Thesis Title: In Their Own Words: A Comparative Study of the Experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students at a British University

Onyinyechi Precious Ogbonna

A thesis submitted for the degree of: PhD Applied Social and Economic Research

Department/ School: Institute for Social and Economic Research

University of Essex

Date of submission for examination: November 2025

Author's declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work, conducted under the supervision of Violetta Parutis and Alita Nandi and all sources used have been properly cited and acknowledged.

Acknowledgements

I am sincerely grateful for all the help, guidance, support and prayers I have received, which have carried me through this journey. Firstly, I am most grateful to God for this opportunity and for bringing me through this process.

I would also like to give special thanks to my supervisors, Dr Violetta Parutus and Professor Alita Nandi, who have been consistent in their guidance throughout all stages of this project. I also want to recognise the members of staff (Jason Glynos, Karon Gush and Laurie James-Hawkins) who provided feedback on this thesis and the student participants who answered the call for the interviews.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents and family, who worked very hard to make this moment possible.

Abstract

This thesis examines Black African Home and Black African International students' experiences from their perspectives and in their own voices. This thesis draws on both semi-structured qualitative interviews and a critical discourse analysis method to examine how the students' experiences are understood. The first chapter explores variations in self-described ethnic identity within the Black African student subgroup, highlighting the complexity of identity formation and the interconnectedness between ethnic identity and sense of belonging. The second chapter identified the different attitudes to formal and informal support structures, with International students being heavily reliant on the support of their peers. Chapter 3 reveals the suboptimality of current survey instruments in capturing the nuanced realities of Black African Home and Black African International students. This thesis contributes to the understanding of the intricate challenges of Black African students' ethnic identity and their barriers to belonging in a British university. It provides further insight into the importance of disaggregating student experiences and tailoring interventions to specific student groups and their unique challenges.

Contents

Thesis introduction 9

Chapter 1: The role of negotiating identity and belonging in understanding Black African Student experiences 13

1.1 Introduction 14

1.1.1 Context of the research question 14

1.1.2 Research question 19

1.1.3 Theoretical framework: Ethnic identity and belonging 21

1.2 Literature Review 31

1.2.1 The importance of disaggregating BAME 31

1.2.2 Lack of UK research into the experiences of Black African International students 35

1.2.3 Challenges in assimilating into Western cultures 40

1.3 Research methodology 45

1.3.1 Qualitative interviewing as a research method 45

1.3.2 Research objectives 46

1.3.3 Sampling and target participants 47

1.3.4 Recruitment procedure 48

1.3.5 Data collection 49

1.3.6 Data analysis 53

1.3.7 Data saturation 54

1.3.8 Researcher Positionality 55

1.3.9 Ethical considerations 58

1.3.10 Funding ... 59

1.4 Analysis and discussion ... 60

1.4.1 Sense of belonging to the university community ... 60

1.4.2 Ethnic Identity and Labels ... 77

1.5 Conclusion ... 94

1.5.1 Research summary ... 94

1.5.2 Summary of research findings ... 95

1.5.3 Key contributions and wider implications of the study ... 98

1.5.4 Limitations ... 100

1.5.5 Recommendations for future research and practical applications ... 100

Chapter 2: Evaluating Formal and Informal Student Support Structures: Views of Black African Students ... 102

2.1 Introduction ... 103

2.1.1 Context of the research question ... 103

2.1.2 The importance of student support services in the student journey ... 104

2.1.3 The role of formal and informal support services ... 106

2.1.4 Research question ... 109

2.2 Literature Review ... 110

2.2.1 Review of student support services at university ... 110

2.2.2 Effectiveness of Formal Student Support Services for Black African Students ... 113

2.2.3 The role of Informal support structures ... 122

2.3 Research Methods Summary ... 141

2.4 Analysis and Discussion 142

2.4.1 University-led vs staff and student-led groups and societies 142

2.4.2 Mental Well-being and Motivational Support 156

2.4.3 Cultural Proficiency of Lecturers and Supervisors 164

2.4.4 Career Preparation and Progression Support 173

2.5 Conclusion 180

2.5.1 Research Summary 180

2.5.2 Summary of research findings 181

2.5.3 Implications and contributions of the study 184

2.5.4 Recommendations for future research and practical applications 186

Chapter 3: A Critical Examination of National Student Surveys through the Lens of Black African Student Experiences. 188

3.1 Introduction 189

3.2 Literature Review: Are student experience surveys fit for purpose? 1945

3.2.1 The student-as-customer model 194

3.2.2 Student Satisfaction vs Student Experience: How reliable are university league tables? 205

3.3. Research methodology 212

3.3.1 Methodological approach: Discourse analysis 212

3.3.2 Data collection 217

3.3.3 Data analysis method 220

3.4 Analysis and Discussion 223

3.4.1 Challenges of belonging as a Black African student 223

3.4.2 Formal support structures 236

3.4.3 Informal support structures 246

3.5 Conclusion 2678

3.5.1 Summary of research findings 269

3.5.2 Limitations of the research method 274

3.5.3 Recommendations for future research, limitations and practical applications of the study 275

Thesis Conclusion... 276

Appendix 1: Promotional flyer 279

Appendix 2: Literature review themes 280

Appendix 3: Interview topic guide 281

References 289

Thesis introduction

The scholarship on the experiences of minoritised students in the UK higher education sector has largely focused on themes of widening participation, which aims to dismantle the perception that higher education is an ivory tower for traditional students (Adams and Corbett, 2010; Munro, 2011). While widening participation measures have proven successful for many students, a limitation of widening participation is its predominant focus on outcomes (Baines et al., 2024; Thomas, 2020). This has placed the onus of achievement solely on the student, as opposed to placing consideration on their learning environment, as evidenced by the focus on attainment gaps in discourses (Cotton et al., 2016; McDuff et al., 2018; Richardson, 2015). In contrast, this thesis chooses to focus on the experiences *along* the student journey as it recognises the foundational importance of experiences in shaping any outcome measures.

The topic of student experiences has gained more prominence, as evidenced by the expansive scholarship discussing its impact both on universities and students (Arday and Mirza 2018; Mahmud and Gagnon 2020). This has led to a reimagining of the understanding of student experiences and a shift away from deficit thinking, away from students' behaviours and attitudes. As such, universities are more considerate of the whole university approach, which reviews the influences of both intersectional and systemic factors on ethnically minoritised students (Reyes and Duran, 2021). Thus, the first contribution of this thesis is to place importance on student voices and focus on their perspective in understanding how both individual and institutional factors shape student experiences at UK universities.

The use of acronyms such as BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) has been employed to categorise members of diverse ethnic backgrounds. While it has helped highlight the systemic barriers faced by minoritised ethnic students in areas such as the degree awarding gap, the use of such acronyms means that the diverse nature of these ethnic minoritised groups and the intersectional inequalities and privileges within this entity are hidden (Advance HE, 2021; Bunce et al., 2021; Whittaker and Broadhead, 2022). This is evidenced in collectively gathered data on ethnically minoritised students, which presents an inaccurate reflection of the experiences of groups such as Black African and Black Caribbean students (Claridge et al., 2018; Morrison et al., 2019). However, the need to understand the experiences of Black people in the UK was amplified following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, with Black student experiences brought from the periphery to the core (Pittam, 2020).

While the experiences of Black students in the UK have been reviewed collectively (Ibezim et al., 2025; Greaves et al., 2021), this thesis is considerate of the differences in their historical, cultural and migratory backgrounds (Reddie, 2020). Although these groups have some experiences in common, the focus of this thesis is on Black African students, and as such, this research must disaggregate the Black collective to ensure that this study adequately reflects the voice of Black African students. Therefore, this research will consider the experiences of both Black African Home and Black African International students. Though students from both groups may share similar countries of origin, their citizenship and migration background impact their personal circumstances, attitudes, and daily challenges. These differences, however, are not always reflected in the guidance provided to help mitigate the barriers faced, with the voices of Black African International students often hidden behind the experiences of Black Home students. This is evidenced

specifically in response to the questions on tackling racism and systemic inequalities during the protests of 2020, where several university bodies, including Universities UK and the National Union of Students, published guidance based on their research of student experiences (Universities UK and National Union of Students, 2019).

However, despite the NUS representing all students at colleges and universities in the UK (NUS, n.d.), and Universities UK, having a membership of over 140 universities in the UK (Universities UK, n.d.), this guidance did not reflect the experiences of ethnically minoritised International students who were not included in the data gathered for the report. As such, only the experiences of UK-domiciled ethnically minoritised students were used to shape the guidance provided for both Home and International students, thus generalising the experiences of all ethnically minoritised students regardless of their ethnicity or migration characteristics. Therefore, this thesis will compare the experiences of both Black African Home and Black African International students to understand the uniqueness and similarities of their experiences at university in the UK.

Chapters 1 and 2 employ a shared qualitative research methodology (in-depth interviews) to understand how themes of identity and belonging, and formal and informal support structures, shape the experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students in British higher education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students at a UK university to capture rich, first-hand narratives that reflect the intersection of migration status, ethnic identity, and institutional support in shaping the experiences of these students at the university. Chapter 3 builds on this foundation by applying the discourse analysis method to critically evaluate the effectiveness of national student surveys in capturing the nuanced

realities of Black African students as expressed in these interviews. This chapter draws on the findings of the interview data to assess the adequacy and relevance of the survey questions asked and the response options provided. Together, these chapters offer a comprehensive examination of how identity, support, and institutional feedback mechanisms intersect to shape the university experiences of Black African students in the UK.

Chapter 1: The role of negotiating identity and belonging in understanding Black African Student experiences

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Context of the research question

The scholarship on the experiences of ethnically minoritised students in the UK Higher education sector and the differences in their educational achievement with White peers has been studied within the framework of racial injustice and structural inequalities. This literature is abundant with various discourses surrounding its implications for both universities and students (Arday and Mirza 2018; Mahmud and Gagnon 2020). As the understanding of student experiences gained more importance, there has been a gradual paradigm shift away from the deficit model, which places more focus on the students' behaviours and attitudes. This has ushered in the more relevant concept of a whole-university approach, which considers the impacts of contextual and institutional factors on ethnically minoritised students (Reyes and Duran, 2021).

One aspect where evidence of the adoption of a holistic approach is evident is the migration away from certain terminologies. The importance of distinguishing the language used when referring to student outcomes lies in recognising the causal factors. The term ‘attainment gap’, while seemingly addressing the difference in attainment, puts the onus of achievement solely on the student as opposed to placing consideration on their learning environment and systemic inequalities perpetuated in these environments. Whereas the term ‘awarding gap’ takes a more holistic view of the gaps and the factors contributing to it (Mountford-Zimdars and Moore, 2024).

Additionally, the binary emphasis on the comparisons between White and non-White students has been stylised within the remits of BAME (Black Asian and Minority

Ethnic) vs White. While the term has been useful in highlighting collective systemic issues such as degree awarding gaps, it disguises the true nature of present inequalities within the BAME group (Advance HE, 2021; Bunce et al., 2021; Whittaker and Broadhead, 2022). Despite the problematic nature of the term BAME, its usage is broadly present in scholarship and publications (Bunglawala 2019; Khunti et al 2020). Furthermore, the review of studies has shown that the varied experiences of ethnically minoritised groups are not adequately reflected in the BAME entity but rather distort the data on certain racial groups, such as Black African and Black Caribbean students (Claridge et al., 2018; Morrison et al., 2019). The differential experience of Black people in the UK, as compared to that of other minoritised ethnic groups, was highlighted and brought to the fore during the protest demonstrations that took place following the murder of George Floyd in 2020. Subsequently, this movement ushered in an international wave of protests and further increased the spotlight on the experiences of Black students in higher education (Pittam, 2020). While these experiences had been a topic of discussion for many years, the events of the Black Lives Matter protests in the summer of 2020 amplified their urgency.

Despite the conflation of the experiences and achievements of Black African and Black Caribbean students under the singular “Black” umbrella term, Black African and Black Caribbean individuals have very different historical and cultural backgrounds. These differences are also shaped by their diverse migration journeys, with many Black Caribbeans coming to the UK after the Second World War as economic migrants (Reddie, 2020). On the other hand, the migration journeys of many Black Africans are relatively more recent, with the majority being either first- or second-generation migrants, with varied reasons for migration (Domboka, 2019). As

such, the research focus will be on Black African students alone to avoid homogenising all Black students and their experiences.

This research will also consider the varied experiences of Black African students, specifically Home and International students, because though Black African International students have a large presence in the UK higher education sector, they are rarely given a voice. While students from both groups may share similar countries of origin, their citizenship and migration background impact their personal circumstances, attitudes, and daily challenges. These differences, however, are not always reflected in the guidance provided to help mitigate the barriers faced, with the voices of International students often omitted.

Specifically in response to the questions on tackling racism and systemic inequalities during the protests of 2020, several university bodies, including Universities UK and the National Union of Students (NUS), published guidance based on their research of student experiences (Universities UK and National Union of Students, 2019). This guidance was published with several recommendations to progressively improve the experiences of ethnically minoritised students at UK universities. While Universities UK represents a collective of over 140 universities in the UK (UUK, n.d.) and the NUS represents all students at colleges and universities in the UK (NUS, n.d.), the views of ethnically minoritised International students were not considered in the data gathered for the report as the participants were Home-domiciled (Universities UK and National Union of Students, 2019). This resulted in only the experiences of Home-domiciled ethnically minoritised students influencing the guidance provided for both UK-domiciled and International students, thus generalising the experiences of all ethnically minoritised students regardless of their ethnicity or migration

characteristics. As such, there is a need to understand the experiences of UK-domiciled Black African and International Black African students separately and review the factors shaping their experiences (Madge et al., 2009).

Hence, this chapter examines the experiences of Black African International students and compares them with those of Black African Home students from their own viewpoint, within the themes of ethnic identity and belonging. While this research investigates different aspects which shape the experience of being a Black African student in a British university, one key factor that permeates all themes of student life at the university and emerged as an important determinant of their sense of belonging in the University was their ethnic identity. This is explored further through the ethnic labels students describe themselves with, such as being Black African and British, Black African or just African. Hence, a prominent focus of this paper is the relationship between different dimensions of Black students' ethnic identity (Black, British, African) and the impact this perception of ethnic identity has on the students' experiences.

This chapter begins with an exploration of ethnic identity formation and the impact this has on the individual's outlook and belonging in their social environment. While this chapter follows the premise that ethnic identity itself is a psychological concept based on a social construct, consideration was placed on the viewpoints of political scientists and their conceptual view of ethnic identity and its relevance in a person's life. Ultimately, this paper and the research embedded in it agree with the scholars Phinney and Ong (2007) that ethnic identity is different from race and instead encompasses factors of personal and group experiences, decisions and customary parallels in a multi-ethnic society. This opens up discussions on the importance of

self-ascribed ethnic identity labels and the differences in the formation of these identities for Home and International students, and how others perceive their ethnic identity.

Both Berry's (1997) conceptual framework for acculturation studies and Phinney's (1989) three-stage model of ethnic identity development were reviewed and used as a theoretical foundation for this research. Both theories were chosen as they validate the objectives of this research by providing the basis for why it is important to understand the uniqueness of both Home and International Black African students and how their specific ethnic identity shapes their experiences at a British university. However, more saliently deduced was the applicability, or lack thereof, of both Berry and Phinney's theories to Black African International students who had been raised in a homogenous ethnic society in comparison to Black African Home students who were raised in a more diverse society, such as the UK.

The existing literature on the experiences of Black African students in British universities was not comprehensive due to the limited number of research papers available. As such, to gain a better understanding of the experiences of Black African students, this paper also relied on the research conducted in the United States of America, which has a more abundant scholarship on the experiences of Black students at university (Allen,1988; Mwangi and Fries–Britt, 2015). While there are some resemblances between being a Black African student in the US and in the UK, the matter remains that ethnic identity is not based solely on ascription to a racial or ethnic group, but it is influenced by the society the individual resides in, especially, the presence of other groups or lack thereof and the receptiveness to plural cultures in that environment (Berry 1997; Berry 2017). As such, while this literature provided

parallels, it also made it clear that the gaps in UK literature cannot be addressed by US-specific scholarship alone. So, in this chapter, in line with the theories on ethnic identity and acculturation, the different challenges faced by both Black African Home and International students in assimilating to British culture are also explored.

This chapter aims to expand the understanding of the experiences of both Black African Home and International students through the lens of ethnic identity and their sense of belonging. Based on the definition of ethnic identity as highlighted earlier, this study will review the students' self-ascribed ethnic identity and labels based on their experiences prior to and during the time of this study. Using a UK university with a multi-ethnic student body as a case study, it is expected that richer and more contextual data can be gathered from the student participants to help understand how their ethnic identity influences their belonging both in the university and the university town. The findings of this study will contribute to the limited understanding of the experiences of Black African students by separating their experiences, as opposed to combining them with those of other Black students. This is an important step in the disaggregation of the experiences of ethnic minorities in research that will contribute to the refusal of conflated or unanimous policy and guidance documents for ethnic groups based on the externally perceived similarities of their experiences.

1.1.2 Research question

The research question was formulated to understand the relevance of ethnic identity and migration status on the experiences of Black African students at a British university. Specifically, the questions have been designed to understand where nuanced similarities and differences occur and the rationale behind those

differences:

To what extent are the experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students impacted by their ethnic identity and belonging? How are these experiences unique to their specific grouping? Specifically, to what extent does their ethnic identity impact their sense of belonging and vice versa?

Data were gathered using qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews with Black African Home and Black African International students at a British university forming the target participants.

1.1.3 Theoretical framework: Ethnic identity and belonging

The subject of ethnic identity and its impact on an individual's sense of belonging is rooted in the understanding of the terminology. The scholar Horowitz (1985) theorises that ethnic identity is a summation of various ethnoreligious characteristics, including "race, language, religion, tribes, nationalities, and castes". (Horowitz 1985, p. 53). Other political scientists in agreement with this definition include Chandra (2006), who argues that divergent characteristics impact an individual's acceptance by others in the same grouping due to the insinuation of shared experiences and hence, a shared identity. However, social psychologists Tajfel (1981), Tajfel and Turner (1979), and later Phinney and Ong (2007), who build on the work of the earlier researchers, purport that ethnic identity is more than a characteristic ascribed to a person; rather, it is solidified through longstanding experiences and choices which shape their worldview through customs and traditions.

This definition, therefore, challenges the generalised conception that race, or ethnicity, is a conclusive determiner of shared experiences, highlighted in the use of overarching ethnic labels in guidance shared on the experiences of Black African students by the NUS (National Union of Students, 2019). It is also important to note that while the Critical Race Theory framework has been used to analyse the systemic inequities present in higher education and their contribution to the marginalisation of ethnically minoritised students (Patton, 2016), this thesis will focus on how the ethnic identity of Black African students influences their experiences at a British university.

Additionally, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) explain that a migrant's individual or collective ethnic identity is constructed based on apparent differences and

similarities to others in their shared heterogeneous society. The presence of a diverse group of people in a shared community leads to the categorisation of people and thus the labels attached to them. In Portes and Rumbaut's (2001) study, they found that just as other areas of visible social categorisation are founded on an individual's specific experiences, ethnic identity is a self-proclaimed label that an individual adopts based on comparisons with others in the same society. This uniqueness is especially important for those whose ethnic identity places them in the minority or results in their marginalisation based on their differences with the dominant group. As such, this study will consider the effects of being a minority in the UK. Nonetheless, consideration will also be placed on the spectrum of minoritisation, which differs for students based on the demography of their primary environment, from ethnically homogenous spaces to multicultural cities within the UK, to smaller towns with lower multiculturalism.

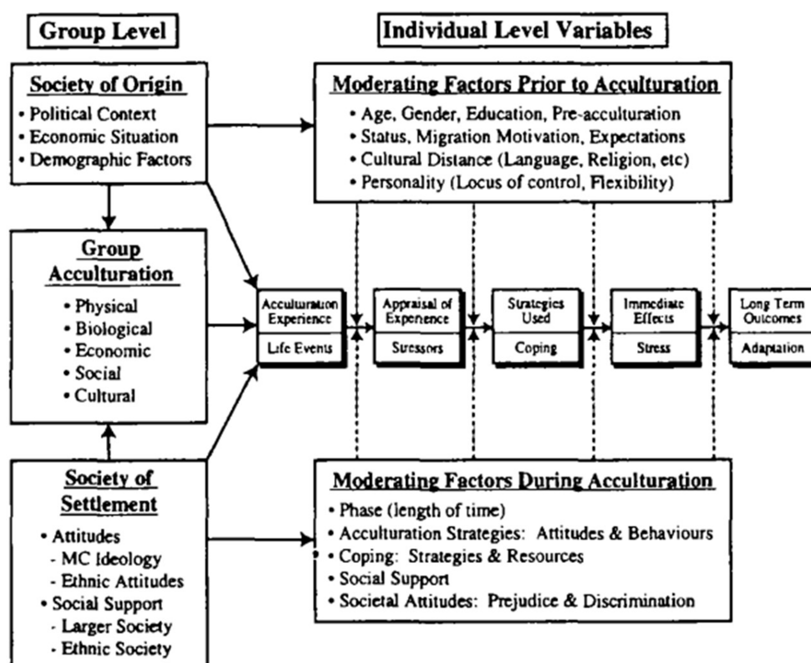
Berry's conceptual framework for acculturation studies

The presence of two or more ethnic groups in a society contributes to both cultural and individual or psychological changes known as acculturation. This change can be observed through the evolution and adjustments of traditions and other customary practices resulting from influences and encounters with other cultures (Berry, 2017). While there are various models and theories of acculturation, Berry's (1997) conceptual framework for acculturation will be used as a guide to explain the importance of acculturation in studies of identity and migration, as it allows identification with both the country or society of origin and the host country or society of settlement. This framework allows individuals to identify strongly or weakly with

one or both cultures, resulting in an integrated, separated, assimilated or marginalised identity.

This framework begins by identifying the preexisting characteristics of an individual and their society before the process of acculturation. It details the factors influencing a group's acculturation, which in turn shapes its members' psychological acculturation over time.

Figure 1: Berry's 1997 conceptual framework for acculturation



The group acculturation section of this framework identifies five changes experienced by groups: physical, biological, economic, social and cultural. These changes produce shifts in groups from their customs and traditions, for example, from those of their countries of origin, such as their dressing, food, and community structures, to a loss of economic viability and social standing over a period of time.

Therefore, acculturation can only be understood when taking into account the length of time in migration and the engagement of a group with the mainstream culture.

Within the psychological sub-category, an individual's place of origin and settlement are two factors that are imperative to understanding the process of a person's acculturation. The importance of evaluating an individual’s society of origin lies in the recognition of the contributory factors of the political, economic and demographic climate to a person’s identity. This justifies the importance of looking at ethnic identity as not only a racial or heritage determinant but as a culmination of experiences which shape an individual's perspective. Secondly, within this sub-category, Berry encourages researchers to evaluate the society of settlement. The receptiveness of an individual’s host society to multiculturalism impacts the adaptive experience of the individual, which contributes to the formation of ethnic identity. As such, this framework provides a holistic list of factors that should be considered, including the characteristics of the individual, their ethnic group and the influences of the dominant culture. It is through the evaluation of these factors that an individual's experiences within a plural society can be understood.

Phinney’s three-stage model of ethnic identity development in adolescence

Phinney (1989) recognised the importance of understanding the formation of ethnic identity for individuals living in a multicultural society. The construction of the three stages of ethnic identity development will be reviewed as a pillar of thought which other researchers have subsequently used to frame their understanding of ethnic identity formation (Huang and Stormshak, 2011). Phinney’s scholarship, based on this three-stage model, is pivotal in creating a foundational understanding of ethnic

identity and its formation. This theory supports Berry's (1997) framework for acculturation as it emphasises that the formation of ethnic identity is a process influenced both by an individual's psychological reasoning and society's treatment of their ethnic group.

The first stage of this model is the diffuse/foreclosure phase. At this phase, the individual's perception of their identity is based on the primary socialisation received from their family. This recognition of the importance of primary socialisation in ethnic identity already highlights the potential differences in the starting point of ethnic identity formation for individuals, regardless of shared heritage or ethnicity. The impact of these differences, including the country in which the individuals were raised and the ethnic demography of those environments, will be explored further during the analysis section of this chapter.

The next phase in this model is the exploration phase, also known as the moratorium phase. This phase sees the increased desire of individuals to understand their ethnic identity and the identity of their ethnic group based on their experiences and growing awareness of ethnic differences. The understanding of this phase is an important component of the understanding of the ethnic identity of participants in this research. The focus on both Home and International Black African students provides an opportunity to understand how and if Phinney's three-stage model can be applied to those who grew up in a homogenous ethnic environment and then migrated to a multicultural environment. It also opens for discussion the effect of urbanisation on ethnic identity formation. Huang and Stormshak (2011) further propose that the awareness of ethnic identity is triggered through situations where there are evident traditional or customary differences between the minoritised ethnic group and the

majority. This, however, also limits the understanding of the ethnic identity of young people who have not been socialised in a plural society, such as many Black African International students.

Lastly, the third stage of this model is achieved identity, which occurs once the individual has accepted their ethnic identity, thereby fostering a deeper understanding and belonging to their group. This occurs through various elements highlighted by Phinney (1991), including the individual's interest and evaluation of the group. The presence of different variables presents the researcher with a multi-dynamic lens in which an individual's ethnic identity cannot be viewed as a fixed state, but rather as a composite continuum tailored to each individual and their experiences (Phinney, 1991).

Ethnic identity and migration: Ethnic identity of Black African Home-domiciled and Black African International students

The concept of ethnic identity and ethnic identity formation differs from the ethnicity label assigned to individuals for data gathering and monitoring, with the former constructed over time and influenced by dynamic components such as values, attitudes and experiences (Phinney 1991; Phinney and Ong 2007). As such, the concept of ethnic identity by Black African International and Black Home students will differ. Additionally, Phinney (1990) explains that the importance placed on ethnic identity differs based on ethnic homogeneity, or lack of it, within a society. In racially homogenous societies, the concept of ethnic identity has little salience, while the opposite is the case for societies with different ethnic groups, especially where some ethnic groups are less visible physically, politically, and socioeconomically. Based on

this, the components which influence the ethnic identity of Black African students who have grown up in a majority White country, such as the UK, will be different to the identity of Black African students who have grown up in Black majority countries. It is therefore unreasonable to assume that students who share the same ascribed ethnicity or ethnic background also share an identical ethnic identity.

One of the characteristics of Black African Home students' ethnic identity is their exposure to two or more cultures, their minoritised culture, and their engagement with the practices of the majority culture. The interlacing of both cultures leads to the formation of multi-ethnic self-identifying labels (Phinney, 1990). First, Home students who are either the children of first-generation migrants or who migrated to the UK as children, will have grown up with the label of Black attributed to them from childhood, a label not comparable with the identity of their parents for whom the new ethnic label of Black became an acquired identity upon migration (Lee and Opio 2011; Park 2008). Furthermore, through childhood and into adolescence, factors such as media and stereotypical portrayals, discrimination, the ethnic density of surroundings, and the deprivation or wealth of their neighbourhood all contribute to the formation of their self-concept and the importance placed on their ethnic identity (Fuligni et al., 2005; Phinney, 1990). As such, bicultural students who have a strong link to their parental cultures and customs and have also integrated into their present culture utilise hyphens to combine their multiple identities.

Nevertheless, while bicultural students may appear to share the same hyphenated ethnic identity label, the experiences of 2nd-generation and 1.5-generation migrants differ. Berry (1997) postulates that acculturation is most successful for those who migrate before the start of their primary education due to the ease of adaptiveness during those formative years. However, concerning older children and adolescents,

the process of ethnic identity formation has begun, and parental culture is embedded, thus leading to more challenges in their psychosocial and identity development within their host country (Berry 1997; Stodolska and Yi 2003). Additionally, Stodolska and Yi (2003) found that adolescent migrants were more likely to have their ethnic label imposed on them by peers due to their apparent foreignness to the customs of their host country. This presents a unique difference in the experiences of adolescent migrants who are primarily socialised in a different culture and are, as such, labelled as foreign.

Unlike 1.5-generation migrants who enter a new country in their formative years, second-generation migrants born in the host country can reject the label of foreign and insist on the label of native. This is evidenced in studies where second-generation participants reject the concept of being labelled as secondary immigrants based on the migration of their parents (Grant, 2007). In such cases, it can be argued that there is no process of acculturation from one culture to another in this context, as the children born in the host country will be primarily socialised into both cultures simultaneously. This is seen in the popular choice of second-generation migrants who use hyphens to help convey that their identity is an equal representation of both their heritage and home country (Belanger and Verkuyten, 2010). Nonetheless, while the strength of their ethnic and national identity is independently dynamic and subject to change over time, the choice to retain a hyphenated identity signifies the desire to hold on to both identities regardless of the changes that take place (Robinson, 2009).

However, membership in both cultures, which transpires through the maintenance of a dual identity, can be challenging, particularly when the attitudes and values of the two cultures are misaligned (Phinney, 1990). This is supported by the findings of

Sekhon and Szmigin (2011), who note that second-generation migrants born in the UK still experience the pressure and frustration of having to adhere to the different and often conflicting values of their parents' culture and British culture even in their adult years. As such, those from dissimilar cultures, such as non-Europeans migrating to culturally European or Western countries, face more difficulties adjusting than those migrating from similar cultures. Compounding this are external factors such as discrimination and racism, and the host country's policies towards immigration and multiculturalism, which further inhibit the assimilation or integration of ethnically minoritised migrants (Berry and Sabatier, 2010). While those with a similar ethnic profile to the dominant group may seek to bypass such practices of enmity, this privilege is not accessible to racially different migrants who must contend with the sentiments of their host country (Phinney, 1990).

Furthermore, it can be said that although first-generation adult migrants arrive in their host country with a fully formed ethnic identity, the reduction of their socioeconomic capital leads to the reformation of their ethnic identity. This is due to a change in the components that help to shape the ethnic identity of a person, such as their educational and economic background (Nagel, 1994). In the case of migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa whose skills and competency are not recognised in the UK (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014), they go through a process in which the status held in their home country is devalued by their host country (Berry, 1997). This reduces the ability of such migrants to integrate into their new society at the same status that they left their home country with. As such, in accordance with Berry's model of acculturation, the process of integration, which can only occur when both the host society and migrants are tolerant of each other's cultures and experiences, is thwarted, thus leading to either separation from the host culture or marginalisation

from both cultures (Berry, 1997). Hence, these challenges are likely to be experienced differently by both Black African International and Home-domiciled students based on the ethnographic differences of the country they were raised in.

1.2Literature Review

1.2.1 The importance of disaggregating BAME

The growth in Britain's migrant population has had a significant impact on the UK's demographic outlook, with 60% of the UK's population growth over the last two decades attributed to net migration (Cangiano, 2023). In the 1970s, following on from the use of Old, New and African Commonwealth as a distinction for its migrant population, the UK's General Household Survey categorised respondents into either 'Whites' or 'Coloured', and in the 1991 census, progressed to include ethnic categories (Laux, 2019). Presently, the sentiments of categorising all ethnic groups under one entity persist with the use of the term BAME, an acronym for Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic, preceded by an almost identical acronym BME, which represents Black Minority Ethnic.

Despite the obscurity of the term BAME and its arbitrary grouping of people from various cultures with differing identities, privileges, and challenges, its usage is broadly present in scholarship and publications (Bunglawala 2019; Khunti et al., 2020). A popular reason for the use of BAME is the requirement to provide data for these fields to the Office for Students (OfS) and Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (Whittaker and Broadhead, 2022). While the term has been useful in highlighting systemic issues such as degree attainment gaps, which calculates the difference in the percentage of White and ethnically minoritised students awarded a First or 2:1 degree classification, it disguises the true nature of present inequalities within the BAME group (Advance HE, 2021; Bunce et al., 2021; Whittaker and Broadhead, 2022). Evidence of this is noted in the category of Asian, used by the

OfS to gather data for all students with heritage from the racially and ethnically diverse continent (Office for Students, 2022). In the category of Asian, the attainment gap for Chinese students is only 2.2% lower than for White students, while the attainment gap for Bangladeshi students is more evident at 12.2%. Even more distorted is the combined BAME attainment gap of 10.8% which overshadows the disparity evident in the attainment gaps of Black African and Black Other students with differences of 20.1% and 23.7% respectively (Advance HE, 2021).

Furthermore, while it is accepted that the degree attainment gap corroborates the requirement for progressive policies to help narrow the ethnic attainment gap (Universities UK and National Union of Students, 2019), it is naïve to exclude a review of the broader variations within the non-White categories. For example, Zwysen and Longhi (2018), in their review of employment and earning differences of ethnically minoritised British students, found that while Indian and Chinese students graduated from more renowned universities than their White peers, Black, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani students graduated on average from less prestigious universities than White students. Consequently, Singh (2011) argues against the sole attribution of students' success to their ethnicity alone due to contributory factors such as social class and values placed on education.

The additional value of disaggregating BAME is recognised when the differing experiences of racially minoritised groups are understood within their own context. An example of this is present in the study by Islam et al (2018), who found that the absence of Halal foods on campus significantly hindered Muslim students' sense of belonging at the university. While Islam is a religion and not a race, the Office for National Statistics (2011) showed that the majority of the UK's Pakistani and Bangladeshi population are Muslim. The challenge of the lack of accessible Halal

foods is a factor that impacts only the experiences of students who practice Islam, a factor that is not shared across all ethnically minoritised groups, and thereby does not have the same level of impact across all ethnic categories within the BAME group. Nonetheless, this does not validate the grouping of experiences within the South Asian Islamic category, as research shows that there are specific nuances between Pakistani and Bangladeshi students in their challenges of access and attitudes to higher education (Maskeen et al., 2021). This supports the arguments of Greaves et al (2022) and Bunce et al (2021) on the need to reflect on the sociocultural factors that influence the experiences of students from different ethnic backgrounds as opposed to taking a homogenous view.

Also hidden from view is that while there are specific stereotypes attributed to BAME students as a whole, within that grouping, different ethnic groups encounter unique stereotypes. While studies have shown that stereotypes negatively affect the learning experiences and outcomes of ethnic minorities through the concept of stereotype threat, where individuals feel at risk of confirming negative stereotypes (Bullock et al., 2020; Morrison et al., 2019), when further analysed, it is increasingly apparent that the nature of these stereotypes is founded on different preconceptions. Some ethnically minoritised students can be negatively impacted due to the pressures of positive stereotypes, while others are negatively impacted due to the dejected misconceptions of their race (Flintoff, 2015). It is also recognised that not all stereotypes encountered by some ethnic groups of students are unanimously advantageous, fixed or shared across all educational disciplines, as evidenced by different research results. Saran (2015) found that the Asian students in their study were positively stereotyped and praised for being good academic students, while Wollfe et al (2008) in another study of Asian students, noted that Asian students

were viewed as detached and lacking confidence, and Flintoff (2015) documented the negative cultural stereotypes encountered by Asian women in a physical education course. While it is evident that these results are diverse, it helps illustrate the complexity of understanding homogenous labels which are formulated through the grouping of students across the Asian continent into a single ethnic category, thus making it difficult to understand which Asian ethnic groups their studies refer to.

Furthermore, a study by Morrison et al (2019) on medical students in the UK found that BAME students encountered different types of pressures on how they expressed themselves and how they spoke to patients. Further analysis of the data gathered from this research showed that while students of South Asian heritage were more concerned with distancing themselves from the stereotype of a timid student obeying their parents' desire to study for a medical degree, African students were fearful of being perceived as aggressive. This supports the findings of Claridge et al (2018), who found that Black female students chose to overcompensate in their learning environment by speaking less and choosing not to raise grievances to avoid the negative stereotypical label of an angry Black woman.

Nonetheless, through the review of scholarships for ethnic minorities, it is notable that the stereotypes encountered have varied impacts on the identity of those being stereotyped. Scholars found that Black students who were aware of the negative stereotypes, such as 'Black students are unintelligent', were consumed with self-doubt about their capabilities and sought to have more Black students present in class to help challenge this stereotype through a plurality of voices and competencies (Solorzano and Yossa, 2000). In another study, Claridge et al (2018) found that Black students felt pressured to counteract the same negative stereotype by increasing their workloads, which led to increased stress levels. However, not all

Black students chose to dispute the negative stereotypes they encountered, as Flintoff (2015) found that some accept this as part of their experiences as a Black person in a majority-White country. On the contrary, Indian students in the United States were more accepting of their positive stereotype as the model minority and adopted this identity with a sense of pride (Saran, 2015). As such, the presence and acceptance of racial stereotypes can act as a powerful influence on the identity of a student and either contribute to feelings of pride or mental distress, leading to different outcomes in terms of their sense of belonging at university and the wider society. Thus, it is necessary to study each ethnic group separately rather than collectively to be adequately informed on the differences in their experiences and outcomes.

1.2.2 Lack of UK research into the experiences of Black African International students

International students account for 22% of the total student body population at UK universities (Bolton and Hubble, 2021). Although this accounts for the largest migration to the United Kingdom outside of UK nationals, their presence within UK society remains largely obscure (Lillyman and Bennett, 2014). Notably, several studies amalgamate the experiences of International students and follow the practice of grouping them by their geographic region of origin (Maringe and Carter 2007). Though this appears practical, there are several nuanced challenges specific to Black African International students which are hidden or demoted when placed within the trials faced by all African students (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014). Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency shows that there are currently 63,320 African students at UK universities, contributing to almost a tenth of the total non-UK

domiciled students The data also reveals that students from 45 sub-Saharan countries are studying in a UK university, highlighting the large diversity of African students in the UK (HESA, 2023).

Africa remains one of the most diverse continents with varying identities when factoring in race, ethnicity, economy, geography, religion, and political identities. As such, it is problematic to assume a pan-African identity of Africans, and more saliently, to assume the challenges faced are universal across all African countries. The presence of Black African students at Western universities dates back decades. As the previous coloniser of many sub-Saharan nations, the United Kingdom's implementation of the formal education structure in its colonies allowed it to maintain the coloniality of knowledge (Poloma and Szelenyi, 2019). This was evident in the educational background of several African independence leaders in the 1950s and 1960s, who received their higher education from Western universities, leading to more Africans utilising Western higher education as an opportunity to improve their socioeconomic status (Bassey, 2009). However, the experiences of Black Africans at Western universities are not reviewed within their own context, but through the lens of either Black students domiciled in the host country or as a collective within the bracket of International students (Manyika, 2001).

Although making up a significant number of BAME students and spending the same length of time, if not more, at UK universities because of pre-sessional courses, the voice of International Black African students has remained sidelined. This stems from the reliance on the local Black student population to act as representatives by serving as an intermediary for the International Black African student population, as seen in anti-racist guidance documents produced by membership organisations (UUK and NUS, 2019). This does not negate the copious research focused on the

experiences of many International students but rather highlights the lack of research into the specific experiences of Black African International students, and exposes the gap in knowledge of a significant group within the higher education student body (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014).

The research on the experiences of Black African International students, while limited, is often centred on their encounters at universities in the USA (Adelegan and Parks, 1985; Boafo-Arthur, 2014). In such contexts, research has produced varying discourses on the identities of Black African migrants and, in particular, Blackness (Asante et al., 2016). Specifically, Asante et al (2016) highlight the privilege attributed to Black African migrants who usually enter the USA through visa routes for students and highly skilled migrants in relation to less desired visa routes of Asylum for other Black migrant populations in the US. This separation of identity is further evident in the different labels used by African Americans and Black migrants in America in identifying their ethnicity. Furthermore, the culture of the dominant Black population and its long and complex political history and challenges in defining Blackness are embedded in the core of the African American identity to which native Black students ascribe (Mwangi, 2016). This not only raises challenges on the topic of identity for Black African students who see themselves as culturally different from African American students but also highlights the prominence of African American initiatives in tackling racial inequities (Lee and Opio, 2011).

Black African International students in the United States have varying challenges, of which many are transferable to the experiences of Black African International students in the United Kingdom. Many Black Africans migrated to the UK and the USA in the 1980s (Flahaux and De Haas, 2016; Ukpokodu, 2020), and researchers have found several consistencies in their experiences both in the UK and the US. It

is noted in the work of Alidou (2000) that Black African international students in the US experienced structural racism due to factors like their accents, which were deemed unintelligible in the classroom. Such experiences were found to instil a gulf between Black/African Americans and Black African international students, leading to the isolation of the latter. The isolation experienced by Black African international students in the US and the difficulties in the classroom are also noted in the research of Hyams-Ssekasi (2014), who highlighted the challenges that Black African international students in the UK encountered in the classroom due to differences in learning styles. However, unlike in the study of Alidou (2000), where the accent challenges resulted in some Black African international students being put in remedial classes, studies in the UK did not reflect any academic consequences but were aligned with the overall consequences of the African international students experiencing isolation.

In line with isolation, studies from both countries have also highlighted a reduced sense of belonging for Black African international students. Boafor-Arthur (2014) found that these students were less likely to participate in social events with Black American home students and instead opted to strengthen their own social networks with other African international students. Similarly, Ajibade and Mwalillanda (2024) found that Nigerian international students in the UK employed similar interventions, such as forming groups with others experiencing the same issues over shared interests, to counter the effects of the psychological stress they experienced due to loneliness. However, Mwaura (2008) also found that the UK's individualistic culture made assimilation especially difficult for the Black African students who had grown up in a more collective culture. This is an important finding as it supports the recommendation of Boafo-Arthur (2014, who suggests that interventions designed to

support Black African students suffering from isolation should embed cultural practices from Africa.

By contrast, the literature highlights the unique positioning of Black African International students in the UK who experience more of a shared culture with Black African Home students who are mainly first- and second-generations of migrants from African countries (Waite and Cook, 2011). Furthermore, the UK government's report on students in Higher Education groups ethnicities into five categories, with one category for Black African and Black Caribbean under the category 'Black' (Cabinet Office, 2023). This reinforces the perceived shared identity of Black African students through a classification that provides both Black African Home and Black African International students with a label which they can personally identify with, regardless of their history within the UK. However, the only specific classification offered to Black African students in the US is 'Black or African American' (United States Census Bureau, 2024). This poses a conflict in identity for many Black African students for whom their Africanness is fundamental to their identity (Uduma, 2014). Thus, the category of 'Black or African American' focuses solely on the political identity of native Black Americans.

While there has been extensive research within the US literature, which has provided learnings on the experiences of international students from the US. The literature exploring the comparative experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students within the UK context remains limited. Hence, the primary objective of this thesis is to compare the experiences of Black African home and

Black African international students to avoid conflating the experiences of Black students in the US with those in the UK.

1.2.3 Challenges in assimilating into Western cultures

The challenges to assimilation for both Black African Home and Black African International students are unique to both groups based on their formative experiences of the UK (Lee and Opio, 2011; Phinney,1989). While Black African Home students enjoy the benefits of being British citizens or having settled status, their experiences and sentiments toward Britain are shaped differently from those of Black African International students (Caldwell and Hyams-Ssekasi, 2016; Gilborn, 2015). Black African Home students have typically grown up in a country where institutional racism is present, including in the areas of health, sport, and education, as highlighted in the following literature reviews. A review of scholarship on the effects of racism against Black women in British higher education highlights the mental fatigue experienced by these women, which also adversely affects their physical health (Rollock, 2021). Similarly, publications in health journals detail the statistics on the exceptionally high rate of admission of Black people into psychiatric facilities (Patel and Heginbotham, 2007) and the negative sustained effects of experiencing discrimination on their mental health (Wallace et al., 2016). Thus, being brought up in an environment plagued by racial inequalities influences the worldview of Black Home students who are educated in schools that are unable to adequately recognise and cater to their needs (Gilborn, 2015). Such racial disparities lead to the distrust of institutions, which leads to a reduced sense of belonging by the time they enter higher education (Ezikwelu, 2020).

Conversely, many Black African International students have not grown up in a country with such factors present, except for countries with a history of apartheid,

such as South Africa (Keswell, 2010). Hence, these students from countries with homogenous racial demography do not share the same views of racism nor its significance to the construction of their identity as their Western peers (Mwangi, 2016). This is important in highlighting the starting differences in mindsets of both groups upon enrolment at their university. Though Black African Home students contend with the challenges of higher education as evidenced in the higher non-completion rates of Black Home students (Advance HE 2021; Rodgers 2013), contrarily, Black African International students joining the UK higher education system have a more optimistic mindset premised on the advantages a UK degree affords them in their home country (Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012; Owusu-Kwarteng, 2021).

These favourable perceptions are further reinforced by UK universities marketing their institutions through the use of local agents in African countries (Hulme et al., 2014). The marketing messages promoted in these locales centre on the desire for UK universities to increase the internationalisation of their student body through the recruitment of geographically diverse students (Trahar and Hyland, 2011). As such, African students, within the bracket of International students, are viewed as invaluable contributors to the progression and brilliance of UK universities, which encourages the perception that they are openly welcomed by British universities (Bolsmann and Miller, 2008).

Nevertheless, once Black African International students are in place at their institutions, they are faced with issues of their accents, which in some cases are deemed unintelligible, thereby affecting their relatability with peers and staff (Alidou, 2000). Several studies have noted the assumption of a lack of proficiency in English of Black African International students from English-speaking countries, leading to referrals for remedial classes and disability help centres, then surprise at their

competence in writing papers in English without additional assistance (Beoku-Betts 2004; Changamire et al 2022; Jean-Francois 2019). The impact of such practices is present in the data gathered by Changamire et al (2022), which makes clear the sentiments of self-doubt experienced by Black African International students in their ability to adequately communicate with others in their host country. This is supported by Adegbola et al (2018), whose findings outline the reluctance of Black African International students to foster relationships with domestic students due to the strained understanding of each other's rhetoric. This results in isolation through a reduction in participation in social events, which is a contributory factor to Black African International students' lack of sense of belonging (Boafor-Arthur, 2014).

Interestingly, the negative connotations of a sub-Saharan accent were not experienced by all African students. White South African students reported positive interactions with domestic peers and the confusion of being a native student (Lee and Opio, 2011). Such differences raise questions about the approaches to varied sub-Saharan accents and their influence on communicating with peers in Western English-speaking countries. Goatley-Soan and Baldwin's (2018) study of attitudes toward different types of South African English in the United States found that General White South African English accents were viewed as the most positive. This study included the accents of White South Africans, Black South Africans, and South African English accents. They also found that the US participants had a stronger preference for European accents in comparison to African or Asian accents. While there is not much literature on this topic to support or refute these findings, this study is important in outlining the presence of implicit bias in ethnically different African accents. The less favourable attitudes to Black African accents are supported by similar findings, which identify challenges of adequate integration and positive

reception into Western universities for Black African students due to their accent challenges (Boafor-Arthur 2014; Jean-Francois 2019).

Furthermore, Black African International students struggle to assimilate into the UK's individualist culture, which differs from the African collective culture norm (Mwaura, 2008). This unfamiliarity with Western culture exacerbates the feeling of solitude, compounding the existing separation anxiety that many International students experience (Szabo et al., 2015). Specifically, Mwangi's (2016) study expounds on this and reveals that although sharing the same race as native Black students of the West, the emotion of isolation is further reinforced by the realisation of differences in identity. This leads to the burden of the requirement of two identities in which foreign students must hold on to their native identity while simultaneously developing a new Western identity to better integrate into their present environment (Scott et al., 2015). Nevertheless, Akanwa (2015) argues against placing the burden of integrating into the Western university culture solely on International students, and calls for universities to take proactive steps to ease the cultural transition process by closing social and academic knowledge gaps, which cause students distress.

Several scholars have also reported cases of unease among Black African International students at Western universities due to cultural differences (Lee and Opio 2011; Mwangi 2016). A common theme in the coping strategies of Black African International students is the development of social groups based on common struggles. Examples of this can be found in the study by Mwangi et al (2019), who report on the attempts by African students to recreate the communal society they have emigrated from in rejection of the maverick culture in Western universities. This is echoed by similar findings from Changamire et al (2022), who note the method of constructing new communities in the West by African students and the expansive

support network and services provided by such groups for their peers. These groups are even more beneficial for new students who are helped to familiarise themselves with new technologies, learning styles, and other unfamiliar cultural norms (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014). The principles of such networks can be traced to the values of communal societies present in African cultures expressed through concepts such as Ubuntu, which centres on the importance of community and oneness (Ikuenobe 2016; Mawere and Van Stam 2016).

Thus, this research will adopt a comparative approach in exploring the challenges and advantages experienced by Black African students in the UK, with particular attention to how a shared ethnic identity is experienced differently by Home and International students.

1.3 Research methodology

This methodology section covers the research design for both Chapters 1 and 2, as they employed the same methodology. This was done to avoid duplication of the research methodology section in both chapters. In Chapter 1, the themes of ethnic identity and sense of belonging are explored, and then in Chapter 2, the themes of students' attitudes on the effectiveness of formal and informal support structures are considered.

1.3.1 Qualitative interviewing as a research method

The objective of this research, which compares the experiences of Black African Home and International students in UK universities, is not to quantify responses or make predictions, but to explore previously un-investigated topics in greater depth from the participants' stance (Williams, 2007). As such, the phenomenology approach, which centres on exploring and understanding lived experiences, was chosen for this research (Van Manen, 2017). This method allows the researcher to capture a range of experiences, thus amplifying the richness of the data gathered (Van Manen, 2017). It also allows the researcher to present the experiences of participants authentically through their viewpoint and not through the view of an existing theoretical stance (Bevan, 2014). However, unlike grounded theory, which is widely used by social scientists, this research paper was not focused on generating a theory from the experiences of participants. The semi-structured interview method was chosen to allow participants the space and opportunity to voice their experiences on potentially sensitive topics while providing the researcher with the flexibility to build on the interviewee's answers (Islam and Aldaihani, 2022).

Phenomenological in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out to gather both data from participants and to obtain the meaning of this data, thereby ensuring the true experience of the interviewee is captured (Bevan, 2014). These were adapted to reflect a conversational-style format to improve the interaction and rapport between the interviewer and the participant. Additionally, the semi-structured style allowed for certain topics to be explored in greater depth, beyond the surface level, ensuring that interviewees could discuss any themes introduced in their responses (Legard et al., 2003).

1.3.2 Research objectives

Prior to outlining the research questions for this study, a review of the data gathered on the experiences of Black African students was carried out. This involved the assessment of guidance documents by organisations within the higher education environment and the literature available. Subject to this review, a deficit was noted in the lack of in-depth data available on this topic, which led to the formulation of a primary research objective: *"To what extent are the experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students unique to their specific grouping?"* Additionally, a sub-objective was formulated: "*To understand the extent to which the Black African ethnic identity impacts the experiences of students at a UK university."*

The objectives were constructed based on the lack of Black African International students included in the datasets for the Black student category for guidance documents (NUS and Universities UK, 2019). The omission of Black African International student experiences leads to the assumption that the experiences of Home and International Black African students are the same. Secondly, and more

damaging to the sense of belonging of the International students, is the suggestion that their experiences are not worth including in findings which will be used to inform interventions concerning their experiences.

1.3.3 Sampling, target participants and the university

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to recruit participants in a UK university for this study. This technique was chosen as it adhered to the research objective in which participants were chosen based on their possession of specific characteristics (Etikan, 2016). This sampling technique was utilised in recruiting current Black African students studying at a research-intensive university outside of London. While the sub-characteristics of the participants varied, the qualifying characteristic for this study was that they all self-identified as Black African. In addition to purposive sampling, the snowball sampling technique was also used to increase access to less visible members of the target population.

Participants who identified as Black African were invited to take part in the interviews regardless of their fee status. Nevertheless, while Black Caribbeans, Black Americans and Black Latinos are historically part of the Black African diaspora, the decision was made to focus exclusively on Black Africans. This decision was made to avoid the conflation of the identities and experiences of these groups due to their very different ethnic identities and experiences. Additionally, as stated in the objectives, this research aimed to explore the experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students independently, thus providing disaggregated data which could be understood within its own unique context.

The university in this case study has students from more than 140 countries, with over a third of all university students from outside the UK. Within this international bracket, one-fifth of students are from outside of the EU. The ethnic demography of the student population shows that the largest ethnic group are White students, who make up 40%, with Asian students accounting for 32%, Black students 17.6%, Mixed 4.5%, Other 3.7%, and 2.2% choosing not to disclose their ethnicity. Within the Black category, 83.9% students identify as Black or Black British African, with approximately 70% of these students identifying as Black African Home students and 30% as Black African International students.

The university offers a range of degrees, including undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research programs. Students also have the flexibility to study part-time, and several courses are available through distance learning. For Home students, the majority of courses require students to obtain A-Levels at BBB-BBC (120-112 UCAS tariff points) or above. However, the entry requirements for international students are not standard and are dependent on the qualifications and exams taken in their home country, which are reviewed by the admissions department. Nonetheless, international students are required to obtain the equivalent of a GCSE English at grade C/4 or above to be eligible to attend the university.

1.3.4 Recruitment procedure

A promotional flyer (appendix 1) was developed and shared via various channels to increase participant numbers. The recruitment window was opened in January 2023 and closed in January 2025. Adverts for the interviews were shared in both formal

and informal social groups. The Black Student Officer at the university was instrumental in disseminating the call for participants in various online groups formed of participants from different university societies. Additionally, this advert was displayed in the university's research participation portal, a student hub specifically designed to address systemic challenges faced by Black students and through a postgraduate research newsletter. Informally, several students shared the advert in their social networks and also with coursemates who possessed the required characteristics of the study. To compensate participants for their time, a £15 Amazon gift voucher, funded by a programme at the university designed to tackle inequalities faced by Black students, was provided to each participant upon completion. As noted by Vadeboncoeur et al (2018), who had experienced barriers to accessing university students for specific areas of research, this study also experienced some challenges in recruiting a large cohort of Black African students from their already limited number within the university.

1.3.5 Data collection

I. Interview themes

The interviews centred on topics of experiences of attending university as an ethnically minoritised student and how they and others view their ethnic identity. An initial review of the literature was carried out to identify common themes and inform the development of the interview topic guide. Once reviewed, a thematic organogram map (appendix 2) was developed, and a broad group of six themes were identified at the top level: sense of belonging, identity and labels, academic and career support, financial anxiety, mental well-being, and assimilation into the university and higher education system. Within each theme were sub-themes (28 in total), and further sub-

themes (15 in total) emerged upon disaggregation. Following this, in Chapter 1, the interview themes of identity and of sense of belonging were analysed, while in Chapter 2, the themes of student attitudes on the effectiveness of formal and informal support networks were reviewed. For more detailed information on the interview questions, please see the Topic guide in Appendix 3.

II. Participant characteristics

Approximately 28 participants responded to the recruitment call, with 23 participants taking part in the interviews. Each interview lasted between approximately 30 minutes and 1 hour and 30 minutes. Overall, there were 13 Home-fee-paying students and 10 International fee-paying students. The distinction of Home and International was based on the fee status allocated by the university, and not the student's nationality or citizenship. While the aim of the participant sample was not to be representative, efforts were made to ensure that students from all degree levels (undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research) were included. The inclusion of all degree levels meant that participants in the study had spent different numbers of years in higher education and within the UK. The participant profile, therefore, reflected diversity in terms of the migration generation of the students, ethnic diversity in the students' hometowns, and experiences of being a Black African student in the UK. There was interest in ensuring that the experiences of 1st, 1.5 and 2nd generation participants were accounted for as the socialisation process for each varies considerably, although this was not the objective of the study. Each participant was assigned a random pseudonym in alphabetical order. The pseudonyms given did not reflect any identity characteristics, including religion or country of origin.

No.	Pseudonym	Degree level	Fee status	Generation	Self-identity
1	Anna	PGR	Home	1.5	Black-British African
2	Barbara	PGR	Home	1.5	African Diaspora
3	Clara	UG	International	1	Black-European
4	Dauda	PGR	Home	1	Black African other
5	Ethan	PGR	International	1	African
6	Florence	UG	Home	2	Black Irish
7	Genevieve	UG	Home	2	Black African, Yoruba (tribal heritage)
8	Hassan	PGT	Home	1.5	Black African
9	Ivan	PGR	Home	2	Black British
10	Joshua	PGT	International	1	African
11	Kevin	PGT	International	1	African
12	Laura	UG	Home	1	Black African
13	Margaret	PGR	International	1	Black African
14	Nelson	PGT	International	1	Black African
15	Omar	PGT	International	1	Black African

16	Paul	PGT	International	1	Black African
17	Quentin	PGT	International	1	Black African
18	Roman	UG	Home	2	Nigerian
19	Sara	UG	Home	1	Black African
20	Tania	UG	Home	2	Black African/Black Irish
21	Usman	UG	Home	2	Ghanian
22	Vanessa	PGT	International	1	Black African
23	Will	UG	Home	2	Congolese

III. Recorded interviews

Prior to the start of each interview, the interviewer reminded the participants that the interviews would be recorded and that only the audio recording was required for transcription purposes. Participants were also made aware that the interviewer would be making notes throughout the interview. The interviews took place on an online platform (Zoom), which could record and transcribe the interviews. The use of an online platform provided the interviewees with greater flexibility and meant interviews could be carried out at a more suitable time for the students, and around their schedules. This also reduced the burden on participants by not having to travel to a location on campus for an in-person interview.

The interviews began with an introduction from the interviewer, who had their camera on but provided each participant with the option of either an audio or video interview to ensure that participants were comfortable with the mode of the interview. Two participants chose to keep the cameras off, which the interviewer also adhered to, while the remaining participants chose to have their cameras on for the interview. Once the interviews were completed, an audio recording and transcript of the interview were downloaded and stored in password-protected folders. Unfortunately, the transcription provided by the platform was unable to properly capture various accents and misunderstood many sentences. As such, a manual checking and editing of the transcripts was undertaken by the interviewer to ensure that the participants' answers were not misconstrued.

1.3.6 Data analysis

According to Rabiee (2004), the success of qualitative data analysis is rooted in the construction of the interviews and the interaction between the participant and the interviewer. Thus, effective interview facilitation was carried out in tandem with observational notes. As purported by Islam and Aldaihani (2022), the objective of qualitative analysis is to identify and interpret patterns and themes within the data to help formulate a better understanding of the research topic and issues. Once all interviews were completed, the audio recordings were relistened to and transcribed. This helped the researcher become increasingly familiar with the data and the sentiments relayed by the participants. Once this stage was completed, a thematic coding framework was developed to categorise the data according to specific codes. This framework was initially modelled after the themes of the topic guide, before expanding to include sub-themes based on the responses provided by participants.

Based on the phenomenological methodological approach, participants were able to delve deeper into certain topics and provide data that generated new sub-themes. The software nVivo was initially trialled as a method for data categorisation, but ultimately substituted with a thematic framework grid on Microsoft Excel, which allowed the researcher a holistic view of the data across themes and increased flexibility in the data management of the coding framework. A review of the coding framework revealed overlapping sub-themes, which were collapsed to avoid duplication. This process produced targeted themes which addressed the specific objectives of the research.

1.3.7 Data saturation

Data saturation is a determinant of adequate sample size in qualitative research methods (Guest et al., 2020). During this study, it was discovered that the research findings had reached a point of saturation when the data gathered from participants corresponded with others in the same participant group, and no new information was discovered (Islam and Aldaihani, 2022). Researchers have provided supportive guidelines for the number of interviews required to reach saturation, with Morse (1994) theorising that those conducting phenomenological research, such as in this study, require a minimum of 6 interviews, while Guest et al (2020) bolsters this with findings that only 6 interviews are required to reach 80% saturation, while 11 or 12 interviews are required to meet a minimum of 95% saturation. Another argument to determine sample size saturation is the homogeneity of the participant group, where studies with greater variations in participant groups are recommended to have a sample size greater than approximately 12 participants (Guest et al., 2006). In this study, although all students were from one minoritised sampling group of Black

African students at one university, the comparison of their experiences was based on their fee status (Home or International), thus requiring a substantial number of students to be recruited from both sub-groups. Once all 23 interviews were analysed, it was evident at that point that the research had reached the process of redundancy, where no new themes or information were being discovered, thus leading to a close in participant recruitment (Islam and Aldaihani, 2022). This followed a similar process to other phenomenological researchers who noticed a redundancy of information and data saturation with 10 interviewees (Hossain et al., 2024), thus providing increased validity for this research.

1.3.8 Researcher Positionality

The researcher's positionality refers to the view and position of the researcher and is made up of their intersectional identities and biases. Additionally, positionality can be determined externally, by research participants, who, through their own construct and previous experiences, will form a view of the researcher based on their multiple identities (Manohar et al., 2017). These characteristics can influence the entire research process from the neutrality and interactions in the interviews to the interpretation and analysis of the data (Manohar et al., 2017). Furthermore, according to Banks's (1998) typology of cross-cultural researchers, the interviewer in this research falls under the classification of an indigenous-insider, a term given to researchers who are regarded as being part of the same community or having the same required characteristics as the target participants. This creates a favourable dynamic for the researcher who is better able to gain the trust of the participants and a well-developed rapport (Manohar et al., 2017). This created a safe space for the participants to share their honest experiences on topics such as racism and ethnicity,

which would have been limited if interviewed by a researcher from a different race or ethnic group.

Prior to the interviewing phase, the researcher enrolled on a training session entitled “Getting the Most out of Relationships with Research Participants”. This course is centred on effective ways to build a rapport with participants and covers research methods, including in-depth interviews.

A reflective diary was also kept and updated after each interview to help analyse the positionality of the researcher. In this diary, moments of assumptions and obstacles were noted down and reflected upon. Nonetheless, the inclusion of such instances led to the re-evaluation of the interaction to ensure that the data gathered was objective. This led to the request for clarification for all presumed terms and experiences mentioned in the interviews.

As a Black African British student who grew up in the UK but spent significant time in Sub-Saharan Africa, I began this research believing that my background and ethnic identity would give me a natural advantage in understanding the experiences of the participants. I assumed that being an “insider” would allow me to access authentic insights and relate closely to their perspectives. However, as the study progressed, I realised that my assumptions about insider status were far more complex than I had anticipated. The research process became a learning experience for me as much as for the participants.

During the interviews, it became clear that the experiences of Black British students who had grown up in different ethnic or social contexts were not always aligned with my own. Their upbringing shaped their identity formation in ways that differed from mine, revealing the diversity of experiences that exists even within the category of

“Black African British.” Additionally, during an interview with a Black African international student, the term “UK natives” was used to describe the difference between Black African Home students and Black African international students. The use of this term made me feel unexpectedly like an outsider. This moment highlighted the fluidity of insider–outsider boundaries and reminded me that identity is not fixed but negotiated in context.

Similarly, although I recognised some of the cultural references used by the Black African international participants, there were moments when I realised I was not as much of an insider as I had assumed. Participants often shared things with the expectation that I would automatically understand them, and I found myself assuming their meaning. When discussing an initial interview with my supervisors, I realised I had assumed the meaning of certain slang terms or phrases based on my own use of these words, without considering whether participants used them in the same way. To address this, I contacted the participant to clarify the meaning of specific terms used during the interview. This experience prompted me to keep a personal reflective journal where I recorded words or expressions that I thought I understood but needed to verify. The journal entries also included my reflections on the interviews and what was said as well as remained unsaid, participants’ reactions to questions and emotional responses.

This also prompted me to review the way I was conducting the interviews. Hence, to avoid ambiguity, at the start of each interview, I began by encouraging participants to pause and ask for clarification whenever needed. I also asked students who presented pensive body language or who paused for an extended period of time if they required a more detailed explanation of the question and offered examples when necessary. This was particularly common when discussing concepts such as

belonging. This allowed me to gain quality responses while avoiding biased prompts. Additionally, I asked participants at the end of each interview whether any questions had been unclear or whether they felt I had missed anything important. These adjustments helped ensure that participants felt understood and that their responses reflected their experiences rather than my assumptions.

1.3.9 Ethical considerations

This research was carried out in accordance with the University's ethical guidelines and was approved by the University's Ethics Committee on 03/01/2023[1]. As required, a suite of online training on the university's ethical standards was completed before the submission of the ethics application. Once approved, participants were provided with a participant information sheet, which included sources on mental health student support services and contact details for participants to direct any complaints to if needed. In addition to signing and returning the consent form, participants were provided with the same information as in the consent form and participant information sheet at the start of the interview to gain their verbal informed consent and given an opportunity to ask any questions before the interview began.

Once transcribed, audio recordings were deleted from the online platform's storage, and the transcripts were anonymised, with all identifiable characteristics removed. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) does not publicly provide university-specific ethnicity data (HESA, 2025). However, during the interviews, it was found that for many of the participants, they were either the only Black African student or one of the few in their programme of study. Hence, identifiable data such as degree

[1] Decision Application Reference: ETH2223-0593.

programme, department and country of origin were withheld. The participants were also provided with an opportunity to request the withdrawal of data, such as experiences shared or comments made. After the interviews, two participants requested the removal of comments made from the data gathered, which was adhered to.

1.3.10 Funding

This research is funded by the Transitions and Transformations project [2] at the University of Essex through the scholarship provided for this PhD.

[2] https://www.essex.ac.uk/blog/posts/2023/01/11/transitions-and-transformations-a-black-researchers-journey

1.4 Analysis and discussion

1.4.1 Sense of belonging to the university community

The analysis of the student interviews has revealed a number of factors that influence Black African students' belonging in a British university. The sense of belonging to the university community was explored in the interviews within the following contexts: being an ethnically minoritised student, the impact of microaggression, and the lack of Black lecturers.

Being an ethnically minoritised student

Home students

All interviewed students noted the low numbers of Black African students at the university, with many highlighting that they were either the only Black student or one of the few Black students in their programme or within their department. However, differences were noted in the impact of being a minoritised student, stemming from their experiences and personal biases. Intriguingly, the understanding and concept of being a minority were greatly influenced by Home students' previous experiences at former organisations and institutions.

Anna, a postgraduate research student, recognised the need for more Black students at the university but was unsure if such an increase would benefit or hinder her collaboration with other non-Black students. Anna shared that her previous experiences of working and studying in institutions with larger numbers of Black

students and colleagues led to alienation and increased sentiments of xenophobia by the majority ethnic group:

> Well, from my experiences here in the United Kingdom. I feel racism is rife when there is a group of Black people compared to when it's just one person. Now if there were more Black students, it will feel good. I would love it. But on the other hand, I'm going to have some anxiety because I personally think that some people, not everyone, some members of the dominant culture or dominant community might feel threatened by that. (Anna, postgraduate research Home student)

However, the view taken by Anna shows that although she is a British citizen, she does not see herself as part of the native population but as a migrant. This interpretation is corroborated by the findings of Amisi et al (2011), who highlighted that migrants are often viewed with hostility and as competition to the native citizens. This also reaffirms the theory of Greaves et al (2022), who posit that Black British students must sacrifice their identity to adapt to what is considered the dominant British culture. Failure to do so and retention of one's culture leads to inadaptation, thereby reasserting the alienation of Black students and their identity, rather than an acceptance of Black British culture as a component of the general British culture.

Furthermore, other students remarked on the potential of being overwhelmed at institutions where there were more Black students than expected. Fatimah, an undergraduate student from a small, majority White town, explained that she felt more comfortable in the university's town because its ethnic demography was similar to that of her hometown. However, she also cited the potential of being overwhelmed if she were in an environment with a large population of Black students:

> Coming to [this town], a lot of Black people from London have spoken of their shock at the lack of Black people here, but from where I'm from, that's the norm. I feel like if it were the opposite and I went somewhere where it was really culturally diverse, I think I would be the one that would say this is a lot!

> Even though it's my people [Black people]. (Fatimah, undergraduate Home student)

Additionally, Barbara, a postgraduate research student from a city with a larger Black population than the university's, shared the same sentiments of possibly being overwhelmed by a large Black student body. Despite being one of two Black students in her department, she did not feel like a minority due to the increased number of Black students she saw on campus in comparison to her previous university:

> At my last university, I knew I would be a minority before joining, so I intentionally went out of my way to join societies for Black students. So, coming here and all you ever see are Black students [on campus], you're thinking Oh, my gosh! I even feel overwhelmed because I've never been around this many Black people [students] in my life. (Barbara, postgraduate research Home student)

While scholars have researched the impact of being a marginalised student at university (Bunce et al., 2021; Cornell and Kessi, 2017), these findings go beyond to reveal the acceptance by Black African Home students that universities are spaces in which Black students exist in minority forms. The findings from the interviews show that subconsciously, there is a limit on the number of Black students expected to be seen at universities by the Home student participants. This perceived limit is based on their experiences of being ethnically minoritised throughout various institutional environments in their lives. Therefore, a significant increase in the number of Black students at university will disrupt the balance they have been socialised to accept, thus potentially overwhelming Black students themselves.

International students

International students were aware of their minoritised status but did not see this as

an area of concern. Rather, those from Black-majority countries found it to have a positive impact on their experience as students in a foreign country. Ethan, a student from a Black-majority country, spoke of his appreciation of the campus diversity and the opportunity to learn more about other cultures:

> Personally, it's been very wonderful […] Being Black in the university is a different experience for me, you stand out, you are unique too! I'm the only Black student in my department, but it has a minute effect.[...] I am open to learning, I want to see other things, I have already known my people [Black people], so I want to see others. (Ethan, postgraduate research International student)

This excerpt highlights that International students such as Ethan do not see their minority status as a barrier to their experiences at university. This can be explained through the findings of Mwaura (2008), who hypothesises that the concept of being a minority race is not present in the developing consciousness of Black African International students throughout childhood and adolescence. As such, the concept of being Black in a majority-White country has not influenced their identity or understanding of Blackness. However, this excerpt goes against the trend that International students choose only to build friendship groups with students with whom they share the same ethnicity or nationality (Mwangi et al., 2019) and supports the study of Hendrickson et al (2011), who found that International students experienced more satisfaction when they had a more varied friendship network.

Similarly, Joshua, another student from a Black-majority country commented on his experience of being the only Black student in his programme by noting an increase in his association with students of different cultures while also longing to collaborate with those he is familiar with:

> It's been bittersweet. Most times, you want to collaborate with people you are familiar with, but I've also been able to pick up some close pals [of other nationalities]. (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

The presence of a new culture and integration with students from different backgrounds provided Joshua with an opportunity for social development. This supports the argument of Brown and Jones (2013), who posit that the move from a homogenous cultural environment to one with more cultural diversity allows for less reliance on the accustomed. This enhances the worldview of International students who take on a more global perspective due to their varied interactions. As such, being an international student in a multinational environment is marked by positive traits of cultural learning.

However, Clara, an undergraduate student from a Western European country, was more comfortable being a Black student in the UK compared to previous experiences in cities and countries with significantly fewer Black people. She also expressed her empathy for students from more culturally diverse cities who found their integration in a majority White town more challenging:

> I thought I lived in a diverse city, but coming to the UK and London, I realise that there is a different [greater] level of diversity [than in her hometown]. I think this is different for students from Paris or London who come to a town like [the university's town] and see that they are the minority, and it is almost overwhelming for them and a little uncomfortable. (Clara, undergraduate International student)

This is a salient addition to the research as it adds the unique perspective of Black African International students who have not grown up in a sub-Saharan African country. This also reveals the complex views of Black African International students who have come from other European countries with less cultural diversity. While not documenting a negative association with the low level of Black students at the

university, the findings show that such students have a greater appreciation for the diversity that they lacked in their home country.

Summary

The complexity of being a minoritised student is apparent for both International and Home students. A causal relationship between the number of Black students at the university and a positive university experience was not detected; rather, students were influenced by different factors. For International students from racially homogenous countries who longed for more global cultural awareness, the introduction to new cultures had a positive impact on their experience. While for the international students who were ethnically minoritised in their home countries, the presence of more Black students provided them with a greater sense of belonging. However, with Black Home students, there was a difference in their attitudes to diversity between their primary socialised environment and their academic environment. Many of the Home students, while not strangers to diverse environments, were anxious about the assumed external responses or repercussions of having more Black students.

Impact of microaggression

Home students

The discussions on the impact of microaggressions on the students' sense of belonging produced varied results among Home students. While all Home students mentioned that they were negatively impacted by microaggressions, students who had been raised in towns with similar ethnic demography to the university's majority-

White population were less disturbed by microaggressions than those who had been raised in cities with larger Black populations.

Hassan, a student from a small town in the UK, explained that his experiences at the university or its environs have not been significantly affected by microaggressions. This was due to the frequency of occurrence of such instances in his hometown, making these acts almost ‘normal’ and therefore unnoticeable:

> These things happen so much to me that it’s just like water off a duck’s back. I am not even that aware of them and have to be hyper-aware to notice them because I’m just so used to it, so it’s really hard for me to say if my [university] experience has been affected because this is the experience I’ve had for most of my life. (Hassan, postgraduate taught Home student)

This was corroborated by another student, Fatimah, also from a small town, who remarked at the unease of her Black friends, from more ethnically diverse cities, in the University’s small and largely White city, where their ethnic differences from the local population were more apparent:

> I don’t really know any different […] but my friends feel really uncomfortable going into town, people looking at them, whereas I’m very used to those things, so [...] I don’t even notice it. (Fatimah, undergraduate Home student)

Contrarily, Home students who had grown up in cities with a large Black population were more sensitive to microaggressions and their minoritised status on campus and in the university’s town. Genevieve, a student from London, described the mental stress of being ethnically minoritised and the methods employed to deal with such situations:

> To be honest, sometimes I try not to think about it too much […] It can be frustrating. I try to subdue it and forget about it, but it is still pretty clear. I try not to think about the fact that there are certain privileges that we’re never going to get compared to White or Asian students […] For example, I flinch when I see campus security because they are more [...] I don’t want to say

> aggressive because that sounds bad, so more assertive with Black students. (Genevieve, undergraduate Home student)

The sensitivity to microaggression differed for students from majority-White towns due to their acclimation to environments where their ethnic differences are apparent. Nevertheless, although their ethnic identities are similar, students who are unfamiliar with such new cultural spaces struggled more with their sense of belonging at the university. These findings uncover the complexities of the experiences of Black African Home students in the UK, and provide insight into how these experiences are influenced by the ethnic makeup of the towns or cities in the UK where they were raised. The highlighted differences in perception noted by the students support the study of Mwaura (2008), who found that students unfamiliar with new environments experienced an increased sense of isolation due to the noticeable differences. As such, the challenges of adapting to a new cultural environment can be attributed not only to those from different countries but also to those from different subcultures within the UK.

Additionally, these shared experiences corroborate the findings of Rollock (2021), who explains that ethnically minoritised individuals often ignore microaggressions due to the constant mental exhaustion they experience. While only Genevieve verbally spoke of the frustration, non-verbal signs of frustration were detected in Hassan’s body language and speech pattern when speaking of his experiences. However, this exhibition is different because students such as Hassan have become indifferent to microaggressive acts due to their frequency and, as such, do not bear the same mental burden.

While none of the Home students denied the presence of microaggressions, the main difference identified was the impact of microaggressions on their wellbeing.

This is an important distinction as it conjures up more nuanced questions on the influence of racial diversity and ethnic homogeneity during upbringing, on the student's sense of belonging later in university.

International students

There were also differences in experiences and the impact of microaggressions within the International students' sample. Students who had grown up in Sub-Saharan Africa were more dismissive or claimed to be unaware of microaggressions, even when describing such experiences. The actions which were readily noticed by Home students as microaggressions were not often interpreted as such by International students. For example, Joshua, a recent migrant to the UK from West Africa, when asked, explained that he had not experienced any forms of racism or microaggression, yet later in the interview, he recounted a microaggressive experience on how he viewed roles were distributed in the UK:

> With labour-intensive jobs, they tend to share it more to international African students. (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

The lack of awareness of what constitutes microaggressions by this student challenges the findings of Gooden and O'Doherty (2015), who posit that Black students have a greater awareness of racism. While the findings from the interviews with Home students may support this view, the lack of consensus from all students shows that there is not only a difference in the impact of microaggressions but also in the discernment of such racial acts of violence. As such, it cannot be assumed that there is a shared understanding of racism by both Home and International students.

However, Ethan, a student also from West Africa, was more aware of microaggressions but concluded that they were insignificant to him as he had experienced harsher conditions living in the Global South:

> Racism happens regularly […] but because the UK society is good, people don't come out plainly [people are not overtly racist] but they exhibit it via their actions and body language. Personally, I don't think it's a problem for me because I prepared my mind for it, I expected it. Also, people have not seen terrible things, things like this will shock them, but I've seen a lot, so there are things you should ignore [like microaggression and racism]. (Ethan, postgraduate research student)

Ethan's perspective on microaggressions, in this account, is trivial compared to the difficulties he experienced previously in his home country. While studies have focused on racism in the context of African students' university experience (Adegbola 2018; Boafo-Arthur 2014; Changamire 2022), they have not reviewed the significance of racism in comparison to the other challenges experienced by students in their home countries. As such, it is challenging to quantify the impact of microaggression on African International students if there are other experiences which conjure up higher levels of distress.

Ethan further explains his views on his disregard for microaggressions based on the acceptance of his positionality within his host country:

> Immigrants should be grateful because you're coming into someone else's society, so you shouldn't expect a welcoming environment. (Ethan, postgraduate research International student)

This statement is linked to Ethan's earlier mention of his mental preparedness for racism at a UK university. This highlights how being raised in a homogenous Black country in Sub-Saharan Africa frames the low expectations of the students on being a migrant to the UK, in comparison to Home Black students, for whom racial

inequalities are inbuilt into their identities and experiences from a young age (Mwangi, 2016). It also highlights the uniqueness of experiences among Black African International students, their concept of home, and the identity they hold while in the UK. In this case, the international student accepts the label of "foreigner" and chooses to navigate their spaces based on this identity. This supports the findings of Adegbola (2018), who showed that international African students viewed themselves as outsiders due to their different legal status and social values from native students. As such, these findings show that the impact and perception of microaggressions are also affected by the individual's expectation or implausible view of equity and equal treatment based on their citizenship.

Summary

In summary, though the presence of microaggressions was noticed by all Home students, there were differences on its impact on their mental wellbeing. In comparison, International students were less aware of microaggressions and disregarded them as an attribute of their migrant status in a new environment. One explanation for the difference in perception could lie in the definition of microaggression itself. Sue et al (2007, p.271) define microaggression as follows: "Racial microaggressions are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of colour". Therefore, the frequency and longevity of microaggressive acts contribute to the intensity of microaggression. As such, those who have less cumulative exposure to microaggression, such as International students from racially homogenous countries,

are less likely to notice the presence of microaggression at the start of their migration journeys when compared to Home students who have had more exposure to microaggression. This is evident in the differences of opinion among student participants based on the length of time spent in the UK.

Lack of Black lecturers

Home students

Most Home students agreed that having more visible Black lecturers would significantly impact their sense of belonging, and their ability to express themselves candidly without further explanations or fear of judgment. Fatimah spoke about the unease she experienced when speaking with a non-Black lecturer, which resulted in a heightened awareness of her cultural and ethnic differences:

> I feel like it would be easier to talk to a Black lecturer about issues. In first year, when I went to speak to a non-Black lecturer, I did feel judged. She was looking at my hair and nails because they were long and a certain type of way [acrylic]. I could just sense that she was judging me [...] This made me uncomfortable, especially because I was going [to her] for help and support. (Fatimah, undergraduate home student)

This quote strengthens the finding of Greaves et al (2022), who observed that Black students seek out both staff and students to help foster a network of safety from cultural misunderstanding. The theme of misunderstanding is echoed through the research of Olaniyan (2021) and Solorzano et al (2000), who explain the anxiety experienced by Black students who feel misinterpreted based on stereotypes and a lack of cultural awareness. However, while scholars such as Olaniyan (2021) explore the differences in culture between international African students and their host culture, it is evident that the same findings are also relevant to Black Home students

who come to university with a different subculture. This is seen in the case of Fatimah, who later reveals her insecurity about her style and appearance not fitting into the norm of her programme peers, of which she is one of the few non-White students:

> The majority of the people on my degree are White, and maybe there is a certain look that STEM students have […] I don't know, maybe I just stand out. (Fatimah, undergraduate Home student)

This sentiment is also apparent in the interviews of undergraduate student Genevieve, and postgraduate students Hassan, and Dawda . All three students shared similar remarks on the importance of speaking to a lecturer who they believe understood their cultural cues and sentiments without the need for further explanation. This was also interpreted as an avenue for help-seeking from lecturers based on the assumption of less judgment:

> I have no Black lecturers in any of my modules, it's very poor. I don't need more Black lecturers because of representation, but there are certain social cues that they will pick up on and be able to help you. There is also that cultural understanding [...] I want to one day become a senior lecturer, so it would be great to see someone in that position already outside of London." (Genevieve, undergraduate Home student)

> Having a Black lecturer will definitely impact my sense of belonging. It's that visibility, when you can see someone, then you can even imagine yourself being in that role. Then you can talk to them about their experiences and what it has been like for them in a candid way […] It's less comfortable speaking to lecturers who are not Black because then you have to explain why you are going through a challenge." (Hassan, postgraduate taught Home student)

> When I'm with non-Black people I need to remind myself of where I am and who I am. I would have to explain myself even clearer. I cannot express myself as freely. I have to remind myself that this is as far as I can go with a particular topic [there is a limit to what can be spoken about]. (Dawda, postgraduate research Home student)

While the existing literature has discussed the importance of the representation of ethnically minoritised lecturers and their impact on students' sense of belonging (Rana et al., 2022), these findings show the importance of disaggregating the experiences of ethnically minoritised students and the nuanced cultural norms which are not shared across all minoritised ethnic groups. In the excerpts from the students, the issues that arise from the lack of Black lecturers cannot be resolved through the presence of other ethnically minoritised lecturers. Moreover, the students highlight the specific challenge of cultural differences and the assumption that they will be more relatable to lecturers of their own ethnic group. These challenges can impact their aspirations within academia post-education, as the lack of visible Black lecturers often translates to the perception that professions such as lecturers and senior academics are not viable aspirations for Black African students. As such, these students and their challenges need to be understood within their own cultural context and not the context of being within an aggregated minoritised ethnic group.

International students

International students' responses to the topic of the visibility of Black lecturers were split between an acknowledgement of the lack of Black lecturers in the university and the unawareness of this issue. Two International students in particular spoke about the direct impact of this topic on their sense of belonging at the university. Clara, an International student from Western Europe, explained that the dichotomy of diversity at the student level versus the staff level induced the feeling of being a visitor at the university:

> So, there's one thing I will say that bothers me, it is that there are no African lecturers. The non-White lecturers are from different parts of the world […]

> There is representation in the lower levels, my level, the students […] Students bring the diversity to [the university's town] and the university, aside from them, there is no diversity whatsoever […] There is no representation higher up [staff members], so that makes it harder to belong. It's like even though they are very welcoming, it's like you are guests still, and they [(the university] are just very nice hosts. (Clara, undergraduate International student)

Clara's account aligns with the research of Bista et al (2019) and Trahar and Hyland (2011), who highlighted that the university's intrinsic agenda for recruiting International students was to promote its appearance as an institution with a diverse student body capable of attracting high-revenue fee payers from across the globe. This objective is focused on revenue growth as opposed to improving the international students' sense of belonging. Such an attitude is present in the above quote, where Clara's awareness of her presence within the institution is likened to a visitor due to the lack of Black lecturers and senior officials involved in shaping the experiences and pedagogy of students. As such, the inability to see a continuation of diversity from student to staff level assumes the concept that there is a limit to the involvement of Black people in universities. This projects an image that the ownership of the academy is not shared equally, but rather inadequately weighted against Black students and academics.

Similarly, Ethan described the impact of having no Black lecturers with whom he could relate by describing feelings of increased comfort if the opposite were the case:

> I have not seen any Black lecturers in my department. I would feel more comfortable and more relaxed if there were Black lecturers because we are facing the same struggles, and when you are relaxed, you can think better and work better. I have students [of the same ethnicity] who come to me simply because they feel I will understand their challenges where others will not. (Ethan, postgraduate research International student)

The comments relayed by Ethan highlight the cross-validity of research in other fields such as mental healthcare, which explains the importance of having adequate representation of a particular ethnicity among practitioners. This is evident in the scholarship of Dare et al (2022) and Memon et al (2016), who describe the distress experienced by Black participants in receipt of mental health care due to a lack of cultural understanding and the frustration of having to explain why their race impacted some of their struggles. As such, these findings show that International students, though not domiciled, can also be mentally impacted by the lack of Black lecturers at universities.

Summary

The sentiments around Black lecturers for both the Home and International participants were similar, with many of the Home students seeking out an affinity with their lecturers to ease some of the discomfort experienced as ethnically minoritised students. The importance of cultural context is apparent in the findings from this section. It is evident that culture is not based on nationality or upbringing alone, and the subcultures of Black students are different from the culture of ethnic minorities in general. The cautiousness of Home students in expressing themselves and their thoughts is similar to the perceptions of International students who are cognizant of their foreign identity at the university. With both groups, there is a heightened sense of difference due to their realisation of non-continuance from students to staff based on the limited presence of Black lecturers and senior staff in the academic community. The impact of a lack of Black lecturers on the mental wellbeing and sense of belonging for both groups is comparable. This is the first theme in the study

where members of both groups describe being impacted similarly based on their shared ethnicity. As such, the requirement for having more Black lecturers affects not only the students' perception of the university and its recruitment practices but can have a significant positive effect on some of the day-to-day challenges faced by Black African students and their career aspirations in British universities.

1.4.2 Ethnic Identity and Labels

The analysis of the interviews revealed the students' active navigation of their identity in a British university as Black African students. The aspects of student experiences discussed within this theme fall within the following contexts: ethnicity and self-identity, migration and its impact on identity, and accent challenges.

Ethnicity and Self-identity

Home students

The Home students interviewed all provided variations in defining their ethnicity, despite all definitions being within the same target participant group of Black Africans. While some conflated their citizenship with their race, others self-identified based on their culture and some merely on their nationality. Saliently, the data showed that the experiences of these students and the acceptance of their Britishness by peers impacted their own self-identification.

Genevieve, a student born in the UK, explained that when asked about her ethnicity, she chose to identify as a particular tribe from her country of origin as opposed to Black British. This decision was influenced by the xenophobic sentiments conveyed to her as a child, in which her indigenous culture and race posed a barrier to true Britishness:

> It was very confusing to me in primary school because people didn't treat me as British, my British identity was invalidated all the time. I experienced racism and xenophobia and was told to go back to my country. […] Also, learning about British values in school and TV shows such as 'Little Britain' made it very clear what it meant to be British, who got to be British and who sits outside of that. (Genevieve, undergraduate Home student)

This experience of Genevieve echoes the findings of Elton-Chalcraft et al (2017), who found that students interpreted national stereotypes as Britishness and British values, thereby othering minority groups who do not fit into these characteristics. Furthermore, in contrast to several other studies conducted on a student's sense of belonging at university (Bunce et al., 2021; NUS, 2019), this finding reveals that the criteria for who belongs at a British institution are already projected to ethnically minoritised groups from a young age in their years at primary and secondary school.

However, there were students such as Hassan and Ivan who believed that citizenship played an important role in defining a person's ethnicity. While both students held different citizenships and identified as different ethnicities, their outlook on defining their own identity shared similar ideals based on cultural capital. Hassan, a student who qualified for home fees due to his settled status in the UK but has a citizenship of an African country, expressed the shock of others at finding out that he was not British. This was despite possessing the same traits and characteristics as other British students around him. Furthermore, he explained that his ethnic identity, although admittedly slightly confusing to him, is a fusion of his citizenship and experiences:

> I see myself as African, but I'm not an African student because I don't have the experience of an African student, such as applying for a visa. I also have the privilege of passing as a British student. When people meet me, they describe me as British. I wouldn't describe myself as British because of [my] citizenship and also because of how I was brought up. (Hassan, postgraduate taught Home student)

This view was echoed by fellow student Ivan, a second-generation postgraduate research student, who questioned his eligibility to take part in the study as he viewed Black African and Black British as different categories despite being of Black African descent:

> By requesting Black African participants in this study, it wasn't clear to me that you also meant Black British. I am Black British primarily, and Black African secondary. I think there is a difference, which I base purely on citizenship. If someone said they were Black African, I would assume it meant they were a citizen of a Black African country. (Ivan, postgraduate research Home student)

The findings from these participants show that while an individual's citizenship can have a stronger influence on self-ascribed labels than shared ethnicity or nationality, there are other factors, such as whether people feel accepted by the dominant ethnic group despite sharing the same citizenship. This is in line with Phinney's (1991) theorem, which explains that ethnic identity is a combination of multiple attitudinal factors in addition to race and nationality. Despite Hassan having grown up and socialised into British culture and receiving the same rights and fee status as other Home-domiciled British students, the lack of British citizenship restricted his ability to truly self-identify as British. While scholars such as Ceuppens and Geschiere (2005) argue against claims of authentic citizens due to their production of multiple tiers of the citizenry, Hassan's account and Ivan's rhetoric reveal that citizenship does have an impact on students with migrant backgrounds and their ability to feel British. This is based on the validation provided by citizenship, which allows the individual to feel British and to be perceived as British by others.

International students

The International students from Sub-Saharan African countries in this study had an overwhelming sense of pride in their ethnic identity as Africans. There was also confusion about the label "Black" with many participants finding it to be an arbitrary and insulting term reflecting little meaning to them or their culture. Also, these

students rejected the idea that they shared the same ethnic identity as Western Black students due to the differences in cultural experiences.

Ethan, a student from West Africa, expresses his pride in being African while simultaneously making a clear distinction between being Black and being African, with ‘Black’, in his opinion, being a pejorative term assigned by others through racism and segregation:

> I am very proud of where I come from. I am African […] Africa is a geographical location, but Black is caused by human bias, a way to devalue and demean you. To be sincere, nobody is the colour Black, and nobody is White. (Ethan, postgraduate research student)

Similarly, Joshua also conveyed his displeasure at being labelled ‘Black’ and the importance of being regarded as an African:

> I am African. Being African means identifying with where you are from, the continent, while Black is just skin colour. In my home country, we don’t identify as Black, we identify as African. If I am not as black as my hair or a keyboard, then why should I be called Black? (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

These findings provide insight into the self-identification of the Black African International participants and their perception of the differences between being Black and being African. The students from Sub-Saharan Africa had a high sense of ethnic identity in the UK due to their loyalty and appreciation for their identity (Phinney, 1991). Furthermore, the rejection of the term Black and a refusal to identify in this way may contribute to increased alienation even among other Black students from Western countries. To combat such issues, Boafo-Arthur (2014) argues that Black African International students who have social networks with other students of similar backgrounds and experiences will develop a greater sense of belonging within their community to reduce feelings of isolation. As such, there is a risk that guidance

documents produced to improve the sense of belonging of Black students, such as the joint publication of the UUK and NUS (2019) on *Closing the racial gap,* will not be receptive to Black African International students who do not see themselves represented in the labels of “BAME” or ‘Black’.

Moreover, Kevin, while identifying as Black African, also made a distinction between African students and those he termed “UK natives”. In his interview, Kevin made plain his belief that identity was also rooted within shared experiences, in which case he identified more with students from the Global South, irrespective of race, in comparison to his Western Black African peers:

> I feel just as foreign when I am in a place filled with Black people from the UK. We are not the same, even though we are Black. I mean, they have a lot of Black UK natives here [in the university]. There is a cultural difference, they are more accustomed to the UK lifestyle and more Western. […] I identify more with other [migrant] minority groups and feel more comfortable around them. […] I don’t feel that the Black British are a minority because they are part of the majority culture. (Kevin, postgraduate taught International student)

Kevin’s views support the argument for further disaggregation of Black students in the UK and their experiences. It uncovers the intersectional identities that Black African International students come to the UK with, including that of being a first-generation migrant from the Global South, in addition to being a student, Black African and an ethnically minoritised member of society for the first time. In this context, the findings of Mwara (2008) stress the importance of viewing International African students through the lens of their distinctive experiences, in which cultural adjustment is a unique challenge that is not experienced by Home Black students. To buttress this, Hyams-Ssekasi et al (2014) note that issues faced by International African students are compounded by the adoption of a new identity as a minority group and alienation from local students. As revealed in Kevin’s interview, the term

'minority' refers not only to skin colour but the culture within the university context. This is particularly evident in the difference in privilege enjoyed by those who are well-versed in Western culture in comparison to those who are foreign to it.

Summary

This topic highlights the importance of ethnic identity and its difference from ethnicity and nationality. The key concepts within this section revolve around topics of self-identity, which are influenced by personal attitudes, collective attitudes and external perceptions. With regard to Home students, the contention lies mainly in who fits into the British identity and who has the right to be British. These definitions were greatly influenced by external factors such as citizenship and the opinions of peers, and media stereotypes. However, the Black African International students' ethnic identity was influenced by their collective attitudes, evident in the students' common reference to the generic pronoun of "we" when explaining their identity. This shared ethnic identity is based on culture and cultural uniqueness compared to other groups, regardless of shared skin colour (Tajfel, 1981). However, in contrast to Phinney's (1990) idea that ethnic identity in racially homogenous countries is insignificant, the students' reflections reveal that globalisation has eradicated this notion based on the political interconnectedness of nations and portrayals of racial groups in the global media.

Migration and its impact on identity

Home students

The Home students who took part in this study had different migration histories, ranging from those born in the UK to those who came to the UK in their teenage years. Remarkably, there is a distinction in the experiences of participants depending on when they or their families arrived in the UK. While Anna and Hassan are both 1.5-generation migrants, the effect of their migration journeys impacts them differently. Hassan's account centres on the internal injuries inflicted on his identity, while Anna's migration journey is continually highlighted in her professional interactions.

Anna, who migrated to the UK in her teenage years, explains the bias she experiences due to her non-UK primary and secondary school educational background:

I think that being born in the UK somehow it mitigates some experiences. […] When I am asked about my educational background, and I tell them I went to [a school in her home country], the next question that follows is 'Do you have a visa?' Or if they were to choose anyone, they [employers] would choose the person who studied here [secondary education in the UK] because they don't think my education is as good as the person that studied here. (Anna, postgraduate research Home student)

While Anna is a Home student with British citizenship, her migrant journey presents her with unique challenges not experienced by all Home UK students. Scholars such as Li (2018) explain such disadvantages in the labour market as the levy imposed on migrants, even though their qualifications and language skills present no obvious challenges. Moreover, Anna, as a 1.5-generation student, also experiences the compounded challenges experienced by first-generation migrants who emigrate to the West. In such cases, the skills from their home countries are unrecognised

(Webb, 2015), just as in Anna’s account, where her experience shows that her educational background is not considered to be on par with those who studied in the UK.

However, Hassan, another 1.5-generation student who migrated to the UK during his primary school years, details a different narrative, namely that of xenophobia and rejection in his early years, but unlike Anna believes he integrates better by going unnoticed as a migrant:

> The people I resonate most with in life are those who have similar experiences as child migrants [...] I identify a lot with Eastern Europeans who migrated to the UK because in my hometown, we both experienced xenophobia. It was so strange for me because when I came to the town, I went to make friends with the Black kids, and the Black kids were like ‘No! You’re African, we’re Black English.’ […] I guess because I have been here so long, I now assimilate well. (Hassan, postgraduate taught Home student)

Hassan’s identity, as reflected in his account, was shaped by his experiences of othering and rejection by those of the same ethnicity as a young child. As such, his identity and those with whom he identifies with more, shifted to people who had similar experiences of rejection. This experience highlights the significance of emotional distress from rejection and its effect on the belonging of migrants and their children, regardless of the presence of a similar ethnic group in the host nation (Parutis and Buler, 2023). As such, the assumption that the experiences of Black students of the same fee status are comparable is flawed, based on these findings, which show the impact of migrating to the UK at different ages within the 1.5 generation group.

Nonetheless, those who came to the UK as infants appeared to have no noticeable challenges as a result of their migration, sharing similar privileges to those who were

born in the UK. Barbara, a 1.5-generation student who came to the UK as an infant, expressed her unfamiliarity with the challenges of being a migrant in the UK:

> Because I came at such a young age, I have been here since nursery, […] I know how to navigate this [educational] space, so while International students or people who migrated here may feel like a minority, it doesn't affect me. (Barbara, postgraduate research Home student)

Separately, Ivan, a second-generation student, also expressed his feelings that class is more of an issue of belonging than race:

> I think that class was more of an issue than race because I get on well with White people of similar backgrounds. (Ivan, postgraduate Home student)

In the accounts of Barbara and Ivan, it appears that their ethnic identities were not proven to be a hindrance in their formative experiences in education. This shows that there is a commonality shared by very young 1.5-generation students who came to the UK with no recollection of their home country and those who were born in the UK. However, when considering all accounts in this sub-section, it can be deduced that unlike the proposed theory by Yi (2009) that posits that all 1.5-generation migrants share a similarity in how they navigate their multinational identities in their host country, these findings show that those who come to the UK at a very early age do not have the same identity struggles as those who come in their later years.

International students

The international student participants shared varied challenges of their experiences in migrating to a Western country. While students from Sub-Saharan African countries were aware of their foreignness and the disadvantages that came with it, a student participant from a Western European country likened her positionality within

the UK to that of her home country, thereby also referring to herself as a second-generation migrant in the UK.

One student, Ethan, did not reflect a desire to belong to the community he lived in, but rather accepted that he was a foreigner who had no ownership within his locale:

> When I say the community in this case, I am talking about the owners of the town […], the local residents. (Ethan, postgraduate research International student)

Ethan's othering of himself within the UK supports the findings of Changamire et al (2022), who argue that the conspicuous nature of Black African International students' race and culture impacts their self-perception in Western universities. This perception of being an outsider is further exemplified by their reduced legal rights, which they must acknowledge and carefully navigate (Adegbola et al., 2018). Therefore, by referring to the local population as the "owners of the town", Ethan's response provides evidence to justify the narrative that International students view themselves as separate from native students due to the differences in the rights afforded to them. Hence, their identity as aliens has a secondary impact on their sense of belonging, separate from the impact of their ethnically minoritised status. According to the acculturation model developed by Berry, Ethan's actions are consistent with the separation theory, displayed by his perception of otherness while having a strong link to his culture (Berry, 1997).

Additionally, Kevin provides further verification on the additional challenges faced by International students when navigating a new labour market:

> Even with part-time work as a student, a lot of them [employers] often ask for experience from here [the UK] already. If I just got here, where do you want me to get that experience from? (Kevin, postgraduate taught International student)

As documented in the scholarship of Scott et al (2015) and Webb (2015), migrants who come to Western nations are faced with the requirement to rebuild their skills due to the obsolescence of their previous knowledge and practices gained in their home countries. However, unlike students who migrated to the UK in their earlier years, International students such as Kevin have not had the opportunity to build their labour experience or skills in the UK. As such, they encounter unique challenges based on the negative bias from employers, which reduces the value of their pre-arrival skillset. This finding provides a clear distinction between the privileges of Home students and International students, with the latter resulting in a deterioration of their mental health (Reid, 2012).

However, Clara, who came to study in the UK from a Western European country, did not present the same challenges as outlined by the other International students. Rather, Clara expressed the similarities she noticed between herself and Home students:

> I identify more with Home students here. […] I guess I would describe myself as a second-generation migrant here. Even though coming here was an adjustment, I feel like […] because I am also from a similar culture, a Western European country, the adjustment was not as big. (Clara, undergraduate International student)

This finding outlines the importance of taking cultural intersectionality into account when examining the experiences of Black African International students. This quote shows that a migrant's shared cultural environment with their host country has a profound impact on a student's sense of belonging. Furthermore, studies show that Western nations do have a degree of shared culture based on histories and nation-building, which is visible in the shaping of their societies (Bendix 2017). As such, this

finding shows that the experiences of International Black students from Western states are more akin to those of other similar nations than those from a different non-Western cultural environment.

Summary

The impact of migration journeys, as detailed in the section, reveals the unique challenges and privileges experienced by migrants. While similar challenges are experienced by some 1.5 and first-generation migrants, the severity of these challenges is not the same. While prejudice was experienced by both groups, the impact of the prejudice was more significant to the identity construction of the 1.5-generation migrant who came to the UK in their primary school years, than to the identity construct of the International students who arrived in the UK, post their primary socialisation. Additionally, time spent in the UK allowed for the accumulation of the social and cultural capital required for the labour market, as those who arrived in the UK and built their resume and qualifications in the UK could enjoy the advantages of having UK experience when applying for jobs. Noticeably, this study has shown that the four dimensions of Berry’s acculturation model are rigid in their categorisation of these participants, whose experiences span across different acculturation strategies rather than independently within each (Berry, 1997).

<u>Accent challenges</u>

Home students

While accent challenges have predominantly been featured in the literature on the integration of Black African International students at Western universities (Beoku-Betts, 2004; Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014), the research conducted for this study also explored the challenges faced by some 1.5-generation Home students due to their accents. Although the accounts from the students were different, they provide a unique insight into the challenges and privileges ascribed to accents.

Anna, a native-English-speaking student who came to the UK as a teenager, explained the frustration of having a non-standard British accent in the higher education sector, especially when dealing with university student support staff:

> What did it for me was when, you know, she said it sounded like I didn't speak English well. I spoke English! You know I speak English very well. […] So my accent was not that standard British accent, and as a result, there was, this is, in my opinion, there was this expectation or this perception that I probably wasn't coherent. (Anna, postgraduate research Home student)

Anna's account offers insight into the overlapping experiences of 1.5-generation migrants and first-generation migrants. While Anna had been in the UK for most of her life, the presence of her accent presented a similar barrier faced by first-generation migrants, where the adequacy of her communication skills was both challenged and doubted. This prejudice against migrants with non-standard or stronger accents has been shown to limit migrants in the labour force through the presumptions of lesser capabilities and competence (Li and Campbell, 2009). In the case of adolescent migrants adopting the accent of their host country, Dovchin (2019) found that students with this migration history worked to alter their accents to resemble that of the host country due to being bullied and teased at school.

However, Anna's excerpt shows that she was not insecure about her accent, but rather confident with her proficiency in English. The findings also revealed that the questioning of Anna's English-speaking skills led her to conclude that this was due to her not having a standard British accent. Thus, for those with a background as child migrants who navigate their identity between their country of birth and the UK, the rejection of their speaking proficiency due to their non-British accent could also translate as a rejection of their Britishness.

However, Hassan, another 1.5-generation migrant student who came to the UK as a child, spoke on the advantages he had over students from London who had grown accustomed to using slang words. He also described the positive reception he enjoyed due to the Britishness of his intonation:

> I also have the privilege of passing [for British] […] Like my voice and how I speak. I don't have concerns because I fit in really well […] when I go for interviews, I feel like that helps me […] I don't have to code-switch, but people [students] from London, they have to change the way they talk, [...] they have to code-switch [...] they have to talk more pleasantly and remove a lot of slang. I've seen it first-hand. (Hassan, postgraduate Home student)

In this extract, Hassan raises a salient point on the negative connotations of certain regional accents and the use of slang words. Furthermore, Hassan uses the phrase "code-switching", which takes place as students replace their usual way of speaking with a less regional and more standard British accent. This theme of a causal relationship between the Received Pronunciation (RP) accent and presumed socioeconomic progression is supported by Baratta and Halenko (2022), who found that participants believed that speaking with a reduced regional accent enhanced their social capital and career prospects. However, the participants in Baratta and Halenko's study did not question their Britishness or assume that an RP accent increased their Britishness, but instead, some rejected the idea of modifying their

accent due to pride in their regional roots. As such, the complex ideology described by Hassan in which a non-regional RP accent equates to enhanced Britishness shows that for 1.5-generation migrants, an accent not only indicates the region they were raised in, but also how well they have acculturated into the British identity.

International students

The findings from International students on the impact of their accents are reminiscent of previous research, which details attitudes of frustration and isolation (Jean-Francois, 2019; Maringe and Carter, 2007). While not all International students spoke about their experience of having a foreign accent in a British university, the majority of International students gave similar accounts of the hindrance caused by being misunderstood by peers, lecturers and the wider university community.

Kevin, a Sub-Saharan African student, spoke of his unwillingness to engage with students outside of his home country in group work. This attitude was based not only on his experiences but also on those of friends in similar situations. The task of having to constantly repeat himself and the anxiousness of being misconstrued or misinterpreted in a scenario that could influence his grade were enough to discourage him from seeking to partner with students of different nationalities:

> In everyday life and inside the university […] when asking a question, you have to repeat yourself at least three times. I learnt from my friend's experience who came to this country with me to stick with people [from his home country] within a group project […] They couldn't understand him […] They completely got wrong what he was telling them and I can't deal with that. (Kevin, postgraduate taught International student)

The challenges of having an unfamiliar accent as an African student led Kevin to internalise the notion of being a foreigner vs being a native. The realisation of being

different in a new culture also reinstated the need to remain in the culture of collectivism, which is referenced in Kevin's decision to "stick with people [from his home country]". Mwaura (2008) describes this as a coping mechanism used to combat the social isolation experienced by African International students who struggle to adapt to their new cultural environments. Additionally, Parutis and Butler (2023) argue that more attention needs to be placed on the emotional responses of migrants when seeking to understand their experiences, as this can help to comprehend their intricate positionalities. In Kevin's case, he is a student at the university like all other students, but his emotional response indicates an aversion to viewing himself as a member of the collective group of students; rather, he is fixated on his identity as a West African student in a British university.

Summary

The findings from this sub-theme have shown that accents are not just indicative of a person's upbringing environments but are also a factor in shaping their identity. With Home students, accents can be a tool used to solidify a person's status and ethnic identity within a multicultural society. This is especially important when seeking to be recognised as a member of the main group, identified through the stereotypical characteristics of that group (Phinney, 1990). As noted in a previous study by Dovchin (2019), the struggles encountered by child migrants due to the differences in their enunciation, particularly in their school years, accelerate their desire to sound more like members of the host country in an attempt to better assimilate and belong. However, this justification is based on the stereotypical characteristics of identity and is not shared among those who possess confidence in their identity. Nonetheless, for International students from Sub-Saharan Africa, the presence of a foreign accent

increases their separation from other students due to challenges in understanding each other. This increases their feelings of alienation from the general student body, thereby reaffirming their identity as foreign migrants.

1.5 Conclusion

1.5.1 Research summary

This study was carried out to provide a contextual understanding of the experiences of Black African Home and International students at a British university. Much available data on the experiences of this ethnic group has often been reductionist, failing to explore the in-depth perspectives of these students by generalising findings from all Black sub-groups or ethnic minorities. Compounded by guidelines on tackling anti-Blackness and racism across UK universities, which are based on Home-domiciled data alone, and purported for all Black students (NUS and Universities UK, 2019). This study helps to demystify the experiences of both Home and International students by comparing the experiences of both groups to understand their similarities and unique challenges. In doing so, the data provided by this research increases the understanding of the key issues and challenges for both groups independently, within the UK.

This study also reduces the overreliance on US literature on topics of Black African student experiences by working to reduce the knowledge gap within the UK. The main contribution of this study is the differences in ethnic identity formation and the concept of ethnic identity between Home and International Black African students. Additionally, the themes of sense of belonging and ethnic identity have been shown through this research to be interconnected in shaping the experiences of the students at their university. The data gathered from the participants were rich and provided insight that was not previously explored in the other literature, such as the

components contributing to self-identification, a premise not previously highlighted as an objective of the study.

1.5.2 Summary of research findings

The research findings based on the data gathered from the interviews were compartmentalised into two key areas: sense of belonging and identity and labels, and within each key area, multiple themes were explored. While both themes are separate, there were noticeable overlaps which can be likened to two sides of the same coin. As such, one of the main findings of this study, as reviewed in the discussion section, is the pertinent link between a student's ethnic identity and their sense of belonging at university. While encompassing similar ethnic characteristics but distinguished by fee status, this research uncovers the uniqueness of each ethnic identity and how such traits impact the perception and the degree of ownership each student believes they have at the university.

The theme of the students' sense of belonging explored three main topics: the impact of microaggression, being an ethnically minoritised student and the lack of Black lecturers. The findings from the topic of microaggressions revealed that the experiences of Home students in the university's town were shaped by the ethnic diversity of their hometown's environment. Though prior research has evaluated the impact of microaggression on Black students at universities, this study shows that the sensitivity of microaggression is heightened in students for whom their ethnic differences become more prevalent in a majority-White town. The findings also suggest the impact of microaggression for Home students is not equally comparable

with that of International students, who have had less cumulative exposure to such acts, and as such are less disturbed by it.

On the topic of being an ethnically minoritised student, the data gathered uncovered the anxiety among some Black Home students at the prospect of a larger increase in the Black student population at the university. Prior experiences of xenophobia and a small Black student population at previous institutions contributed to anticipated feelings of being overwhelmed based on internalised acceptable limits on the number of Black students in higher education spaces. Nevertheless, the International student cohort enjoyed more positive experiences based on their minority status, including exposure to more international cultures.

The final theme explored within the area of sense of belonging is the lack of Black lecturers. The findings from this area centred on the direct positive impact both sets of students believed they would experience with the presence of more Black lecturers. The perception conveyed by students surrounded the ability to communicate with Black lecturers without fear of judgment or misunderstanding due to collective cultural empathy. Noticeably, the findings from this subsection highlighted the importance of cultural competency and informed on the requirement to understand Black African students within their ethnic context and not within the collective bracket of ethnically minoritised.

The second key area of analysis was identity and labels, and within this area, three themes were further explored: ethnicity and self-identity, migration and its impact on identity and accent challenges. The main findings in the theme of identity and labels were the components of identity construction and the difference between ethnic identity and national identity. Many Home students in the study, due to their migration

histories and classification of British identity based on media portrayals, citizenship and peer groups, detailed the complexities of identity formation. However, the International students displayed evidence of a high sense of ethnic identity based on collective identity formation. This section of the findings reveals key elements of differences between the groups, starting with their differences in self-identification.

This follows through into the next theme of migration and its impact on identity. This section uncovered the importance of deciphering the migration journeys of students, especially the complex experiences of 1.5-generation migrants who came to the UK between infancy and adolescence. The findings within this section revealed the overlapping challenges between 1.5-generation migrants and first-generation migrant students and highlighted the privilege of 1.5-generation Home students in their ability to accumulate more cultural capital than their first-generation peers. As such, the challenges of International students in the labour market were found to be more intense than those of Home students.

The final sub-section of this area reviewed the impact of accents on student experiences. Unlike previous research on the experiences of Black students, these findings unearthed the underlying link between accents and identity. For some Home students who came to the UK as children, their accents acted either as a reminder of their migration history or as a sense of validation or invalidation of their Britishness. However, for International students, the difficulty in their peers' understanding of their accents fostered an increased sense of separation from students outside of their nationality. This increased their acceptance as foreigners within the university, leading to these students distinguishing themselves from other students.

1.5.3 Key contributions and wider implications of the study

The main implications of this study address the gaps outlined in the research objectives, which were to focus primarily on the extent to which the experiences of Black African International and Home students are unique to their specific grouping, with a secondary focus on understanding how ethnic identity impacts the experiences of students at a British university. It is important to note that the ethnic demographic profile of the university means that the results of this study, if replicated, may vary in other parts of the country with a different demographic profile. This study has contributed to knowledge within this field of research by providing data that helps to understand key components of Black African student experiences.

This comparative study also addressed the first objective by gathering data from both International and Home students separately. While the findings from the research have been detailed, this study shows that Black African International and Home students do not share equivalent experiences while at university due to the experiences that shape their identities. Additionally, the presence of previous challenges, such as microaggressions and issues with being ethnically minoritised, did not affect International and Home students equally. While Home students have a higher susceptibility to these issues, the impact of these issues on the wellbeing of International students is not as severe. As such, this study has provided insight into key differences in attitudes and perceptions by both groups, showing that their experiences should be understood within their unique contexts.

Another important area addressed within the study was an overreliance on US literature on the experiences of Black students at university. Throughout the scholarship review process, there was a noticeable gap in the literature on Black African international student experiences in the UK. Furthermore, no visible studies

were comparing the experiences of both groups within the UK. As such, an understanding of the topic was dependent on the small number of papers published on this topic within the US. While these provide a good understanding of the differences between the groups, the findings cannot be entirely transferable to the UK because of the differences in context. Consequently, although part of the general African diaspora, the components forming the identities of African Americans, migration histories and racial political climate differ significantly from the UK. Therefore, this study helps to bridge the gap in knowledge within the UK context by focusing specifically on the Black African category in the UK. The key themes discussed and the findings outlined will act as a foundation for further exploration within this area.

The final implication of this study is in the understanding of ethnic identities between Black African Home and Black African International students. Previous research, guidelines and racial categorisation assume the ethnic identities of Home and International Black African students to be the same. However, this study challenges that perception through its understanding of the differences in attitudes, perceptions and identity formation attributed to each group. This highlights the need to review the guidelines provided for Black students to ensure that they are inclusive in addressing the challenges experienced by Black African Home students *and* Black African International students. As such, this study demonstrates the importance of disaggregating the experiences of students and the counterintuitiveness of initiatives designed to help a group of students without first consulting a sizeable number of those students on their specific needs and challenges.

1.5.4 Limitations

This study, like many others, has limitations based on the methodological approach and data gathered. Firstly, while the aim of qualitative studies is not generalisation or representation, with 23 participants, this study was not able to expand on the voices of many others with different characteristics. An example of this is the limited number of undergraduate Black African International students in the research. While the aim of this research was not to disaggregate regionally within Africa, it was recognised that the cultural identity of Sub-Saharan Africa is not homogenous and different histories and factors may contribute to the perception of its citizens. Another limitation of the study was the time commitment of students who had other priorities, thus leading to the cancellation of some interviews. However, while the data gathered from the students was rich and varied, it cannot be said with certainty if the inclusion of more participants would have significantly influenced the research findings. Nonetheless, the exploratory character of this research focused on comparing the experiences of Black African International and Home students, which led to significant findings, even with a relatively small number of interviews conducted, as evidenced in previous research (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014)

1.5.5 Recommendations for future research and practical applications

Based on these conclusions, there is scope to further increase the knowledge on Black African students with different identities and heritage. This area will benefit from further research on the impact of migration on students' identities by interviewing more migrant students who came to the UK at different age groups and settled across towns and cities with different ethnic makeups. Additional research will

help to strengthen the findings of this study by uncovering the relationship between the age of migration, the diversity of the host area and its impact on identity formation.

Secondly, to better understand the implications of these results, further studies could address the experiences of Black African students at other UK universities, specifically at different types of universities in different geographical locations and with different histories, as this study has focused on the experiences of students in a university with a mainly White population. This will help to increase the understanding of the experiences of Black students in different demographic environments and with different ethnic populations. Additional attention should also be paid to Afro-Latin, African American and Afro-Caribbean students at British universities who fell outside of the scope of this research and, as such, were not featured. Further research is also needed to determine the causes of anxiety among some Home-domiciled Black students when faced with the prospect of increasing the number of Black students at the university. Finally, a survey focused solely on the experiences of Black African students may provide a more quantifiable method to gather a larger dataset on the experiences of students in British universities.

Chapter 2: Evaluating Formal and Informal Student Support Structures: Views of Black African Students

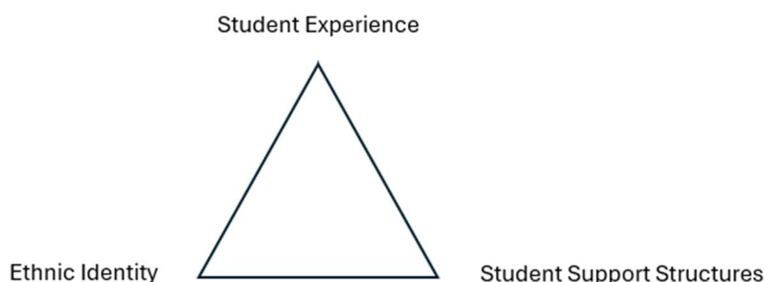
2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Context of the research question

This chapter builds on the foundational groundwork in Chapter 1, which compared the experiences of Black African Home and International students through the intersections of ethnic identity and belonging. The study focused on the uniqueness of the identities of Home and International Black African students, thereby contributing to an increased awareness of the differences in their experiences at a British university. By disaggregating the acronym BAME and the Black ethnic category, the previous chapter was able to gain an authentic view into the perceptions and attitudes of Black African Home and Black African International students on their sense of belonging within their academic and wider communities.

However, to gain a more comprehensive view of student experiences of these two groups, it is imperative to consider the attitudes to both formal and informal student support services alongside ethnic identity. These factors are interrelated and contribute to shaping one another as well as shaping student belonging, and are visualised in an equilateral triangular diagram below (Figure 2) with each factor affecting and being affected by the others.

Figure 2



This chapter will focus on reviewing the effectiveness of formal support structures for Black African Home and International students and highlighting areas where informal support is required to close and mitigate gaps in knowledge and services. In doing this, this study will continue to build on its objectives of understanding the unique experiences of Home and International Black African university students in the UK.

2.1.2 The importance of student support services in the student journey

Student support services are an integral part of a student's journey at university, improving student engagement while simultaneously creating a beneficial experience for them (Buultjens and Robinson, 2011). These services are in place to assist students outside of the traditional classroom learning environment and have been designed to help familiarise them with aspects of student life not encountered prior to university enrolment (Lintern et al., 2001). While the impact of student services is visible within the university through success measures such as student retention and dropout rates, it is also influential in the lives of students through the promotion of an inclusive environment (Thomas, 2002).

The current trend of focusing on symptomatic responses, such as student outcomes, promotes a deficit thinking ideology which compares the achievements of Black and minoritised ethnic groups with White students without first establishing a baseline of the students' needs and the university's response to this (Lewis and Hunt, 2019). Hence, the needs of students who require more specific support, such as Black African students, are overlooked (Mimirinis et al., 2024). Consequently, this system of viewing students through university metrics diminishes the importance of student

experiences by placing the focus instead on their contributions to the university (Dean et al., 2020; Murray, 2025; Thangavelu et al., 2019).

While universities commonly offer a range of support services that share similar themes, including financial, mental well-being, accommodation, and skills development, the take-up of these services has been shown to differ according to the diverse needs of the students (Weuffen et al., 2021). Similarly, studies reviewing student satisfaction have shown that Black African students' satisfaction levels are lower when separated and compared to other ethnically minoritised groups (Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012; Oswald, 2021). Furthermore, Black African students have been found to suffer from race-related mental challenges such as alienation and anxiety due to contributory issues such as a lack of representation of Black academic and mental health practitioners, and a lack of awareness by universities on the unique identity and challenges of these students in higher education (Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012; McCann et al., 2018).

Thus, the experiences of Black African students must be understood within their context and not amidst the grouping of minoritised groups. As such, Black African students require non-generalised and specific support to help them navigate their unique experiences while in academia (Mimirinis et al., 2024). Such interventions must take into consideration the varying characteristics among these students, through the acknowledgement of differences between Black African Home and Black African International students. To ensure this, support services must be non-reactionary but instead targeted to the requirements of Black African students to ensure that they have a positive impression on the lives of these students (Mimirinis et al., 2024). A crucial aspect of this is recognising and reducing events which trigger

occurrences of trauma and alienation by providing the necessary resources, all of which influence a student's sense of belonging (Jackson Preston et al., 2023).

2.1.3 The role of formal and informal support services

Formal support services are a collection of structured services offered by the university to assist students throughout their academic journey (Raaper et al., 2022). These services are designed with a deliberate aim, validated through reviews and administered by professional staff members (Rafik Hama et al., 2020). However, while the compilation of formal support services offered by universities differs according to each university, it encompasses the provision of guidance, information, counselling and advice to students (Morgan, 2012). University professional staff provide advice, guidance and support within the remit of career preparation, mental well-being and general personal needs of the student (Perez and Sabato, 2023). Hence, formal support is separate from the academic services rendered through teaching and instead focuses on the support received by students from either professional or academic staff members outside of the classroom environment.

Career preparation services are one example of formal support that is offered within universities and is constantly evolving to meet the changing demands of the labour market, society and the university itself. As such, to better prepare students for life post-academia, universities offer students access to a range of career services, including job placements, networking opportunities and counselling services (Dey and Cruzvergara, 2014). The impact of career services is beneficial to graduate employability outcomes as it helps students learn how best to navigate the labour landscape (Bridgstock et al., 2019).

Alongside this, mental well-being services have gained prominence within higher education as academies recognise the increasing need for these services for their students (Bennett et al., 2024; Quinn et al., 2009). The large diversity of students and the increasing number of mental health service seekers at universities mean that universities are tasked with providing targeted and effective care for their students (Quinn et al., 2009). For example, researchers have reported the development of health challenges such as depression and anxiety in students during their transition into higher education due to significant shifts in their personal circumstances, which impact their mental well-being (Bryant et al., 2022; Deasy et al., 2016). Furthermore, universities offer other targeted guidance and information pre-and post-enrolment on areas such as accommodation, orientation guidance, and the curriculum.

Informal support services, on the other hand, are inconspicuous and can be categorised as all unregulated support received by students outside of the formal structures of the university, or any other formal institutions (Rafik Hama et al., 2020). This can take place through a variety of networks, including peers, family and friends (John et al., 2018). The support offered informally can range from informational to emotional and plays a significant role in the lives of students (Hefner and Eisenberg, 2009). Peer support among students is based on respect and an understanding of shared experiences, which does not follow the formal approach to diagnosing problems (John et al., 2018; Mead et al., 2001). This form of support is seen to be mutually beneficial and helps students build a sense of community by reducing negative psychosocial effects of transitioning to student life and advancing the positive rate of student outcomes (John et al., 2018). The value of peer support is evident in the transition to university, where students with peer relationships are

better able to adapt to their new surroundings, thereby reducing the students' anxiety (Ding and Stapleton, 2015).

Family support is another important avenue for students when dealing with academic, financial, and personal challenges. This support system can provide invaluable assistance to students by helping to ease psychosocial challenges through the provision of positive reinforcement (Cheng et al., 2012). This is an integral aspect of the well-being of students who experience levels of mental distress during trying times in their academic journeys (Deasy et al., 2016). The positive influence of family support has been noted in the literature discourse, which shows a correlation between the support received from the family and the student's ability to overcome academic challenges (Klink et al., 2008)

Formal and informal support services are both important structures for students during their academic careers. While formal support structures are designed to equip students with the required tools to advance in their academic journey (Raaper et al., 2022), the role of informal support services and their use as a contingency to bolster formal support services is an important avenue which will be explored. Additionally, upon viewing these structures together, it becomes increasingly apparent that informal support services are utilised differently by both Home and International Black African students, with the latter heavily relying on the use of social support structures as tools to address their knowledge gaps. One area where this is evident is the duty of care that universities have in providing both Home and International students with access to information on topics such as securing accommodation (Universities UK, 2023). However, due to less familiarity with the local customs, International students require additional support and failure to provide this results in a knowledge gap. This burden is then undertaken by informal support networks,

despite it being a key area of the university's formal support services. (Dhillon et al., 2008; Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell, 2018).

2.1.4 Research question

This chapter will evaluate *how Black African Home and International students utilise formal support and in which instances informal support is relied on to provide additional guidance*. For clarity, in this research, formal support services are the services and structures put in place under the directive of the university to support students, while informal support services are provided outside of the direction of the university and administered by peers, friends and family, networks, the wider communities and in some cases, staff members. Specifically, the questions have been designed to understand where nuanced similarities and differences occur and the rationale behind those differences.

Finally, this chapter aims to shed light on how differences in identity construction by Home and International students influence their attitudes towards and use of student services. Data was gathered using the qualitative in-depth interview research method highlighted in the methodology section of Chapter 1.

2.2 Literature Review

This section will provide a critical review of the effectiveness of formal and informal student support services, and their role in fostering student belonging and wellbeing for all students with diverse needs, with a particular focus on the needs of Black African Home and Black African International students. This review will help understand and contextualise the experiences of these students, as reported by them, and analysed in this chapter.

2.2.1 Review of student support services at university

Though the university's primary position is to educate its students academically, scholars such as Kaur (2016) argue that the absence of adequate student support services limits the university to an institution of degree distribution and not a place of holistic learning. Furthermore, Chaney et al (1998) posit that student support services play an even more important role in the lives of disadvantaged or marginalised students in helping to improve the retention and educational achievement of these students within higher education. Severiens and Schmidt (2008) delve further by addressing the importance of support services in not only academic integration but also informal social integration, such as interactions with teachers and peers.

One of the key roles of student services is to help facilitate the integration of students into a new and potentially challenging environment (Thomas et al., 2002). While all students beginning their academic journey are new to the higher education environment, it is important to view this unfamiliarity as a spectrum as opposed to a

generalised standard. In doing so, it becomes clear that the support needs of students will differ depending on where on the spectrum they fall, with the divergent characteristics of these students presenting as a compounding factor in addition to their ethnicity (Shaw, 2009). It should also be taken into consideration that this diversity of needs may not be well understood by the institution (Audin et al., 2003). This becomes apparent when reviewing the lens through which support is understood and addressed by institutions, which is grounded in the assumption that, firstly, there is a shared understanding of the term support and what it encompasses (Marie et al., 2023; Walsh et al., 2009). As such, without continuous development and increased awareness of the changing needs of students, the effectiveness of the support provided to students will become outdated (Jacklin and Le Riche 2009).

Within the case of Black African students, the nuanced challenges faced by both Home-domiciled and International students should be reviewed separately. An example of this is evidenced in the increased number of Black African International students in the UK who have no recourse to public funds despite being financially disadvantaged due to the astronomical rise in inflation in their home countries in recent years (Ohuocha 2023; Reuters, 2023). In cases such as this, it can be argued that an understanding of ethnicity or racial issues through the experiences of Home-domiciled students alone is inadequate to understand the geopolitical challenges of Black African students from outside the Global North. As such, there is a need to apply both a holistic and intersectional approach to the understanding of students' needs, even when focusing on ethnicity.

Importantly, the impact of support services tailored to the issues of Black students in environments where they are minoritised is found to have great psychological

benefits (Stewart, 2011). Such practices help students by providing a network to assist them in navigating the academy and the specific challenges they face as Black minoritised students in White spaces (Stewart, 2011). These non-academic services play a fundamental role in providing care and guidance for students on matters that could adversely impact their mental wellbeing, and it is thereby essential that student support services are well-informed and culturally relevant (Huffstead, 2016).

Furthermore, accepting that the integration of students requires the assistance of universities and does not happen automatically provides a space for addressing the complex challenges that Black African students face. A prominent obstacle, as reported in Girmay and Singh's (2019) study, is the barrier of unfamiliarity and isolation due to the enhanced cultural differences at universities. Selected studies have focused on the disadvantages of experiencing cultural dissonance between host nations and International students (Girmay and Singh, 2019; Kim and Markman, 2006); however, Chaney et al (1998) broadened this area of thought by forming the conceptualised theory that any student who notices differences between themselves and the general student population is disadvantaged. This is true for many Black African Home students who, despite a shared cultural understanding and partaking in the host nation’s customs, also face burdens based on their intersectional differences from the majority, thereby impacting their experience at university (Osbourne et al., 2021).

2.2.2 Effectiveness of Formal Student Support Services for Black African Students

Moreover, although the university is an institution of learning, it is also a microcosm of the world, which exhibits the same structural inequalities found in other spaces (Byron, 2009). Thus, formal support services are required to help minoritised students who are more impacted by these inequalities, such as Black African students, to circumvent these barriers. For many Black students who are domiciled as a minority in their home environment, this equates to the transition from one structurally unequal system to another, where experiences of isolation and minoritisation remain common (Lewis and Shah 2021). Nonetheless, for Black African International students who are part of the majority ethnic group in their home country, their transitional experience of becoming a minority in the UK is often reviewed within the collective group of International students, which distorts the specific challenges of prejudice and alienation that Black African International students face (Caldwell and Hyams-Ssekasi, 2016). This presents a unique challenge to universities in offering effective support for Black African Home and International students, in a climate where the support is based on data gathered on the experiences of home-domiciled students, thus leaving gaps in knowledge of challenges faced by Black African International students (NUS and Universities UK, 2019; Seuwou et al., 2023).

However, following the events and protests of 2020, post the murder of George Floyd, many universities were under increased pressure to improve the racial disparities in student outcomes (Ali, 2020). This led to further engagement in the promotion of anti-racist institutions, which focused on tackling the barriers Black

students faced inside the classroom through curricular diversity and outside the classroom with approaches facilitated by the university's support services (Ali, 2020; Lewis and Shah, 2021). These non-academic services are centred on guidance around finance, accommodation, well-being and skills development to help universities create a safer and more tolerant community for students alongside their academic studies (Dhillon et al., 2008). Additionally, the increasing pressures faced by students and exhibited through mental distress have contributed to the prominent requests for more pastoral and well-being services (Bennett et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the evidence suggests that the availability of amenities tailored to the service users positively contributes to the overall student experience by providing students with a sense of connection to their university beyond academics, thus increasing engagement and diversity of experiences (Ciobanu, 2013). In comparison, the design and delivery of student support models have often been reviewed through the lens of improving student outcomes such as student retention (Thangavelu et al., 2019). This is a characteristic of the literature within this area and does not take into consideration the unique perspectives or identities of Black African Home and International students, but focuses instead on the objectives of outcomes. Thus, the choice to focus on the collective of ethnically minoritised students can lead to the creation of interventions that only impact their shared barriers, thereby failing to mitigate the challenges that are specific to certain groups, such as Black African students (Mimirinis et al., 2024).

Additionally, it should be noted that the premise of recognising the needs of ethnically minoritised students without effective action is insufficient in tackling the root causes of those issues (Sabri, 2011). Universities in Western countries such as

the UK are familiar with the presence of Black African students and the requests for measures to tackle the alienation faced by this group in predominantly White institutions (Read et al., 2003). Common issues experienced by Black students include alienation, isolation and marginalisation, all of which are exhibited throughout their student journey (Haywood and Darko, 2021). This is buttressed by Williamson's (1999) study, which found that despite the recognition of Black students' issues, the failure of academies to sincerely commit to the alleviation of both academic and non-academic barriers facing Black students continues to reproduce an isolating environment.

Hence, Haywood and Darko (2021) advocate for the interjection and increased understanding of Black culture in all avenues of the university experience to help eradicate the cultural dissonance encountered by Black students. The success of such measures will ensure that Black students feel part of their institution and are not made to feel alienated due to their cultural differences with the majority ethnic group. Similarly, a review by Guiffrida et al (2018) calls for an increase in university support for student unions through university counsellors, with a particular focus on the support offered to Black students through initiatives such as Black Officers and Black societies. The importance of these services and roles lies in their ability to help Black students better assimilate into their university life, thereby improving inclusivity and increasing the consideration given to the Black student voice. More importantly, the review also highlights the importance of universities playing an active role in counselling Black students involved in student societies to help protect them from burnout.

Another avenue for which academics recognise that a university's support can be impactful is through allyship. Through effective allyship, non-Black staff can help those leading change through societies and initiatives by helping to alleviate some of the labour, which can lead to exhaustion (Huxtable, 2021). The support provided in this stance helps to ensure that minoritised students advance further in duties such as progressing their societies, which leads to a positive impact on the whole student community. (Ro et al., 2024). Nonetheless, this support must be provided with sensitivity to the marginalised experiences of Black African students by promoting the voices of those with lived experiences as opposed to embodying their voice by proxy to be truly effective (Huxtable, 2021). This helps to counter common criticisms of allyship as being superficial and performative (Ro et al., 2024).

Consequently, Bell et al (2020) champion the importance of allyship in eradicating themes of anti-Blackness in the academy by calling for a united stance against these problems. This can be done through conscious efforts to understand the experiences of Black students, the importance of the formation of groups centred on their ethnic identity, and the purpose these serve. The proactive act of engaging in an understanding of such important issues highlights a sense of commitment that goes beyond just acknowledging the lived experiences as noted by scholars (Arday 2018; Marshall 2016).

Navigating the university environment as International students

However, the changing racial demography of the UK's student population, evidenced by the increase in the number of Black students entering higher education, has produced a more dynamic climate, resulting in an increase in the plurality of needs of

its students (Audin et al., 2003). Although there is an increasing recognition of the challenges faced by Black African students studying in the UK, this recognition is marginal and not expansive (Maringe and Carter 2007). Moreover, a distinct theme that is revealed in the scholarship is the difficulty Black African International students have in adjusting to a different cultural environment without their friends and family (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014). This is remedied by students through the formation of social communities and groups that help to bring together Black African International students from similar backgrounds to counter the effects of isolation. Hence, in light of this, Boafo-Arthur (2014) recommends that universities employ a format of group counselling designed with the cultural components of Black African culture to offset the negative stereotypes of counselling.

A sufficient understanding of the needs of Black African International students requires a student support service that not only reacts to the historical requirements of its current student population but takes a proactive approach to prepare a safe and fair environment for its incoming students, which must go beyond the passive recognition of issues (Gibbs et al., 2006). Instead, universities should focus on mitigating potential harm by installing mechanisms to support all Black students through their journeys, without being limited to Home-domiciled Black students, as witnessed in the contents of anti-racist guidance documents (UUK and NUS, 2019). One key difference in adapting to the university environment for Black African International students is the culture shock experienced, which steepens their adjustment curve in contrast to Black African Home students who are already familiar with the domestic culture. This compounds the stress that the international group encounters and therefore requires psychological support tailored to these specific experiences (Zhou, 2008).

While it can be argued that an approximate prediction of incoming Black African Home students to a university may prove challenging, universities have the advantage of their partnerships with overseas institutions and recruitment agents to predict the number of students they will receive from their target marketing regions across the world, including students from sub-Saharan African countries (Hulme, 2014). As such, universities, many of which are partnered with international agencies operating in Sub-Saharan Africa (Hulme et al, 2013), have the foresight to ensure that their student support services meet the needs of these incoming students. However, there is limited literature on the specific experiences of Black African International students in the UK, as their plights are often grouped with all other international students, thereby limiting the understanding of the group and further reducing the ability to adequately propose interventions that counter the barriers faced by this group of students (George Mwangi et al., 2019).

Financial anxiety of International students

Although Black African Home and International students share the same ethnicity and similar challenges relating to their ethnicity, the aspect of a sense of belonging in the UK is one which differs between these two groups due to financial constraints. A major difference between the Home and International students is the fee they pay to study at UK universities and who provides the funds for their studies. While the fees of Home students increased substantially in 2012 from £3000 a year to £9,000 a year and then to £9,250 since the 2017/18 academic year (Culbertson and Brown, 2024), the method in which many Home students paid these fees remained the

same, with the immediate burden financed by the UK government's Student Loans Company (Student Loans Company, n.d.).

However, many International students have continued to bear the immediate financial burden of paying for these fees to the universities themselves. Granting that the socioeconomic class of International students varies greatly, the disposable income of Black African International students is reportedly lower than that of students from other continents (Dominguez-Whitehead and Sing, 2015). Similarly, a study by Hyams-Ssekasi et al (2014) on Black African International students in the UK found that almost all students admitted to experiencing anxiety when considering the payment of their tuition fees. This impacts the ability of such students to experience a sense of belonging as doing so requires the possession of academic materials, attending social events and technologies, which all require additional monetary contributions (Nguyen and Herron, 2021).

An assumption of all International students, including African students, is that they are financially buoyant due to the affordability of higher tuition fees, which has led to the increased marketing of British education to foreign students and a favourable outlook on such students (Tannock 2012). This portrays International students as the ideal students who can pay premium university fees without financial concerns (Koutsouris et al., 2021). However, studies show that the affordability of the initial tuition fee or the ability to prove that these fees can be paid does not translate to high socioeconomic status for all African students but is a cause of major distress to many (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014; Mwangi et al., 2019). Indeed, Maringe and Carter (2007) found that some African students do not have enough resources to complete payment for the full duration of their tenure at their UK university, leading to disruptions in their studies due to part-time work commitments. The lack of certainty

on how tuition fees will be paid in future years foreshadows the inevitable distress faced by many African students who experience financial hardship in the UK (Hyams-Ssekasi et al, 2014).

Lowe (2023) further buttresses this point by explaining the disparity experienced by students contending with financial obstacles and how such difficulties lead to isolation and disengagement. As such, the collective experiences of Black African International students are shown to differ from the general population of other International students and from UK Home-domiciled Black African students who have the option to receive loans and grants from the UK government for their tuition fees and maintenance (Student Loans Company, n.d.).

For foreign students, this is especially discouraging for those whose professional skillset and qualifications are not well recognised in the Western labour market, thereby resulting in the uptake of lower-skilled jobs (Webb, 2015). This is further intensified by the loss of social and professional networks in their home countries and the need to restart their socialisation and understanding of a new labour market (Scott et al., 2015; Webb, 2015). However, the knowledge needed to familiarise themselves with labour processes is not always evident to African International students who often rely on their informal networks of friends and acquaintances to help guide them through the ordeals (Mwangi et al., 2019). The resulting combination of these factors is underemployment due to the underutilisation of the skills possessed, leading to a decline in their mental health (Reid, 2012).

Furthermore, unlike Black African Home students, options of additional funding for International students are limited. The financial burden on Black African International students extends beyond the payment of tuition to include sustenance and

maintenance costs, which they often have difficulty meeting (Constantine et al., 2005), and these costs can increase significantly in a short space of time due to the inflation of their home currency (Maringe and Carter, 2007). This is evidenced in West African countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, which saw their rate of inflation soar year on year in December 2022 to 54.1% and 21.34% respectively (Ohuocha 2023; Reuters, 2023). Therefore, while the price of their tuition and accommodation costs are fixed for the year, the value of the savings held by students from those countries depreciated due to the country's weakened currency. This provides an added problem for Black African International students whose place at university is dependent on their ability to fulfil their financial obligations to the university.

Additionally, students who migrate to the UK without their families do not have the support of their kin to rely on in times of financial hardship. This reinforces the anxiety caused by separation and intensifies feelings of isolation (Beoku-Betts, 2004). These feelings make apparent the foreignness of Black African International students, who, unlike their Home-domiciled counterparts, have significantly fewer privileges in times of financial hardship due to the difference in their citizenship and their immigration status (Adegbola et al., 2018). In such cases, Black African International students experience a type of marginalisation not shared with their Home peers, who have the support of their home government and family members in their home state. This distinction places Black African Home students within the dominant privileged group while Black African International students navigate around the greater costs of being a student in a foreign country (Adegbola et al., 2018). As such, the theme of financial anxiety, while indiscriminate, has a profound effect on Black African International students once accounting for the factors mentioned.

2.2.3 The role of Informal support structures

The importance of informal student support and its contributory factors to the outcomes and success of students is not as widely studied as the impacts of formal support (Hommes et al., 2012). While universities try to address the transitional challenges students encounter through formal approaches, it is often the efforts of informal peer-led methods that enable students to build and navigate their new identity within higher education, thus increasing their confidence (Morosanu et al., 2010). The adoption of this new identity, coupled with other intersectional identities such as ethnicity, means that Black African students are faced with the task of learning to negotiate their selfhood in academia through the support of their peers. For many Black African International students, pre-existing students with similar backgrounds are viewed as possessing a blueprint for navigating their new environment and new status as migrant students (Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012). This is supported by the scholarship of Okyere et al (2024), who found that these students actively sought to connect with other Black African International students to minimise their feelings of isolation while simultaneously seeking to increase their access to support at university.

Similarly, Black Home students utilise their informal networks of students with shared heritage to help combat issues of alienation in their universities (Grier-Reed, 2013). This is facilitated through groups and societies such as the African Caribbean Society as a safe space to help them navigate their student identity as an ethnically minoritised group (Osbourne et al., 2023). Thus, these spaces and communities play an imperative role in the lives of new Black African students who require additional support in familiarising and adapting to their new location to ensure progression

through their academic journey. Thus, the imperative nature and impact of informal support networks have been found to help students foster a sense of belonging to combat encounters of isolation and unfamiliarity (Cajax et al., 2021).

Another advantage of informal networks, such as social groups, is the ability to use these to build social capital and help identify opportunities. While studies have shown support for this concept with academics building their career (Padilla-Meléndez et al., 2020), the same can also apply to students, as evidenced through opportunities for peer-reviewed work and invitations to social groups for additional informational and learning support (Saw, 2020). This is of huge significance for Black African International students, who Hyams-Ssekasi et al (2014) found were required to rapidly increase their familiarity with new technologies and learning styles upon enrolment at UK universities. Thus, the knowledge transfer which occurs within informal networks provides Black African students with a theoretical map, predicting challenges and opportunities in academia and thereby helping to shape their aspirations.

Significantly, the advice received informally by Black African students from their social networks influenced the choices they made from the modules they chose, how and with whom they networked, and whether to accept formal advice given by the university (Johnson et al., 2023). This support, while vast, is not dispersed evenly among all ethnically minoritised groups, with first-generation migrants noting a comparative deficiency to peers of second and above generational migration status who have been conferred with pre-existing knowledge by family and friends (Birani and Lehmann, 2013). Nonetheless, the intensive informal support received is not

enough to negate the feelings of dissonance and incompatibility experienced by Black students while advancing through university (Sutherland, 2011).

Additionally, student societies are categorised under the remit of extracurricular activities along with other sporting activities and hobbies. However, in the absence of a culturally diverse curriculum that is heavily influenced by Western pedagogy, students turn to their informal networks within their university to encourage their interests and provide an avenue to solve the problem of an undiversified pedagogy (Loader et al., 2015). In these cases, societies such as Afro-Caribbean Societies (ACS), which are common in many universities in the UK, can act as a medium to bridge the gap between stipulated learning and the interests of Black African students at universities (Adams, 2012). Nevertheless, the significance of these social groups and their intended use is different for Black African International students who are faced with navigating their new identity as foreigners and minorities, while seeking a network of other Africans to assist them (Changamire et al., 2021). Thus, such societies help to enhance the overall student experience by bolstering the university's hidden curriculum, hence playing a supporting role to both formal student support and the academic curriculum (Buckley and Lee, 2021).

However, engagement with ethnicity-related societies is not a universal position shared by all, with some ethnically minoritised students in majority-White universities choosing instead to actively avoid ethnically themed societies to circumvent further increased isolation from their White peers (Bunce et al., 2021). Notwithstanding, the lack of membership in such groups does not equate to a lack of interest, but rather, further highlights the difficulties some Black African students face in being overt in their cultural interests. Thus, it cannot be deemed that the presence of student

societies is sufficient in addressing the topics of culture and diversity, which Black African students value; rather, the academy is required to proactively address the requirements of a diversity of voices and experiences to support marginalised students (Ohito et al., 2018). This is supported by the findings of Rahman and Alwi (2018), who argue that due to the internalisation and diversity of students within the university, educators should be responsible for ensuring that their environment accepts and recognises the cultural plurality of its students through embedded practices both inside and outside the classroom environment.

The importance of cultural competency of university staff

Nonetheless, due to the subjectivity of the effectiveness of support services, it is difficult to quantify the efficacy of these services. The role of personal tutors is a good example displaying the dichotomy in the support received by students based on the level of training, time and willingness of the individual tutor, all of which contribute to discrepancies in the roles fulfilled by personal tutors (Dhillon et al., 2008). In a study conducted by Rana et al (2022), it was found that students from minoritised ethnic backgrounds felt that the role of their personal tutors should encompass dealing with specific cultural issues, a service unavailable within the formal support provision of the university. This highlights the trend in the needs of minoritised students seeking support that is tailored to their cultural experiences.

However, due to the low ratio of the ethnically minoritised academic staff population at UK universities, not many tutors are equipped with shared lived experience to facilitate or identify with such students (Gabi et al., 2024). In the case of Black African students, the number of Black African academics is a fraction of the small

number of staff from ethnically minoritised groups (Warrener and Douglas, 2023). This is especially evident when compared to the dramatic growth of Black African International students in the UK (HESA, 2023). Thus, in the absence of the required levels of Black African academic staff, it can be argued that academies cannot reach an optimum level of effective service to provide to their students without first addressing issues with the ethnic demography of their academics (Vieler-Porter, 2020).

Nonetheless, the degree of complexity in Black African students' requirements of their personal tutors will vary. This is due to Black African Home students possessing an advantage of cultural capital over their International peers through familiarity with the UK's education sector. The learning curve for Black African International students and the level of support they require from their personal tutor will involve issues that Home students do not present, such as help with transitioning to the host culture (Taylor and Ali 2017). Similarly, the learning curve will also be steeper for personal tutors of Black African International students who also have to learn to understand the exhibited behaviours of these students, which may be rooted in cultural norms of respect for seniority (Raby, 2020). As such, the evaluation of this formal service will depend both on the backgrounds of the students and the personal tutor, thus leading to a varying assessment of a personal tutor's effectiveness.

The inconsistencies in the level of support offered by personal tutors can also be linked to how well-equipped these staff members are in performing their roles adequately (Dhillon et al., 2008). This is compounded by tutors and tutees lacking clarity on the remits of the personal tutor's role (Ghenghesh 2018; McFarlane 2016). This is further impacted by the dynamic requirements of students coming from

minoritised backgrounds, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, combined with the multiple roles performed by the personal tutor within the university (McFarlane 2016). Hence, tutors who lack a cultural understanding of their students will not be well prepared to help the students deal with issues attributed to ethnic or cultural characteristics. This is evidenced in a study by McFarlane (2016), who, while reviewing the level of support personal tutors received, found that several tutors in the study had received no guidance or training before commencing their role as a personal tutor, based on the assumption that the tutors were intuitively prepared for the position. Additionally, Walker (2022) found that personal tutors felt they needed additional support to deal with more commonplace issues in universities, such as mental well-being matters. This highlights the importance of training for personal tutors who are tasked with providing a pastoral role to students for whom many do not understand the nature of their plight. Thus, the lack of adequate support for tutors is transferred to students, who in turn are also left insufficiently supported (McFarlane, 2016).

The increasing number of Black African students in the UK higher education sector brings with it a diversity of customs and experiences, and the onus of ensuring that these students are adequately supported both academically and socially by skilled practitioners falls on the university (Coggins, 2008). Historically, there has been more emphasis on how well Black African students can assimilate into the academy, thus encouraging the deficit model narrative, which assumes culturally different students are deprived of cultural capital. This then places the burden of adapting to the dominant culture on these students (Ford et al., 2001). Thus, Kruse et al (2018) theorise that an understanding of the diversity of the student body should be central to the development of all staff members, which can only be accomplished by promoting an institutional focus for all staff members to be culturally competent, not

just academic staff. Thus, the cultural competency of support staff should be evaluated similarly to their academic counterparts. This is supported by Cormier (2021), who posits that the importance of cultural competency, which is formed through an understanding of the customs and values that shape a student's worldview, including their approach to learning environments, is even more salient when the learning providers and students are of different ethnic groups.

Therefore, for student support to be effective in tackling the barriers faced by Black African students, it must be culturally relevant and culturally competent (Hama et al., 2020). While not academics, support staff also shape the learning of students outside of the classroom through the services they provide and by guiding students through their transition to greater independence (Thompson et al., 2021). However, Comeaux et al (2023) argue that the concept of cultural competency, which focuses on increasing knowledge and awareness of minoritised cultures, adopts the notion that a baseline of awareness is sufficient, whereas there is a need for staff to continually evolve their knowledge and cultural awareness. This is important as Pomales et al (1986) found that Black students perceived culturally sensitive staff to be more competent in their work than those who were not culturally competent. Saliently, this is indicative of the perceived effectiveness of staff by Black African students who may require their help or services.

Effectiveness of mental and emotional support to students

Additionally, failure to embed cultural competency as a principle of non-academic student support, such as mental health, has been shown to result in misunderstandings of Black people by professionals, which in turn leads to distrust

by this group (Huffstead, 2016). More specifically, Arday (2018) suggests that for mental health support to be effective for Black students, it must consider cultural awareness and historical and epistemic challenges faced by this group. Hence, for services to address the appropriate needs of Black African Home and International students, there should be a level of disaggregation to avoid the conflation of challenges faced by both sub-groups. The implementation of cultural proficiency must therefore penetrate beneath the surface of cosmetic tick-box exercises to address the distinctive issues these students face.

This is further expanded on by Livingston et al (2022), who posit that while mental health issues can be experienced by all, the concept of Blackness and the unique stigmas and stereotypes that are associated with it is an important component that should be viewed interconnectedly when caring for Black mental health service users. However, it is important to note that the concept of Blackness differs for various ethnic groups based on their historical and migratory backgrounds, and as such, it is a difficult concept to understand without engaging with all groups with African heritage (Andrews, 2020). Thus, for universities to provide a culturally competent level of service to Black African students, they must ensure that the measures employed are relevant to the historical context of Black African Home and International students in the UK.

While the focus on improving mental health and well-being care for students is welcomed, the needs of Black students, specifically Black African Home and International students, are unique to their identity and migratory context and thus cannot be resolved with interventions formulated for the general student body. Hence, once the barriers that are obstructing members within the community are

recognised, it is imperative that the university proactively eliminates those barriers (Schilling-Dickey, 2022). This can be done by tailoring the support offered to the needs of student characteristics as opposed to an all-purpose approach to placate the general population. In doing this, the university will actively break the cycle of low expectations induced by experiences of marginalisation in previous institutional and social settings (Collins, 2018), and thus, work to eradicate the gaps highlighted in understanding the plights of Black students' experiences and their mental wellbeing (Stoll, 2022).

Nevertheless, a common barrier for Black British people in accessing mental health services is the fear of being misunderstood due to their racial identity or having to explain the challenges faced as a result of this identity (Memon et al., 2016; Olaniyan and Hayes, 2022). The burden of helping mental health practitioners understand the intersection of race and mental illness exposes the Eurocentrism of help services, which dissuades Black users from accessing the care they need (Dare et al., 2022). This concept is further developed by Olaniyan (2021) and Olaniyan and Hayes (2022), who, in their studies, found that students developed cynical attitudes toward their university’s efforts to help students from minority backgrounds access mental health care due to the lack of ethnically varied mental health practitioners.

Additionally, it was found that while there is a sense of discomfort within the Black student community on topics of mental health illness, the feelings towards formal service providers are those of suspicion stemming from experiences of systemic repression and a lack of culturally relevant practices (Arday 2022; Burkett 2017). This conundrum leads those within this community to come together with others facing similar circumstances in their informal networks to create support groups

(Arday, 2022). This shows that despite the barriers hindering Black students from obtaining support formally and informally, there is an appetite for these students to receive mental well-being support. This gives insight into the need for a more proactive stance by universities to shift from reactionary services, which only respond to those who seek help, to a more diverse provision of help to encourage those who would ordinarily shun interventions (Hughes and Spanner, 2019). Subsequently, the rhetoric within this area is that Black students are also underserved by their informal support structures and require their universities to provide help that is accessible and culturally informed to reduce the prevalence of isolation experienced by this group (Burkett 2017).

Social interactions outside of lectures and formal activities among students are found to have a positive relationship in predicting the students' learning trajectory, even when controlled for other factors (Hommes et al., 2012). This is supported by Zwolak et al (2018) and Holdsworth et al (2018), who also found that informal support outside the classroom is a contributory component in students' academic mental persistence. This is due to the formation of a kinship among students facing the same challenges, leading to the ability to share relatable practices to help overcome the issues faced (Garratt, 2023). In the case of many Black students, the presence of student-organised networks dedicated to addressing ethnic-specific challenges is pertinent to students dealing with the psychological stressors they endure during their time at university, thereby enabling them to feel supported as they continue with their education (Grier-Reed, 2013). This suggests that informal support, though not part of the curriculum, provides intangible benefits by improving the mental well-being of Black African students and thereby contributing to their outcomes at universities.

Despite the presence of acculturative stress and financial difficulties discussed in this paper, and their impact on mental health, the services provided by universities to help students with mental health struggles are underutilised by African students who hold negative attitudes towards formal mechanisms and deem such services humiliating (Boukpessi et al., 2021). This view reoccurs in the findings of Hyams-Ssekasi (2014), in which African students dealing with mental health issues chose not to engage with the counselling services provided for them by their universities. As such, several scholars posit that formal services such as counselling should be adapted to suit the needs of Black African international students who may be perturbed by individual counselling sessions due to the negative cultural connotations attributed to this.

To combat such issues, scholars recommend considering more culturally appropriate styles, such as the introduction of group counselling with students of similar backgrounds tailored to focus on their specific needs (Boafo-Arthur 2014; Hyams-Ssekasi 2014; Tidwell and Hanassab 2007). The theme across this literature shows that Black African International students are especially more vulnerable to mental health challenges in universities, as there is a disconnect between the services offered by practitioners and the students' cultural attitudes to such services. This contrast leads to increased loneliness and isolation, which further exacerbates the mental struggles experienced by these students (Wawera and McCamley, 2020).

Conversely, the scholarship on the mental well-being of Black African Home students is generally conflated with the findings of Black students as a whole (Dare et al., 2022; Memon et al., 2016), therefore assuming a similar experience for students of African descent in British universities. Nonetheless, scholars have highlighted specific challenges faced by Black students in accessing mental health services,

such as stereotypes and the lack of practitioners of a similar ethnic group (Edge and MacKian 2010; Watkins and Neighbor 2007), which differ from the already discussed challenges of Black African International students. While there are similarities between the two groups in the shared pessimism about mental health services, there are nuanced differences in their attitudes to these services.

However, Black African Home students, like other Home students, have the presence of established informal social networks, such as family and friends, whom they can rely on for motivational support. This reliance becomes more important during lonelier periods, such as the start of the university journey, when they need additional help in adapting to their new environment (Sovic, 2009). This advantage is contrasted with the experiences of their International peers, who have a greater dependence on the university's support services during their transitional stages in the academy while building their own familial network (Sovic, 2009). Nonetheless, the value social networks hold is increasingly recognised by students, which has led to their requests for the inclusion of informal networks such as social groups into the university's formal commitments to enhance the student experience (Holdsworth et al., 2018). This provides evidence to support the value of informal networks in addressing gaps otherwise not formally provided by the university.

Nonetheless, from a gender stance, Watkins and Neighbor (2007) found that Black men were faced with supplementary anxieties about accessing support services due to stigmatisation based on reinforced stereotypes, indicating that Black men should be physically and mentally resilient when faced with obstacles. This, coupled with fears of discrimination based on their campus experiences, adds to the reluctance and distrust of Black male students accessing help when needed. Similarly, Edge and MacKian (2010) found that Black women were also concerned about the

negative labels attached to those accessing psychiatric help services and also preferred to speak with Black therapists who were less likely to misinterpret their experiences. This shows that for Black British students, while cultural dissonance on the topic of mental health is also a barrier to accessing mental health services, themes of racial identity and the Eurocentric approach to support services similarly limit the use of such services (Dare et al., 2022).

The significance of informal networks in solving accommodation needs

While Black African Home and International students face similar issues of required support, there are certain areas which highlight the differences in their knowledge and needs. This is evident in the area of accommodation, where International students are disadvantaged by their lack of familiarity with the customs of practices when searching for a place to live. Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell (2018) found that one of the biggest challenges faced by Black African International students in their transition period within the UK was their lack of understanding of the accommodation criteria, local alternatives and where to request further support and/or information. This is in part due to the UK-centric style used in disseminating information about accommodation, which is only palatable to those already familiar with this form.

More saliently, in cases where there is a lack of information or clarity on how to navigate housing challenges, Black African International students have found themselves in a vulnerable position of lacking accommodation, resulting in turning to their informal networks of students to help support them (Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012). Indeed, Changamire et al (2021) also found that Black African International students who found their orientation insufficient sought the help of previous and current Black

African International students to assist them in acquiring accommodation of their own, and in more desperate cases, supported each other by sharing their accommodation with peers in need. As such, these cases provide an interesting purview into the mindset of Black African International students on which support structures they view as effective in helping to resolve their challenges in troubled times.

While the effectiveness of accommodation support from informal networks, such as peers, is subjective, the lack of clear information from formal spaces for International students and the non-acceptance of the university's formal support services as a safe space forces these students to turn to peers who have gone through similar challenges and had success (Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell, 2018). A deeper review highlights the culture of fear imposed on International students through the compliance requirements for Tier-4 study visa holders who endure the anxiousness of having to be the model student to avoid their visa being cancelled (Cranston and Esson, 2024). Wilson et al (2022) add to this point by addressing the issue of the vulnerable design of student visas, which provides no social security for students, and disproportionately impacts those from low-income countries. While it can be presumed that Black African Home students have a relevant advantage through their citizenship, thus allowing them to circumvent such circumstances, the experiences of these minoritised students and their choice of accommodation cannot be fully understood without cross-referencing their socioeconomic status (Weeks and Lupfer, 2004).

The risks of relying on informal support networks

Though Black African students come from different backgrounds, they bond over their shared experiences, which can only be understood by encountering others with the same lived experiences (Grier-Reed 2013; Griffith et al., 2019). Thus, universities that do not understand these challenges leave students to be guided by peer-led personal or anecdotal tactics, which may not be empirically factual (Grier-Reed, 2013). This is because the burden of being minoritised in racially politicised institutions pushes Black students into a state of help-seeking where they look to utilise their informal networks in seeking support through open dialogue in dealing with common issues faced (Griffith et al., 2019). These informal spaces, though beneficial in providing cohesive support, are by nature unregulated. Hence, while students have reported positive results from integrating with peers (Garratt, 2023), not all students possess the relevant, factual knowledge to advise their fellow students accordingly, which can lead to the spread of misinformation on important matters (Pinchevsky and Hayes, 2022).

Furthermore, factors such as a student's socialised attitudes and cultural perceptions impact their understanding and approach to resolving issues, which can become problematic if used as the basis for advice, even if given informally (Aruna et al., 2016). For example, Caldwell and Hyams-Ssekasi's (2016) study found that for Black African International students in the UK, the perseverance of cultural norms led to many students internalising the stress and pressures faced at the expense of their mental well-being, in part, based on the financial sacrifices their friends and families had made for them to study in the UK. Post-migration, community pressures in the host country are further heightened due to fears of alienation, labelling and a lack of

Black African migrant mental health practitioners to combat the negative stigma, thus deterring this group from seeking the help they need (McCann et al., 2018). This presents a challenge to universities as they cannot regulate the thoughts and opinions of their Black African International students but must actively work to deter the spread of misinformation, which can deter help-seeking, especially for students in vulnerable positions (Delaney et al., 2022)

As such, universities must give precedence to the safeguarding of their students by being pre-emptive in understanding the issues their students face and areas where they may be in need. An example of this is the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which showed that many students received their information on the virus from social media, which impacted their mental health (Albaqawi et al., 2020; Uddin and Uddin, 2021). This highlights that the presence of widely available repeated information distributed by peers is not indicative of accuracy, and as such, the universities must ensure that students are protected from possible detrimental effects of unregulated guidance. This theme of fostering a safe environment for students is not only applicable to global pandemics. Still, it transcends to the upskilling of students to enable them to discern, challenge and respond to disinformation and misinformation about racism and hateful sentiments, which is a common occurrence for many ethnically minoritised students (Delaney et al., 2022; Evenden-Kenyon, 2020). Nonetheless, the inadvertent reliance universities have on informal support networks is apparent in the promotion of social networks outside of the classroom through student unions and faculties (Rafik Hama et al., 2020).

Formal and informal approaches to coaching and mentoring

The importance of formal mentoring and coaching to aid students' progression both academically and in their career journeys is present in ranking tables through measures such as career readiness and employability skills (Jones and Smith, 2022). Moreover, Jones and Smith’s (2022) study reviewed the effectiveness of formal mentoring and coaching and recorded positive perceptions in their research. However, the success measure used to evaluate the effectiveness of coaching in the study was the student’s ability to secure professional opportunities. While this is important, the choice to focus on metrics such as professional outcomes negates the current experiences and challenges of racially marginalised students and assumes that the purpose of mentorship and coaching within the university is to improve the university’s employability ranking. This further highlights the gulf in students’ level of preparedness in utilising services such as mentoring and coaching, with ethnically minoritised students requiring additional steps in preparation, such as emotional support, before being equipped to receive informational support (Williams et al., 2017).

One method that provides minoritised students insight into pathways after their studies is informal mentoring and career support from past and current students who faced the same challenges (Wilson and King, 2016). The significance of the informal structure lies in the student's ability to seek out support that is crucial to their worldview as opposed to being given a pre-defined structure of support that they need to conform to (Wilson and King, 2016). This lack of pre-existing factors allows students to be authentic in their requests for help, enabling them to explore their intersectional challenges of race and identity as suits them (Guzman Johannessen

and Unterreiner, 2010). Buttressing this, the research of Williams et al (2017) found that similar emotional and informational benefits were also experienced by minoritised students when provided with external coaches outside of their institution due to the sense of community provided. This is different from how formal mentorships are embedded, with institutionally driven mentorship focusing on the needs of the institution and using this as a basis for their approach (Guzman Johannessen and Unterreiner, 2010). Furthermore, scholars Guzman Johannessen and Unterreiner (2010) and Stravakou and Lozgka (2022) agree that there is value in championing the plurality of views concerning the adoption of mentorship to ensure that students benefit. Additionally, Stravakou and Lozgka (2022) go further within their research by removing the boundaries created by formally imposed definitions of mentorships, seeking to understand their student participants' needs for effective mentoring and using this as a basis for their comprehension.

Nonetheless, informal mentorship and career support are not only restricted to previous students but have also been found to be beneficial when implemented by staff regardless of their race and ethnicity. In such cases, staff who are allies work with students to demystify the academy and, in doing so, contribute to helping these ethnically minoritised students navigate conceptual barriers such as the positioning of universities as ivory towers (Phelps-Ward and DeAngelo, 2016). However, for this to be effective, Schwartz et al (2016) suggest that students and staff must be trained in tandem, with students learning how to navigate the acquisition of informal support, while academics are trained to provide effective support for racially marginalised students. This presents a unique approach to formalising informal coaching and mentoring support by providing a mechanism for students to seek culturally relevant support while equipping them with the skills to be productive in this facet, and in

parallel, providing an enabling environment which eases their navigation. Hence, the dismissal of a one-size-fits-all approach to providing coaching and mentoring support to students allows institutions to view their offerings through the culturally specific lens of various student groups (Boafo-Arthur 2014).

2.3 Research Methods Summary

The research methods employed in this chapter mirror those outlined in Chapter 1, drawing on qualitative, in-depth interviews. The thematic analysis presented here focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of both formal and informal student support structures.

.

2.4 Analysis and Discussion

2.4.1 University-led vs staff and student-led groups and societies

The interviews revealed that students valued the informal social networks for their ability to address some of the key challenges experienced as Black African students at university. Particularly, the Home students sought out these groups to further their interests, while International students sought these groups for help coping with their new environment.

Home students

In the interviews, many Home students spoke of dissatisfaction with the lack of university-led initiatives or groups that would address the needs of Black African students. A key theme in the interviews is the frustration experienced by students who feel that issues related to their identity are not embedded in their university curriculum. As highlighted in Chapter 1, the marginalisation experienced by Black African Home students is centred on feelings of a gulf of ownership between this group and the majority ethnic group. This lack of ownership is exhibited in the limited cultural representation of this group within their university. This translates to feelings of invisibility and is an important component of the lack of belonging that many Black African students experience.

Thus, the discussion on the topic of university-led initiatives, groups and societies allows the participants to speak to the hollows in their experiences and compare the efforts of the university against their requirements as minoritised students. While

comparisons are made between the efforts of the university and students, the rhetoric remains that there is a burden on Black African Home students who have an interest in their cultural and identity issues to orchestrate targeted informal societies in their spare time.

Genevieve speaks of the difficulty experienced in being unable to rely on university-led initiatives to tackle the issues that matter to students like her. In the excerpt below, while Genevieve acknowledges both the diversity of students and the efforts of the university in employing a Black Student Officer to voice out concerns or issues of Black students, it is apparent that these approaches are not sufficient in addressing the issues of being a racially minoritised student in a Western institution:

> There is a physical representation [in the university], but the community element and diversity aren't really there [...] I wouldn't say that I felt seen or heard [...] I'm glad that we do have a Black Officer at least, but then it's like [...] crumbs. (Genevieve, undergraduate Home student)

Genevieve's comments provide an indicative view of the psychological awareness of an ethnically minoritised student who lacks the support of their institution in formalising the issues that are pertinent to them. In this case, the mere presence of other minoritised students is not a substitute for the support they require from their university. This is because the onus of assisting minoritised students through their academic journey should remain with universities and does not come to an end when widening participation targets and diversity in the student body targets are met (Mannay and Ward, 2022). This is consistent with the findings of Rahman and Alwi (2018), who posit that the increasing diversity of students and cultures on campus should be met with an effective adaptation of the university's provision to ensure that all cultures feel a sense of acceptance. This idea is further reinforced by the findings

of Arday (2017), who shares that some minoritised students are reluctant to carry the burden of having to assimilate to accommodate the university, but rather are calling for this burden to be placed back on the university to provide a comprehensive environment for minoritised students. This reaffirms the sense of ownership of Black African students who do not consider it a privilege to have their issues addressed, but rather an expectation. Thus, this emphasises why students such as Genevieve feel unseen and unheard in an institution with a diverse body of students.

Fatimah, a second-year undergraduate student, also agrees that the presence and visibility of Black students on campus are not enough to eradicate the feeling of being isolated. Fatimah speaks about the expectations she had for a holistic university experience which embraces and highlights Black culture. More specifically, Fatimah pinpoints the concerns of those who, due to their social preferences, are less able to integrate with other Black students through popular activities:

> I thought this [the presence of Black students] would have a big part to play in my university experience, but it hasn't lived up to my expectations. I feel like a minority here, although I see my people [Black people], I may not go to some of the social events they go to, like clubbing, so I am not involved [in the culture]. I don't think enough is done by the university for the learning of Black culture, [...] even Black History Month, I don't remember seeing anything significant. (Fatimah, undergraduate Home student)

The findings unveiled in this interview with Fatimah build on previous results from the work of Holdsworth et al (2018), who also discovered that students look to their universities to lead the integration of social and cultural groups to improve their university experience. By providing activities to address pertinent issues, universities can create a learning environment beyond classroom-based studies, which contributes to building a holistic anti-racist institution by tackling barriers of diversity in the university's support services (Ali 2020; Lewis and Shah 2021). In addition,

according to Peat et al (2010), university-led approaches are especially important for students who experience challenges transitioning to their academic environment and, as such, require the proactive assistance of their institution to overcome these barriers. The provision of such assistance was then found to have a positive impact on the students' experience at university. Therefore, the presence of diversity on campus is not a representation of success in supporting Black-African students, and these findings offer an important insight into the psychological impact experienced by students when their institution offers minimal formalised approaches to topics of cultural significance.

Additionally, many Black African Home students spoke of the reliance on student and staff-led informal groups and societies in the interviews. These informal groups have been developed to facilitate dialogue on issues that concern the racial identity and interests of these students. This is particularly important for Black African Home students who have their experiences of being Black, Black African and British shaped and questioned by their environments from their primary socialisation into the wider society. This highlights a spectrum of differences in their identities based on the affirmation or rejection they received at varying institutions. As such, the findings from this section detail the importance of Black African students having a space to explore and understand their fellow students' thoughts and experiences in a non-restrictive environment. The essence of these groups is to provide these students with a place, outside of the confines of the university's priorities, to navigate their sense of self as minoritised individuals and an opportunity to own their own university experience by filling a gap left by their university.

Additionally, Dauda, a Postgraduate Research student, explains how individual academics at his department recognised informally that students with a Global South heritage required a forum to allow for shared experiences as ethnically minoritised students. The absence of a university-implemented forum is also documented in Barbara's account, where it is apparent that, regardless of the visibility of Black students on campus, the issues that pertain to Black students are discussed informally through student-led societies, and without the work of these students, such groups would cease to exist:

> This year, some of the lecturers and professors have decided to create a group for non-European students to get together. [...] There wasn't a place to answer specific questions for minority students, most of the time I had to go and find them [minoritised students] myself. (Dauda, postgraduate research Home student)
>
> When you walk around campus, you see a lot of Black students, especially undergraduates, and you hear that there are a lot of societies, but there is nothing specifically from the university that is intentional for Black students. If it's not created by Black students, it's not at the university. (Barbara, postgraduate research Home student)

The findings in this section detail the desire of Black students to have more formalised engagement with others within their ethnic group to discuss issues relating to their identity. In contrast to the research of scholars Smith and Moore (2000), whose findings detail that social factors influence the closeness of Black students on campus, the findings from this chapter go beyond to reveal that some Black African Home students are less focused on the socialising factor and more on the community of support. The search for other students with shared minoritised experiences, as mentioned by Dauda, builds on the scholarship of Grier-Reed (2013), who theorises that Black students seek out other Black students to temper

the negative associations of minoritisation, such as isolation, which acts as a remedy.

This is supported by the research of Johnson-Bailey et al (2008), who found that one of the biggest contributors to Black students' university experience was access to other Black students, thus leading to their recommendation for creating more formal networks, spearheaded by the university, that are inclusive of Black students. Therefore, in light of the benefits Black students acquire from having access to other Black students, these scholars call for the university to provide student-centred support which is considerate of the needs of Black students (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008).

Furthermore, Hassan provides an in-depth justification of Black societal groups and their impact on his experience as a minoritised student. Such groups provide members with a therapeutic sense of community and give students a space where they can liberally express their emotions and experiences with those who have similar identities. This provides a learning environment outside of the traditional classroom, which helps students build their social and interpersonal skills:

> The Black Political Society is a place to discuss, and it is much more respectful. Everyone listens to your thoughts and your experiences, not trying to discredit how you feel. You speak to people and you hear the struggles that they have, like being a minority for the first time, so I can be more empathetic to their viewpoint. (Hassan, postgraduate taught Home student)

The justification provided in this quote signals the use of Black societal groups as coping strategies for Black African students. While Black African Home students hold the same legal citizenship as their non-Black Home peers, the university environment can be alienating for this group, who may not feel included in the culture

of the institution. Therefore, the ability to connect with others within the same ethnic group who face similar challenges can help to mitigate the negative experiences of isolation (Thelamour et al., 2019). This directly relates to the finding of Grier-Reed (2013), who found that Black students in White majority universities sought out Black societies as places to share their experiences of being othered, coping strategies of being a minority and dealing with conflicts. Though the findings of Grier-Reed (2013) are based on American universities, it is interesting to find that there are similarities in struggles and coping mechanisms among Black students across both settings.

International students

The findings from the International students differed according to their home country, with most of the International students in this research coming to the university from a Sub-Saharan African country. These discussions build on the rhetoric of findings in Chapter 1, where it was established that sub-Saharan Black African students who come to the UK from a homogenous ethnic environment are less concerned about their host university's efforts to embed their Black African culture within the learning environment. This is because part of the appeal of coming to the UK for the international participants is to embed themselves with other cultures, as they are already familiar with their own cultures and histories, in both formal and informal contexts. Thus, the students from sub-Saharan African countries were less aware or concerned with university-led racial or social support interventions. In comparison, International students from other Western countries had a more heightened sense of the discussions and initiatives led by the university. Such students, from European countries that have lower rates of diversity and a Black African population, were

more impressed with the advancement of discourse on racial issues, which they were not privy to in their home countries.

Clara details her amazement at the investment of the university in Black issues. Coming from a predominantly White country, the presence of many Black students and the non-avoidant stance that the university took in speaking on topics such as racism was a point of celebration in Clara's university experience:

> I have never had so many Black people in my life, so coming here, there are so many people [Black people] that the university is forced to take it into consideration. They have to recognise Black issues. That definitely helps! (Clara, undergraduate International student)

The quote from Clara provides support that ethnically minoritised students, like many other marginalised students, fall within a spectrum of required support from their institution and thus have varied requirements (Audin et al., 2003). This account provides evidence that students who come from a more ethnically minoritised demographic region into a more diverse environment are less likely to feel marginalised in their new location in comparison to their previous setting. Research into the correlation between an ethnically minoritised student's needs for formal support on racial initiatives and the demography of their migratory background has not been located in the scholarship reviewed. As such, this finding provides an introductory insight into the importance of understanding students within their own context.

Unlike Clara, however, both Ethan and Joshua arrived in the UK from West Africa and were not perturbed or aware of a lack of university-led initiatives on Black culture. Ethan specifically mentions that his university experience is not limited based on being a Black African student, while Joshua calls instead for more

departmental collaboration to enhance his experience. The views of both participants are more aligned in their receptiveness to getting to know other students within their academic environments better, to encourage greater association:

> There is a minute effect on my university experience from being a minority. Personally, I am open to learning about others, and that is why [there is a minute effect]. (Ethan, postgraduate research International student)

> One thing that can be improved is collaboration for students in the department to get to know each other better. (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

While the findings from both participants indicate a lack of interest in formal support structures that speak to their race and culture, Mannay and Ward (2022) explain that for non-traditional students such as Joshua and Ethan, both of whom are mature students studying for advanced degrees in a foreign country, the absence of social support networks is a more important issue. These networks are easier to form for younger undergraduate White students who fall under the remit of the expected student population. Thus, the primary request for collaboration, as mentioned by Ethan and Joshua, with other students may not reflect their detachment from racial issues but highlight the additional barrier of being a foreign student. This is a recurring theme in the discourse of scholars who have reviewed the experiences of Black African International students and found that a primary need for this group is for connections for better adjustments to their new host environment (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, the findings from the international students detailed above have shown that students who come from other Western countries, where they were more marginalised, welcome the progressive efforts of UK universities in addressing racial

issues. This is bolstered by Kennedy-Macfoy and Lewis (2014), who express the need for more focus and conversations on the topic of race in continental European countries, where silence is chosen as the default. Nonetheless, for those who have had the opposite transition and have become a minority by studying in the UK, their preliminary hurdle is not for the university to address issues of race, but to help them better integrate with their academic peers through collaborative initiatives.

Furthermore, the International students in this study provided insight into the purpose of the informal networks and groups they formed. The Black African International students previously revealed in Chapter 1 their acknowledgement of bearing the identity of foreigners within their host university. This identity is formulated psychologically before they enrol, through a state of mental preparedness, which considers being away from their social and formal support networks. As such, there is a requirement to be proactive in building informal networks once they arrive at their host country, and they require their university to help bridge anticipated formal and informal support gaps.

Additionally, Kevin explains the purposes of the groups formed by International students. This included providing the students with a space to share their experiences and a platform to seek help from those who have navigated similar challenges in the past. These connections provide new students to the country with opportunities to troubleshoot common challenges faced by many Black African international students:

> We sort of formed a group, like a gathering where we relate our experiences, even over on WhatsApp. Here we can relate the experiences and struggles, and things to do to make your life easier. It is like a community. They have an established community here [at the university] to help people just coming into the country, people having difficulties navigating life at the university. If I am

> experiencing difficulty, I am more likely to go to the group than Student Support Services at the university because most likely, there is someone who has already experienced the issue you have before, and they will share their experience dealing with that issue. (Kevin, postgraduate taught International student)

This excerpt uncovers the dynamic role and importance of informal networks for Black African International students who are new to the country. Firstly, this quote provides support for the scholarship of Hyams-Ssekasi (2012), who posits that challenges in understanding how to navigate essential services in the UK lead to Black African students relying on their informal networks for guidance. This is an important finding in legitimising the role of informal support networks in helping students navigate their introductory journey within academia.

Subsequently, this finding also buttresses the work of Morosanu et al (2010), who recognise the importance of peers in helping students navigate their new student identity. Additionally, in the quote above, Kevin reveals that his informal network is his first point of contact when faced with a difficult query. However, this level of trust placed in the knowledge of friends and peers echoes the warning of Pinchevsky and Hayes (2022), who explain that, unlike expert staff, student peers do not always have the qualified or accurate knowledge to advise peers accordingly, which can lead to the dissemination of erroneous information.

Similarly, Joshua echoed the sentiments conveyed in Kevin's account. In this quote, it is apparent that cultural cohesion is a prominent factor in the establishment of informal groups for International students who experience difficulty adapting to the host culture. As such, there is a longing for students to relate with others in an interconnected environment where familial bonds can be built and strengthened:

> It's cultural, in my culture we like coming together, but here is a different culture. What people do is organise small family groups to create that feeling like you are back home, to create that atmosphere. (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

This quote reveals the psychological benefits of informal groups on International students seeking to recreate the familiarity they left in their home countries. This is well detailed in the work of scholars who explain that to cope with the individualistic culture of Western societies, Black African International students come together to create a communal society (Changamire et al., 2022; Lee and Opio, 2011; George Mwangi et al., 2019). Such networks are particularly important as Black African International students are faced with reminders of being foreign through measures of microaggression, feelings of homesickness and the negative impacts on their mental health (Pruitt, 1978). As such, the quote reveals that attempts at recreating a homely or familiar environment are helpful coping mechanisms which provide cathartic benefits to the students. More importantly, this quote supports the thought of Akanwa (2015), who argues that due to the significant mental impact of adapting to a disparate environment, International students should not be left to shoulder the responsibility of integration through informal networks alone.

Summary

The findings from this section indicate the differences in anticipation and preparation between Home and International students when beginning their university journey. This difference is rooted in the sentiments of ownership and the expectations students have of their university, as Home students have a higher expectation of their university to provide them with services to help alleviate the pressures that

come with being an ethnically minoritised university student. The findings from this section have revealed that Home students are also less satisfied with the formal approach taken by the university to address issues of race and culture. This frustration negatively impacts their university experiences and, for some, translates into a negative positioning of themselves within their institution.

However, their International peers arrive at their university with much lower expectations of their university and actively work to ensure that they build a community to provide the support required. The findings uncovered that the informal groups formed by International students are designed to cater to the specific needs and challenges of these students. These groups act more as communities and take on the burden of providing well-being support, which the students favour over the support provided by the university. As such, these community groups are reminiscent of the social support the International students enjoyed in their home country with their friends and family.

As such, Black African Home students experience a greater sense of dissatisfaction with their university's interventions, while International students experience less dissatisfaction due to their commitments to providing their own support. However, among the International students, those who had come from a dissimilar culture required more help to facilitate a better working relationship with their peers, while those from a similar Western culture, who came from a more racially marginalised background, were content with the formal support received in the areas of race and culture.

Regardless, even scholars focused on the general student population have written about the dependent relationship between a student's belonging and their sense of

ownership at their institution. While not focused on ethnicity, du Toit-Brits (2022) posits that having a sense of belonging promotes a view of ownership within their learning environment by promoting the student's visibility and acceptance within the learning community. This is supported by the findings of Asatryan et al (2013), who discovered a positive relationship between student satisfaction and the sense of psychological ownership within their institution, thus leading to better student experiences, and as such recommend the development of practices by universities to improve the options available to students to enhance their experiences. This supports the findings in this section, which point to the need for Black African students to have ownership of their experience at university by having elements of their culture and identity embedded within their university.

Nonetheless, both the Home and International participants praise informal networks for their ability to fill many gaps in their university experiences. The voids experienced by these students, however, differ according to their grouping. For Home students, the findings show that informal networks are relevant in providing a space to discuss issues pertaining to their racial heritage and identity. Whereas, for International students, these informal groups are designed to offer practical support in navigating the challenges of being in a different culture and dealing with the unfamiliar issues and demands that arise. While these informal networks fulfil different purposes for students, it is evident from the findings that they gave all participants a sense of care and the ability to be seen and heard in a safe environment.

2.4.2 Mental Well-being and Motivational Support

The data collected from both sets of participants suggests that both groups were more likely to utilise informal support groups to manage their mental health issues. However, the data also revealed differences in the types of care required between the groups.

Home students

The topics of mental wellbeing and motivational support were deeply rooted in the experiences of isolation and negative mental experiences, which are noted in the literature on Black African students' experiences in Western countries. The findings from Chapter 1 show that Black African Home students contend with how to deal with the microaggressions and feelings of alienation they experience while at university. In this chapter, however, the findings show that most students choose to ignore the bouts of microaggression due to the frustration and exhaustion they experience from trying to resolve such repeated issues, while some become indifferent. However, none reported seeking help from the university to deal with these issues.

Hence, when evaluating the contribution to mental distress, the Home student participants focused on their academic experiences. Then, when questioned specifically on the topic of motivational support and where students seek help when experiencing stressors that could impact their progression, the students feedback that they relied either on themselves or their peers. While there is an acknowledgement of the support offered by the university, such as personal tutors

and the availability of academic office hours, these students, having previously utilised those services, found them ineffective in dealing with their issues, which led to seeking support from either their peers or themselves.

Fatimah previously spoke of her difficulty getting support from her personal tutor while struggling with her course in her first year. In the excerpt below, Fatimah recounts the difficulty in her first year but notes that the progress she has witnessed in her second year is due to the support she received from her peers through study groups. Informal networks such as these study groups helped Fatimah advance in her second year while also positively impacting her mental health:

> The first year for me wasn't great because I didn't know how to balance It, and I was in that mindset of "I don't like my course". This year, I have a lot of support from my coursemates. We do study sessions together, and they are the ones who have been really helpful in getting me through it. Without them, I would not be on this course. Having a good support system around me is what is making it a lot easier. (Fatimah, undergraduate Home student)

Fatimah's experience as a student who was able to thrive as a result of embedding herself in social support networks is an important finding in this chapter. It supports the argument of Davis (1991), who theorises that Black students on majority-White campuses require social support networks to help them overcome various challenges of student life, including academic difficulties. However, this finding goes beyond by providing insight into how social support for Black African Home students can contribute to improved student outcomes by reducing their risk of dropping out. This is linked to the findings of Tezci et al (2015), whose study highlighted that students exhibited a positive relationship between motivation and efficient social support received, and that support from peers was closely related to the students'

academic success. This is evidenced in the quote as Fatimah attributes her academic persistence directly to the support received from peers.

In addition, Hassan, like Fatimah, recounts his experience of utilising support hours such as academic office hours. In his case, Hassan found that the service offered was not specialised to his challenges and chose to rely on himself alone. However, unlike Fatimah, Hassan did not have an informal support group to provide targeted assistance. This led to repeated episodes of extreme distress, which he blamed himself for, and thus had to resolve those academic issues independently:

> I feel like the university really wants you to utilise their academic support services [support services to help students better prepare for exams], but the support also feels very generic. None of it feels specialised, but I am not asking the university to make me out of all students special. Every year, I get into the same pattern where I [feel extreme stress] and promise I won't get there again. I don't know who to blame, maybe it's my fault. (Hassan, postgraduate Home student)

Hassan's account provides a unique lens into the link between social support and motivation. While the Rehman et al (2020) study found that the adoption of social networks tempers psychological burnout among students, the findings from Hassan indicate that students can choose to delink themselves from certain aspects of their social and formal support networks and place the burden solely on themselves. This provides an alternative lens to the views held by scholars such as Davis (1991), who view a positive correlation between social support and positive academic experience. This suggests that while there may be a correlation, participation in social networking groups is not a causal factor in reducing psychological and mental distress caused by academic submissions. Thus, in cases such as that of Hassan, where the preference for formal support is deemed ineffective and social support networks are not utilised, students choose to rely on their self-efficacy.

International students

The International students spoke of the motivational challenges that came with being in a foreign country, as opposed to speaking explicitly about the stress that came from their studies. As highlighted previously, the International student participants developed a mindset of self-reliance prior to enrolment. This mindset can be understood as a coping mechanism that shapes International students' perception of help-seeking or the rejection of it. Saliently, this links to the findings in Chapter 1, which reveal that the stigma surrounding formal help-seeking discourages such students from speaking out about their mental challenges, especially to those outside of their community. This provides a better understanding of the findings from this section, which show that while some students took a more fatalistic view in accepting that there was nothing that could be done to alleviate their stressors, others spoke of the importance of having a community to share their burdens with. In all cases of the International students interviewed, none of them spoke of having tried to utilise the university's formal services.

Ethan, a mature postgraduate student, explained the role he played within his student community, which took the form of a counsellor for younger students who recently joined the university from his home country. This transitional role was in place until the new students were able to better embed themselves in the UK and develop supportive relationships of their own. However, Ethan later explained that the Black African International mature students were not looking for a community in the same sense as the younger students, but sought a small group of trusted

advisors among their peers who could help them manoeuvre their challenges to enable them to carry on with their academic journey:

> I have a lot of younger friends from my background [Black African International students] who call me to complain about the same issues because they have nobody to talk to until they find a community of their own. [...] However, an older student [Black African International mature student] does not want to use the suggested mental well-being platforms, they just want to speak to a few trusted people about their issues. (Ethan, postgraduate research International student)

Ethan’s experiences on the importance of community for new Black African International students are embedded in the findings of Garratt (2023), who found that students who faced similar challenges sought out others with shared experiences to help them resolve their problems. Although this quote details the difficulties such students face in seeking out a confidant, this account by Ethan also provides a layered understanding of the role a student’s age has in discussing issues of mental wellbeing among peers. Similarly, Boafo-Arthur (2014) also speaks on the importance of Black African International students having access to others within their group through social networks, which can help them in their adjustment to life in a different culture, thereby mitigating some of the challenges which can inhibit the students’ mental and academic progress. These scholars agree on the positive effects of having informal social networks when traversing into a new culture, thereby providing supportive evidence for the effectiveness of informal networks in dealing with mental wellbeing issues.

Joshua, another postgraduate student, however, did not share the same sentiments as Ethan in finding a community that could help boost motivation in times of difficulty. While accepting that there are challenging moments which impact his mental wellbeing, Joshua’s thinking is focused on accepting the difficult period as part of life

as a student living away from their family and friends. This tolerance of mental stressors is based on his notion that no support can alleviate the challenges of being a foreign student.

> I don't think you can work on the feeling of isolation, it's something you just accept. There is nothing you can do. It affects your mental wellbeing over time, especially when you also have other things going on which require a cool-off period [a time to destress]. When you leave your family, the psychological effects will definitely be there. You just have to move with the flow because there is nothing you can do. (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

The feelings of isolation documented in Joshua's account are also present in the findings of Girmay and Singh (2019), who found that all the international student participants in their study experienced loneliness at their host university. Furthermore, their study also found that some students, like Joshua, chose to accept the factors contributing to their isolation and instead focus on progressing with their academic journey. While theories exist on how International students can combat the effects of loneliness, Sawir et al (2008) argue that there is no all-encompassing remedy which can be relied on to counter the psychological effects of trying to assimilate into a different culture. As such, these scholars call for an increased intervention of the university's pastoral services to fulfil their duty of care to students, which cannot be substituted for with social networks. Thus, this literature, while supporting the sentiment of this participant, highlights the importance of formal support for many students like Joshua, whose symptoms cannot be placated with the presence of social groups.

Summary

The findings from this section indicate similar sentiments between Home and International students in response to the influence of social support networks on their motivation to progress. Both groups found informal services more effective in dealing with mental wellbeing and motivation than formal services. Specifically, the findings suggest that the help-seeking behaviours of the Home student participants are restricted due to their perception of the ineffectiveness of these formal services. While Bryant et al (2022) reported findings that are contradictory to this study, by positing that Black students are more likely to engage in seeking help through formal services including personal tutors than their White counterparts, their study nonetheless, shares one alignment with this study, in that they found a positive correlation between a student's sense of belonging at their university and their attitude to seeking help. This is an important foundational point which expresses the intricate importance of helping students first develop a sense of belonging at their university and using that groundwork to build tailored support services that can be effective. Additionally, the International students' behaviours toward help-seeking are consistent with the findings of de Moissac et al (2020), who reported that International students as a group were less likely to seek help formally for mental wellbeing issues than their domestic peers.

Nevertheless, while Home students detailed accounts of motivation and resilience within their academic journey, International students focused on the psychological barriers of adapting to a new host culture. In both groups, some participants chose to utilise support networks such as study groups for Home students or community groups for International students, while others chose to place the burden on

themselves. Another key difference between the two groups in this support area was that Home students recounted their experiences of utilising formal support services before choosing to turn to informal or self-support, while the International students made no mention of utilising formal support services.

2.4.3 Cultural Proficiency of Lecturers and Supervisors

The findings highlight a clear difference in how cultural proficiency is understood by both student groups. For Home students, cultural competency is interpreted through their lived experiences as ethnically minoritised students, whereas for International students, cultural competency is construed through cultural norms from their home countries.

Home students

The topic of cultural proficiency in this study relates to the attitudes and behaviours which help individuals to successfully navigate a culturally diverse environment (Lindsey and Lindsey, 2016). The advantages of cultural proficiency are directly linked to positive student outcomes, with culturally proficient universities having better general student outcomes and improved staff experiences (Guerra and Nelson, 2007). For Black African Home students, the act of transitioning between different cultural norms is learned before they become university students, as explained in Chapter 1. These students, through the act of “code-switching”, a term introduced in an interview in Chapter 1 to symbolise the changes in behaviour to suit one’s environment, have learned to modify their behaviour styles, accents and temperament to become more palatable to their Western-centric institutions. This dual-identity formation that Black African students apply is a form of self-censorship in situations where they could result in being negatively labelled as aggressive or angry.

However, the concept of reviewing their supervisor's cultural proficiency levels resonated differently between participants based on the experiences and support they had from their supervisors and lecturers. This support was not based on the academic expertise of their supervisors but centred on whether their supervisors understood why certain chosen topics were of significance to the students and their ethnic identity. The interviews uncovered how the perceptions these students had of their supervisors' willingness to learn to better understand their needs were shaped by the affirmation and support they received in areas they viewed as important. Secondly, the data explored whether there was a positive relationship between supervisors and lecturers who shared an understanding of the participants' cultural/racial background.

The theme of cultural proficiency and its impact on Black African students is solemnly underpinned in the data provided by Dauda, a Postgraduate research student. In this account, Dauda explains the self-imposed mental barrier he puts up when faced with navigating culturally sensitive conversations with non-Black formal staff members, such as lecturers and supervisors, due to the perception that such sensitive matters will be treated trivially. Dauda recounts a personal experience where this lack of understanding impacted his interest in a topic which was of significance to his ethnic identity. However, his research interests were not seen to be within his research scope by his supervisors. Dauda openly explains the effect this has on his perception of support from the university:

> I felt silenced, to be honest, and my supervisors didn’t do much to back me up either. Other Black staff in the department [informally] recognised that my article [on the experiences of Black students in a war-torn country] could have been published elsewhere. [...] Consciously or subconsciously, I have to remind myself of who I am and where I am. (Dauda, postgraduate research Home student)

The psychological impact and isolation that occur when the needs of ethnically minoritised students are misunderstood are evident in Dauda's account. As such, Coggins (2008) purports that universities must take an active stance to provide an enabling environment where all students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, have the tools and support to flourish in their institution. Hence, the adoption of cultural proficiency encourages educators to take an intrinsic evaluation of their privileges, which reduces preexisting bias and can help to improve the quality of interactions with ethnically minoritised students (Boles, 2018). While academics do not need to be cultural experts, acknowledging the issues raised by ethnically minoritised students was found to have a positive effect on the students' attitudes and academic progress (Ballenger and Ninness, 2013). As such, the receptiveness to understanding the diversity of students promotes a more inclusive environment, which allows students to better communicate their experiences and interests with their supervisors.

On the contrary, another Postgraduate research student, Anna, who also has non-Black supervisors, describes them as model supervisors due to their open communication and information-sharing, which Anna believes is responsible for advancing her studies and research. Despite not sharing the same ethnicity, Anna ponders whether sharing a migrant intersectionality with her supervisors impacts their ability to communicate and understand each other better:

> My assessment and supervision have been excellent, and I've had the best supervisors who are not Black, by the way, and they've just been very, very helpful and engaging. Although I do wonder if that is because they are also migrants like myself. (Anna, postgraduate research Home student)

Anna's account reflects on cultural proficiency in a non-racial sense, where importance is placed on sharing a migrant background. Although Anna is classified as a Home student, migrating as a teenager has significantly shaped her identity as a migrant. Thus, the ability of Anna's supervisors to recognise Anna's needs as an individual student with a migrant background, and not as a member of a homogenous group, is an example of how culturally aware educators can positively impact the academic journey of their students (Boles, 2018). This finding is also important in its recognition that cultural competency for minoritised students is not only effective when students have a shared heritage with their educators, but an understanding of the students' challenges and a willingness to engage in helping such students overcome these barriers. Furthermore, this speaks to the argument of Nelson and Guerra (2010), who call for more educators to adopt a culturally aware ideology in catering to the needs of their current students. This will ensure that, regardless of the academic staff's expertise, an improvement in their cultural awareness will reduce the likelihood of a negative impact on the trajectory of their ethnically diverse students.

The accounts on cultural proficiency from both Home students have provided a unique look into the impacts academics can have on the experience of Black African Home students. While not distinctly agreeing with the comments provided by Dauda, both Anna and Dauda allude to similar sentiments on the importance of cultural proficiency for effective support. This is in line with the research of Cormier (2011), who advocates for greater cultural learning in occurrences where the educator and the student are of different ethnicities. While Dauda's account focuses on racial cultural proficiency, Anna's account is geared towards the topic of migration cultural

proficiency, with both providing evidence for the importance of a dynamic view of cultural proficiency even when prominently focusing on race.

International students

When interviewing the International students, the concept of cultural proficiency and their interpretation of the term differed according to their previous experiences in their home countries. As highlighted by Martirosyan et al (2015), the cultural shock experienced by International students is further impacted by the academic adjustments required, thus contributing to further psychosocial barriers which could impact their academic performance. As mentioned by the International participants in Chapter 1, being an International student is not only about being foreign to the culture and country but also about having none of the previously amassed social capital which Home students benefit from.

Interestingly, International students come to their host environment with their own sets of norms based on their home culture, but are challenged with navigating their academic experiences through a foreign culture that many have not had enough time to assimilate into. This results in a complex state for these students during interactions with lecturers and supervisors in their academic environment, as they are faced with trying to interpret interactions simultaneously through their host and home cultures. In these scenarios, significance was not placed on the ethnicity or race of the educator but rather on non-verbal interactions such as the tone or body language of the lecturer/supervisors.

Joshua, a student from West Africa, detailed the difficult and often alienating encounters with some of his lecturers due to differences in cultural relatability, based on their body language and receptiveness to his comments and queries. Joshua's account is important in highlighting the compounding challenges faced by Black African International students who have the additional task of deciphering the host culture in addition to managing the effects of being misunderstood, and reveals the impact of non-verbal cultural interpretations by foreign students in a Western institution:

> When I speak with you [the lecturer] and you feel [seem] uninterested, you just see it as if I am wasting my time or you try to shun me like I am not making sense [...] It might be the questions I ask [...] If I get that kind of body language, it is likely I will not come back [to the lecturer for help]. (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

While scholarship on cultural proficiency at universities is focused on embracing the cultural diversity in the West, the literature has been limited in explaining the plurality of cultural interpretations. (Ballenger et al, 2013; Lindsey and Lindsey, 2016). Scholars such as Hişmanoğlu and Hişmanoğlu (2008) explored the importance of body language and posture within teaching environments in their cross-cultural research and found that gestures which are commonplace and inoffensive in the West may be seen as impolite in certain African cultures. This explains why in Joshua's account, his interpretation of a phlegmatic interaction with a lecturer translates to disinterest, which sees him choosing to withdraw from further interactions. Hence, this account provides insight into how body language can be viewed differently through another cultural lens. With this context, it becomes more apparent that cultural competence exceeds verbal interactions alone and can also be evidenced in non-verbal interactions. However, this presents an additional challenge

to lecturers and supervisors who face the increasing difficulty of trying to promote inclusivity in their practices with limited capacity (Svendby, 2024).

Moreover, Kevin, another student from West Africa, details the varied backgrounds of lecturers whom he has been taught by at the University. Kevin begins by explaining that cultural relativity, or the lack of it, has not impacted his engagement with his lecturers. In this interview, Kevin notes that his ease in approaching his lecturers is not dependent on their cultural background, as he found that all were approachable when compared to previous lecturers from his home country:

> All the lecturers here are approachable, regardless of where they came from. They have a kind tone here. They don’t have this air of respect [arrogance or pride] around them, like at home. For those reasons, I find them more approachable here. (Kevin, postgraduate taught International student)

This account echoes the findings of Nwosu (2009), who writes about the importance placed on respect and formality in African society, which can also be expressed through acts such as tone of voice and being critical of challenges to those in positions of power. However, this ingrained formality can become a cultural barrier for Black African International students who are presented with an avenue for dialogue and critical thinking discussions as opposed to monologues with their lecturers. As such, these students are faced with having to unlearn cultural norms such as viewing critical challenges with the lecturer as disrespectful (Okusolubo, 2018). Nonetheless, this interview reveals that students from different cultures are not rigid but can adapt and thrive in new cultural environments as long as the environment is conducive to their academic growth. Thus, by providing a comfortable atmosphere where students such as Kevin can interact with their lecturers without

fear, it can be said that lecturers do not need to have a shared cultural background to engage positively with their students.

Summary

The findings reveal that for Black African Home students, cultural proficiency takes the form of mutual concession, where there is an expectation for students to culturally adapt to their institutional environment, but also seek the same in return from their academic staff. Their exposure to a bi-cultural environment from a young age provides them with the advantage of acting as chameleons to suit the needs of their environment, while also establishing the perimeters of acceptable behaviours to avoid the negative stereotypes applied to many Black students. In support of the findings detailed in this study, Anderson (2011) emphasised that the cultural proficiency of educators is a motivational factor in the outcomes of all ethnically minoritised students, as they are encouraged to perform better based on the assumption that their teacher recognises and values their identity. Hence, this links to the findings in Chapter 1, where the discussion highlighted the need for recognition of the multiple identities Black-British African students possess. This requirement to accept the authenticity of their identity impacts their experiences of being both British and Black African.

In the case of the International student participants, they are challenged with navigating their experiences through their home cultural lens while at the same time learning the new British culture. This has been shown through the findings to lead to varied and perhaps unintended interpretations of their lecturer’s actions, based on their concept of hierarchy and the lecturer’s authority. This obscurity is not only

witnessed by Black African International students but has also been found to be an issue for all International students by Marangell et al (2018), who suggest that universities need to take a more proactive approach to help International students by facilitating integration with their academic and wider host communities. In doing this, Marangell et al (2018) put forward that there will be a reduction in the cultural dissonance experienced by International students, thus improving cross-cultural interactions. Therefore, International students can start to see themselves first as students who belong at their university rather than foreigners in an alienating environment, as purported in Chapter 1.

Thus, the theme of cultural proficiency, when explored, has been shown to have different meanings to different students. While Home students reviewed cultural proficiency through their identity as ethnically minoritised members of the institution, International students viewed this attribute through non-verbal interactions. Interestingly, the International students focused little on their lecturers' race when recounting their experiences, but instead emphasised how those interactions influenced their comfort level to seek further guidance. However, Home students placed their concentration on how the interactions with their supervisors impacted their academic progress. As such, it is salient to note that the understanding of cultural proficiency and its effectiveness differs depending on the previous experiences of the students.

2.4.4 Career Preparation and Progression Support

The interviews showed that for Home students, there was a divergence between the awareness of career support services and engagement with these services. Whereas, for the International cohort, while it was agreed that these services had been communicated to them, these students were more concerned with the effects of their knowledge gap of the labour market in the UK.

Home students

Career preparation and progression support is a particularly important theme for Black African Home students who showed levels of disengagement with the provisions of their university. The topic of career preparation and progression support was met with varied responses from the Home students interviewed. All students acknowledged the presence of a career service at the university, but were not well informed about the specific services offered by this department. Additionally, while the students showed a lack of engagement with the career services department, they primarily sought guidance from other areas in the university, such as their department, supervisors or personal tutors.

Barbara, a postgraduate research student, conveyed her preference for the career and skills development initiatives provided by her department compared to those of the university. As a student working part-time, her preference was to engage with content that was directly relevant to her aspirations as opposed to general-themed events that could conflict with her working hours:

> There is an extensive amount of support from my department and help when it comes to that [career development and preparation], such as going into a Post-Doc, conferences, and job adverts. The help provided by my department is very tailored. I know that the university provides support, but I don't attend their events as sometimes it conflicts with my working hours. (Barbara, postgraduate research Home student)

The findings from this excerpt reveal the dichotomy in the support received from faculty departments and the centralised university career department. As highlighted by Coates and Ranson (2011), it is vital that students are kept engaged through initiatives that will support their progress into further academia and employment. The topic of engagement and its use as a measure of quality is also questioned by Coates (2005), who notes that student engagement is a fundamental part of the student experience and one which should be used to assess a university's commitment to its students. While the department's efforts may be commended in Barbara's case, the argument is that this level of success is not centralised within the institution and, as such, the university's ability to successfully engage with its students depends on the varying efforts of its schools and departments. From a central standpoint, the work of Hahn et al (2021) is useful in explaining the importance of understanding the career aspirations of its minoritised students and the barriers that limit their ability to achieve said goals. This calls for universities to work to improve their comprehension of the types of support their students from non-traditional, ethnically minoritised backgrounds require to ensure improved levels of engagement (Irlbeck, 2014).

Moreover, Fatimah, a second-year undergraduate student, recounted a confusing period in her academic journey where she needed time-sensitive support in making a decision that would affect her academic progression and future career choices.

While struggling with her degree subject, Fatimah contemplated changing to a different department and reached out to her Personal Tutor for support with this decision:

> I know there is a Career Hub and a lot of services where you can book appointments. For me, I reached out to my Personal Tutor when I wanted to change my degree, and they didn’t reply. He didn't respond to me for like a few months. He just wasn't responding to me. (Fatimah, undergraduate Home student)

The account provided in this quote, while challenging for the student, supports the scholarship of Jacklin and Le Riche (2009), who theorise that universities should clarify their definition of support structures to ensure that students are utilising the correct support system at their time of need. Clarifying the support provided, as suggested, will eliminate the confusion and time taken for students to receive the appropriate support for sensitive matters. As such, instances such as the time lag noted in the response of Fatimah’s Personal Tutor provide practical evidence to support the work of Dhillon et al (2008), who argued that the unregulated medium of support provided by Personal Tutors equates to wide-ranging and distorted levels of service based on the tutor’s time, willingness and training. This was also the focus of the Gabi et al’s (2024) study, which calls for Personal Tutors to be better prepared to help ethnically minoritised students improve their student experiences and thus student outcomes. In cases where students are faced with making a decision that will impact their trajectory at the university and beyond, the university must ensure that all students are aware of and adequately signposted to the appropriate resources, regardless of the efforts of their Personal Tutors.

Ivan, however, was less concerned about the support provided by the university for students. While not diminishing their efforts, Ivan was clear that this was not a service he was interested in finding out more about:

> The university might be doing things that I am not aware of because that is not what I am gravitating towards [interested in]. (Ivan, postgraduate research Home student)

The reluctance to engage with the career support services provided by the university shows that, for some students, generalised support is not viewed as impactful or useful. This builds on the findings of Richards (2023), who found that universities seeking to provide effective support to non-traditional students must be proactive in helping students as opposed to waiting for such students to seek help. This means that universities should seek to engage students first rather than choosing to react only when a student seeks out an intervention. Furthermore, a targeted study by Brooms et al (2015) found that initiatives that were designed to engage Black students yielded positive results through increased awareness of opportunities and improved their overall university experience. As such, the absence of engagement with crucial services such as career support should not be left to ethnically minoritised students to resolve, but the university should lead on methods to improve engagement.

International students

The International student participants displayed levels of dissatisfaction due to their belief that they received insufficient career preparation support. Consequently, the interviews revealed that due to the gap in knowledge of the UK labour system, the

students become increasingly frustrated when not provided with information on how to access tailored and equitable support to bridge this gap and become career-ready in the UK.

Most of the International students interviewed, while aware of the Career Hub, did not suppose that the university extended its support to students preparing for life after their studies. Their sentiments regarding this area of discussion were of disheartenment towards what was advertised before they came to the UK and what was received when they arrived.

Ethan mentioned that he was unaware of any effective services provided by either the university or his department in helping him prepare for a career after his PhD. He further refers to the services provided as a marketing strategy to attract students. This line of questioning evoked emotions of discontentment at the level of support received in preparing for his career beyond academia:

> I don’t think the university provides those services [career support services]. If my department provides those services, then it's just a marketing strategy. It's not really intended [intentional]. For example, they don’t have the avenue to help PhD students improve [their skills], like teaching. I have tried to fund [request funds from the university] for some conferences, but it was either not allowed, or the amount given was minute. When I saw the university offering [in marketing materials before coming to the UK], I said “Wow, this is good!” Then, when you come, you realise this is not what was intended [advertised]. (Ethan, postgraduate research International student)

The disappointment expressed in Ethan’s response adds validity to the research of Coates and Ranson (2011), which explains that effective support should go beyond creating a favourable perception of services and provide students with unambiguous expectations throughout their tenure at the university. This is significant in the case of International students who face supplementary difficulties in adapting to a new

environment and employment system in addition to the systemic issues experienced by other Black African students (Franco et al., 2019). When compounded with the challenge of the unavailability or misunderstanding of information on career planning in their host country, this becomes a primary factor in inducing anxiety among International students on the topic of their career development (Uosaki et al. 2015). Therefore, requirements for clarity in the career support available to International students are needed to ensure that this group is not further marginalised due to their unfamiliarity with the host culture.

Additionally, Joshua also interestingly distinguishes the Career Hub from services that help students with career preparation. His understanding of the remits of the Career Hub is limited to CV building and not to career development post-academia. Similar to Ethan, Joshua does not regard the university as helpful in planning for his future endeavours:

> I don’t think I know of any services to help you after your studies. The only one I know of is the Career Hub, where they can help you with your CV. Other than that, I don’t think I know any others. Directly, I would say I have not received any help from the university to help me when I finish. Indirectly, the projects I am working on as part of my degree would go on my CV. (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

Though Joshua recognises the presence of the Career Hub, the limited knowledge of the services provided shows the variation in knowledge between students. Thus, to effectively target minoritised students, career services should embed the practice of producing guidance that concentrates on the information gaps through a culturally sensitive approach (Arthur and Popadiuk, 2010). This approach involves increasing awareness of how to mitigate the different types of pressures which could negatively impact the career development of International students (Singaravelu et al., 2005).

This is supported by the work of Arthur and Nunes (2014), who write on the importance of career services building relationships with International students to provide support that is culturally relevant and beneficial to the students' decision-making process.

Summary

The theme of career development support has been explored through the lens of both Black African Home and International students. The findings portray the dichotomy in awareness between the two groups, with Home students having more awareness of career services than International students. Black African International students have been shown to require additional tailored help with bridging their knowledge gap in the UK labour market to aid their progression through university and beyond. This corroborates Moskal's (2017) study, which found that prior to studying at their host universities, many International students also imagined a more favourable outcome of gaining employment in the UK. However, this perception was usually disrupted and found to be improbable.

Secondly, these findings revealed that while Home students are more informed about the career services department, they are less engaged with the services provided. This suggests that the level of engagement with career services is low due to the notion that the generalised support offered by the university is either inapplicable to the participants or not relevant to their specific needs. As such, to increase engagement, tailored career support services must be provided proactively to address the required developmental needs of these students.

2.5 Conclusion

2.5.1 Research Summary

This study was carried out to provide a contextual understanding of the experiences of Black African Home and International students at a British university. Data on the experiences of this ethnic group has often been reductionist, failing to explore the in-depth perspectives of these students by generalising findings from all Black sub-groups or ethnic minorities. However, this also omits the data of international students when reviewing Black student experiences. Yet, guidelines on tackling anti-Blackness and racism across UK universities, which are based on Home-domiciled data alone, are disseminated and purported for all Black students.

This study helps to demystify the experiences of both Home and International students by comparing the experiences of both groups to understand their similarities and unique challenges. In doing so, the data provided by this research increases the understanding of the key issues and challenges for both groups independently within the UK. This, in addition, reduces the overreliance on US literature within this area by working to reduce the knowledge gap within UK universities in this area.

This chapter builds on the objectives of the first chapter, which sought to compare the experiences of both Black African Home and International students through their identities and sense of belonging by applying these same components to the students' perception of the effectiveness of formal and informal student support services. This allowed for the review of support structures through a specific Black

African ethnic lens, thereby evaluating the benefits of formal and informal support structures for these students in a manner that is uncommon in the literature.

2.5.2 Summary of research findings

The research focused on comparing the attitudes of Black African Home and International students on two key aspects, namely formal and informal support structures at a British university. This approach highlighted the key finding of continuous engagement, an important metric used to ascribe value to the support service in question. Nonetheless, the disaggregation of experiences between Home and International students provided a deeper understanding of both formal and informal support structures and the objectives of use for each. For International students from sub-Saharan Africa, these objectives were found to be formed at the start of the student's academic journey, while the objectives of Home students evolved based on the challenges they faced while growing up as an ethnically minoritised person in the UK.

The findings in the formal support thematic area were analysed in three sub-themes: university-led tailored interventions, the cultural competency of lecturers and supervisors and career preparation and support.

On the topic of university-led tailored interventions, it was revealed that there are differences in satisfaction between Black African Home and International students on the university’s efforts in addressing issues of race and identity. Black African Home students were frustrated with the university’s limited interventions, which led to dissatisfaction with their student experience due to the burden on them to mitigate

this lack through student-led interventions. Conversely, the international peers from sub-Saharan African countries were less perturbed by interventions on ethnic and racial identity by the university, and instead sought the university’s assistance in building stronger ties with other students to develop academic communities which offer practical support for those foreign to the UK higher education sector. Nonetheless, the Black African International student from a European country was delighted with the increased focus on race at the UK university, in comparison to their home environment.

The area of cultural proficiency of lecturers and supervisors garnered data which unveiled the pertinence of the students’ understanding and interpretation of culture, which can be formed through experiences at different institutions. The findings showed that Black African Home students evaluated the cultural proficiency of their lecturers and supervisors firstly through the affirmation provided by the staff member and secondly through either a racial or migratory lens. However, the findings for Black African International students showed that non-verbal cues between the staff and students formed the basis on which the International students evaluated their interactions. This cross-cultural lens influenced the students' perception of the usefulness of their engagement with their lecturers.

The other sub-theme of career preparation and support revealed a difference in the awareness and engagement of career services. The findings detailed that the attitudes of Black African Home students toward career services, centred on a lack of engagement due to the notion of irrelevance based on the lack of tailored services. This is an important learning that unveils the importance of using engagement to measure the effectiveness of career services instead of awareness. The low

engagement levels were present across both groups. However, for Black African International students, there was limited awareness of the comprehensive suite of services offered by the university's career services. This provides an opportunity to enhance the career service with a level of cultural integration to ensure that the services address both the needs of Black African Home and International students.

The second thematic area explored, informal support, was reviewed through two key sub-themes: student and staff-led race and culture groups and societies, and mental wellbeing and motivational support.

The reception to informal student and staff-organised groups and societies formed through similar interests, such as ethnicity and culture, was positive from both Black African Home and International students. The main benefit of informal networks to both students was their ability to provide them with a holistic student experience by mitigating the effects of gaps that were not addressed by the university. Black African International students utilised their groups and societies to mitigate the gaps in their knowledge of the customs and systems in the UK, while also leaning on these groups for support with mental wellbeing issues. Whereas the Black African Home participants sought out and created groups and societies to discuss issues about their race and identity, which were not offered formally by the university. This provided them with a safe place to voice their experiences as minorities without fear of judgment.

The second area within the informal support theme focused on the effectiveness of mental wellbeing and motivational support for the students. Similar to the previous sub-theme within informal support, both sets of students were delighted and appreciative of the support they received from peers. Interestingly, some of the Black

African Home students detailed a similar sequence of initially trailing the formal support service for academic support, and when it was deemed ineffective, they turned to their informal networks or themselves. Whereas for the Black African International students, they bypassed seeking formal help when faced with psychological pressures, but instead leaned on their community of fellow Black African International peers to help alleviate these pressures.

Additionally, the research on the effectiveness of informal motivational support is not common in the literature, which makes these findings useful in understanding how important informal support is in helping students progress through their studies and enhancing the objectives of positive student outcomes for the university.

2.5.3 Implications and contributions of the study

The first objective of this study was to understand the uniqueness and differences in the experiences of Black African Home and International students, which this comparative study has successfully addressed by gathering data from both groups, showing that they do not share equivalent experiences while at university. The secondary objective of this paper was to review the attitudes on the effectiveness of formal and informal student support structures through the lens of Black African Home and International students. The value of effectiveness was ascribed based on the student's reception of the services. As such, this study opens up discussions on how services should be evaluated and challenges the view that the awareness of a service does not equate to its usefulness if students do not engage with it.

Consequently, the study also highlighted differences in the reception of formal services between Black African Home and Black African International students. The key difference noted was the disparity in awareness of the formal services offered, with Home students having more awareness than their International peers. Nonetheless, the awareness of the Home student participants did not translate to engagement, thus highlighting the issues of effectiveness in the formal services provided. This was compared with informal structures, which students had a consistent positive review of. This study highlighted how students relied on informal support services not only to mitigate experiences caused by being an ethnically minoritised group but to bolster gaps within the formal support services. This led to the significant discovery of the role of informal support in helping students progress through their tenure at university, and also the hidden benefit of helping universities improve their student outcomes. Thus, these finding reveals the dual benefit to the sector, which is not widely researched in the scholarship of Black African student experiences.

However, though the students did not mention any disadvantages of informal support services, it was deduced from the analysis and discussion that there was a potential for the spread of misinformation among the Black African International students, particularly due to their overreliance on unregulated information from peers. While it was acknowledged that the International students utilise peers for knowledge sharing due to their unawareness of customs and cultural differences in their host country, the information received was not checked against the provision of the university's formal services. This implies that the university can leave such students vulnerable to the advice of their peers by failing to proactively increase signposting and information sharing. As such, this study demonstrates the need for a different

approach to Black African International students to ensure that the university's information services are effective in providing the right support for the students' needs.

2.5.4 Recommendations for future research and practical applications

Based on these conclusions, there is scope to further increase the knowledge of Black African students' experiences with a focus on the impact of socioeconomic status on their reception of the effectiveness of formal and informal support services. This will help to strengthen the findings by further disaggregating this subgroup and identifying how and if socioeconomic status impacts the experiences of these students. A review of formal support services against the metrics of engagement, awareness and utilisation by Black African Home and International students separately will also help universities highlight areas of improvement for both groups. However, to address the themes of alienation highlighted in this chapter, the university could implement a formal buddy scheme to pair new first-year Black African International students with other Black African International students in their second and further years. However, for this to be effective and not cumbersome, the university should assume the role of organiser, and those taking on the roles of buddies and mentors should be compensated.

Finally, to mitigate the probability of misinformation, universities should take a more proactive approach with Black African International students to reduce knowledge gaps and thereby the reliance on seeking primary information from peers. To better understand the implications of these results, further studies could address the experiences of Black African students at other UK universities. Nevertheless, this

study has focused on Black African students' experiences in a university outside of London, which has a largely White population. As such, further research in other geographical locations will help to provide a holistic view of the experiences of Black African students in different parts of the country and with different ethnic populations. Additional attention should also be paid to Afro-Latin, African American and Afro-Caribbean students at British universities who fell outside of the scope of this research and, as such, were not featured. Finally, a survey focused solely on the experiences of Black African students may provide a more quantifiable method to gather data on the experiences of students in British universities.

Chapter 3: A Critical Examination of National Student Surveys through the Lens of Black African Student Experiences.

3.1 Introduction

The importance of student experiences within national student surveys has gained increased prominence in tandem with the recognition of students as customers in the higher education sector, a perspective that may have become stronger with the rising cost of higher education and the increasing purchasing power of students (Woodall et al., 2014). Although there is a lack of consensus on the view that students are customers, based on the unique role of academics as educators, not suppliers (Guilbault, 2016), there is no denying that institutions must do all they can in the current higher education climate to attract and retain their students (Guilbault, 2016). This is buttressed by the multiple factors that have contributed to the decline in student numbers, including tighter restrictions on International student dependent visas and falling rates of postgraduate taught Home students, both groups for whom universities have the autonomy to charge a preferred fee (Blake, 2024; Salmon, 2024). Therefore, instruments such as ranking tables, which are influenced by student satisfaction surveys, become increasingly important in the attraction of new students.

However, there remains a need to understand if the national student surveys are effective in gathering data on the experiences of marginalised groups such as Black African Home and Black African International students. Hence, following on from the findings of the qualitative research interviews on the experiences of Black African students conducted in Chapters 1 and 2, this chapter will review how these experiences are reflected in the questions and response options provided in national student surveys. This will provide greater insight into how inclusive and

representative the surveys are in gathering and understanding the experiences of these students.

Scholars purport that the essence of student experience surveys is in the accomplishment of the following objectives: increasing accountability and quality assurance among universities through the student as customer model, and the influence of satisfaction and experience surveys on a university's rank on league tables (Canning, 2015; Webber et al., 2013; Yorke, 2009). National student surveys are expected to enforce a culture of accountability within universities through performance measurement, which theoretically leads to improvements in areas of shortcomings (Kandiko et al., 2020). These surveys contribute to the evaluation of a university's performance and are thereby seen as an index which prospective students can utilise in their decision-making process (Yorke 2009). Such surveys provide students with an opportunity to report their own experience and allow prospective students to review current students' satisfaction with their programme of study and host university. Following the increase in tuition fees for students in 2012, there has been an amplified interest in ensuring that students attending universities receive a valuable education which meets their satisfaction (Wiley, 2019).

Within the collective of national student surveys, the National Student Survey (NSS) by the Office for Students is utilised by league tables in the UK as a contributor to a university's performance index (Rogers,2025). This mandatory survey, which is managed by the UK government, collates all final-year undergraduate students' perspectives on the quality of education they received from their university (Canning, 2015). However, universities can, and do employ other national surveys, including the Advance HE Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTESS) and the

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), which focus on postgraduate taught and research students respectively, and whose experiences fall outside of the scope of the NSS survey (Advance HE, n.d.).

Nevertheless, the student voice, which is expressed through the NSS, is more representative of traditional students who make up the majority of undergraduates, i.e., who are White and non-mature (HESA, 2025). This presents a false narrative that the higher-ranked a university is in the NSS, the more satisfied *all* its students are with their experiences. This sentiment is heavily critiqued by the vast range of scholarship detailing the negative experiences of Black, Black African and Black African International students across the UK (Fakile, 2021; Osbourne, 2023; Owusu-Kwarteng, 2021; Zewolde, 2022).

Additionally, student experience surveys are administered at a specific point in the student journey, usually during the first and or last year of the degree study through self-reporting. This method of gathering data means that students are asked to inform on their general experience as opposed to specific components that together provide a complete view of their student journey (Morgan et al., 2018).

Employing quantitative measures to capture the complexity and breadth of student experiences diminishes attention to their individual narratives but rather prioritises the measurement of student outcomes instead (Pickford, 2013). This is salient when considering the negative impacts of racism, microaggression and alienation on the academic performance and experiences of Black African students in the UK, which scholars have attributed to the shortfall in the understanding of these students' experiences (Fakile 2021; Zewolde 2022).

Furthermore, the NSS, which focuses on satisfaction, is criticised for being open to interpretation as there is no shared consensus on the definition of student satisfaction (Howson and Matos, 2021). This is intensified by criticisms that the NSS is a customer survey and enforces the stance that students are customers of learning alone, thereby reducing their role as co-contributors and failing to address their ever-changing needs (Howson and Matos, 2021). This places students as passive participants of the data-gathering process rather than active stakeholders who have valuable input into how their educational experiences are measured and interpreted (Winstone et al., 2022). Nevertheless, this restricted method of gathering student responses is exacerbated by the NSS's use of the Likert scale, which works well for quantifying responses that can be used to produce a performance index for a university (Yorke, 2009). However, there is a limitation in the literature in understanding whether such surveys provide a reflective space for Black African Home and Black African International students to address the complex challenges they experience based on their ethnic identity and cultural background.

This chapter aims to go beyond the current focus of existing research on how well national student surveys measure student outcomes and satisfaction and asks instead how adequately they capture broader student experiences. A review of the qualitative interview data gathered in the previous chapters highlights the systemic issues particular to Black African students which shape their experiences. This raises questions of whether there is a gap in the collection and understanding of data on Black African student experiences and whether these students are given adequate opportunities in the surveys to document their experiences. Hence, to understand the effectiveness of national student surveys for Black African students, this study

will review survey questions thematically through the lens of the students' narratives rather than the lens of measures of satisfaction and outcomes.

3.2 Literature Review: Are student experience surveys fit for purpose?

3.2.1 The student-as-customer model

Assessing how well universities meet student expectations

Over time, the increasing diversity of the British student population has made the idea of a single, uniform student experience, based on a homogeneous group of traditional students, outdated. As a result, universities have placed greater emphasis on improving and tailoring the experience for all students (Ramsden, 2008). As the cost of university rises for students, the question of value and, in particular, the value of the university experience has become more prevalent (Woodall et al., 2014). Students are now viewed as having more purchasing power, and Cuthbert (2010) buttresses this by positing that the transaction of funds for an educational service means that students are within their rights to expect higher standards of their university experiences, a sentiment underpinned by the introduction of the NSS. Nevertheless, some scholars have documented that this logic does not apply to International students who pay a higher fee but rely on their personal networks rather than university services to supplement gaps in their university experiences (Dhillon et al., 2008; Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell, 2018).

Additionally, the positioning of students as customers has been found to conjure debates among academics with concerns raised that such terms promote the marketisation of higher education ideology and question the academy's integrity (Guilbault, 2016). Whereas findings from Adisa et al (2023) detail accounts from

participant lecturers who expressed their dislike of the NSS as a review of customer satisfaction due to the entitlement and high expectations held by some fee-paying students. While these arguments are valid, it has been recognised that by viewing students as customers, universities are presented with a responsibility to understand the root cause of their customers' needs, which national student surveys do not provide solutions for (Pickford, 2013).

While national student surveys approach student experiences as a monolithic entity, the scholarship on ethnically minoritised students shows that there is a longstanding issue with overlooking and culturally misunderstanding the unique issues of these students within the academy (Arday, 2018). For Black African International students, this includes challenges such as negative cultural perceptions of their backgrounds and an isolated journey assimilating to the culture of their host country (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014). Whereas for Black African Home students, who are habitually grouped with other Black students, there are noted inequalities which are evidenced through less favourable outcomes and university experiences in comparison to their peers (Haywood and Darko, 2021). As such, these adverse experiences confirm that greater effort is required by universities to resolve the issues of both groups. However, the lack of depth in national student surveys means that intricate issues such as these, which shape the overall experiences of students and impact their identity as minoritised students, are not considered. Additionally, Calma and Dickson-Deane (2020) argue that the university as a business has multiple areas of focus, which are driven by performance indices, such as productivity and efficiency are prioritised in the formation of its objectives instead of a sole focus on the learning experience of its students.

Therefore, it is argued that placing the students as customers creates space for dialogue, empowering students to actively evaluate and shape the conversations that define their university experience (Gravett et al., 2020). This is an important discourse within the higher education sector that offers an opportunity to enhance the relationship between Black African students and the academy by allowing these students to actively participate in shaping how their experiences are understood and the quality assurance measures used to evaluate them (Naylor et al., 2020; Tight, 2013). Currently, Black African Home and International students administer informal reactionary remedies to counteract the barriers they face as students. This takes form through mechanisms such as the utilisation of informal peer support, social groups and networks (Maundeni, 2001).

Thus, it can be argued that students should be provided with clarity on how to collaborate with their universities and provided with spaces where they can exercise their agency to champion their concerns (Naylor et al., 2020). However, this student agency, which indicates their positions of influence, is currently limited to areas outside the university's governance, such as the student union, thereby restricting its influence on the entire student experience (Rafik Hama et al., 2020). Hence, nurturing the idea of a customer relationship between the university and Black African students can foster positive engagement in addressing the concerns related to their experiences (Bowden, 2011; Calma and Dickson-Deane, 2020). This can be facilitated effectively through national student surveys, which are mechanisms to elicit feedback from students. However, the surveys must first ask the questions that are related to the experiences and understanding of the students, to ensure that the responses adequately reflect the realities of this marginalised group (Bennett and Kane, 2014).

<u>Identifying the gaps in understanding Black African students' experiences in particular</u>

For both Black African Home and Black African International students, their experiences are either entangled in the experiences of all ethnically minoritised students through acronymised labels such as BAME (Black And Minority Ethnic) or, for Black African International students, within the confines of "International" (Whittaker and Broadhead, 2022; Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014). Therefore, to demand better services, Black African Home and Black African International students must first have their own voice outside the aggregated group of minoritised students. This becomes possible only when such students can express their views on their university experiences, thus promoting their own sense of value and authority (Bonner et al., 2004).

Nonetheless, various scholarships detail the effort Black African International students make in formulating guidance for their incoming peers to circumvent the collective challenges they experience (Changamire et al., 2022; Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012; Lee and Opio, 2011). Similarly, Black African Home students, with other Black students, take on similar roles of providing spaces to help their peers combat feelings of isolation by addressing topics relating to cultural interests (Adams, 2012). Thus, while the use of national student surveys promotes the concept of students as consumers, there is an argument to suggest that the student-as-customer model is not entirely applicable to Black African Home and International students who take on the additional role of both consumers and providers of services to support their groups (Adams, 2012; Lee and Opio, 2011). As such, for Black African students, the feedback captured in student experience surveys is likely to be influenced by the

interventions facilitated by these students outside of the efforts of the university. The efforts of these students are recognised by scholars who found that Black African student groups focus their efforts at the micro level to improve their university experiences (Changamire et al., 2021; Davis, 1991). Hence, Black African Home and International students take on the ambiguous and additional role of the student as the producer, thus lending support to the findings of Naylor et al (2021) who call for greater transparency in the expectations and roles of students in their involvement with citizenship activities within the university.

The issue of student survey data quality

One of the intended attributes of the NSS is to provide prospective students with an avenue to objectively rank the performance of universities using league tables powered by the scores formulated from the experiences of NSS participants (Bennet and Kane, 2014; Cuthbert, 2010). However, Cuthbert (2010) questions the quality of the data used to generate these league tables, particularly because there is an asymmetric balance between the information available to prospective students on the quality of the student responses and what is held by the universities. This critical piece of information, which focuses on the quality of experiences, is often substituted with the university's promotional marketing materials, such as websites and prospectuses, thereby reinforcing the imbalance of information for minoritised groups and International students who do not have the same university experience as the traditional majority groups (Hosein and Rao, 2023). Furthermore, for Black African students, this poignant issue of being uninformed of the racially specific experiences of students across British universities is not as well documented in the available scholarship as the data gathered tends to focus on the outcomes of Black students

(Taylor and Kendhi, 2021; Richardson, 2015). This presents a missed opportunity for universities to adequately inform their prospective ethnically minoritised students on the experiences of similar minoritised students and the interventions in place to support them through any challenges.

Additionally, the NSS has been ingrained within the higher education sector as the determinant of student experience success, thereby encouraging universities to emphasise the elements that can improve the survey scores and, in turn, a lack of focus on others (Sabri, 2013). Saliently, the breakdown of the core questions in the NSS survey focuses mainly on academic services such as teaching, learning, assessments, and academic support, with the exception of the student voice category at the end of the core questions section (The National Student Survey, 2024). Furthermore, most of the questions require fixed responses that do not provide an opportunity for the student to elaborate on why their response was chosen, and for the optional open-text questions, there is no requirement for students to provide a response or additional details on their comments. This deprives the opportunity to accumulate reasons for a university's positive or negative performance on a particular theme (Robinson and Sykes, 2014). As such, the structural barriers that have been found to impact the experiences of ethnically minoritised students cannot be interpreted through the use of general questions with a Likert response (Sabri, 2011). Hence, the information that Black African students deduce from the rankings of the NSS is not sufficient to inform them of the supporting structures at university, which will contribute to the shaping of their experiences (Cuthbert, 2010; Yorke 2009).

Another challenge to the data accuracy of the NSS comes from Langan and Harris (2024), who discuss the undue influence institutions have on their students by referring to the potential negative impact these future graduates may endure if low scores from the NSS negatively impact their university's league table ranking. This questions the accuracy of the information presented in student feedback results and supports the scepticism of staff when reviewing this data, as documented in the findings of Sabri (2013). This theme of reciprocity as a consideration factor when completing student surveys is also present in the scholarship of Adisa et al (2023), who question the credibility of the NSS as a measurement of accurate student experiences. This is based on revelations from student participants who confirmed that their NSS scores were positively or negatively influenced by the grades received. As such, it is justified to question whether prospective Black African students can rely on the feedback and ranking of the national student survey to make an informed decision on where to study.

It can further be argued that while mechanisms such as student experience surveys already exist to give Black African Home and International students a voice, this potential is undermined by the underutilisation of collected data and the inconsistent translation of feedback into meaningful actions and policies (Duane et al., 2024). Thus, the act of gathering student feedback can be viewed as unnecessary if there are no follow-up interventions to address issues raised. In such cases, the voices of students whose shared views are collected but not translated are effectively muted.

This is supported by the work of Pickford (2013), who argues that the data gathered at the macro level, which the NSS operates, is insufficient in tackling specific issues of student experiences within individual universities. This is because the

measurement of student experience is treated as a universal concept that applies to all students, which fails to consider the structural inequalities, privileges, or disadvantages impacting the lives of specific student groups (Sabri, 2011). Nonetheless, even studies which focus on the general experiences of students, not specifically ethnically minoritised students, have found that institutions are not always cognisant of the needs of their students. This is evidenced in the findings of Miles and Leinster (2009), whose study reviewed the overall student experience and found that staff were unaware of the inadequacy of support structures designed to help students combat stress. Hence, this highlights the need for increased research into the experiences of Black African students and the effectiveness of the structures designed to enhance these experiences outside of teaching and learning.

Thus, there is a requirement for universities to make further efforts to enhance their understanding of the student responses gathered from the NSS with additional research. This lack of corresponding inquiries is noted by scholars who critique the absence of exploration into student responses by institutions once their quality improvement review processes are completed (Williams et al., 2008). Hence, failure to probe data which indicates concerns creates a cycle of data collection without meaningful institutional responses (Duane et al., 2024). This lack of additional effort is not penalised because national student surveys do not hold universities to account for whether or not they make changes to address issues from student feedback (Duane et al., 2024; Williams et al., 2008). Similarly, the choice to ask undergraduate students to provide their feedback in their final year contributes to a lack of accountability for universities, as these students will not have the awareness to ascertain if their concerns are resolved (Dean et al., 2020). This is compounded by

the focus of authors such as Langan and Harris (2019) on the metrics of the NSS and not on the university's ability to fulfil their roles as active agents of change.

The limitations of surveys in understanding the intersections of identity and belonging for Black African student experiences

A critique of the NSS in particular by scholars Cocksedge and Taylor (2013) is that the teaching-centred and primarily quantitative design of the survey reduces the diversity of questions asked and the ability to understand the meaning of the answers provided, thus limiting the opportunity to identify specific issues and produce targeted interventions. The generalised format of national student surveys is designed to apply to all students and all experiences, with questions specifically relating to identity and its impact on belonging largely absent. Murray (2025) argues that the current themes of questions in the NSS are not sufficient to quantify the entire experience of the student journey, but are used by universities to evidence their position on student experiences in league tables. However, when scholars MacKay et al (2019) reviewed the open-ended questions from the NSS at one university, it was discovered that there was a positive correlation between the students' sense of belonging in their course and positive experiences encountered. This reinforces the findings of Cameron (1999), who found that students who had a sense of belonging within the university were better able to realise their goals, which enhanced their overall satisfaction. However, while the term belonging has increased in prominence within university discourses, it is often linked to outcome measures such as retention (Pedler et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, due to the presentation of NSS data using quantitative measures such as frequency tables to measure satisfaction (Cocksedge and Taylor, 2013), the data which reflects the experiences of Black African students are limited to a small percentage due to their minoritised population. As such, without further qualitative research, it is possible that there is a disparity between the accuracy of student experience in student survey results and the actual student experience of Black African students. This hypothesis is bolstered by the findings of Sabri (2013), which explained that some staff members at universities cautiously accept the results of the NSS due to their awareness of the challenges some of their students encounter, and the incomplete support provided by their university in addressing these issues.

Additionally, in the case of support for mental wellbeing, Pollard et al (2019) found that some universities relied on the data collected in the optional question bank on mental wellbeing from the NSS to gain an annual understanding of their students' satisfaction with the services provided. The concern with relying on the optional to answer question bank to understand the mental wellbeing of students is that scholars have documented the challenges Black people in the UK have with mental wellbeing services (Wallace et al., 2016). This includes issues of stereotyping and a lack of practitioners from the same racial group (Edge and MacKian 2010). Moreover, Black African International students have been found to have limited engagement with formal mental well-being support due to stigmas associated with the topic (Boukpessi et al., 2021; Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012). Subsequently, the non-requirement for students to answer questions on their mental wellbeing means that universities may be missing vital insight into the acute challenges experienced by this group. Therefore, there is a need to evaluate how effective student experience

surveys are in terms of the questions they ask, and the opportunities provided for Black African students to express their experiences.

3.2.2 Student Satisfaction vs Student Experience: How reliable are university league tables?

Why student experience matters more than graduation surveys

Student satisfaction is regarded as a measure by which students can convey their approval of the quality of service received from their university. This is expressed through satisfaction surveys, and the university's value is indicated to the sector through league tables (Calma and Dickson-Deane, 2020). Hence, the perception is that universities that rank highly on student satisfaction surveys offer their students a better-quality experience than others (Harvey, 2022). Nonetheless, while satisfaction scores are used as an indicator of student experience, it remains that the factors which affect the lives of Black African students and their experience, such as their sense of belonging, cannot be measured through surveys which focus mainly on the teaching and learning services provided (Calma and Dickson-Deane, 2020). For instance, Greaves et al (2021) document the positive impact the visibility and availability of Black lecturers have on the experiences of Black students at universities, but intangible benefits such as these are not within the focus of national student surveys.

Furthermore, students' experiences, although intertwined with satisfaction, are a separate dynamic entity which can be assessed by the university's ability to understand the influence of sociocultural factors affecting students both before and during their time at the university, and the facilities in place to support them (Jones, 2017). This is particularly important for Black African Home and International students who come to study at universities in the UK with varied intersectional

influences that separate them both from the traditional student body and from each other (Bowl, 2001). Furthermore, Jones (2017) argues that to understand a student's experience, they must be viewed within their circumstantial context and not homogenously within the unit of the student body. Therefore, unlike satisfaction surveys, by reviewing the specific experiences of Black African Home and International students, the university essentially shifts the focus from itself, along with the benefits ascribed to it through high satisfaction scores, to the benefits available to these students. This is supported by the findings of Pickford (2013), who suggests that the initiatives promoted by universities to enhance their NSS survey scores are done with institutional priorities in mind. This lack of concentration on the barriers impacting smaller groups of students is further intensified by the limited availability of qualitative data from open questions from the NSS, which can produce more granular insights into student experience and therefore limits the efforts of institutions in this area (MacKay et al., 2019).

Moreover, the timing of the NSS, which occurs in the final year of an undergraduate course, means that the data collected is on the experiences of students with positive progression outcomes, thereby not capturing the experiences of those who did not progress to their final year (Dean et al., 2020). This highlights an issue identified in the regression analysis findings of Petrie and Keohane (2019), who identified that Black students were more likely to withdraw from lower-ranked universities and, across all university tiers, were also more likely to transfer from their universities, in comparison to White students. Thus, the prominence of satisfaction scores, championed through student surveys, does not accurately represent the student journey experience, but rather the satisfaction of the students who have progressed to their final year. More saliently, this means that the opportunities to understand the

factors influencing the students' attitude to their learning environment and their university are missed for some Black students, as these attitudes are found to be shaped in their first year (Trotter and Roberts, 2006). In the absence of this consideration, academics utilise available but often localised data from researchers to gain an improved understanding of why ethnically minoritised students choose to withdraw from their university. For example, Kauser et al (2021) found that the ethnically minoritised students who withdrew from their university were impacted by a range of factors both within and outside of the learning environment. This prompted their recommendation for universities to proactively increase their understanding of the challenges of ethnically minoritised students in the absence of support for those with higher non-continuation rates.

The mutual co-existence of high satisfaction scores and poor student experiences

Following this, it is pertinent to note that NSS responses should be viewed as components of student satisfaction, not predictors, as the NSS does not feature all structures that contribute to student satisfaction (Pickford, 2013). While the questions in the NSS fixate on teaching and learning, Elliott and Shin (2022) note that not only are the experiences of students in the classroom affected by factors outside of the classroom, but the value which students place on academic and non-academic support structures varies according to their needs. As such, the classroom experience cannot be understood solely outside of other personal and cultural influences. For instance, Yaro and Smith (2024) found that the drivers of satisfaction influencing Black African International students' decision to study at a Western university included the receipt of non-academic support from student services and

the prestige of obtaining a Western degree, neither of which focuses on the quality of teaching. Therefore, it is possible for universities to receive a high rank for their teaching and learning provision from student surveys and not achieve the same success if their non-academic support services are not on par with the requirements of the students. Therefore, the absence of scoring for non-academic support services in national student surveys means that teaching quality becomes the predictor of student experiences, which highlights another limitation in the use of the current national student surveys as a predictor of student experience (Fassett and McCormick 2021; Pickford 2013).

Hence, the lack of further in-depth research by student surveys outside of teaching and learning quality is problematic in obtaining an accurate view of the issues shaping the student experience. This is buttressed by the findings of Yorke (2000), which indicate that the main predictors for students who withdraw from their studies were based on difficulties assimilating with their degree programme and financial issues, not just the quality of teaching and learning. Yet, more recently, York's (2014) findings demonstrate the benefits to universities in taking a racial disaggregation approach to understand the comparative experiences of their students and the issues that impact their belonging and satisfaction at their university. These benefits included the identification of differences in scores of belonging between White and ethnically minoritised students, which were followed up locally with specific interventions. These results are in tandem with the findings of Ritchie (2022), who reiterates that a gulf remains between the satisfaction rates of White students and their ethnically minoritised peers in the UK, with White students reporting higher rates of satisfaction with their academic experience.

Additionally, the focus on value for money and career readiness as a method of evaluating a university's performance means that the understanding of student satisfaction becomes embedded in monetary value (Holligan and Shah, 2017). Thus, the question of satisfaction becomes one which asks if students have received what they paid for. In this case, it is a university degree that can help them secure a career post-graduation, hence explaining the focus on classroom-based activities in national student surveys (Yaro and Smith, 2024). Consequently, while the findings from Bowles (2020) provide a correlation between course satisfaction and self-efficacy in the classroom, which is useful in understanding the contributory value of self-competence in national student satisfaction scores, it does not explain how these students acquire this competence. This is an important discussion point for Black African students, as documented in the findings of Chapters 1 and 2, which reveal that these students turn to their peers and other Black African students for help in boosting their competency in the classroom due to challenges with the available formal support services provided by their university. As such, the presence of competency for Black African students in the classroom neither implies satisfaction with the university's provision nor does it negate the present challenges in their overall student experiences.

Satisfaction with perceived service quality vs actual service quality

Additionally, the responses to student surveys are shaped by factors which influence the perceived quality of service students receive (Dean et al., 2020). This perceived quality of service is impacted by the expectations of the customer, which simultaneously affects their levels of satisfaction (Yu et al., 2005). The literature

reports that Black African International students place Western education on a pedestal in comparison to the universities in their home countries (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014). This high opinion of a Western degree centres around themes of greater international mobilisation and widely recognised qualifications (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014). These expectations, theoretically, will lead to high levels of satisfaction among this group of students once they receive a degree certificate. Thus, the assumption of being on a journey to receive greater mobility may positively influence their perception of satisfaction.

Another key driver for Black African International students choosing to study in the UK, as detailed in the findings of Owusu-Kwarteng (2021), is to escape the incessant university strikes by lecturers in their home country, which often leads to significant delays in completing a degree programme. Hence, unintentionally, the presence of a university which offers little to no strikes and allows students to complete their course in a set timeframe will also positively influence their perception of service quality. These findings allude to the sentiment that the perception of quality by Black African International students is influenced by their comparisons to less favourable circumstances in their home countries, which influences their motivation to study in the UK. This means that for Black African International students, the actual quality of the service received may not be as influential as the perceived benefits that come with having a Western degree when rating a university. This is in alignment with the argument of Elliott and Shin (2022), who propose that students ascribe merit to their university based on its ability to meet their requirements. This therefore supports the discourse that Black African International students may rank their satisfaction with their institutions based on the perception that it will help them meet their future needs (Bassey, 2009; Yaro and Smith, 2024).

Furthermore, the factors influencing the satisfaction of Black African Home students alone are sparse or grouped within the minoritised ethnic category. However, a study by Tedam (2014) found that Black African students share similar experiences of microaggressions, exhibited through additional scrutiny and the lack of a supportive environment. Though these issues may not be directly linked to teaching and learning quality, they impact how these students experience learning. Additionally, unlike their International counterparts, who are motivated to study in the UK due to fewer comparable features in their home country institutions (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014; Owusu-Kwarteng, 2021), Black Home students' perception of classroom service quality may be shaped by internalised feelings of distrust toward their providers (Haslanger, 2014). This is also evidenced in McClain and Cokley's (2016) study, which highlights that Black students who do not trust their lecturers also assume that their lecturers' bias influences their educational outcomes. Nonetheless, while these incidents may be contained in certain interactions, Pickford (2013) highlights that these exchanges can influence the student responses provided on the NSS. Moreover, consideration should be placed on the idea that student perceptions, shaped by a racial lens, are already formed before Black students arrive at their university. This is evidenced in Marcus et al's (2010) study, which found that Black children noticed an unfavourable difference in the treatment received by teachers in comparison to White children in school. As such, Black students from non-homogeneous backgrounds arrive at university with preexisting experiences of structural inequalities which may influence their view of the teaching and learning services provided (Ezikwelu 2020; Gillborn 2015).

3.3. Research methodology

In this chapter, the focus of the study is to ask, *“How effective are national student surveys in gathering data that identifies the specific challenges faced by Black African Home and Black African International students?”* To answer this, the critical discourse analysis method will be used to analyse national student survey questions within the themes highlighted as crucial to student experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students, as identified in existing literature and the findings in Chapters 1 and 2. In this section, the critical discourse analysis methodological approach is discussed, its limitations, and the data collection and analysis method employed.

3.3.1 Methodological approach: Discourse analysis

This study utilises the discourse analysis method to critically evaluate how well the surveys capture the experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students, and where gaps present themselves in the collection of data relevant to the experiences of these students. This study builds on the findings outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 on the experiences of these students by using the data gathered in the interviews to critically evaluate the survey questions and response options. Nonetheless, the objective of this chapter is to determine whether national student surveys are effective in asking questions and providing adequate response options that can help identify the specific challenges faced by Black African Home and Black African International students.

The discourse analysis method has been chosen because it enables researchers to critically review both written and spoken communication by focusing on the context

of words and their intended meaning (Budd and Raber, 1996). This method analyses the language used to deduce a narrative from the structures of the sentences or phrases (Gee and Handford, 2012). It is a multidisciplinary approach established in the 1960s which interprets texts through the lens of social contexts (Bhatia et al., 2008). Discourse analysis is utilised in different ways by researchers based on their areas of discipline, including sociologists, linguists and anthropologists[3]. However, this study will follow both the 'situated meaning approach' of discourse analysis, which, as explained by Gee and Handford (2012), focuses on providing context-specific analysis of texts and the 'critical discourse analysis approach' which as explained by Gee (2011) "argues that language-in-use is always part and parcel of, and partially constitutive of, specific social practices and that social practices always have implications for inherently political things like status, solidarity, the distribution of social goods, and power" (p.68) Within the context of this study, discourse analysis highlights that the questions asked in the national student surveys are not in a vacuum, but reflective of the intersections between context and power.

This method takes a critical review of the dynamic between who is asking the questions and who is being asked the questions. Additionally, this thesis uses discourse analysis to illustrate two issues. The first being whether there are questions in the national student surveys that exclude information on Black African students by minimising or silencing their experiences, and secondly, whether the positioning of the survey question allows for the collection and analysis of reliable and unambiguous information that is representative of the experiences of Black African students in higher education.

---

[3] [3] This research method has been reviewed by experts who confirmed the appropriate methodological approach to be discourse analysis

This research will utilise the discourse analysis method through an intersectional interpretation of text, allowing for the investigation of research objectives through different dimensions and social disciplines (Wodak, 2008). By employing this approach, this study will review if and how the collection of data on student experiences by national student surveys is equitable to Black African students' journey (Glynos et al., 2009). To achieve this, this study will draw on Jorgensen and Phillips' (2002) work to investigate and understand how the texts in the national student surveys reflect how social structures, such as the government and higher education institutions, contribute to shaping the experiences of Black African students.

In the case of Black African students' experiences, discourse analysis provides an opportunity to review the questions in the national student surveys to identify the gaps in the questions asked by evaluating how the experiences described in the qualitative study of the previous chapters are reflected in the survey content. Through the lens of discourse analysis, the survey questions can be critically evaluated to reveal how the inclusion of some survey questions gives greater importance to specific experiences, thus minimising the significance of other student experiences that are excluded by the survey design. This stance is substantiated by scholars who argue that the presence or absence of discourse serves to reinforce existing power dynamics, subtly shaping what is deemed significant or worthy of attention (Bazzul 2014; Foucault 1971).

The discourse analysis method is a useful method in outlining the power dynamics that present themselves through words and the omission of words. Within surveys, the discourse analysis highlights that the relative power of groups is understood and

measured by examining whose experiences are considered worthy of being recorded and whose experiences are omitted. This is evidenced by the lack of questions asked or response options provided about their circumstances and experiences.

Discourse analysis was used in this study to examine how power operates through the language, structure, and omissions within the national student surveys. This approach allowed me to analyse not only what the survey asked, but also what it did not ask, and how these choices shape whose experiences are gathered, made visible and used to evaluate the services provided by the university. By employing an intersectional lens with the discourse analysis method, I reviewed the questions asked and the response options provided. In doing this, this method highlighted several poignant issues. One of these issues is that structural racism and its barriers are presented in the surveys through the omission of questions that would allow Black students to share how their ethnic identity shapes their experiences at university. Additionally, the intersectional application of this research method highlighted that the privileges and challenges of both groups are not consistent, with the unique experiences of international Black African students less present in the surveys and response options.

The aim of this research was not to evaluate the survey as a methodological tool, such as how well surveys could collect the intended information, but to question the intended information and understand how its design reflects and reproduces structural inequities. Hence, this study did not conduct an in-depth textual analysis of the questionnaire, its wording, framing, or ordering. Thus, by choosing the discourse analysis method, this study remained focused on the current state of the survey

instruments and how they contributed to capturing the experiences of students, rather than shifting to the next phase, which would be to address how the survey questions and response options could be drafted to gather better data on Black African students' experiences. This allowed for an in-depth understanding of how student experiences are captured and whether the experiences of all students are given the same opportunity to convey the experiences that influence their student journeys. However, by not focusing on how the questions could be improved using methods such as cognitive interviews, there is a lack of insight into the validity of the survey questions (Howell et al, 2013). Hence, the findings show that by using surveys such as the NSS as a metric of performance, universities are evaluating their own performance through the experiences of the majority and overlooking the views of those from more marginalised backgrounds.

Unlike content analysis, which centres on eliciting quantitative patterns in communication through methods of coding, discourse analysis is focused on revealing the meaning behind communication (Saraisky, 2016). Thus, rather than quantifying how many times themes or words are present in the survey questions, the use of discourse analysis in this study will focus on what questions are measuring, particularly, whether these questions provide opportunities to understand the challenges of Black African students better and if the response options provided are adequate in gathering impactful data on these challenges.

A common critique of the discourse analysis method is that the research relies heavily on the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the context and phrases being analysed, thus amplifying the subjectivity of this method (Breeze, 2011). However, Glynos and Howarth (2008) explain that alternative logics can be

employed to challenge a dominant view, to ensure that the experiences of those with a minoritised view can be reflected in the discourse. As such, when critiquing the questions from the national surveys, rather than gaining insight from the intended target respondents on their perception of the questions, the analysis was constructed based on the researcher's discernment. This restriction was also present during the analysis of the gaps in the survey questions, where the absence of questions on thematic areas such as informal support led to the researcher identifying the questions they believed to be missing. Hence, there is a possibility that due to the researcher sharing the same ethnicity as the participants, and thus a shared cultural knowledge, a repetition of this study by another researcher could yield different questions from those provided in this research, thereby limiting the reliability of the discourse analysis method (Hux et al., 1997).

3.3.2 Data collection

To answer this research question using discourse analysis, the first step was to use the literature review and interview data from the previous two chapters to identify the factors which influenced the experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students. These were grouped in Chapters 1 and 2, under the following overarching themes: ethnic identity, sense of belonging, formal support structures, and informal support structures. In this analysis, the same thematic structure will be followed.

Following this, three surveys were chosen to be analysed for this study: the National Student Survey, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey.

I. National Student Survey

The National Student Survey (NSS) is a mandatory survey for all final-year undergraduate students managed by the Office for Students (Office for Students, 2024). The survey is divided into three sections: core questions, additional questions and a bank of optional questions. The core questions are grouped under the themes: teaching on my course, learning opportunities, assessment and feedback, academic support, organisation and management, learning resources and student voice. The additional questions include themes of mental wellbeing services, freedom of expression, overall satisfaction, experiences of healthcare placements and an open-text question on the student's overall experience. Finally, the optional questions include a bank of marketing questions and a range of other questions, including themes of personal development, career preparation, social development and the academic environment and community (Office for Students, 2024). While universities and their student unions collaboratively select a bank of up to six optional questions and two additional questions to include in the survey, students are not required to answer these questions (National Student Survey, n.d.). Nonetheless, the 2025 survey response rate for the NSS was 71.5% with responses from 357,174 students (Office for Students, 2025).

II. Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey

The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) is a UK-wide survey for postgraduate students developed by Advance HE, a higher education sector organisation in the UK (Advance HE, n.d.). While not mandatory, 108 universities in the UK participated in the survey in 2024. The survey questions are divided into two sections: core questions and optional questions. The core questions are grouped under the themes of teaching and learning, engagement, community and assessment and feedback. The optional questions include questions on resources, support, and skills development (Quinn, 2024), with higher education providers deciding on which optional questions to include for their students (Advance HE, 2024).

III. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), also developed by Advance HE, is the largest postgraduate research survey in the UK, with 101 UK institutions and 4 Australian institutions taking part in 2023. The survey questions are grouped under nine key areas: supervision, resources, research culture, community, progress and assessment, responsibilities, support, research skills and professional development. (Neeves, 2023).

The final step was to review the national student survey questions individually and to group these under the overarching themes of ethnic identity and sense of belonging in Chapter 1, and the effectiveness of formal and informal support structures in Chapter 2. During this process, it was apparent that there were no specific survey questions on ethnic identity aside from those requesting personal data characteristics. However, the questions on sense of belonging and community in the

surveys were interconnected with the theme of ethnic identity. Therefore, ethnic identity and sense of belonging were grouped as one theme. Also, the questions which were specific to certain nations were not included in the thematic grouping, nor were course-specific questions, marketing or personal data gathering questions. A table with the thematic grouping of the questions analysed has been included in the appendix.

3.3.3 Data analysis method

The questions allocated to the different themes mentioned above were analysed to understand what students were being asked to report on in these questions, and if the intended measure correlated with the experiences highlighted in the findings of the previous chapters. To enhance the validity of the research findings, survey questions were compared with the interview data from earlier chapters, thereby contributing to the reduction of potential positionality bias by the researcher (Donkoh and Mensah, 2023; Natow, 2019). As such, this approach helped to ascertain whether the questions asked in the surveys provided deeper insights into the challenges faced by Black African Home and Black African International students.

Employing the discourse analysis method, this stage of the data analysis process highlighted how the language used in many of the questions assumed that all respondents were privy to the same experiences and pre-university knowledge, which led to a deeper analysis of how this impacted the experiences of Black African students. The study of the questions in the surveys revealed that while some questions were relevant to the themes discussed in this chapter, many were not in-

depth enough to gather deeper insights, while other questions in the survey were unable to capture the marginalised experiences of Black African students.

In particular, the use of the discourse analysis method revealed how structures in place to gather student experiences reflect which experiences are valid and which are not considered. For example, on the topic of learning resources, the three national student surveys reviewed focused on asking students about their access to learning technologies as a measure of satisfaction, without considering the learning differences and knowledge that Black African International students come to the UK with (Neeves, 2023; Office for Students, 2024; Quinn, 2024).

Subsequently, the response options provided were also analysed to understand how students were expected to share their experiences and if these options were sufficient to elicit the types of experiences highlighted in the interview data captured in the previous chapters. Hence, the responses to questions similar to those in the interview data were compared with the types of responses students could provide in the surveys. Following the review of the survey questions and response options, an analysis was performed to identify areas in the surveys which either addressed the themes highlighted in the interviews adequately. This included question and answer categories that were good enough for the students to be able to share the experiences highlighted in the interviews, questions that addressed the topics inadequately (i.e. questions were not detailed enough or response categories were not exhaustive enough) and questions that did not address topics identified in the interviews at all (i.e. no questions on certain themes found in the surveys at all).

The analysis revealed that several topics were not present in the national survey questions, meaning that there were outstanding gaps in the collection of data on the

holistic experiences of Black African students. The data from the interviews on these missing themes was analysed, with the researcher proposing questions that should have been asked in the surveys to gather such responses.

3.4 Analysis and Discussion

As is the established practice for designing good-quality survey questions, the Office for Students commissioned cognitive testing for the NSS survey questions. However, a review of the participant profile within these tests revealed that the ethnicity profile for Black students was divided into two components: Black or Black British Caribbean and Other Black or Black British background (Wild and Behar, 2022). This means that it is not feasible to ascertain from the report if there were any Black African student participants in the cognitive testing of the surveys. Hence, it is probable that neither Black African Home nor Black African International students reviewed or provided feedback on the NSS survey questions, and therefore, the questions in the NSS may not be adequate for the experiences of these students. Furthermore, a similar cognitive test report for the PRES and PTES surveys by Advance HE could not be found, which raises questions about how the questions were designed and tested.

3.4.1 Challenges of belonging as a Black African student

This section reviews how barriers to belonging for Black African students are captured, or fail to be captured by national student surveys, through the types of questions asked and the survey instruments used. The data gathered shows that pertinent issues related to the identity of Black African students are not collected due to the generalised nature of the survey questions.

<u>The impact of clubs and societies on Black African students' sense of belonging</u>

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of students feeling a sense of belonging at their institution as universities recognise its impact on academic outcomes (Ahn and Davis, 2020). However, within the review of student surveys, only the NSS recognises the need to question students about the impact of the student union on their sense of belonging, while the PRES and PTES fail to draw this link. Within the optional bank of questions in the NSS, students are asked to what extent they agree or disagree that "the students' union (association or guild) had a positive impact on my sense of belonging to the university or college" (Office for Students, 2025). Whilst this is a pertinent question that addresses a key contributor to students' experiences, the placement of this question in the optional bank of questions reduces its significance and lowers the likelihood of it being answered. Hence, if the number of responses to questions of belonging is trivial, there is a possibility that the results will not offer a true reflection of the student body, and any targeted actions developed from this data will be biased to those who responded (Nulty, 2008).

Secondly, the Likert scale response option for this question limits the opportunity for students to expand on how the student union either impacts or does not impact their sense of belonging. Although scholars such as Wu and Leung (2017) advocate for increasing the number of points in the scale to obtain more precise results, the findings from the previous chapters have shown that Black African students' experiences can be better understood through in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured questions. The review of the national student surveys in this chapter also revealed an absence of questions on identity in the surveys, aside from those

requesting the provision of personal characteristics data, which is an interrelated component of belonging.

The data gathered from the interviews in the previous chapters show that sports clubs and societies are leading factors in enhancing belonging among Black African Home students at their university. Whereas for Black African International students, the interview data showed that informal networks and societies outside of the students' union take precedence in developing a sense of community. This supports the findings of Soira et al (2022), who encourage universities to provide more recreational activities for students due to their positive contributions to student success and outcomes. Nevertheless, while this supports the validity of the NSS's question on belonging, which is only featured within the question on the student union, the limited nature of this NSS question also highlights the gap in understanding why clubs and societies contribute to an increased sense of belonging for Black African students.

Saliently, the interviews provide additional insight by highlighting that Black African Home students remedy feelings of isolation and alienation triggered by being an ethnically minoritised student by seeking out clubs and societies to interact with other Black students with similar interests. This buttresses the findings of Hensby et al (2024), who found that Black students intentionally sought out clubs and societies with other Black students to escape the disaffection they experienced in majority White classrooms and spaces. For example, Will, an undergraduate student, attributes his sense of belonging to his affiliation with a university sports team. This membership provided an opportunity to be around like-minded students with a

similar racial heritage and thereby gave him a sense of community in a part of the country that was not as diverse as that of his upbringing:

> So, the good thing about it is that because I'm in a sport that's predominantly Black, I see a lot of my people [Black students] and I'm around them a lot, and we connect outside [meet outside the confines of playing the sport]. (Will, undergraduate Home student)

However, as revealed in the interviews, the benefits which Home students enjoy through societies and clubs within the student union are realised by International students through the formation of their informal groups and societies. Black African International students form these networks to establish a community underpinned by cultural values in a foreign environment, which reduces their feelings of isolation (Adeyoyin, 2024). More specifically, the interview data show that informal networks play an essential role in the experiences of International students by providing them access to peers of similar backgrounds who have encountered comparable struggles of assimilation. Thus, Kevin, an international student, explains the usefulness of a student-led informal network for both new and established students in navigating the challenges of being a Black African International student:

> Nigerians, we kind of formed a group. It is a gathering where we relate our experiences, even over a WhatsApp group. We relate the experiences and struggles, things to make your life easier. They have an established community here at [the university] that helps people just coming [to the country] and people having difficulties navigating life at [the university]. (Kevin, postgraduate taught International student

Hence, the findings have shown that the Black African International students' responses may not link their sense of belonging to the student union's offering of clubs and societies. This is because the student union's offering differs from the approach of creating informal cultural networks and peer relationships, which

focuses on assisting students with integrating into a new country. While Kevin is a postgraduate student and not eligible to complete the NSS, the account provided is valid and not specific to his degree level. Nonetheless, Black African International students still enjoy the same benefits as the Black African Home students who utilise the student union. As such, these findings demonstrate that the impact on the sense of belonging is not due to the presence of the student union, but the opportunity for Black African Home and Black African International students to meet with others of a shared identity over common hobbies or experiences. Therefore, the student union acts as a facilitator for Black African Home students by providing them with access to various communities, while Black African International students provide these communities for themselves. Consequently, this shows that the NSS's survey question on sense of belonging and the student union, though important, is limited in its understanding of why extracurricular activities and networks impact a student's belonging, which this study explains.

The student community and its impact on belonging

The PTES and PRES surveys both acknowledge the importance of belonging among students. However, unlike the NSS, which links a sense of belonging to social activities, the PTES and PRES link the impact of the student academic community to the student's sense of belonging. While this is important, it should be tempered with the notion that belonging to an academic community is dependent on the context of the student's environment (Marshall et al., 2012). Nonetheless, unlike the NSS, these questions feature in the core section of the surveys and ask students to what extent they agree or disagree with the following statements on community. In the PRES, these include phrases such as "I feel part of a community of postgraduate

research students” and “there are sufficient opportunities to interact with other postgraduate research students” (Neeves, 2023). The same questions are asked for postgraduate taught students in the PTES survey, but are adapted for the postgraduate taught audience: “I feel part of a community of postgraduate taught students” and “there are sufficient opportunities to interact with other postgraduate taught students” (Quinn, 2024). These questions are important as researchers have indicated that being part of an academic student community directly influences the achievements of students (Fong Lam et al., 2015).

The findings from the interviews showed that at the department level, students did not necessarily attribute their belonging to their degree level as specified by the PTES and PRES questions, but their perception of belonging varied according to their degree programme. This is reinforced by Howson and Kingsbury (2024), who propose that belonging as a concept for students is multifaceted and students’ perception of belonging or not belonging in their academic community is shaped by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, such as relationships with coursemates or comfort with their degree programme.

Furthermore, the findings of this study unveiled the importance of race and ethnic identity in the formation of belonging for the Black African Home participants. This connection was previously established in Hunter et al’s (2019) study, which showed that Black students feel an underlying connection to other Black students when in an ethnically minoritised environment. However, the International student cohort shared more diverse views on the influences of belonging to their programmes, including factors such as familiarity with the degree programme and freedom of expression in a foreign country, thereby providing more evidence to support Howson and

Kingsbury's (2024) view that a student's belonging is intersected by their identity and previous experiences.

While the questions in the PRES and PTES are formulated for postgraduate students, there is evidence from the interviews that this is also an important issue for undergraduate students. For both Will and Usman, who are both undergraduate Home students, the presence or lack of other Black students affected their interactions with other coursemates. When asked about his sense of belonging to his department, Will provided a rating of three out of ten due to feelings of isolation incurred by not fitting in with the stereotype and racial profile of the students in his course. This emotion was also shared by Usman, who, when speaking about the ease of interacting with other students in his department or course, shared that it was easier to speak with other Black students because of a visible similarity through a shared heritage and experience:

> I don't know if I see any Black people in my department. It's a stereotype in the [STEM] department that you get White kids. I wouldn't say I have a sense of belonging there. When I'm there, I generally sit on my own at the back. I'm there for the lecture, and then I go back. (Will, undergraduate Home student)

> Yeah, I think a lot more Black people [than other ethnicities] have managed to have conversations with me. […] I think it just might be because we have something obviously in common. So, like, even before we've just spoken. We have a shared experience, and that kind of just makes it easy to break down whatever barriers we might have. (Usman, undergraduate Home student)

These quotations show that for the Home students, access to interacting with other students was not viewed as a factor in establishing a community among course peers, as indicated by the PTES and PRES survey questions. Rather, the data shows that the presence or absence of other Black students in the course programme impacted the ease with which these students could relate to others.

Hence, as posited by Hunter et al (2019), to foster a greater sense of belonging in the classroom for Black students, improvements should be made to incorporate greater cultural awareness in the learning environment, which will reduce the anxiousness experienced by these students in the classroom environment.

However, the Black African International students did not recognise race as a contributor to the formation of belonging within their course or department. Their ability to interact with other students and their belief in being accepted within the student community were formed by their experiences of coming from a foreign country. As highlighted by scholars, Black African International students' belonging is shaped by either their positive or negative experiences assimilating to a new country (Adeyoyin, 2024; Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012; Okyere et al., 2024). As such, Omar, a Master's student, noted that the absence of discrimination at the university and the freedom to share his ideas contributed to an enhanced sense of belonging among his peers. This is an important factor for foreign students who encounter barriers of exclusion due to discriminatory practices in their host country (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012):

> Within the university [as a non-native], [...] It's very clear, there is no atom or no sign or evidence of discrimination. [...] I have that confidence. So, whenever I'm at university or in the classroom, I don't have any feelings of inferiority. So, I have always been bold enough to share my ideas. (Omar, postgraduate taught International student)

Nonetheless, Kevin, another Master's student, highlighted that his sense of belonging within his course was formed by the presence of students from his home country and other minoritised international students. This was also coupled with the additional benefit of being familiar with his degree programme:

> Yes, I do feel like I belong to my department, specifically more than the university. This is a subject I am used to, and there are a lot of Nigerians on the course, and Indians, because they are also a minority group here. But even though they're not from your home country, the fact that you're surrounded by other minority groups makes you feel a bit more comfortable. (Kevin, postgraduate taught International student)

As such, the findings highlight that the impact of belonging for each student differs according to the community they identify with. In the scenarios shared, the presence of comfort when interacting with peers is a key indicator of whether students feel a sense of belonging to other students in their departments or courses. Hence, the concept of belonging among students can be influenced either by shared experiences or the absence of barriers to freedom of speech. Therefore, the questions asked in the PTES and PRES surveys need to go beyond asking students whether they feel part of a student community and if they have sufficient access to interact with other students, to questions that can provide an understanding of what shapes belonging for different groups of students. Following this, it is advisable that these surveys focus on asking students what barriers they experience in forming this sense of belonging with other students in their departments and programmes.

<u>Factors influencing a sense of belonging at the institutional level</u>

When reviewing student survey questions in more depth, it can be deduced that the NSS, the PRES, and PTES surveys focus primarily on the outcomes of students, as evidenced by the majority of their questions focusing on the topics of teaching and learning (Neves, 2023; Office for Students, 2024; Quinn, 2024). This highlights a gap in understanding how factors which contribute to a student’s ethnic identity can shape their university experiences, both within and outside of the classroom.

While belonging has been discussed at the departmental and course levels, it is important to evaluate Black African students' sense of belonging at an institutional level. This is because the factors that influence belonging are dynamic, and therefore, a student's sense of comfort can vary across the different spaces they occupy (Marshall et al., 2013). The PTES and PRES surveys both address this issue by separately asking to what extent students agree or disagree with the statement 'I feel a sense of belonging at my institution'. Theoretically, the choice to ask a separate question focusing on belonging at the institutional level can help data users understand if there are individual factors impacting belongingness at a macro level.

However, due to the constraints of the Likert scale response options provided in the response option for this question, students can only express their opinion, without the prospect of providing further evidence to support their indication of where their sense of belonging stems from. Nonetheless, while Sofroniou et al (2020) posit that survey responses such as those gathered in the NSS encourage universities to review their services and make improvements to their services, the analysis of this study suggests otherwise. This chapter raises important questions on whether the interventions formed by universities are effective due to the asymmetry of information provided on student experiences, based on the limited response options provided.

For instance, during the interviews, the question of belonging at an institutional level was met with mixed responses from the Black African Home participants, who viewed their sense of belonging at the university through a blended lens of their experiences at previous institutions. For those who had difficult memories of racism and prejudice stemming from being part of a small minority during their primary or secondary years in the UK, the university offered them not only an opportunity to

meet others of the same background, but also White students who had grown up in diverse areas. In cases such as this, the university has been successful in enhancing the sense of belonging through its efforts in increasing the diversity of its student profile. This offers crucial insight into why some Black African Home students have a stronger sense of belonging at diverse institutions. This is demonstrated through the quote from Tania, an undergraduate student, who was previously educated in areas where she was one of the only Black people in her classroom and school:

> I really feel like it's the first time in school I have felt like, oh, I'm not the Black girl, because I encountered a lot of experiences with racism, especially during my secondary school. […] I think, with the White people [White students at the university] I know, there haven't been problems because a lot of them have grown up with a lot of diversity. (Tania, undergraduate Home student)

In contrast, Laura, another Home student who came to the UK as an adult, gained a sense of belonging at the university due to the welcoming service she received from non-academic staff:

> I don't feel threatened in any way. I feel like, belong. For instance, I went to the library for the first time, and I had no clue what to do, and the lady [library assistant] was like, Oh, don't worry, I'll just show you, and she stood up, and you know, she was very helpful. (Laura, undergraduate Home student)

While Laura’s experiences of belonging have been shaped by the positive welcome from the professional support service staff, the Black African International students shared a different view regarding belonging at an institutional level. These students framed their sense of belonging at the institution around their citizenship and experiences integrating into the UK society (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Hyams-Ssekasi, 2012). As highlighted in several interviews, the challenges of settling into a new country and the difficulty of obtaining the support they expected to receive were

constant reminders that they were foreigners in a new environment. While the data from the interviews capture these reasons, the lack of follow-up questions seeking to understand why some students do not feel like they belong at their university limits the impact of the data gathered by the PTES and PRES surveys. For example, Paul, an International student, acknowledges the strength of the university in its offerings, but rates them lower regarding his sense of belonging due to an innate reminder that he is from a different country:

> From the angle of hospitality and availability of resources, I would say I will give the university, like maybe 9 out of 10, because of what the university has to offer. When you see it from the angle of belonging here. I'm not from here, so I would give 5 out of 10. (Paul, postgraduate taught International student)

Firstly, Paul's choice to attribute his sense of belonging to his foreign status is in line with the scholarship of Muijs and Bokhove (2017), whose review of the PTES found that International students from Africa were more satisfied with their university's resources. Yet, more interestingly, this quote from Paul, in which his rating of his satisfaction with the university's services is much higher than his rating for his sense of belonging at the university, also buttresses the argument of Calma and Dickson-Deane (2020), who assert that student satisfaction scores cannot be substituted for student experience.

Additionally, Vanessa, also a postgraduate student, expands further on experiences that have reinforced the view of not belonging at an institutional level. In the quote provided, Vanessa first recounts her coping mechanism for being a minoritised student. However, in the second scenario, unlike other Black African International student participants who have successfully formed informal communities with students of their home country, Vanessa recounts feelings of isolation when

naturalised students from her home country did not want to participate in an informal network. Thus, the inability to form a bond with students from her home or host country heightened her feelings of homesickness and alienation at her university, which negatively impacted her sense of belonging at an institutional level:

> Looking at the minority issue, I just told myself, no, this is what it is. I'm not at home. I have to quickly adjust. So basically, when I really felt like maybe crying and [feeling like] I'm lost, and this is not for me, to calm myself down, I spent more time, like on the phone with my family and friends back home [her home country]. [...] But I've come to realise that it doesn't really work like that, as much as you think we are Africans, in one space, we are bound to get on, it doesn't really work like that. I moved here recently, and there are some people from [Southern Africa] who moved here like 15 years ago, and we're also studying at the same university, but because these people now don't term [identify] themselves as International students since they got their permits to stay here [naturalised], there's that gap. They've got that feeling like, no, we cannot really be mingling with you, you know. (Vanessa, postgraduate taught International student)

The findings in this section have demonstrated that belonging is a key factor in a student's experience, and there is a need for questions in the national student surveys to review the relationship between a student's experiences and their belonging at the university. Significantly, these findings support the argument of Adeyoyin (2024) by showing that for Black African international students, the ability or inability to form informal community groups with students from their home country is an integral component to having a sense of belonging at the institutional level. Therefore, for national student surveys to be more inclusive of the experiences of Black African international students, they should include questions asking if students have access to informal networks of peers from similar backgrounds.

3.4.2 Formal support structures

Academic support: The number of contact hours vs the usefulness of contact hours

The topic of academic support is poignant to the experiences of both Black African Home and International students, as these experiences shape the relationship between lecturers and students (Boles, 2018). Within the NSS and the PTES surveys, under the subheadings of academic support and teaching and learning, there are questions which focus on the ease of contacting staff. The NSS poses the question “How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?” (Office for Students, 2025). The PTES asks students to confirm the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement “There is sufficient academic contact time (in-person or virtual/online) between staff and students to support effective learning” (Quinn, 2024). This question also occurs in the PRES survey, with participants asked again to answer based on their agreement or disagreement with the statement “I have regular contact with my supervisor/s, appropriate for my needs” (Neeves, 2023).

Though it is important to ascertain the staff’s availability for students, the findings from Chapters 1 and 2 show that for Black African students, the crux lies in the strained interactions between non-Black academics and these students during those contact hours. During the interviews, many students did not dispute the availability of office hours but stressed the gulf in relatability between themselves and their non-Black academic lecturers. For Home students, this gap was exacerbated by discomfort during interactions, while the International group’s experiences were influenced by the cultural proficiency of the lecturers.

The accounts by the home-domiciled participants exposed the barriers to engagement with non-Black lecturers and the discomfort experienced when seeking help or support. They offer insight into why the number of contact hours cannot be reliably used to measure the provision of good academic support when the student in need of the assistance is not at ease. Fatimah, an undergraduate home participant, recounted her reasons for disengaging from academic support from a non-Black lecturer whom she felt was distracted by her appearance, which was heavily influenced by Black popular culture:

> She was looking at my hair and nails because they were long and a certain type of way [acrylic]. I could just sense that she was judging me. This made me uncomfortable, especially because I was going for help and support. (Fatimah, undergraduate Home student)

Similarly, Will, another undergraduate student, spoke of the required effort needed to present himself as approachable, especially to non-Black lecturers. This was due to his acceptance that his physique could be perceived as threatening based on widespread negative stereotypes. To counteract the negative stereotypes that are prevalent about Black young men being threatening and aggressive, as evidenced in the scholarship (Kleider-Offutt et al., 2017), and his experiences living in a less diverse area than his hometown, Will chooses to adapt his demeanour with non-Black lecturers to appear more unassuming in the hopes of appearing less intimidating:

> I think, you know, stereotypes and generalisations are everywhere. So, especially in an area like [the university's location], which is predominantly old, White people. When I go up to lecturers, I make sure I smile. First thing they see is a smile, and then I speak to them about whatever I need. (Will, undergraduate student)

Additionally, Will addresses his perception that there will be little need for posturing with Black lecturers based on having more freedom to be himself.

> Naturally, I think if you see someone of your race or culture. You're naturally inclined to speak to them, or it's easier to speak to them. I just feel like, because you have this one similarity already. It just breaks a barrier, you know, that needs to be broken beforehand with others [with lecturers of other races].(Will, undergraduate Home student)

Interestingly, Margaret, an International postgraduate student, similarly speaks of the value she placed on ensuring her supervisors were from a similar ethnic background before she started her programme. When asked why she went to the effort of searching for a Black African supervisor, she illustrated the importance of having someone who had lived experiences of the systemic barriers faced by Black African people and someone who could guide her through when similar challenges arise:

> I was so intentional about it. it's so important for me to have someone to understand where I'm coming from. They are Black African. They have gone through the hurdles that I've gone through. Because I felt like they understand the hurdles of the system, and the barriers, like systematic barriers that Black people will face, which I probably will face. So, it was important for me to have someone to help me navigate that. (Margaret, postgraduate research International student)

These quotes demonstrate that Black African International students are not only seeking assistance from other students to navigate the challenges of being a Black African foreign person in a new country, but are also actively seeking the help of Black African lecturers for the same reason. As such, these excerpts provide evidence that the questions in the student survey need to go beyond whether students can contact their lecturers, to how comfortable students are in communicating with academics when in need of academic support. This strengthens the argument of scholars who recognise that the complex needs of minoritised

students are rarely addressed by institutions, and that survey mechanisms such as the NSS are not comprehensive in providing a mechanism for universities to better understand the issues of their students (Arday 2018; Pickford 2013).

The quotes from the participants have shown the lack of consideration by student surveys on the burden that minoritised Black African students endure due to the weight and barriers imposed by racial stereotypes in majority White spaces. This speaks to Cuthbert's (2010) point, which highlights that prospective students are not privy to the content of student responses due to the imbalance of information shared. As such, it may be assumed by the students that the availability of contact hours is a predictor of positive experiences of academic support, as this is what the survey questions ask to review academic contact hours. Therefore, national student surveys must go beyond surface-level questions and delve deeper to uncover the issues that address the systemic pain points which limit the positive experiences of Black African students when interacting with their lecturers.

Additionally, the questions in surveys highlighted above focus on the provision of contact time as a determinant of academic support, without considering the additional cultural barriers that Black African International students must navigate during those contact hours. Rather than questioning the usefulness of the contact hours in advancing the students' familiarity with their host university's academic style, the questions stop at quantifying the contact hours. This is a salient topic for Black African International students, as indicated in the interviews, which provide key insight into the predictors of their engagement levels with lecturers at their university. A principal factor which was highlighted by some International students is the barrier of cultural proficiency, which is translated through non-verbal cues.

Joshua, a postgraduate student, noted that a good indicator of future engagement levels with his lecturers was dependent on how interested or understanding the lecturers seemed or portrayed themselves through their body language while conversing. Though the lecturer may intend no harm, due to differences in cultural attributions, some postures and gestures may be viewed as impolite in some African cultures (Hişmanoğlu and Hişmanoğlu, 2008):

> When I speak with you [the lecturer], and you feel uninterested, you just see it as if I am wasting my time, or you try to shun me like I am not making sense [...] It might be the questions I ask [...] If I get that kind of body language, it is likely I will not come back [to the lecturer]. (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

This shows that while contact time is an important tool in trying to gauge levels of engagement, national student surveys are not holistic in their focus on the contributors to positive student experiences (Pickford, 2013). As the quote shows, a Black African International student who has a negative experience with an academic during contact hours may respond in the survey that they received sufficient contact time and do not require further hours. This could be based on the concept that the cultural barriers experienced hinder the usefulness of those meetings for them.

This supports the scholarship of Martirosyan et al (2015), who warned that the cultural dissonance experienced by International students in a new academic environment could have a negative bearing on their academic success. This is an issue that should be addressed immediately, as Trotter and Roberts (2006) found that a student’s attitude to their institution’s environment is shaped by their interactions in the initial year. As such, for Black African International students, concerns around the usefulness of contact hours highlight the importance of

discussing how these interactions influence their academic outcomes and overall experience.

Nevertheless, there were some instances where contact hours proved to be useful for International students, due to the cultural competency of the non-Black African lecturer who recognised the needs of the student and facilitated a buddy scheme as a remedy. Vanessa, a postgraduate taught student, spoke of her struggle to assimilate into her new environment and academic style until her White lecturer recognised her issue and connected her with other International students on the same course, a year ahead, who were also from minoritised backgrounds:

> At one point, during the period that I was really feeling lost and confused, there was a time when I would even be in a lecture, and hours would lapse without me understanding a thing. I would even ask myself questions like, why am I here? Is this the right thing, the right move? Was this the right thing for me to come here? And so, I had to reach out to this one lecturer and then explain my situation, and she managed to connect me with other International students who are in their second year. Believe me, this other girl [who she was connected to] was like, you know what I was also in the same situation last year as an International student and there's no way that I'm going to let you go through what I go through what I went through. (Vanessa, postgraduate taught student)

Though this resulted in a positive experience for the student, the solution was not in the quantity of available contact hours, but in the usefulness of the hours utilised. While this contrasts with Joshua's account above, they both arrive at the same deduction, which is that the cultural competency of lecturers can influence the academic performance of ethnically minoritised students (Anderson, 2011). Hence, this analysis provides further evidence to support the chapter's argument that there is a gap in the national student surveys in procuring the right information to address the challenges faced by Black African International students. By failing to ask pivotal questions on the usefulness of contact hours when addressing issues or concerns

that impact the students' experiences in the learning environment, the institutions are limited to data that assumes the students' satisfaction based on the number of contact hours available.

Learning resources: Access vs Familiarity

Within the theme of learning resources, all three surveys focus on the students' access to learning resources. The NSS asks a series of questions to students, stating "How well have the library resources / IT resources and facilities supported your learning?", and "How easy is it to access subject specific resources when you need them?" (Office for Students, 2025). The PRES and PTES follow a similar format by presenting students a succession of questions on the learning resources provided and asking to what extent they agree or disagree that there is "appropriate access to library resources and facilities, IT resources and specialist resources such as software, while on and off campus" and "the support for using IT and accessing resources meets my needs (for example, support with accessing online journals and e books, using digital learning tools/apps)" ((Neeves, 2023; Quinn, 2024). These surveys ask important questions about access, which improves the efficacy of the school environment by indicating to universities if their students believe they have access to all the required resources (Otieno, 2010).

However, the questions on access follow a generalised view that all students are privileged enough to know how to utilise the resources they are provided with. While the interviews found that Black African Home students were already familiar with the software being used at university, a major drawback for many of the Black African International students was this lack of familiarity. Also, the use of Likert scales as an

instrument for the majority of questions asked highlighted that all surveys were limited in gathering specific data that addressed the root causes of the challenges Black African students faced. As highlighted in the excerpt from the NSS questionnaire below, the wording used in the scales can be interpreted differently by the respondents, leading to varying results, and secondly, the response options may not be adequate in addressing the students' experiences (Hasson and Arnetz, 2005):

> Question 19. How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning? Very well; Well; Not very well; Not at all well; This does not apply to me. Excerpt from NSS questionnaire. (Office for Students, 2024)

During the interviews with Black African Home students, access to learning resources was not highlighted as a challenge that this group of students faced. Genevieve, an undergraduate student, noted the ease of transitioning into the teaching and assessment style at university due to similar experiences before university. Interestingly, Genevieve follows this point by speaking of the challenges Black African mature female students, who were first-generation migrants, had in completing assessments due to their unfamiliarity with the new learning style:

> To be honest, because I did a diploma, I already had experience writing essays. I used to do volunteering as well. There were some aunties [mature, often first-generation, female students] who wanted to do Level 3 courses, so I would help them and provide them with tutoring so they could get distinctions and be able to study [independently]. (Genevieve, undergraduate Home student)

The questions on access for Home students did not present much of an issue, but rather, Home students highlighted the disparity between themselves and International students on the topic of familiarity with learning tools in the UK. This offers a unique insight, as previous research indicates that Black African

International students seek out other Black African International peers for support with assimilating to the new academic environment (Hyams-Ssekasi 2012; Okyere et al 2024). However, in this excerpt, the Home student has expressed a sentiment of sympathy and absorbed the burden of helping her International or first-generation counterparts who are new to the UK's education system. Saliently, the excerpt demonstrates that new Black African International students require more than familiarity with new tools, but also how to use these tools to study independently and obtain better grades. Therefore, the position by Duane et al (2024), which theorises that universities are underutilising the data gathered from national student surveys by failing to produce more targeted policies, is not entirely accurate because the surveys do not ask enough questions to provide comprehensive data on the barriers experienced by Black African International students.

Additionally, for Black African International students, the pertinent question is not about access to technologies, but the lack of formal support in becoming acquainted with many of these technologies. Nonetheless, the ability to address this issue by universities is restricted as the survey questions assume that access is enough to gain an understanding of the students' satisfaction with their learning resources. Joshua, an International student, lamented retrospectively on his decision to come to a UK university without knowledge of the differences in software programmes used on his course. He expressed a sentiment of dismay at not initially being able to progress adequately with his studies due to a lack of understanding of the software programmes being used in the course:

> To pass your module, you shouldn't come directly from your [home] university to the UK. I would recommend that if they [prospective students] know what subject they want to do their Master's in, to take a year of industry experience [in their home country], learn the latest technology and search the [host]

> university to know what [software] are used in that department. So, when they come [to the host university], they will not struggle with anything. The technologies they use here are practical, so if you don't know the languages [software programmes], you will not know how to start your work. (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

This quote highlights the importance of providing formal support that is tailored to the specific needs of Black African International students, whose prior learning resources and style differ from those of the UK education system. Thus, the PTES and PRES question, which asks if students have received appropriate support to meet their needs, is relevant, although limited due to the phrasing of the question. Consequently, the questions in the national student surveys present no provision to understand how Black African International students overcome the challenge of unfamiliarity with new software and technologies.

To address this issue, the more beneficial question would be to first ask students if they are familiar with the learning technologies required for their modules, and if not, if they have been formally supported in becoming more proficient with these resources. As evidenced in the literature of Seuwou et al (2023), the gap in understanding the peculiar barriers faced by Black African International students would remain if the questions asked in surveys and data gathered are focused on other groups of students. Hence, this lends support to Naylor et al.'s (2010) argument, who call for a more collaborative approach between universities and students in understanding and addressing the specific concerns of their students.

3.4.3 Informal support structures

The unrealised impact of peer support in the classroom

Throughout the review of the student surveys, there were no direct questions on the impact of informal support on learning or how students bolster their education when gaps in understanding remain after lectures and seminars. Though lecturers and supervisors hold the primary role of delivering teaching, which is rightly assumed through core questions in the NSS question, “How good are teaching staff at explaining things?” (Office for Students, 2025). Likewise, the optional survey questions continue the rhetoric that successful learning can only be attributed to the formal teaching provided. Hence, the NSS asks students to what extent they agree or disagree that “the range and balance of approaches to teaching has helped me to learn” (Office for Students, 2025). Similarly, the PTES survey focuses only on the academic’s ability to help students learn by asking students to what extent they agree that “Staff are good at explaining things” (Quinn, 2024). The PRES survey is the only survey to omit such questions because Research students are typically enrolled on a self-taught programme.

While these questions are asking about formal support towards learning, they assume that teaching is provided by staff alone. By failing to question who students turn to if they do not completely understand their lectures, or how they overcome barriers to learning, the surveys miss the opportunities to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contributors to learning success. The need to address this gap in questioning is important in understanding the experiences of Black African Home and International students who strongly utilise their peer and social networks to

advance their learning (John et al., 2018). The findings from the interviews show that for some Black Home students, peer groups have played a key motivational role in their progression outcomes, while Black African International students rely on their informal networks to be their foundation when adapting to their new educational environment.

As such, for many of the Black African Home students interviewed, motivation from peers and themselves was found to be a key component in driving progression. Saliently, trends in the analysis of the interviews showed that this motivational factor was instigated following the Home students' realisation that the academic formal support provided was insufficient for their needs. In such cases, the students credited either their peers or themselves for finding an intrinsic motivation to overcome their challenges. While the questions from the surveys on teaching are important, the findings from the Home students indicate that there is a need to understand the role of informal support in supplementing academic support. An excerpt from Fatimah, an undergraduate student, provides details of the instrumental role her coursemates played in deterring her from dropping out of her degree programme while struggling academically in her first year:

> First year for me was not great. […] Then me feeling like, I don't like my course. I want to change my course, and very much being in that mindset, like, my grades are not the best this year. [...] I had a lot of support from my coursemates, like we normally have study sessions together and stuff like that, and they're the ones who have been really helping and getting me through it. So, I think without them, I probably still wouldn't be in this course. (Fatimah, undergraduate Home student)

This quote provides evidence for the need for follow-up survey questions on the topics of teaching and staff explanations. As highlighted in Fatimah's quote, it is the community effort with other students in the same course that positively influenced

her thinking process when deciding on the next steps in their academic journey. This shows that academic outcomes can not only be credited to the teaching efficacy of the academic, but the substantial role that informal actors play in shaping the progression outcomes of students, and this should be recognised in the surveys by asking questions directly related to this. This clearly supports the argument of Pickford (2013), who calls for careful consideration of students' experiences at a local level rather than aggregating their experiences at a national level. This is especially important for Black African Home students whose specific experiences would be lost at the national level due to the focus on quantifying results. Furthermore, the decision to only focus on questions on the academic's teaching abilities forgoes the efforts of peers and coursemates whose labour is pushed to the periphery and unrecognised. Hence, there is an omission of the role students play informally as producers of learning. As such, the lack of these targeted questions means that crucial evidence directly related to the experiences and outcomes of Black African Home students is not being correctly collected, analysed or understood.

Furthermore, when reviewing the data produced from the interviews in comparison with the questions asked in the surveys, it becomes apparent that learning, through the format described in the survey questions where the lecturer divulges information to the students, is not a complete reflection of the teaching and learning process. This is because learning also happens through peer groups in the format of group projects. The findings from the International student group cohort expose the barriers to learning that are pertinent to Black African International students during group projects. In such cases, while staff may be good at explaining things, there are times in the learning process when there is a need to learn from fellow peers in the

classroom, and these experiences are not questioned in the student surveys. In such instances, barriers to learning present themselves through communication challenges manifested through difficulties understanding accents or differences in educational backgrounds. Joshua, a postgraduate student, speaks of the barrier of communication with International students from other backgrounds. In the example provided below, his learning is inhibited during group projects by the difficulty in understanding the way information is conveyed by a member of his group due to differences in the style of learning and communication:

> For instance, if I see someone coming from the same background [same home country/ educational style], it will be easier to divide up the work [in a group project] and explain the findings to each other [...] It is always difficult with somebody far ahead [working with a student from a different international country with more advanced knowledge on a particular topic or module]. It's more of a burden than a help. They could be so far ahead, but when it comes to explaining, the fluency of communication might be a barrier [due to different styles of learning and communication]. Regardless, if I see a person from my background [home country], regardless of their accent or style of speaking, there will be a common ground for understanding." (Joshua, postgraduate taught International student)

This supports the view of another postgraduate taught student, Kevin, who concurs by outlining the barriers that exist in the learning environment due to accent challenges. In this quote, the challenge causes Kevin to refrain from participating in group work with other nationalities, due to the repercussions experienced by a close friend:

> My close friend whom I came to the university with was put in a project where he was the only one [from my country], and he found the whole experience extremely difficult. The project didn't flow well because of the difficulty in understanding each other. I cannot deal with that, and I learned from him to just stick with [people from my own country] within a project. (Kevin, postgraduate taught International student)

While these moments of peer learning significantly impacted the experiences of these students, there will be an absence of recording such experiences in national student surveys due to questions not being asked about peer learning in formats such as group work. Unlike the Home student cohort, the International group are particular about the support they receive from students of their nationality, which provides them with the freedom to learn and explain to others without fear of miscommunication or alienation. These quotes from the students highlight the need for additional questions on the barriers that students face to learning, by accepting that learning also occurs between peers in a formal environment. However, scholars Williams et al (2008) and Duane et al (2024) are cautious about universities' lack of proactive follow-ups on concerns raised in national student surveys. Nonetheless, these findings are not only important to the learning experiences of the students but can also influence their sense of belonging and impact their grades. Therefore, when asking about teaching and learning, the survey questions need to move beyond the fixation that teaching occurs only through academics and develop a plural lens to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of learning during mandated group work and the barriers presented in those situations, as these scenarios can either hinder or propel a student's progress.

The Burden of having to support Black African International students

A review of the national student surveys in this chapter has shown that they typically focus on the formal academic support and services students receive. However, while surveys such as the NSS position themselves as collectors and comparers of student experiences, there is evidence from these findings to support the position of Sabri (2011), who argues that student experiences should be reviewed with a focus

on the structural barriers that impact different student groups. A comparison of the experiences of Black African Home and International students gathered from the interviews has shown that the Home students do not depend on their informal support networks to the extent of their International peers. This is strongly echoed in the findings of scholars who agree that there is a greater burden on Black African International students to assist recently migrated Black African International students in settling into the new country (Hyams-Ssekasi et al., 2014; Caldwell and Hyams-Ssekasi, 2016; Changamire et al., 2021).

The information gathered from the interviews demonstrates that, due to the variation of dependence on informal networks between the Home and International groups interviewed, the questions in the national student surveys should focus on collecting data that can help universities recognise where the following trends exist, namely, who has the greatest need, and the root causes of overdependence on their peers. However, the absence of any questions on the informal services provided by peers could threaten the data accuracy of these surveys, as all efforts are attributed to the university's formal provision without question on where or if it has been subsidised by informal networks. This speaks directly to the argument of Cuthbert (2010), who highlights that the data generated from national student surveys do not provide prospective students with enough information to accurately deduce the experiences of current students.

Particularly, this study has found that the informal support offered and received by students outside of the classroom has a profound impact on Black African International students or recently naturalised students who bear a greater burden of helping their new migrant peers assimilate to the UK. For example, welcoming and

transporting fellow students from the airport and providing peers with short-term accommodation are some of the services these students have been found to provide to their peers. These services, which are instrumental to the shaping of the students' journey in the UK and during the rest of their studies, are placed in the responsibility of other students also navigating through their studies. During the interviews, it became apparent through the account of Laura, a first-generation mature Home student, that a change in fee status from International to Home does not eradicate the responsibility to help new migrants who are still faced with the challenges of being an International student. Laura recounts the efforts her family endured in transporting new arrival students from a UK airport to her family home and the provision of accommodation for these students without charge until they found their own place to live:

> The majority of International students I know because many of them passed through [lived in] my house before they go to their schools [universities]. I have had a total of, without exaggeration, maybe 18 students pass through [lived in] my house. When they arrive, my husband will pick them up from the airport. They stay a week or two before they collect their necessary documents and permits, before they go to their schools. [...] The money that they use for their school fees, much of which is borrowed money, so the students most time are also under a lot of pressure when they get to the UK. That's why, like I told you, many of them come to my house, and I'm not the only one. There are other people that are also open-minded who offer their homes [for free]. [...] Even though they've shown evidence that they have this money, they dare not spend the money on renting a place to stay immediately, because they need to keep some of that money to pay the next school fees. (Laura, undergraduate Home student)

Laura’s account is interesting because she is a Home student as defined by fee status, but culturally and socially, she adheres to the same customs as other International students. This offers a relatively unexplored topic of the experiences of first-generation migrants who naturalise and receive similar benefits to Home

students, yet socially retain the same burdens of helping other Black African International students. This offers a critical view as to how the experiences of International students have been observed and if the contributions to the support of Black African International students by some first-generation Home students have been overlooked. However, questions relating to these experiences of providing informal support services are not present in the national student surveys, which suggests that the participants for whom these questions were designed have different experiences from those of Black African International students.

These thoughts are in line with the work of Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell (2018), who earlier identified that International students have an over-reliance on other Black African International peers once in a new country. Nevertheless, this also highlights the lack of willingness or confidence of these students to place this burden on their university, who have the duty to support them. As such, it is integral that national student surveys ask questions that can produce reasons for these fundamental choices, which have a bearing on the mental and financial welfare of both the students seeking the support and the students required to provide this support.

Furthermore, the unavailability of such significant questions in national student surveys, which could help universities understand why Black African International students believe they have a responsibility to provide welfare services to their peers, reaffirms the notion that their experiences are of minor importance in comparison to the general student population, which these surveys are geared towards. Hence, on the theme of the provision of informal services outside of the classroom, the survey questions have failed to discern key experiences that have been found in the previous chapters to have a profound effect on students' lifecycle, from the pre-

enrolment stage of leaving their home country, to the post-enrolment stage of navigating the UK's higher education sector.

3.4.4 Mental wellbeing and Financial anxiety

Lack of questions on financial anxiety

There is a lack of questions in the national student surveys concerning the mental distress students experience due to financial hardship. While there are no core questions directly on financial anxiety, the NSS has an optional question which asks respondents, “How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing support services?” (Office for Students, 2025). While the PRES and PTES ask students to what extent they agree or disagree that “the support for my health and wellbeing meets my needs (for example: personal tutor, student support and counselling services)” (Neeves, 2023; Quinn, 2024). During the interviews, the majority of students noted that they were aware of the university’s mental wellbeing offering, and many could recollect the medium of communication used to disseminate this information. Although this provides evidence that the students would respond positively to the NSS survey question on communication of mental wellbeing services, it does not indicate satisfaction levels with such services due to the simplicity of the surveys (Langan and Harris, 2019).

Consequently, a deeper dive into the interview data on financial anxiety revealed differences in privileges between the Home and International groups. Such differences cannot be captured from the NSS due to the limitations of the questions asked. Still, the PTES and PRES offer a more interpretive approach to their closed question on whether students have had their needs met. Additionally, the varying examples provided within the questions further generalise the question. By not specifying what these needs are, Black African students cannot indicate their

university's ability to fulfil these priorities. However, as highlighted by Bennett and Kane (2014), there are differences in the interpretation of words within the student surveys, which are influenced by a range of background factors and the students' expectations of their university. As such, Bennett and Kane (2014) argue that improvements in student experiences can only be successful if the questions are tailored to the characteristics of the student participants.

Hence, when the participants were asked if they had any experiences of financial anxiety in the interviews, many of the Home students referred to the management of their student loans and maintenance grants. However, one of the most common challenges outlined by participants in the International cohort related to the effects of the currency devaluation crisis of many sub-Saharan African countries, which led to widespread levels of distress among many of these students. Hence, Fielding et al (2010) posit that reviewers interpreting the results of national student surveys should factor in the likelihood that they have a different understanding of the survey questions from the respondents.

Nelson, a Master's International student, faced with paying his tuition fees, recounted his initial attempt to seek counsel from his university in the hopes that they could offer guidance on how to navigate the unexpected predicament of currency devaluation. However, he was met with a response which offered limited support in remedying the issue of the reduced value of his savings. This encounter left him feeling that the rigid nature of the help service was impractical in assisting his needs as a Black African International student:

> I don't think they [mental wellbeing services] are useful to be honest, because the policy or the system here works in such a structured way that these services are there, but when you go to them, they tell you what they have to

> tell you, or what is in the books. It's not practical. [...] It's just paperwork support. (Nelson, postgraduate International student)

Hence, though he was aware of the mental wellbeing services, which is the focus of the NSS survey question, his review after employing this service was that it was unhelpful and performative. As such, the data gathered on the NSS survey question of awareness may lead to the presence of false-positive data. This is because an assumption may be made that students responding positively to the question of the university’s communication efforts regarding their wellbeing services is a determinant of the helpfulness of those services. This provides further evidence to support the rhetoric of Fielding et al (2010) and Bennett and Kane (2014), who insist that understanding how students interpret the survey questions is key to understanding their responses.

Furthermore, due to the closed questioning response option of the PTES and PRES survey, while students can indicate their displeasure with the service in the response options, they are not able to provide detailed information on their experience, which could be used by the university to transform their services. This lends to the criticism of Winstone et al (2022), who argue that national student surveys do not position students as active agents able to expand and provide dialogue on their experiences, but as passive participants.

Lack of questions about utilising support services for financial anxiety

More specifically, further analysis of the Black African International students' interactions with their university’s payments department revealed that for some students, the university was a contributor to their mental distress. A common theme

identified when analysing the data from the interviews was the perception that the university is on the opposing side to the student, and the lack of compassion encountered during these interactions caused students to be wary of going to the university when dealing with financial issues. This is a significant finding which cannot be elicited from the closed questions and fixed responses of the student survey questions on mental wellbeing in the surveys. This is in line with other limitations identified in Harkin et al.'s (2022) study, which maintained that quantitative responses in the NSS restrict the ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of the students' views. Thus, the comparative analysis of this study provides opportunities to understand how the management of Black African International students in the vulnerable position of financial hardship can influence their mental health.

Importantly, the sentiment that Black African International students were met with harsh conditions in their university was recorded by a Black African student, Quentin, who recognised this despite his privilege of being on a fully funded scholarship. In this case, he was present during an unpleasant encounter involving another Black African International student whose pleas for a lenient approach to their financial situation due to their home country's currency devaluation were not granted:

> I went to pay my accommodation fees, and I met one guy from Ghana. That very day was the deadline for him to pay his school fees. He was really pleading with them. He said that in Ghana, the exchange rate really affected the currency [conversion], but the school management said no, they gave him one week. They said that they can only ask him to go back to Ghana and come back in January. He pleaded with them because there are so many expenses. What I learned from that experience is that so many Black African International students are facing challenges here. (Quentin, postgraduate International student)

This account shares similarities with that of another Black African International student, Nelson, who described the devastating effects of the university's approach to requesting the payment of fees despite the currency crisis taking place in his home country. The lack of compassion detailed in this account can be seen to negatively impact the student's mental health:

> The school income section they were at one point choking you [stressing him] with pressure and then threatening bills. [...] When you're not able to meet up with the payment plan, you begin to get some kind of difficult messages from the income section of the school [university], and then it totally destabilises you, and you know, messes with your mental health. (Nelson, postgraduate taught International student)

Additionally, Omar, a Master's student, provides insight into how negative interactions with a university's student services department can cause widespread fear within the Black African International student community. This reluctance to engage with university services on crucial issues stems from the view that university staff could pose a threat to the student's visa and ability to remain in the country. Hence, there is a preference to seek guidance first from peers rather than the university's practitioners:

> If I have an issue, if it's just an inquiry about school that wouldn't raise any risk factors, I can move [go] straight to the school [university]. But for instance, when some of our colleagues [other Black African International students] had an issue with the school registration, they were being threatened with de-registration. And if they lose their school sponsorship, it means their visa could be terminated. It's such a dicey situation, so in that case, the school becomes the opponent. The school is the one threatening you. So, in such a case, there's no way you can go to school first. The first option should be those who have seen such experiences before and have passed through such cases before. (Omar, postgraduate taught International student)

Based on the review of these accounts, there is a need for a suite of questions in the national student surveys, specifically on the impact of financial hardship on the

mental wellbeing of students. While scholars have discussed the additional financial stress caused by currency devaluation on students (Gill and Hanefar 2025; Idemudia Ferguson 2020; Nyabiti 2020), there remains a lack of questioning on this topic in the student surveys, which thereby limits the understanding of the experiences of Black African International students, and the significant impact financial hardship has on their mental health. Although the PTES and PRES surveys ask students if their university's services have met their needs, the framing of this question does not allow the reviewer to decipher what needs have or have not been met. Hence, there remains the possibility that the students' responses received from that question could be based on any interaction they have had with any service in their school.

As such, the data gathered on this question may not increase the understanding of Black African students' experiences due to the question's ambiguity and lack of specificity (Robbins, 1999). Thus, to help universities take a more inclusive approach by gaining more insight into the challenges faced by marginalised students, national student surveys must expand the focus of their questions beyond the assumption that all Black African International students studying in the UK are financially buoyant (Caldwell and Hyams-Ssekasi, 2016). These questions should provide students with an open-ended response option as an avenue to describe any external factors contributing to their anxieties and mental distress, and whether they have received adequate support from their university in addressing these challenges.

Lack of questions about accommodation challenges

The comparative analysis of the surveys and the interview data revealed that none of the surveys made the association between securing accommodation as a Black

African International student and the mental distress it caused for those who had to utilise the private rental market. Just under half of the Black African International students interviewed stated that they came to the UK with their dependents and thus required different accommodation from the single-person provision offered by the university. This showed a split in the needs between the Black African International students who came to the UK with their families and those who came alone. However, questions that can reveal this level of detail are not included in any of the surveys, as there are no questions focused on the additional burden experienced by those who migrated with dependents. This is because national student surveys take an inflexible approach in their request for students to review their institution without considering the interconnectedness of the different factors that contribute to their experiences (Sargeant, 2016).

Nelson, a student who came to the UK with his wife and children, detailed the difficulty of obtaining suitable accommodation due to the lack of a guarantor for his tenancy agreement. This exacerbated the pressure he felt as a Black African International student, thus leading to a decline in his mental wellbeing. However, such unique experiences for students like Nelson go unrecorded in national student surveys, as the challenges of securing private accommodation as a foreign student fall outside the provision of the university, despite an absence in the university's accommodation offering for families:

> For someone like me, who came in with my wife and my kids, the university accommodation cannot help me or support me in any way, even if I had all the money to pay for it. You have to get a guarantor [for privately rented accommodation], and nobody wants to take up that responsibility. It's very difficult. Everything is difficult as an International student. It's just double the pressure. (Nelson, postgraduate taught International student)

Additionally, the findings from the interview data also revealed that the predicament of securing a guarantor also impacted Black African International students who came to the UK without their family members. Margaret, a postgraduate student, shared the extreme lengths students like herself were going through to obtain a guarantor to secure their accommodation. The quote revealed that the use of third-party entities to guarantee accommodation intensified the financial pressure she experienced every month:

> There are private lenders who have crazy interest rates. [...] For example, when renting [as part of the tenancy agreement), they need a guarantor working here, making a certain amount. You don’t have that [as a new International student]. So now there are companies that have set up these things [services], that they will guarantee you, but you have to pay monthly. That's another expense on top of my rent that I'm going to have. (Margaret postgraduate research International student)

Interestingly, the difficult scenarios detailed in the accounts of the previous International students were not shared by Black African International students who were on fully funded scholarships. For these students, the services provided by the university were pleasant and caused them no distress. In the case of Paul, a postgraduate scholarship holder, there were recorded financial benefits because of his status, which enhanced his positive attitude towards the university:

> In terms of offering support and availability of services, the university is a very good university. [...] It's up to you on the accommodation. So, I get my stipend for my scholarship, and I pay the accommodation [fees] to the university. I think they exempted me specifically from paying the down payment just because I am a scholarship holder. (Paul, postgraduate taught International student)

This provides even more evidence for the need to stratify the questions on the impact of finance on the mental wellbeing of Black African International students

based on their funding status, caring responsibilities, and length of study of the students. As highlighted in the quotes provided, those who are on fully funded scholarships without dependents can have their accommodation needs met by their university, as reflected in the PTES and PRES survey questions. However, Black African International students who come into the country with dependents or whose programmes are longer than the university's fixed accommodation offering experience additional financial challenges. These are all specific components which influence the student's experience in the UK and should be considered in the survey questions (Bennett and Kane, 2014).

<u>Lack of questions about experiences of using mental wellbeing services</u>

Furthermore, a pattern that became prominent during the comparative analysis of the interview data and the survey questions was that many of the Home and International participants who spoke about mental wellbeing services at their university were convinced that these services were not designed for Black African students. This is a topic that has been explored by several scholars who call for a more inclusive design in mental wellbeing practices that incorporates the lived experiences and culture of Black students (Stoll et al., 2022; Watkins and Neighbors, 2007). Nonetheless, within this study, the sense of exclusion became apparent after the students spoke of their reasons to either engage with the mental wellbeing services or reject them, and supported their claims with additional details on why the mental health services provided appeared alien to them. Considering that promoting accountability and improving services within universities are key aims of national student surveys (Kandiko Howson and Buckley, 2020), it is essential that the surveys help universities to understand why Black African students may choose to either not

use their mental wellbeing service or refuse additional engagement with the university's mental health practitioners.

Nevertheless, the lack of follow-up questions which aim to understand the barriers Black African students face in accessing or utilising mental health services further contributes to the concerns of mental health decline among Black students (Busby et al., 2021). However, this study has shown that through in-depth questions asked in the interviews on the experiences and opinions of Black African students on mental wellbeing services, it is possible to elicit responses which highlight the barriers Black African students face in accessing appropriate mental wellbeing care. This was achieved due to the provision of open responses in the interviews that produced relevant data, compared to the restricted questions asked in the national surveys on mental wellbeing services. As such, this addresses a key limitation of the NSS, which fails to offer insight into the underlying reasons behind students' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their university's services (Robinson and Sykes, 2014).

For instance, Margaret, a postgraduate international student, recounted her experience of utilising her university's mental wellbeing service while dealing with a crisis. As a Black African International student, it became apparent during the appointment that her experiences, which triggered her crisis and need for help, were foreign to the mental wellbeing practitioner. This realisation led her to believe that her experiences as a Black African International student were outside the scope of what the practitioner had been trained to offer help with, thereby intensifying her feelings of homesickness and alienation:

> You are constantly reminded that you are not home, because even the services that you get are not designed, I feel, by people who have experiences like yours. [...] Let me give you an example of [utilising] student

> wellbeing [services]. So, I go there, and I have a crisis, and I'm having panic attacks, and I want someone to talk through my feelings with. But this person has experience in the UK, and they have never experienced some of the things that I've experienced. So, I'm explaining to them, instead of them listening for information and seeing how to help me. They are listening, and they are shocked at what I'm telling them actually happened. (Margaret, postgraduate research International student)

Additionally, Genevieve, an undergraduate home student, had a similar view of the mental wellbeing services. In this account, Genevieve highlighted that the presence of Black students in the university did not translate to mental wellbeing services that were tailored to the experiences of Black students. This led to feelings that the efforts of the university for marginalised groups were cosmetic and not intentional:

> Sometimes we are kind of used as tokens to the fact that the university is diverse and accommodating. And then I also feel like the mental health facilities don't actually accommodate people from marginalised communities, whether that's Black and LGBT, or whatever.” (Genevieve, undergraduate Home student)

Furthermore, though Barbara, a postgraduate Home student, outlined the usefulness of the university’s mental wellbeing services, she emphasised that the stigmas of seeking mental health support as a Black person impacted her decision to use such services. This led to her choosing to deal with issues of mental wellbeing alone or seeking the help of another Black student in a similar circumstance:

> I did consider it [utilising the university’s mental wellbeing service], and then I didn't do it. It's actually there and available to you. It's always nice to have in the back of your mind, and as a Black student, sometimes there are negative connotations with mental wellbeing and struggles, even though it's something everyone deals with. So, when I’m dealing with burnout and all these things, I prefer to deal with it by myself, or I speak to one person on the basis that, one, she is Black. Well, not just that she's Black, but just the fact that we have this commonality of we're doing this PhD journey together. (Barbara, postgraduate research Home student)

These findings offer a pertinent area for discussion, which is not featured in the national student survey questions. This prevents the universities from identifying targeted areas for improvements to the student experience, which is one of the priorities of the national student survey (Pickford, 2013). This lack of focus on the barriers to accessing mental wellbeing support for Black African students supports the argument of Sabri (2013), who criticised national student surveys for failing to have an impact on non-teaching and learning based areas due to the lack of prominence attributed to these areas in national student surveys. As revealed in the findings of Burgess et al (2018), the NSS has been successful in helping universities to improve student satisfaction within core areas of questioning where they have historically scored lower in the surveys. As such, there is a need for national student surveys to help universities identify areas for improvement in the mental wellbeing services offered to Black African students by placing the same significance on these less discussed areas in the optional bank of questions, which also impact student satisfaction.

3.5 Conclusion

The scholarship on the experiences of Black African students in British universities, though limited, is available, and similarly, literature critiquing and reviewing national student surveys is also accessible. However, scholarship which evaluates national student surveys based on the experiences of Black African students has been difficult to find. National student surveys are designed to be utilised as a tool to help prospective students make informed decisions when choosing which institution to apply to, while simultaneously helping universities to increase their accountability and improve their services. However, a review of the literature revealed a gap in understanding whether national student surveys were effective in assisting Black African Home and Black African International students based on their unique challenges and experiences. Therefore, this study critically evaluates the questions asked and response options in three national student surveys to identify their efficacy in capturing the specific experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students by cross-referencing with the data gathered through qualitative interviews in previous chapters of the thesis.

This study was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of national student surveys in capturing data that informs the experiences of Black African students in Britain. The aim of this study was to identify how useful the surveys were in addressing topics that impacted the student journey of Home and International Black African students, respectively. This is an important objective as it has been difficult to find literature which cross-references the experiences of Black African students with the questions asked in national student surveys. As such, this research is pioneering in its provision of contextual understanding within this discourse.

The success of this study is centred on its ability to identify specific gaps in the national student survey questions. This includes the identification of bias in the questions towards those with UK educational experiences and the absence of questions on experiences specific to Black African Home and Black African International students. This chapter has provided evidence to enhance the call for a more equitable approach to the types of survey questions included in national student surveys to capture the experiences of marginalised Black African students who can only provide an incomplete version of their experiences due to the limited nature of some of the questions asked and the absence of more relevant questions. As a result of this study, further contributions have been made to the literature on the experiences of Black African students, but more importantly, this study has promoted the importance of evaluating national student surveys against the needs of Black African students.

The previous two chapters provided the foundation for this study by comparing the experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students. These themes of ethnic identity, sense of belonging, formal support structures and informal support structures were used to thematically code the national student survey questions, analyse the effectiveness of the survey questions and highlight any existing gaps. The triangulation of the findings from the previous two chapters and those of this chapter reinforces the importance of disaggregating the experiences of marginalised groups, especially when often viewed as a homogenous entity in the literature. This enhances the impact of the data gathered in previous chapters by promoting a critical discourse on the interventions designed to increase belonging and improve student experiences at universities for Black African students.

3.5.1 Summary of research findings

The research has produced some important findings which lend to a literature topic in need of expansion. The first theme explored in the study was the interconnectedness between ethnic identity and sense of belonging. The interview data revealed that clubs and societies had a profound effect on the sense of belonging for both Home and International participants who pursued membership in such groups to help combat feelings of homesickness and isolation. Yet only the NSS linked sense of belonging and the student union. Nonetheless, the study revealed that the value of the clubs and societies under the student union had less impact on the Black African International participants, who placed a higher value on the informal networks and societies created by their peers. Notably, none of the surveys inquired about the impact of informal peer-led groups and networks on students' sense of belonging, highlighting once again a lack of understanding of the contributory factors to belonging for Black African students.

Nevertheless, one of the most profound findings within this theme was that students' sense of belonging varied from course level to institutional level. This is important because the PTES and PRES survey frame their questions on belonging around the students' sense of community at their degree level. However, the study showed that a student's sense of belonging was more influenced by factors within their degree programme, such as lack of racial diversity, and at an institutional level through attendance at societies which provided them with access to students with similar ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Hence, this research is impactful because it has helped to reveal that there is a gap in the presence of factors that influence a Black

African student's sense of belonging within national student surveys. Thus, by focusing on belonging at a degree level, the surveys miss the opportunity to truly comprehend how belonging is impacted at the local and institutional levels.

Specifically, within the theme of formal support, it was revealed that whilst the questions on access to academic support were important, for both Black African Home and Black African International students, the presence of contact hours did not indicate their usefulness. Contact with non- Black or non-African lecturers or supervisors was found to be useful when engaging with culturally competent staff, while lecturers who lacked cultural proficiency contributed to decreased engagement levels. Therefore, asking students about their awareness of contact hours as a measure of student engagement was found to be flawed because, though students were aware of the contact hours, their engagement was dependent on the ease of relatability with their lecturers. Thus, this critiques the interpretation of engagement levels as awareness within these surveys and recommends evaluating the usefulness of these contact hours instead as a measure of engagement levels.

Interestingly, the study also found that many of the questions specific to learning resources centred on access to these resources or how well the learning resources supported the students' learning. While these questions were relevant for the Home participants, many of the International students discussed the disadvantages of learning to use new learning tools and software. This had adverse effects on their capability to progress alongside other students in their modules, which conveyed feelings of declining progress and threatened their attainment outcomes. This is a significant finding that demonstrates the importance of not generalising survey questions to all groups of students. By triangulating the interview data from Chapters

1 and 2 with the survey questions, this study provides evidence for the need for additional questions on the support students receive when familiarising themselves with the required learning resources for their course.

Saliently, there were no questions on informal support, a key theme from the previous two chapters. Nonetheless, the interview data revealed the absence of key questions which should be included in the surveys to gain a better understanding of the challenges experienced by Black African students and the remedies employed. For instance, the questions on the topic of teaching and learning were all attributed to the staff's effort, neglecting the positive contributions students make in improving the progression outcomes of their peers. This highlighted the gap in understanding the experiences of Black African students who strongly utilise their peer and social networks to advance their learning. As such, academies are not only missing vital information on why this motivational role is so impactful for Black African students, but also why these students need their peers to bolster their learning outside of the classroom.

Additionally, learning, through the format described in the survey questions, where the lecturer disseminates information to the students, is not a complete reflection of the teaching and learning process. This is because the study posits that learning also happens through peer groups in the format of group projects. The findings from the International student group cohort expose the barriers to learning that are pertinent to Black African International students during group projects. In such instances, barriers to learning present themselves through communication challenges manifested in differences in educational backgrounds, style of communication and accent challenges. These aspects contributed to some students

choosing not to liaise with peers who were not from their home country. Such in-depth findings promote a critical review of how learning is evaluated and the recognition of students as co-contributors of both teaching and learning. Thus, it presents a compelling argument for the expansion of questions within the teaching and learning sections of the surveys to go beyond their focus on the contributions of academics alone.

However, outside of teaching and learning efforts, the interview data also revealed a lack of questions on the additional burden that Black African students experienced because of a societal and internal requirement to support other Black African International students. The findings from this chapter demonstrated that Black African International students not only sought assistance from other students to navigate the challenges of being Black African foreign students in the UK, but also actively sought the help of Black African lecturers for the same reason. As such, it is imperative that the surveys gather data on the informal services provided by staff and students to help universities better tailor interventions to support the students and staff who are asked to bear this additional burden informally, in place of their institution.

A topic which was prevalent during the interviews was the impact of mental wellbeing and financial anxiety on the experiences of the International student participants. While mental wellbeing questions were listed outside of the core survey questions, none of the surveys included questions on financial anxiety. Again, this highlights the assumption of privilege ascribed to all students without consideration for the global economic situations impacting students from Sub-Saharan Africa. Although the impact of financial anxiety was found to be the most reported contributing factor to

the mental distress of Black African International students, there was a lack of adequate space to express such concerns within the response options. A similar issue was highlighted by the International participants who spoke about the difficulties in obtaining suitable accommodation due to financial pressures and the unavailability of tailored accommodation for foreign students with dependents from the university. These findings highlight the unique financial burden faced by Black African International students, which remains unreported in the survey data due to the failure to diversify questions away from its focus on traditional student experiences.

When reviewing the findings within mental wellbeing, it was also highlighted that although Black African students were aware of their university's mental wellbeing services, with some using this service, ultimately, many felt that it was not sufficient for their needs. For some Black African International students, the lack of preparedness of mental health practitioners in dealing with experiences which were uncommon in the UK left the students feeling that the university's mental health services were not designed for their experiences. Whereas, some Home student participants expressed distrust in the mental wellbeing services and agreed that it did not accommodate the needs of Black students. As such, this finding shows that asking students about the communication of mental wellbeing services is not sufficient in understanding if these services are adequate for Black African students. Similarly, while the questions in the PTES and PRES surveys on whether the mental wellbeing needs of students have been met are welcomed, the provision of closed response options in these surveys prevents the identification of barriers to good mental wellbeing support.

3.5.2 Limitations of the research method

A common critique of the discourse analysis method is that the research relies heavily on the researcher's understanding and interpretation of the context and phrases being analysed, thus amplifying the subjectivity of this method (Breeze, 2011). As such, when critiquing the questions from the national surveys, rather than gaining insight from the intended target respondents on their perception of the questions, the analysis was constructed based on the researcher's discernment. This restriction was also present during the study of the gaps in the survey questions, where the absence of questions on thematic areas such as informal support led to the researcher identifying the questions they believed to be missing. Hence, there is a possibility that due to the researcher sharing the same ethnicity as the participants, and their shared cultural knowledge, a repetition of this study by another researcher with a different ethnic identity could yield different questions from those provided in this research, thereby hindering the reliability of the discourse analysis method (Hux et al., 1997).

While this research has demonstrated one approach to analysing the experiences of Black African students, further investigation into the quality of data collected through student surveys is required. Researchers can further explore factors such as the national student surveys response rates of Black African students, disaggregated by Home and International domicile, and the robustness of publicly available survey metrics.

3.5.3 Recommendations for future research, limitations and practical applications of the study

This study has produced useful insights into the effectiveness of national student surveys for Black African students. Hence, the principles of this study can be applied to better understand the experiences of other marginalised students and thus promote a reflective approach to the evaluation of national surveys. Though the researcher is not a survey methodologist, it would be helpful if the survey questions, responses and design were reviewed by survey methodologists to examine the question design and to test it on various groups of participants. However, concerning the target participants of this study, there is an opportunity to conduct additional cognitive testing on the national survey questions with Black African Home and Black African International students, to understand their interpretation of the questions and to outline fundamental contributors to their experiences. Additionally, to gain an accurate understanding of engagement levels, the questions in the surveys could be reviewed to ask about how useful students found their university's formal services, in addition to whether students had access to the services

Furthermore, future research could explore students' perspectives on informal support structures by testing the questions raised by the researcher in the analysis and discussion sections. Following this, to improve the validity of the discourse analysis method utilised in the research, the research could be repeated, and an analysis of the questions could be conducted to ensure that the interpretation of the analysis within this research is consistent with the findings of other researchers.

Thesis Conclusion

At the start of this research process, the researcher viewed ethnic identity through a Western lens, which characterised people's ethnicity by common categories found in the literature, institutions, and national surveys. This view of ethnic identity as a static category reflected the societal impact of growing up in a Western environment where the social construct of race was fixed and reinforced through institutional structures. This view initially did not take into account the nuanced differences that shape an individual's ethnic identity and sought to understand the experiences of Black African students by reinforcing the practices learned where race and ethnicity are ascribed to an individual, rather than self-described.

However, as this research progressed, through the literature reviews and especially when gathering data from participants, it became more evident that the concept of ethnicity is multi-dimensional and dynamic, evolving in response to an individual's changing environment. More importantly, this research changed the researcher's approach on how ethnicity is understood and conveyed, and by allowing participants to self-describe their ethnic identity, the researcher was able to gain even more valuable insight into how one's ethnic identity can change throughout an individual's lifetime based on where they live, how and if they choose to assimilate to a different culture and the experiences they encounter along that journey.

This research sought to understand the comparative experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students in a British university. The three chapters of this study investigated how the following themes shaped the overall student journey and experiences of these students: ethnic identity and belonging; attitudes towards formal and informal student support structures; and the

effectiveness of national student surveys in capturing Black African student experiences. The first two chapters of this paper examined how the experience of Black African students was shaped in their higher education journey, and the third chapter built on this by exploring how those experiences were reflected in student surveys, which are used as a mechanism to obtain and rank student experiences.

Based on the qualitative analysis of the student interviews, in tandem with the critical analysis of the national student surveys, it can be concluded that while sharing a similar ethnic identity, there are noteworthy differences between the experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students shaped by citizenship privileges, levels of acculturation and perceptions of racial construct, and their differing responses to systemic inequities. Though the results also indicate that there are shared similarities in the experiences of both groups, such as experiences of microaggression and the important role of peer networks in advancing learning and progression outcomes, the methods by which both groups approach these topics differ significantly.

Chapter 1 revealed the interconnectedness between a student's sense of belonging to their university and their ethnic identity, while Chapter 2 identified the different attitudes to formal and informal support structures, with International students being heavily reliant on the support of their peers. Subsequently, Chapter 3 explained that the bank of questions in national student surveys was not sufficient in capturing the unique experiences of Black African Home and Black African International students.

Semi-structured qualitative interviews were used to gather comparable insights from Black African Home and Black African International students in the first two chapters. This ensured that both participant groups were provided with the space to give a

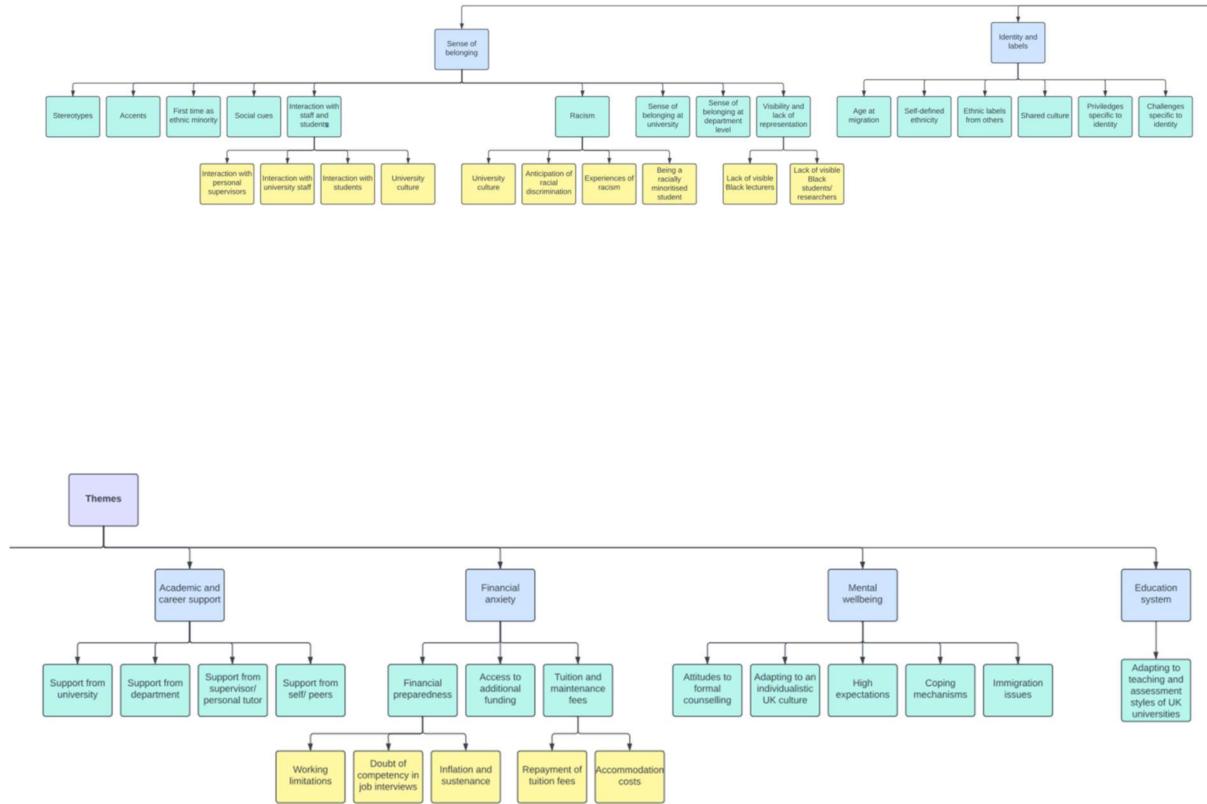
reflective account of how their student journeys had been impacted by their ethnic identity. Additionally, the semi-structured nature of the research method allowed participants to speak freely about their experiences, which allowed for new insights, thereby improving the value of the data gathered by increasing its authenticity. The third chapter draws from the data captured in the interviews in the previous chapters in its examination of national student surveys. The NSS, PTES and PRES student surveys were analysed using the critical discourse analysis method to examine if the questions and response options were capable of eliciting the nuanced details conveyed in the interviews and in capturing the experiences of Black African students.

While the aim of this research was not to offer generalised statements, it is powerful in its ability to expose the intricate challenges of Black African students' ethnic identity and their barriers to belonging in a British university. This provides further comprehension into the importance of disaggregating student experiences and tailoring interventions to specific student groups and their unique challenges. These findings emphasise the need to expand the scope of this research beyond Black African students to understand the experiences of other marginalised students. In doing so, a greater repository of information can be gathered, which will help better inform the practices of institutions. Also, practitioners and the academy should consider using levels of engagement as a measure of understanding how well-received student support structures are by their students, in addition to assessing the accessibility of their services, which may impact the policy and practice implications. This will help ensure that services provided to help students are actually being utilised.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Promotional flyer

Appendix 2: Literature review themes



Appendix 3: Interview topic guide

Interview Topic Guide (Year 1)

Qualitative interviews with Black African International and Black African Home-domiciled students on their lived experiences studying at a British university.

Introduction

- Participants are thanked for agreeing to take part in the study
- The study and its purpose are outlined through a recap of the participant information sheet
- Participants are told that the interviewer will also be taking some notes to complement the audio recording
- Participants are reminded that the session will be audio-recorded and of their ability to leave at anytime
- If you find the interview uncomfortable at any point, please let the interviewer know who will bring the interview to an end. Additionally, we have provided the details of support and help services should you like to contact them after the interview. These include:
    - **24-hour Student Wellbeing Support Line**: on 0800 970 5020 (outside UK: +44 141 271 7168) –open every day, including weekends and bank holidays
    - SilverCloud: an online cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) resource offering a range of programmes on mental health, wellbeing, and long-term conditions

- **Samaritans**: call free on116123 or email jo@samaritans.org
- **Student Minds**: call on 0113 343 8440 or email info@studentminds.org.uk

Topics

Introduction

The interviews began with introductory questions which focused on the participant's motivations to study at the university, their experiences living in the university's majority-White town and the help they received from the university in planning for their post-academic future. These questions were formulated to be general in nature yet act as an introduction to the context of the study. The questions also allowed the interviewer to gain an initial understanding of the participant's positioning as participants were naturally prompted to speak further on their previous academic background, hometown ethnic demography and identity based on the answers given.

Prompts:

Studying at this university

- What inspired you to study at this university?
- How have you found your time at this university?
- What motivates you the most while studying here?
- How would you describe your time at this university to friends or family thinking about studying here?
- Living and or studying in [this town]
    - How have you found living and/or studying in [this town]?

    - What is your opinion of the city?
    - How well do have you settled into the city?

- Preparing for life after studies
    - How much do you know about the services provided by the university to assist you in your career or furthering your academic education?
    - How much help have you received from this university in planning for your future after your studies?
    - What additional help would you like to receive from the university in planning for your future if any?

General questions around ethnic identity and the context of the study

Another theme which was covered focused on the topic of identity, highlighted in the literature review and the context of the study. Participants were given an opportunity to describe their ethnic identity, and then their experiences of being a Black African (or self-defined ethnicity) international/Home-domiciled student at the university. Subsequently, participants were asked which issues, if any, they experienced because of this identity. This question was designed to understand if there was a common theme between the literature and the experiences of the participants. Hyams-Ssekasi et al (2014) highlighted the lack of research into the experiences of Black African International students in the UK and an overreliance on literature from the US. Furthermore, these questions asked about the specific ethnic identity of

“Black African”, an identity which is often hidden under the label of “Black”, “BAME”, “BME” or “ethnic minorities” (Bunce 2021; Office for Students 2022):

- How would you describe your experience of being a Black African (International/ Home-domiciled) student at this university?
- What are some of the issues, if any, you would say you have faced as a Black African (International/ Home-domiciled) student?

1. Detailed exploration of key themes

Sense of belonging

This set of questions explores the topic of belonging at the university and the push and pull factors affecting the student’s sense of belonging at the university. The questions asked were influenced by the current literature on student experiences, where several scholars posit varying factors affecting Black students’ sense of belonging at university (Mwangi 2016; Koutsouris et al 2021). To act as an ice-breaker for gaining more insight into the participants’ sense of belonging, a question using the ten-point scale, ranging from one to ten, was posed, with one meaning the student has no sense of belonging at the university and 10 signifying having a great sense of belonging at the university. The use of the Likert scale in the attitudinal questions was advantageous as it allowed for a verbal exploration of students' experiences. This provided the interviewer with an opportunity to ask further open questions on the answers provided to better understand the student’s responses and the experiences that influenced such answers.

- On a scale of 1-10 where would you rate your sense of belonging at the university and why would you give that rating?
- Is this score the same for your department/programme? Please explain.
- How would you describe your experience of being a racially minoritized group within the student body at the University?
- Which group of students do you feel you have the most in common with and why?
- What initiatives has the university provided to help you feel welcomed that you are aware of?
- How has your university approached and encouraged open discussions about racism and racial harassment for students?

Financial Anxiety

The topic of financial anxiety was prevalent in the literature concerning the challenges faced by Black African International students at Western universities (Boafo-Arthur, 2014). As such, these sets of questions were developed to understand if such issues affected both home and International students equally. Specifically, these questions were tailored to the students to understand if they experienced financial anxieties and what they believed to be the root causes. Additionally, the following questions explored the financial priorities of each student and the sources of income to fund such priorities. Participants were provided with an opportunity to discuss the impact of their financial situation on their sense of belonging at the university and the effects it had on their mental well-being.

- What are some of the financial challenges faced by a (Home-domiciled/ International student) such as yourself?
- How would you describe the ease or lack of, in accessing additional funding for your studies and maintenance?
- What additional financial priorities do students such as yourself have to consider if any?

Mental wellbeing

This section focused on the impact of student life on the participants' mental well-being. The psychological and emotional welfare of both Black home and International students has been discussed in depth, with scholars noting different triggers particular to both groups of students (Arday 2018; Constantine 2005; Olaniyan and Hayes 2022). Due to the sensitivity of these questions, participants were provided with sources to multiple mental health support services and reassured that they could stop the interview at any time. Due to the sensitive nature of the questions asked, the interviewer reminded students of their decision to stop the interview at any time and provided mental well-being resources in advance should this be required. However, if participants were comfortable, further questions were asked on coping strategies and the effectiveness of such methods.

- How have you found your transition from the life you had when living at home to your new life at the University?
- How do you deal with the challenges of student life at the University?

Assimilation into the university and higher education system

The questions within this theme were focused on gaining an understanding on how well students assimilated to the university's academic style and teaching. While studies have noted that Black African International students struggle more due to the cultural differences in the education system (Hyams-Ssekasi, 2014), the question was also posed to Home students to understand if they also faced any unique challenges in assimilating to the university's academic culture. These questions allowed the participants to speak further about their experiences in the HE environment and their interactions with academic staff.

- How well do you feel you have assimilated to the style of teaching and assessment at the University?
- What are some of the differences and/or similarities between the style of your previous place of learning and the University?

2. Questions aimed at pulling out essential insights

This section will focus on delving deeper into some of the answers provided by participants from the previous section (key themes). It will be used as an opportunity to explore their experiences without any leading questions.

3. Summary and reflection

Once all sections were covered, the participant was asked for their input on any topics or themes that were missed or required further exploration. Recommended questions were taken into account and added as a note for further interviews. Following this, the interview drew to a close, and interviewees were asked for referrals to others within the target participant bracket.

- Does the interviewee feel that any questions have been missed, or is there anything they would like to discuss further?
- Is there anyone they believe would be useful to speak to?

References

Adams, J., & Corbett, A. (2010). Experiences of traditional and non-traditional college students. *Perspectives*, *2*(1), 1-29

Adegbola, O., Labador, A., & Oviedo, M. (2018). African Students' Identity Negotiation and Relational Conflict Management: Being "Foreign", Being "Careful." *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research*, *47*(6), 474–490. https://doi.org/10.1080/17475759.2018.1486876

Adeyoyin, O. (2024). The Impact of Informal Communal Support Systems on Acculturative Stress among International African Students. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences,* 6 (6), 340-352 DOI: https://doi.org/10.36348/gajhss.2024.v06i06.011

Adisa, T. A., Harrison, M., Sani, K. F., Mingazova, D., & Kypuram, J. (2023). The National Student Survey and the 'customerization'of university students: a qualitative study of UK higher education*. Higher Education*, 86(2), 449-466.

Advance HE (2021). *Equality and Higher Education. Students Statistical Report.* https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2021

Advance HE (2024) *Postgraduate Taught Experience. Survey* https://advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/postgraduate-taught-experience-survey-2024

Advance HE (n.d.) Helping HE shape its future. Advance HE https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/about-us

Ahn, M. Y., & Davis, H. H. (2020). Four domains of students' sense of belonging to university. *Studies in Higher Education,* 45(3), 622-634. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1564902

Akanwa, E. E. (2015). International students in Western developed countries: History, challenges, and prospects. Journal of International Students, 5(3), 271-284.

Ali, S. (2020). Managing racism? Race equality and decolonial educational futures.(Working Paper No. 47) https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/105275/1/LSE_III_Working_Paper_47_2020.pdf

Alidou, H. (2000). Preparing Teachers for the Education of New Immigrant Students from Africa. *Action in Teacher Education*, *22*(sup2), 101–108. https://doi.org/10.1080/01626620.2000.10463044

Amisi, B., Bond, P., Cele, N., & Ngwane, T. (2011). Xenophobia and civil society: Durban's structured social divisions. *Politikon,* 38(1), 59-83. https://doi.org/10.1080/02589346.2011.548671

Anderson, M. (2011). Teacher & Student Perspectives on Cultural Proficiency. *Leadership,* 40(5), 32-35.

Andrews, K. (2020). Blackness, Empire and migration: How Black Studies transforms the curriculum. *Area,* 52(4), 701-707. https://doi.org/10.1111/area.12528

Arday, J. (2017). Exploring Black and minority ethnic (BME) doctoral students' perceptions of an academic career. University and College Union.

https://pih.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/UCU_Arday_Report_-_June_20171.pdf

Arday, J. (2018). Understanding mental health: what are the issues for Black and ethnic minority students at university?. *Social Sciences*, 7(10), 196. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7100196

Arday, J. (2018). Understanding race and educational leadership in higher education: Exploring the Black and ethnic minority (BME) experience. *Management in Education,* 32(4), 192-200 https://doi.org/10.1177/0892020618791

Arday, J., & Mirza, H. S. (Eds.). (2018). Dismantling Race in Higher Education: Racism, Whiteness and Decolonising the Academy. Palgrave Macmillan Cham https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60261-5

Arday, J., Branchu, C., & Boliver, V. (2022). What Do We Know About Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Participation in UK Higher Education? *Social Policy and Society,* 21(1), 12-25. doi:10.1017/S1474746421000579

Arthur, N., & Popadiuk, N. (2010). A cultural formulation approach to career counseling with international students. *Journal of Career Development*, 37(1), 423-440. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845309345845

Arthur, N., Nunes, S. (2014). Should I Stay or Should I Go Home? Career Guidance with International Students. In: Arulmani, G., Bakshi, A., Leong, F., Watts, A. (Eds) *Handbook of Career Development. International and Cultural Psychology*. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-9460-7_33

Asante, G., Sekimoto, S., & Brown, C. (2016). Becoming “Black”: Exploring the racialized experiences of African immigrants in the United States. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 27(4), 367-384. https://doi.org/10.1080/10646175.2016.1206047

Asatryan, V. S., Slevitch, L., Larzelere, R., Morosan, C., & Kwun, D. J. (2013). Effects of psychological ownership on students’ commitment and satisfaction. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Education*, 25(4), 169-179. https://doi.org/10.1080/10963758.2013.850294

Baines, L., Gooch, D., & Ng-Knight, T. (2024). Do widening participation interventions change university attitudes in UK school children? A systematic review of the efficacy of UK programmes, and quality of evaluation evidence. *Educational Review*, 76(3), 628-647. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2022.2077703

Ballenger, Julia W., and Sharon Ninness. (2013). Increasing one’s cultural proficiency. *National Forum of Multicultural Issues Journal*. 10(1), 1-5.

Banks, J. A. (1998). The lives and values of researchers: Implications for educating citizens in a multicultural society. *Educational researcher*, 27(7), 4-17. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X027007004

Baratta, A., & Halenko, N. (2022). Attitudes toward regional British accents in EFL teaching: Student and teacher perspectives. *Linguistics and Education*, 67 (101018). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2022.101018

Bartoli, A., Kennedy, S. & Tedam, P. (2008). ‘Practice learning: Who is failing to adjust? Black African student experience of practice learning in a social work

setting. *Journal of Practice Teaching and Learning*, 8(2), 75–90. https://doi.org/10.1921/jpts.v8i2.370

Bassey, M. (2009). Higher education and the rise of early political elites in Africa pdf. *Review of Higher Education in Africa*, 1(1) 30-38.

Bazzul, J. (2014). Critical discourse analysis and science education texts: Employing Foucauldian notions of discourse and subjectivity. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies,* 36(5), 422-437. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2014.958381

Bélanger, E., & Verkuyten, M. (2010). Hyphenated identities and acculturation: Second-generation Chinese of Canada and the Netherlands. *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 10(3), 141-163. https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2010.495906

Bell, M. P., Berry, D., Leopold, J., & Nkomo, S. (2021). Making Black Lives Matter in academia: A Black feminist call for collective action against anti-Blackness in the academy. *Gender, Work & Organization*, *28*, 39-57. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12555

Bendix, R. (2017). Nation-building and citizenship: studies of our changing social order. Routledge. London and New York https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315125107

Bennett, J., Kidger, J., Haworth, C., Linton, M. J., & Gunnell, D. (2024). Student mental health support: A qualitative evaluation of new well-being services at a UK university. *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2024.2335379

Bennett, R., & Kane, S. (2014). Students’ interpretations of the meanings of questionnaire items in the National Student Survey. *Quality in Higher Education*, 20(2), 129-164. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2014.924786

Beoku-Betts, J. (2004). African Women Pursuing Graduate Studies in the Sciences: Racism, Gender Bias, and Third World Marginality. *NWSA Journal*, 16(1), 116–135.https://www.jstor.org/stable/4317037

Berry, J. W. (1997). Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology,* 46(1), 5-34. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1464-0597.1997.tb01087.x

Berry, J. W. (2017) Mutual Intercultural Relations. Cambridge University Press

Berry, J. W., & Sabatier, C. (2010). Acculturation, discrimination, and adaptation among second generation immigrant youth in Montreal and Paris. *International journal of intercultural relations*, 34(3), 191-207. doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2009.11.007

Bevan, M. T. (2014). A method of phenomenological interviewing. *Qualitative health research,* 24(1), 136-144. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732313519710

Bhatia, V. K., Flowerdew, J., & Jones, R. H. (2008). Approaches to discourse analysis. In Advances in discourse studies (pp. 11-28). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203892299

Birani, A., & Lehmann, W. (2013). Ethnicity as social capital: An examination of first-generation, ethnic-minority students at a Canadian university. *International Studies in Sociology of Education,* 23(4), 281-297. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2013.822715

Bista, K. (2019). Exploring the field: Understanding the international student experience. In K. Bista, K. (Ed.), *Global perspectives on international student experiences in higher education: Tensions and issues* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.

Blake, G. (2024). Reduced international student numbers are a much bigger problem than you think. HEPI. from https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2024/09/03/reduced-international-student-numbers-are-a-much-bigger-problem-than-you-think/

Boafo-Arthur, S. (2014). Acculturative experiences of Black-African international students. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 36, 115-124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-013-9194-8

Boles, A.M (2018). The Culturally Proficient Law Professor: Beginning the Journey, 48 *N.M. L.* Rev. 48, 145.

Boliver, V. (2018). Ethnic Inequalities in Admission to Highly Selective Universities. In: Arday, J., Mirza, H. (Eds) *Dismantling Race in Higher Education*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60261-5_4

Bolsmann, C. & Miller, H. (2008) International student recruitment to universities in England: discourse, rationales and globalisation, Globalisation, Societies and Education, 6(1) 75-88. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767720701855634

Bolton, P., & Hubble, S. (2021). International and EU students in higher education in the UK FAQs. House of Commons Library. [online] Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7976/>

Bonner, F. A., Evans, M., & Cleveland, D. (2004). Can you hear me?: Voices and experiences of African American students in higher education. In D. Cleveland

(Ed.), A long way to go: Conversations about race by African American faculty and graduate students. 3-18

Boukpessi, T.B., Kpanake, L. & Gagnier, JP. (2021) Willingness to Use Mental Health Services for Depression Among African Immigrants and White Canadian-Born People in the Province of Quebec, Canada. Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health 23, 320–328 https://doi.org/10.1007/s10903-020-01061-y

Bowden, J. L. H. (2011). Engaging the student as a customer: A relationship marketing approach. *Marketing education review,* 21(3), 211-228. https://doi.org/10.2753/MER1052-8008210302

Bowl, M. (2001). Experiencing the barriers: Non-traditional students entering higher education. *Research papers in Education*, 16(2), 141-160. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520110037410

Bowles, D. P. (2020). Psychological predictors of National Student Survey course satisfaction. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice,* 8(2), 7-15. https://doi.org/10.14297/jpaap.v8i2.423

Breeze, R. (2011). Critical discourse analysis and its critics. *Pragmatics. quarterly publication of the international pragmatics association*, 21(4), 493-525. https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.21.4.01bre

Bridgstock, R., Grant-Iramu, M., & McAlpine, A. (2019). Integrating career development learning into the curriculum: Collaboration with the careers service for employability. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability,* 10(1), 56-72.

Brooms, D. R., Goodman, J., & Clark, J. (2015). "We need more of this": Engaging Black men on college campuses. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 33(1), 105-123. https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csj.2015.0002.

Brown, L. (2009). The transformative power of the international sojourn: An ethnographic study of the international student experience. *Annals of Tourism Research,* 36(3), 502-521. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2009.03.002

Brown, L., & Jones, I. (2013). Encounters with racism and the international student experience. Studies in Higher education, 38(7), 1004-1019. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.614940

Bryant, A., Cook, A., Egan, H., Wood, J., & Mantzios, M. (2022). Help-seeking behaviours for mental health in higher education. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 46(4), 522-534. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1985983

Buckley, P., & Lee, P. (2021). The impact of extra-curricular activity on the student experience. *Active Learning in Higher Education,* 22(1), 37-48 https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787418808988

Budd, J. M., & Raber, D. (1996). Discourse analysis: Method and application in the study of information. *Information Processing & Management*, 32(2), 217-226. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0306-4573(96)85007-2

Bullock, J. L., Lockspeiser, T., del Pino-Jones, A., Richards, R., Teherani, A., and Hauer, K. E. (2020). They don’t see a lot of people my color: a mixed methods study of racial/ethnic stereotype threat among medical students on core

clerkships. *Academic Medicine,* 95(11S), S58-S66. 10.1097/ACM.0000000000003628

Bunce, L., King, N., Saran, S., & Talib, N. (2021). Experiences of Black and minority ethnic (BME) students in higher education: applying self-determination theory to understand the BME attainment gap. *Studies in Higher Education,* 46(3), 534-547. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1643305

Bunglawala, Z. (2019). Please, don't call me BAME or BME. Civil Service Blog. Available at: https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2019/07/08/please-dont-call-me-bame-or-bme/

Burgess, A., Senior, C., & Moores, E. (2018). A 10-year case study on the changing determinants of university student satisfaction in the UK. PloS one, 13(2), e0192976.

Busby, D. R., Zheng, K., Eisenberg, D., Albucher, R. C., Favorite, T., Coryell, W., ... & King, C. A. (2021). Black college students at elevated risk for suicide: Barriers to mental health service utilization. Journal of American college health, 69(3), 308-314. https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2019.1674316

Cabinet Office (2023) *People starting at higher education providers with high, medium and low entry tariffs. Ethnicity Facts And Figures.* https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/higher-education/entrants-at-higher-education-providers-with-high-medium-and-low-entry-tariffs/latest#entrants-to-high-medium-and-low-tariff-institutions-by-ethnicity

Caldwell, E. F., & Hyams-Ssekasi, D. (2016). Leaving Home: The Challenges of Black-African International Students Prior to Studying Overseas. *Journal of International Students,* 6(2), 588-613.

Calma, A., & Dickson-Deane, C. (2020). The student as customer and quality in higher education. International Journal of Educational Management, 34(8), 1221-1235. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-03-2019-0093

Cameron, H & Greenland, L (2021) 'Black or minority ethnic' (BME), female, and dyslexic in White-male dominated disciplines at an elite university in the UK; an exploration of student experiences. *Race Ethnicity and Education,* 24(6), 770-788. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1579180

Cameron, J. E. (1999). Social identity and the pursuit of possible selves: Implications for the psychological well-being of university students. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice,* 3(3), 179–189. https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2699.3.3.179

Campbell, J. P., & Bozeman, W. C. (2007). The value of student ratings: Perceptions of students, teachers, and administrators. Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 32(1), 13-24. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668920600864137

Cangiano, A. (2023) The impact of migration on UK population growth, Migration Observatory. The University of Oxford. Available at: https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/the-impact-of-migration-on-uk-population-growth/ (Accessed: March 26, 2023).

Canning, J. (2015). A new measurement and ranking system for the UK National Student Survey. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 19(2), 56–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603108.2015.1021401

Cathy Walsh , Carl Larsen & Damian Parry (2009) Academic tutors at the frontline of student support in a cohort of students succeeding in higher education. *Educational Studies,* 35:4, 405-424, DOI: 10.1080/03055690902876438

Caxaj, C. S., Chau, S., & Parkins, I. (2021). How racialized students navigate campus life in a mid-sized Canadian city: ‘thrown against a White background ’but ‘comfortable enough to laugh’. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 24(4), 503-522. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1511528

Chandra, K. (2006). What is ethnic identity and does it matter?. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 9, 397-424.

Chaney, B., Muraskin, L. D., Cahalan, M. W., & Goodwin, D. (1998). Helping the progress of disadvantaged students in higher education: The federal student support services program. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 20(3), 197-215. https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737020003197

Changamire, N., Mwangi, C. A. G., & Mosselson, J. (2021). International students and the neoliberal marketplace of higher education: The lived experiences of graduate students from sub-Saharan countries in Africa of a US university’s internationalization policy. *Higher Education*, 1-17.

Changamire, N., Mwangi, C.A.G. & Mosselson, J. (2022). International students and the neoliberal marketplace of higher education: the lived experiences of

graduate students from sub-Saharan countries in Africa of a U.S. university's internationalization policy. *Higher Education* 84, 505–521

Cheng, W., Ickes, W., & Verhofstadt, L. (2012). How is family support related to students' GPA scores? A longitudinal study. *Higher education,* 64, 399-420.

Chue, K. L., & Nie, Y. (2016). International students' motivation and learning approach: A comparison with local students. Journal of International Students, 6(3), 678-699.

Claridge, H., Stone, K., & Ussher, M. (2018). The ethnicity attainment gap among medical and biomedical science students: a qualitative study. *BMC medical Education*, 18(1), 1-12 https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-018-1426-5

Coates, H and Ranson, L. (2011). 'Dropout DNA, and the genetics of effective support', *AUSSE Research Briefings* v.11

Coates, H. (2005). The value of student engagement for higher education quality assurance. *Quality in higher education,* 11(1), 25-36. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320500074915

Cocksedge, S. T., & Taylor, D. C. (2013). The National Student Survey: is it just a bad DREEM*?. Medical teacher*, 35(12), e1638-e1643. https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2013.835388

Coggins, P., & Campbell, S. D. (2008). Using cultural competence to close the achievement gap. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 2(4), 44-59.

Collins, K. H. (2018). Confronting color-blind STEM talent development: Toward a contextual model for Black student STEM identity. *Journal of Advanced Academics,* 29(2), 143-168. https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X18757958

Comeaux, E., Grummert, S. E., & Mireles, D. C. (2023). A critical review of the literature on cultural competency in student affairs: Toward transformative cultural responsiveness. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education,* 16(5), 563–574. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000363

Constantine, M. G., Anderson, G. M., Berkel, L. A., Caldwell, L. D., & Utsey, S. O. (2005). Examining the cultural adjustment experiences of African international college students: A qualitative analysis. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 52(1), 57.

Corbin, N.A., Smith, W.A., & Garcia, J.R. (2018) Trapped between justified anger and being the strong Black woman: Black college women coping with racial battle fatigue at historically and predominantly White institutions, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,* 31(7), 626-643, https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2018.1468045

Cormier, D. R. (2021). The Cultural Proficiency Continuum Dialogic Protocol: An Emergent Tool for Assessing and Codifying Preservice Teachers' Cultural Competence. *School-University Partnerships,* 14(1), 8-23.

Cornell, J., & Kessi, S. (2017). Black students' experiences of transformation at a previously "White only" South African university: A photovoice study. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 40(11), 1882-1899. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2016.1206586

Cotton, D. R., Joyner, M., George, R., & Cotton, P. A. (2016). Understanding the gender and ethnicity attainment gap in UK higher education. *Innovations in education and teaching international*, 53(5), 475-486. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2015.1013145

Culbertson, A., and Brown, F. (2024) *University tuition fees to increase in England for first time in eight years.* Sky News. Available at: https://news.sky.com/story/tuition-fees-increase-in-cap-on-university-costs-expected-sky-news-understands-13248301. [Accessed on 18.11.25]

Cuthbert, R. (2010). Students as customers. Higher Education Review, 42(3), 3-25.

Dare, O., Jidong, D. E., & Premkumar, P. (2022). Conceptualising mental illness among University students of African, Caribbean and similar ethnic heritage in the United Kingdom. *Ethnicity & Health,* 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2022.2104817

Davies, C., & Garrett, M. (2012). The BME student experience at a small northern university: an examination of the experiences of minority ethnic students undertaking undergraduate study within a small northern university. Compass: Journal of Learning and Teaching, 3(5), 1-10

Davis, R. B. (1991). Social support networks and undergraduate student academic-success-related outcomes: A comparison of Black students on Black and White campuses. In Allen, W., Epps, E., and Haniff, N., (Eds.) *College in Black and White: African American students in predominantly White and in historically Black public universities*, 143-157. SUNY Press

Dawn Edge & Sara C. MacKian (2010) Ethnicity and mental health encounters in primary care: help-seeking and help-giving for perinatal depression among Black Caribbean women in the UK, *Ethnicity & Health,* 15(1), 93-111. https://doi.org/10.1080/13557850903418836

de Moissac, D., Graham, J. M., Prada, K., Gueye, N. R., & Rocque, R. (2020). Mental health status and help-seeking strategies of International students in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, *50*(4), 52-71. https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.vi0.188815

Dean, A., Shubita, M., & Claxton, J. (2020). What type of learning journey do students value most? Understanding enduring factors from the NSS leading to responsible decision-making. *Journal of Global Responsibility*, *11*(4), 347-362. https://doi.org/10.1108/JGR-01-2020-0017

Deasy, C., Coughlan, B., Pironom, J., Jourdan, D., and Mannix-McNamara, P., (2016). Psychological Distress and Help Seeking Amongst Higher Education Students: Findings from a Mixed Method Study of Undergraduate Nursing/midwifery and Teacher Education Students in Ireland. *Irish Educational Studies* 35 (2): 175–194 https://doi.org/10.1080/03323315.2016.1146157

Dey, F., & Cruzvergara, C. Y. (2014). Evolution of career services in higher education*. New directions for student services*, 2014(148), 5-18. https://doi.org/10.1002/ss.20105

Dhillon, J.K, McGowan, M., & Wang, H., (2008) How effective are institutional and departmental systems of student support? Insights from an investigation into

the support available to students at one English university. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 13(3), 281-293, DOI: 10.1080/13596740802346472

Ding, F., & Stapleton, P. (2015). Self-emergent peer support using online social networking during cross-border transition. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 31(6), 671-684. https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.2305

Domboka, T. (2019). The migration history of black Africans to Britain. In Immigration and the Current Social, Political, and Economic Climate: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice. *IGI Global Scientific Publishing*. (pp. 1-18). DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6918-3.ch001

Dominguez-Whitehead, Y., & Sing, N. (2015). International students in the South African higher education system: A review of pressing challenges. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 29(4), 77-95.

Donkoh, S., & Mensah, J. (2023). Application of triangulation in qualitative research. *Journal of Applied Biotechnology and Bioengineering*, 10(1), 6-9.

du Toit-Brits, C. (2022). Exploring the importance of a sense of belonging for a sense of ownership in learning. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 36(5), 58-76.

Duane, A., Hafen, Q., Morales, L., Jones, T. M., & Shapiro, V. B. (2024). “Embracing the essence of student voice… then doing something with the data”: One district’s critical use of evidence. Journal of Educational Change, 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-024-09515-y

Edge, D. & MacKian, S. C. (2010) Ethnicity and mental health encounters in primary care: help-seeking and help-giving for perinatal depression among Black Caribbean women in the UK, *Ethnicity & Health,* 15(1), 93-111, https://doi.org/10.1080/13557850903418836

Elliott, K.M. and Shin, D. (2002), “Student Satisfaction: an alternative approach to assessing this important concept”, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management,* 24(2), 197-209. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080022000013518

Elton-Chalcraft, S., Lander, V., Revell, L., Warner, D., & Whitworth, L. (2017). To promote, or not to promote fundamental British values? Teachers’ standards, diversity and teacher education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(1), 29-48. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3253

Equality Challenge Unit. 2015. *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report. Part 2: Students*. Available online: https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/ecu/Equality-in-HE-statistical-report-2015-part-2-students_1573207137.pdf

Canton, E., & Blom, A. (2009). Student support and academic performance: experiences at private universities in Mexico. Education Economics, 18(1), 49–65. https://doi.org/10.1080/09645290801931766

Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American journal of theoretical and applied statistics,* 5(1), 1-4. doi: 10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11

Ezikwelu, E. U., (2020) “Institutional Racism and Campus Racial Climate: Struggles for Sense of Belonging and Academic Success Among Black Students in the K-12 Public Schools”, *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* 10(1), 1-20

Fakile, D. I. (2021). “Is my University White?” Exploring the role and influence of a University’s Culture on the experiences of Black Undergraduate Students in the UK. *Polish Journal of Educational Studies*, 73(1), 63-82. DOI: 10.2478/poljes-2021-0005

Fassett, K. T., & McCormick, A. C. (2021). Teaching and learning in university rankings: a critical review and reassessment. In Hazelkorn, E., and Mihut, G. (Eds). *Research Handbook on University Rankings*, 329-339. Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788974981.00035

Fielding, A., Dunleavy, P. J., & Langan, A. M. (2010). Interpreting context to the UK’s National Student (Satisfaction) Survey data for science subjects. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 34(3), 347-368. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2010.484054

Flahaux, M. L., & De Haas, H. (2016). African migration: trends, patterns, drivers. *Comparative migration studies*, 4,(1) 1-25. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-015-0015-6

Flintoff, Anne (2015) Playing the ‘Race’ card? Black and minority ethnic students' experiences of physical education teacher education. *Sport, Education and Society,* 20(2), 190-211. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2012.745397

Fong Lam, U., Chen, W. W., Zhang, J., & Liang, T. (2015). It feels good to learn where I belong: School belonging, academic emotions, and academic

achievement in adolescents. *School Psychology International*, 36(4), 393-409. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034315589649

Ford, D. Y., Harris III, J. J., Tyson, C. A., & Trotman, M. F. (2001). Beyond deficit thinking: Providing access for gifted African American students. *Roeper Review,* 24(2), 52-58. https://doi.org/10.1080/02783190209554129

Foucault, M. (1971). Orders of discourse. *Social science information*, *10*(2), 7-30. https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847101000201

Franco, M., Hsiao, Y. S., Gnilka, P. B., & Ashby, J. S. (2019). Acculturative stress, social support, and career outcome expectations among international students. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance*, *19*(2), 275-291. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10775-018-9380-7

Fuligni, A. J., Witkow, M., & Garcia, C. (2005). Ethnic identity and the academic adjustment of adolescents from Mexican, Chinese, and European backgrounds. Developmental psychology, 41(5), 799.

Gabi, J., Braddock, A., Brown, C., Miller, D., Mynott, G., Jacobi, M., ... & Rawson, A. (2024). Can the role of a personal tutor contribute to reducing the undergraduate degree awarding gap for ethnically minoritised students?. *British Educational Research Journal*, *50*(4), 1784-1803. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3999

Garratt, M. (2023). For when you just can’t talk to ‘normal’people... Exploring the use of informal support structures by supernumerary university paramedic students: findings from a phenomenological study. *British Paramedic Journal*, *7*(4), 1-7. https://doi.org/10.29045/14784726.2023.3.7.4.1

Gautam, C., Lowery, C. L., Mays, C., & Durant, D. (2016). Challenges for global learners: A qualitative study of the concerns and difficulties of international students. *Journal of International Students,* 6(2), 501-526. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v6i2.368

Gee, J. P. (2025). An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method (3rd Ed). Routledge.

Gee, J.P., and Handford, M. (2012). *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis.* Routledge. (pp. 1-6)

George Mwangi, C. A., Changamire, N., & Mosselson, J. (2019). An intersectional understanding of African international graduate students' experiences in US higher education. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 12(1), 52. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000076

Geschiere, P., & Ceuppens, B. (2005). Autochthony: local or global? New modes in the struggle over citizenship and belonging in Africa and Europe. *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 34, 385-407. https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004181168.i-452

Ghenghesh, P. (2018). Personal tutoring from the perspectives of tutors and tutees. *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 42(4), 570-584.https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1301409

Gill, P. S., Kai, J., Bhopal, R. S., & Wild, S. (2018). In Black and minority ethnic groups. In Stevens, A., Raferty, J., Mant, J., and Simpson, S. (Eds). *Health care needs assessment,* 227-400. CRC Press. London

Gill, R. S., & Hanefar, S. B. H. M. (2025). Student well-being in transnational education: Financial challenges and institutional responses. In Transnational Education (1st Edition). 89-209. Routledge.

Gillborn, D. (2015). Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, and the Primacy of Racism: Race, Class, Gender, and Disability in Education. *Qualitative Inquiry,* 21(3), 277-287. https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004145578

Girmay, M., & Singh, G. K. (2019). Social isolation, loneliness, and mental and emotional well-being among International students in the United States. International Journal of Translational Medical Research and Public Health, 3(2), 1-8. doi:10.21106/ijtmrph.82

Giroux, H. A. (2003). Public pedagogy and the politics of resistance: Notes on a critical theory of educational struggle. *Educational philosophy and theory,* 35(1), 5-16. https://doi.org/10.1111/1469-5812.00002

Glynos, J., & Howarth, D. (2008). Critical explanation in social science: a logics approach. *Swiss Journal of Sociology/Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie,* 34(1), 5-35.

Glynos, J., Howarth, D., Norval, A., and Speed, E. (2009) 'Discourse Analysis: Varieties and Methods', ESRC *National Centre for Research Methods*, NCRM/014,

Goatley-Soan, S., & Baldwin, J. R. (2018). Words apart: A study of attitudes toward Varieties of South African English accents in a United States employment scenario. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology,* 37(6), 692-705. https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X18800129

Gooden, M. A., & O'Doherty, A. (2015). Do You See What I See? Fostering Aspiring Leaders' Racial Awareness. *Urban Education*, 50(2), 225–255. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085914534273

Grant, P. R. (2007). Sustaining a strong cultural and national identity: The acculturation of immigrants and second-generation Canadians of Asian and African descent. *Journal of International Migration and Integration,* 8, 89-116. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-007-0003-2

Greaves, R., Kelestyn, B., Blackburn, R. A., & Kitson, R. R. (2021). The Black student experience: comparing STEM undergraduate student experiences at higher education institutions of varying student demographic. *Journal of Chemical Education*, 99(1), 56-70 https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.1c00402

Grier-Reed, T. (2013). The African American student network: An informal networking group as a therapeutic intervention for Black college students on a predominantly White campus. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 39(2), 169-184. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798413478696

Griffin, K. A., Cunningham, E. L., & George Mwangi, C. A. (2016). Defining diversity: Ethnic differences in Black students' perceptions of racial climate. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education,* 9(1), 34.

Griffith, A. N., Hurd, N. M., & Hussain, S. B. (2019). "I didn't come to school for this": A qualitative examination of experiences with race-related stressors and coping responses among Black students attending a predominantly White

institution. *Journal of adolescent research*, 34(2), 115-139. https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558417742983

Guerra, P. L., & Nelson, S. W. (2007). Cultural proficiency. *Journal of Staff Development,* 28(3), 59-60.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field methods,* 18(1), 59-82 .https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903

Guest, G., Namey, E., & Chen, M. (2020). A simple method to assess and report thematic saturation in qualitative research. PloS one, 15(5), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0232076

Guiffrida, D., Boxell, O., Hamell, S., Ponicsan, I., & Akinsete,R. (2018). Supporting Black British university students, part one: Understanding students' experiences with peers and academic staff, 6 (1), 4-11

Guilbault, M (2016). Students as customers in higher education: reframing the debate, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education,* (26)2, 132-142, DOI: 10.1080/08841241.2016.1245234

Hahn, F. T., Bush, A. A., Zhang, K., Patel, A., Lewis, K., Jackson, A., & McLaughlin, J. E. (2021). Exploring the career engagement, interests, and goals of pharmacy students identifying as underrepresented racial minorities. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education,* 85(4), 8365. https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe8365

Hama, S. R., Benediktsson, A. I., Hansen, B., Jonsdottir, K. L. S., & Ragnarsdóttir, H. (2020). Formal and informal support at Icelandic universities: experiences of staff members and immigrant students. Tímarit um uppeldi og menntun, 29(1), 45-64.

Harkin, B., Paltoglou, A. E., Tariq, K., Watkin, M., Ashfaq, S., Yates, A., & Jacobs, C. (2022). Student experiences of assessment and feedback in the National Student Survey: an analysis of student written responses with pedagogical implications. *International Journal of Management and Applied Research*, *9*(2), 115-139.

Harper, S. R., Patton, L. D., & Wooden, O. S. (2009). Access and equity for African American students in higher education: A critical race historical analysis of policy efforts. *The Journal of Higher Education,* 80(4), 389-414.

Harvey, L. (2022). Back to basics for student satisfaction: improving learning rather than constructing fatuous rankings. *Quality in Higher Education*, 28(3), 265-270. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538322.2022.2050477

Haslanger, S. (2014). STUDYING WHILE BLACK: Trust, Opportunity, and Disrespect. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 11(1), 109-136. doi:10.1017/S1742058X14000095

Hasson, D., & Arnetz, B. B. (2005). Validation and findings comparing VAS vs. Likert scales for psychosocial measurements*. International Electronic Journal of Health Education,* 8, 178-192.

Haywood, M. M., & Darko, A. (2021). Breaking barriers: using mentoring to transform representation, identity and marginalisation in Black higher education

students. *The Journal of Educational Innovation, Partnership and Change*, 7(1).

Hefner, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2009). Social support and mental health among college students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 79(4), 491-499. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0016918

Hendrickson, B., Rosen, D., & Aune, R. K. (2011). An analysis of friendship networks, social connectedness, homesickness, and satisfaction levels of international students. *International journal of intercultural relations*, 35(3), 281-295. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2010.08.001

Hensby, A., Adewumi, B., Twumasi, A. M., & Thomas, D. S. (2024). BAME Students' Extracurricular Belonging at University: Building Networks, Representation, and Capital. In Race, Capital, and Equity in Higher Education: Challenging Differential Academic Attainment in UK Universities, 85-113. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

HESA (2023) Where do HE students come from?, HESA. Available at: https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from#non-uk

HESA. (2023, January 31). Where do HE students come from? | https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from

HESA (2025) Who's studying in HE?: Personal characteristic. Available at https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he/characteristics

Hişmanoğlu, M., & Hişmanoğlu, S. (2008). The use of body language in foreign language learning and teaching. *Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, (19), 165-178.

Holdsworth, S., Turner, M., & Scott-Young, C. M. (2018). … Not drowning, waving. Resilience and university: A student perspective. *Studies in higher education*, 43(11), 1837-1853. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1284193

Holligan, C., & Shah, Q. (2017). Global capitalism's Trojan Horse: Consumer power and the national student survey in England. *Power and Education*, 9(2), 114-128. https://doi.org/10.1177/1757743817701159

Hommes, J., Rienties, B., de Grave, W., Bos, G., Schuwirth, L., & Scherpbier, A. (2012). Visualising the invisible: a network approach to reveal the informal social side of student learning. *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, 17, 743-757. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-012-9349-0

Horowitz, D. (1985). Ethnic Groups in Conflict. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hosein, A., & Rao, N. (2023). Selling lemons? The relationship between learning and teaching information on university programme web pages and future students' course satisfaction, *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 33:1, 124-141, DOI: 10.1080/08841241.2021.1894527

Hossain, M. S., Alam, M. K., & Ali, M. S. (2024). Phenomenological approach in the qualitative study: Data collection and saturation. *ICRRD Quality Index Research Journal*, *5*(2), 148-172. https://doi.org/10.53272/icrrd

Howell, H., Phelps, G., Croft, A. J., Kirui, D., & Gitomer, D. (2013). Cognitive interviews as a tool for investigating the validity of content knowledge for teaching assessments. *ETS Research Report Series*, *2013*(1), i-97. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2333-8504.2013.tb02326.x

Howson, C. K., & Kingsbury, M. (Eds.). (2024). Belonging and Identity in STEM Higher Education. UCL Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781800084988

Huang, C. Y., & Stormshak, E. A. (2011). A longitudinal examination of early adolescence ethnic identity trajectories. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology,* 17(3), 261-270

Hulme, M., Thomson, A., Hulme, R., & Doughty, G. (2013). Trading places: The role of agents in international student recruitment from Africa. *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 38(5), 674–689. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2013.778965

Hunter, C. D., Case, A. D., & Harvey, I. S. (2019). Black college students' sense of belonging and racial identity. International Journal of Inclusive Education, 23(9), 950-966. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1602363

Hux, K., Sanger, D., Reid, R., & Maschka, A. (1997). Discourse analysis procedures: Reliability issues. Journal of Communication Disorders, 30(2), 133-150. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0021-9924(96)00060-3

Huxtable, J. (2021). Pragmatic White Allyship for Higher Education Popular Music Academics. IASPM Journal, 11(1), 94-99. http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7596-3122

Hyams-Ssekasi, D. (2012). The transition of International Sub-Saharan African students into the UK University system with reference to a University in the North of England (Doctoral dissertation, University of Huddersfield).

Hyams-Ssekasi, D., & Caldwell, E. (2018). Should I stay or should I go? The quandary for Black-African International students studying in the UK. In C. Rose-Redwood and Rose-Redwood, R. (Eds). *International Encounters: Higher Education and the International Student Experience.* Rowman & Littlefield

Hyams-Ssekasi, D., Mushibwe, C. P., & Caldwell, E. F. (2014). International education in the United Kingdom: The challenges of the golden opportunity for Black-African students. Sage Open, 4(4), https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014562386

Ibezim, V., McKeown, M., Wainwright, J. P., & Chohan, A. (2025). Voices from Campus: A Systematic Review Exploring Black Students' Experiences in UK Higher Education. Genealogy, 9(3), 87 https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy9030087

Idemudia, E. C., & Ferguson, R. (2020). The Novel Model To Empirically Investigate The Factors That Influence Graduate GPA: Emergency Loans. *International Journal of Statistics and Economics*, *21*(1), 1-9

Ikuenobe, P. A. (2016). The communal basis for moral dignity: An African perspective. *Philosophical Papers*, *45*(3), 437-469.

Inyama, D., Williams, A., & McCauley, K. (2016). Experiences of African students in predominantly White institutions: A literature overview. Nursing research and practice, Article ID 5703015. https://doi.org/10.1155/2016/5703015

Irlbeck, E., Adams, S., Akers, C., Burris, S., & Jones, S. (2014). First Generation College Students: Motivations and Support Systems. Journal of agricultural education, 55(2), 154-166.

Islam, M. (2021). Disaggregating the BAME Degree-Awarding Gap: Understanding and Exploring the 'Asian' Student Experience. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.19843.63525

Islam, M. A., & Aldaihani, F. M. F. (2022). Justification for adopting qualitative research method, research approaches, sampling strategy, sample size, interview method, saturation, and data analysis. *Journal of International Business and Management*, *5*(1), 1-11.

Islam, M., Lowe, T., & Jones, G. (2018). A 'satisfied settling'? Investigating a sense of belonging for Muslim students in a UK small-medium Higher Education Institution. *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal*, *2*(2), 79–104.

Jacklin, A., & Le Riche, P. (2009). Reconceptualising student support: from 'support'to 'supportive'. *Studies in Higher Education,* 34(7), 735-749. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802666807

Jaswinder K. Dhillon , Mhairi McGowan & Hong Wang (2008) How effective are institutional and departmental systems of student support? Insights from an investigation into the support available to students at one English

university, Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 13:3, 281-293, DOI: 10.1080/13596740802346472

Jean-Francois, E. (2019). Exploring the perceptions of campus climate and integration strategies used by International students in a US university campus, Studies in Higher Education, 44(6), 1069-1085. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1416461

Jenny Lee & Thomas Opio (2011) Coming to America: challenges and difficulties faced by African student athletes, Sport, Education and Society, 16(5), 629-644. https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.601144

Jessop, T., and A. Williams. 2009. “Equivocal Tales About Identity, Racism and the Curriculum.” *Teaching in Higher Education,* 14 (1) 95–106. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562510802602681

John, N. M., Page, O., Martin, S. C., & Whittaker, P. (2018). Impact of peer support on student mental wellbeing: a systematic review. MedEdPublish, 7. 170 doi: 10.15694/mep.2018.0000170.1

Johnson-Bailey, J., Valentine, T. S., Cervero, R. M., & Bowles, T. A. (2008). Lean on me: The support experiences of Black graduate students. The Journal of Negro Education, 365-381.

Johnston, M. P. (2017). Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come. *Qualitative and quantitative methods in libraries*, *3*(3), 619-626.

Jones, J., & Smith, H. A. (2022). A comparative study of formal coaching and mentoring programmes in higher education. International Journal of Mentoring

and Coaching in Education, 11(2), 213-231. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-03-2021-0054

Jones, R. (2017). The student experience of undergraduate students: towards a conceptual framework. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *42*(8), 1040–1054. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1349882

Jorgensen, M. W., & Phillips, L. (2002). Discourse analysis as theory and method. London: Sage,

Kandiko Howson, C., & Buckley, A. (2020). Quantifying learning: Measuring student outcomes in higher education in England. *Politics and Governance*, *8*(2), 6-14. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i2.2564

Kandiko Howson, C., & Matos, F. (2021). Student surveys: Measuring the relationship between satisfaction and engagement. *Education Sciences*, *11*(6), 297. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11060297

Kaur, S. (2016). Student support services in higher education: A student perspective. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *3*(3), 126-132., DIP: 18.01.166/20160303

Kauser, S., Yaqoob, S., Cook, A., O'Hara, M., Mantzios, M., & Egan, H. (2021). Learning from the experiences of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) university students who withdraw from their undergraduate degree. *SN Social Sciences*, *1*(5), 121. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-021-00115-8

Kennedy-Macfoy, M., & Lewis, G. (2014). Race and anti-race in Europe. European *Journal of Women's Studies*, 21(1), 3-8. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506813511883

Kerry Audin , John Davy & Michael Barkham (2003) University quality of life and learning (UNIQoLL): An approach to student well-being, satisfaction and institutional change, Journal of Further and Higher Education, 27:4, 365-382, DOI: 10.1080/0309877032000128073

Keswell, M. (2010). Education and racial inequality in post-apartheid South Africa. In Attewell, P. and Newman K.S. (Eds) *Growing gaps: Educational inequality around the world*, 82-110. Oxford University Press

Khunti, K., Routen, A., Pareek, M., Treweek, S., & Platt, L. (2020). The language of ethnicity. BMJ, 371. DOI: 10.1136/bmj.m4493

Kleider-Offutt, H. M., Bond, A. D., & Hegerty, S. E. (2017). Black stereotypical features: When a face type can get you in trouble. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(1), 28-33. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721416667916

Klink, J. L., Byars-Winston, A., & Bakken, L. L. (2008). Coping efficacy and perceived family support: potential factors for reducing stress in premedical students. *Medical education,* 42(6), 572-579. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2923.2008.03091.x

Koutsouris, G., Mountford-Zimdars, A., & Dingwall, K. (2021). The 'ideal' higher education student: understanding the hidden curriculum to enable institutional

change. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *26*(2), 131-147. https://doi.org/10.1080/13596748.2021.1909921

Kruse, S. D., Rakha, S., & Calderone, S. (2018). Developing cultural competency in higher education: An agenda for practice. *Teaching in Higher Education*, *23*(6), 733-750. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2017.1414790

Lakshman, M., Sinha, L., Biswas, M., Charles, M., & Arora, N. K. (2000). Quantitative vs qualitative research methods. *The Indian Journal of Pediatrics,* 67(5), 369-377. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02820690

Langan, A. M., & Harris, W. E. (2019). National student survey metrics: where is the room for improvement?. *Higher Education*, 78(6), 1075-1089. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00389-1

Langan, A. M., & Harris, W. E. (2024). Metrics of student dissatisfaction and disagreement: longitudinal explorations of a national survey instrument. *Higher Education*, *87*(2), 249-269. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01004-0

Laufer, M., & Gorup, M. (2019). The invisible others: Stories of international doctoral student dropout. *Higher Education,* 78(1), 165-181. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0337-z

Laux, R. (2019) 50 years of collecting ethnicity data, History of government. GOV.UK. Available at: https://history.blog.gov.uk/2019/03/07/50-years-of-collecting-ethnicity-data/

Lee, J & Opio, T (2011) Coming to America: challenges and difficulties faced by African student athletes. *Sport, Education and Society,* 16(5), 629-644.https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2011.601144

Legard, R., Keegan, J., & Ward, K. (2003). In-depth interviews. In Ritchie, J and Lewis, J (eds) *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*. London, SAGE Publications, 138-169

Lewis, E. L., & Hunt, B. (2019). High expectations: Increasing outcomes for Black students in urban schools. *Urban Education Research & Policy Annuals*, 6(2). https://doi.org/10.55370/uerpa.v6i2.893

Lewis, K. R., & Shah, P. P. (2021). Black students' narratives of diversity and inclusion initiatives and the campus racial climate: An interest-convergence analysis. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 14(2), 189–202. https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000147

Li, M., & Campbell, J. (2009). Accessing employment: Challenges faced by non-native English-speaking professional migrants. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal,* 18(3), 371-395. https://doi.org/10.1177/011719680901800303

Li, Y. (2018). Unequal returns: higher education and access to the salariat by ethnic groups in the UK. In Arday, J and Mirza, H.S. (Eds) Dismantling race in higher education: Racism, Whiteness and decolonising the academy, London: Palgrave Macmillan. 103-124

Lillyman, S., & Bennett, C. (2014). Providing a positive learning experience for International students studying at UK universities: A literature review. *Journal*

of Research in International Education, 13(1), 63-75. https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240914529859

Lindsey, D. B., & Lindsey, R. B. (2016). Build cultural proficiency to ensure equity. *Journal of Staff Development*, 37(1), 50-56.

Livingston, V., Bost, A., & Copeland, A. (2022). Exploring Black students' mental health characteristics by field of academic study utilizing a critical race lens. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 32(6), 738-753 https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2021.1956394

Loader, Brian D., Ariadne Vromen, Michael A. Xenos, Holly Steel, and Samuel Burgum. "Campus politics, student societies and social media." The Sociological Review 63, no. 4 (2015): 820-839. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12220

Longhurst, R. (2003). Semi-structured interviews and focus groups. In N. Clifford, M. Cope, T. Gillespie, and S. French (Eds), *Key methods in geography*, (3rd ed), pp. 143-156. Sage Publications.

Lowe, T. (Ed.). (2023). Advancing Student Engagement in Higher Education: Reflection, Critique and Challenge. Taylor & Francis.

MacDonnell, J., & Bisel, A. (2021). Identifying and addressing differential Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student experiences at a post-1992 institution. *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning*, 23(3), 9-36. https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.23.3.9

MacKay, J. R., Hughes, K., Marzetti, H., Lent, N., & Rhind, S. M. (2019). Using National Student Survey (NSS) qualitative data and social identity theory to

explore students' experiences of assessment and feedback. *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 4(1), 315-330. https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2019.1601500

Madge, C., Raghuram, P., & Noxolo, P. (2009). Engaged pedagogy and responsibility: A postcolonial analysis of international students. *Geoforum,* 40(1), 34-45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2008.01.008

Mahmud, A., & Gagnon, J. (2020). Racial disparities in student outcomes in British higher education: examining Mindsets and bias. *Teaching in Higher Education,* 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2020.1796619

Mannay, D., Ward, M.R.M. (2022). The Coffee Club: An Initiative to Support Mature and Non-Traditional Higher Education Students in Wales. In: Crimmins, G. (Eds) *Strategies for Supporting Inclusion and Diversity in the Academy*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04174-7_12

Manohar, N., Liamputtong, P., Bhole, S., & Arora, A. (2017). Researcher positionality in cross-cultural and sensitive research. *Handbook of research methods in health social sciences,* 1-15.

Manyika, S. (2001). Negotiating identities: African students in British and American universities. Dissertation Abstracts International Section A: Humanities and Social Sciences, 62(1-A), 97.

Marangell, S., Arkoudis, S., & Baik, C. (2018). Developing a host culture for international students: What does it take. *Journal of International Students,* 8(3), 1440-1458.

Marcus, G., Gross, S., & Seefeldt, C. (1991). Black and White Students' Perceptions of Teacher Treatment. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 84(6), 363–367. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.1991.9941817

Maringe F., Carter S. (2007). International students' motivations for studying in UK HE: Insights into the choice and decision making of African students. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 21, 459-475. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513540710780000

Marshall, C. A. (2016). Barriers to accessing higher education. In *Widening participation, higher education and non-traditional students: Supporting transitions through foundation programmes* (pp. 1-18). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Marshall, S., Zhou, M., Gervan, T., & Wiebe, S. (2012). Sense of belonging and first-year academic literacy. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, *43*(3), 116-142.

Martirosyan, N. M., Hwang, E., & Wanjohi, R. (2015). Impact of English proficiency on academic performance of international students. Journal of International Students, 5(1), 60-71.

Maskeen, S., Matthews, J., Smith, D. M., Stain, H. J., & Webster, Lisa. A. D. (2021). Higher education as the pathway to personal and community success for Pakistani and Bangladeshi people: A systematic review. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, *27*(6), 853–874. https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2021.1997976

Maundeni, T. (2001). The Role of Social Networks in the Adjustment of African Students to British Society: Students' perceptions. *Race Ethnicity and Education,* 4(3), 253–276 https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320120073576

Mawere, M., & Van Stam, G. (2016). Chapter Eleven, Ubuntu/Unhu as Communal Love: Critical Reflections on the Sociology of Ubuntu and Communal Life in sub-Saharan Africa. In Mawere, M and Marongwe, M (Eds) . *Violence, politics and conflict management in Africa: Envisioning transformation, peace and unity in the twenty-first century,* 287-304. Langaa RPCIG

McCann, T. V., Renzaho, A., Mugavin, J., & Lubman, D. I. (2018). Stigma of mental illness and substance misuse in sub-Saharan African migrants: A qualitative study. International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, 27(3), 956-965. https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12401

McClain, S., & Cokley, K. (2016). Academic disidentification in Black college students: The role of teacher trust and gender. Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology, 23(1), 125-133.

McDuff, N., Tatam, J., Beacock, O., & Ross, F. (2018). Closing the attainment gap for students from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds through institutional change. Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning, 20(1), 79-101. https://doi.org/10.5456/WPLL.20.1.79

McFarlane, K. J. (2016). Tutoring the tutors: Supporting effective personal tutoring. Active Learning in Higher Education, 17(1), 77-88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787415616720

Mead, S., Hilton, D., & Curtis, L. (2001). Peer support: a theoretical perspective. Psychiatric rehabilitation journal, 25(2), 134.

Memon, A., Taylor, K., Mohebati, L. M., Sundin, J., Cooper, M., Scanlon, T., & De Visser, R. (2016). Perceived barriers to accessing mental health services among Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities: a qualitative study in Southeast England. BMJ open, 6(11), e012337. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-012337

Miles, S., & Leinster, S. J. (2009). Comparing staff and student perceptions of the student experience at a new medical school. Medical Teacher, 31(6), 539–546. https://doi.org/10.1080/01421590802139732

Mimirinis, M., Ventouris, A., & Wright, E. (2024). Variation in Black students' conceptions of academic support. British Educational Research Journal, 50(1), 241-259. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3921

Moira Hulme, Alex Thomson, Rob Hulme & Guy Doughty (2014) Trading places: The role of agents in international student recruitment from Africa, *Journal of Further and Higher Education,* 38(5), 674-689 https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2013.778965

Morgan, M. (2012). The evolution of student services in the UK. Perspectives: Policy and practice in higher education, 16(3), 77-84. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603108.2011.652990

Morgan, M., Butler, M., Sinclair, J., Gonsalvez, C., & Thota, N. (2018, July). Contrasting CS student and academic perspectives and experiences of student engagement. In *Proceedings Companion of the 23rd Annual ACM*

Conference on Innovation and Technology in Computer Science Education. pp. 1-35 https://doi.org/10.1145/3293881.3295777

Morosanu, L., Handley, K., & O'Donovan, B. (2010). Seeking support: researching first-year students' experiences of coping with academic life. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *29*(6), 665-678. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2010.487200

Morris, J. and Hobson, L. (2024) *Nigerian students 'make up 75%' of Thornaby Charity's clients*, *BBC News*. Available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cljjwg5dw34o

Morrison, J., Merrick, B., Higgs, S., & Le Métais, J. (2005). Researching the performance of International students in the UK. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(3), 327-337. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500095762

Morrison, N., Machado, M., & Blackburn, C. (2019). Student perspectives on barriers to performance for Black and minority ethnic graduate-entry medical students: a qualitative study in a West Midlands medical school. *BMJ open*, *9*(11), e032493. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2019-032493

Morse, J. M. (1994). Designing funded qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 220–235). Sage Publications, Inc.

Moskal, M. (2017). International students pathways between open and closed borders: Towards a multi-scalar approach to educational mobility and labour market outcomes. *International Migration*, *55*(3), 126-138. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12301

Mountford-Zimdars, A., & Moore, J. (2024). Addressing awarding gaps through assessment design. In *Research handbook on innovations in assessment and feedback in higher education*. 253-277 Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800881600.00022

Muijs, D., & Bokhove, C. (2017). Postgraduate student satisfaction: A multilevel analysis of PTES data. *British Educational Research Journal*, *43*(5), 904-930. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3294

Munro, L. (2011). 'Go boldly, dream large!': The challenges confronting non-traditional students at university. *Australian Journal of Education*, 55(2), 115-131. https://doi.org/10.1177/000494411105500203

Murray, Ó. M. (2025). University Audit Cultures and Feminist Praxis. Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press. https://doi.org/10.51952/9781529214345

Mushonga, D. R., & Henneberger, A. K. (2020). Protective factors associated with positive mental health in traditional and nontraditional Black students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, *90*(1), 147.

Mwangi, C. A. G. (2016). Exploring sense of belonging among Black International students at an HBCU. *Journal of International Students*, *6*(4), 1015-1037.

Mwaura, John N. (2008). "Non-traditional Age Black African International Students' Experiences: Phenomenological Heuristic Inquiry," *Adult Education Research Conference.* https://newprairiepress.org/ aerc/2008/papers/44

Nagel, J. (1994). Constructing ethnicity: Creating and recreating ethnic identity and culture. *Social problems*, *41*(1), 152-176. https://doi.org/10.2307/3096847

Nardi, P. M. (2018). *Doing survey research: A guide to quantitative methods*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315172231

National Student Survey (n.d.). FAQs. Accessed on November 7, 2025. Available at https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/faqs/

Natow, R. S. (2019). The use of triangulation in qualitative studies employing elite interviews. *Qualitative research*, *20*(2), 160-173. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794119830077

Naylor, R., Dollinger, M., Mahat, M., & Khawaja, M. (2020). Students as customers versus as active agents: Conceptualising the student role in governance and quality assurance. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *40*(5), 1026-1039. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1792850

Nelson, S. W., & Guerra, P. L. (2010). Eliminate inequities to transform the college prep process in elementary school. *The Learning Professional*, 31(3), 63.

Neves, J. (2023) *Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2023: sector results report.* Advance HE. https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/advance-he/Postgraduate%20Research%20Experience%20Survey%202023%20-%20sector%20results%20report%20%281%29_1700478160.pdf

Nguyen, D. J., & Herron, A. (2021). Keeping up with the Joneses or feeling priced out?: Exploring how low-income students' financial position shapes sense of belonging. Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, 14(3), 429–440.

Nulty, D. D. (2008). The adequacy of response rates to online and paper surveys: what can be done?. *Assessment & evaluation in higher education*, *33*(3), 301-314. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930701293231

NUS UK (n.d.) *About*, *NUS UK*. Available at: https://www.nus.org.uk/about (Accessed: April 16, 2023).

Nwosu, P. O. (2009). Understanding Africans' conceptualizations of intercultural competence In Deardorff, D.K (Eds), The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence,158-178. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Nyabiti, R. (2020). *Challenges Facing African International studentsin US Community Colleges* (Doctoral dissertation, National American University).

Office for National Statistics, 2011. *Ethnic Group by Religion, 2011 Census.* [online]. [Accessed 27 March 2023]. Available from https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/DC2201EW/view/2092957703?rows=c_ethpuk11&cols=c_relpuk11

Office for Students (2024). *The National Student Survey* https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/650ac66a-f36c-45a4-a26e-3f577b8708eb/annex-a-nss-2024-full-questionnaire.pdf

Office for Students (2025) *National Student Survey – NSS.* https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/student-choice-and-flexible-learning/national-student-survey-nss/

Office for Students (2024) *National Student Survey NSS* https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/650ac66a-f36c-45a4-a26e-3f577b8708eb/annex-a-nss-2024-full-questionnaire.pdf

Office for Students (OfS) (2022) *Access and participation resources. Findings from the data: sector summary dashboard*, https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/978ffe7f-633a-464c-8ce9-9b7ac4a4d734/access-and-participation-data-findings-from-the-data-v2.pdf/

Ohito, E. O., Lyiscott, J., Green, K. L., & Wilcox, S. E. (2021). This moment is the curriculum: Equity, inclusion, and collectivist critical curriculum mapping for study abroad programs in the COVID-19 era. *Journal of Experiential Education,* 44(1), 10-30. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825920979652

Ohuocha, C. (2023) Nigeria's inflation dips in December after 10 months of increases, Reuters. Thomson Reuters. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/nigeria-annual-inflation-2134-december-stats-office-2023-01-16/

Okusolubo, G. S. (2018). Academic and social challenges faced by African International students in collegiate institutions in America. *International Journal of Economics & Management Sciences,* 7(2), 1-8. DOI: 10.4172/2162-6359.1000514

Okyere, A. A., Orhierhor, M., Nartey, A., Nuhu, J., Joseph, A. A., Koboti, A., ... & Nicol, C. (2024). Identities in Transition from Africa to Canada: Becoming Students. *The Canadian Journal of Action Research*, 24(2), 81-111. https://doi.org/10.33524/cjar.v24i2.665

Olaniyan, F. V. (2021). Paying the widening participation penalty: Racial and ethnic minority students and mental health in British universities. *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, *21*(1), 761-783. https://doi.org/10.1111/asap.12242

Olaniyan, F. V., & Hayes, G. (2022). Just ethnic matching? Racial and ethnic minority students and culturally appropriate mental health provision at British universities. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, *17*(1), https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2022.2117444

Osbourne, L., Amer, A., Blackwood, L., & Barnett, J. (2023). ‘I’m Going Home to Breathe and I’m Coming Back Here to Just Hold My Head Above the Water’: Black Students’ Strategies for Navigating a Predominantly White UK University. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 11(2), 501-515. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.8581

Osbourne, L., Barnett, J., & Blackwood, L. (2023). Black students' experiences of “acceptable” racism at a UK university. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 33(1), 43-55. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2637

Otieno, K. O. (2010). Teaching/learning resources and academic performance in mathematics in secondary schools in Bondo District of Kenya. *Asian social science*, *6*(12), 126.

Owusu-Kwarteng, L. (2021). ‘Studying in this England is wahala (trouble)’: analysing the experiences of West African students in a UK higher education institution. *Studies in Higher Education*, *46*(11), 2405-2416. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1723528

Padilla-Meléndez, A., Del Aguila-Obra, A. R., Lockett, N., & Fuster, E. (2020). Entrepreneurial universities and sustainable development. The network bricolage process of academic entrepreneurs. *Sustainability*, *12*(4), 1403. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12041403

Park, J. Z. (2008). Second-generation Asian American pan-ethnic identity: Pluralized meanings of a racial label. *Sociological Perspectives*, *51*(3), 541-561. https://doi.org/10.1525/sop.2008.51.3.541

Parutis, V and Buler, M (n.d.) Are transnationals 'real' agents of change? An exploration of how returnees' transnationalism relates to their social remitting (unpublished manuscript)

Parutis, V and Buler, M (n.d.) Chapter 5: Emotions on the Move – Returning 'home' (?) in the Family Life Course in Migration Perspective of Return Migrants and Their Family Members in Poland and Lithuania (unpublished manuscript)

Parutis, V and Buler, M (2023) 'Emotions on the Move: Returning Home(?) in the Family Life Course from the Migration Perspectives of Return Migrants and their Family Members in Poland and Lithuania.' In V. Čiubrinskas et al (Eds) *Returning-Remitting-Receiving: Social remittances of transnational (re)migrants to Croatia, Lithuania and Poland.* Pp. 115-146). Zuerich: Litverlag.

Patel, K., & Heginbotham, C. (2007). Institutional racism in mental health services does not imply racism in individual psychiatrists: Commentary on … Institutional racism in psychiatry. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 31(10), 367-368. https://doi.org/10.1192/pb.bp.107.017137

Patton, L. D. (2016). Disrupting postsecondary prose: Toward a critical race theory of higher education. *Urban Education*, *51*(3), 315-342. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085915602542

Peat, M., Dalziel, J., & Grant, A. M. (2001). Enhancing the First Year Student Experience by Facilitating the Development of Peer Networks through a One-day Workshop. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 20(2), 199–215. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360123888

Pedler, M. L., Willis, R., & Nieuwoudt, J. E. (2022). A sense of belonging at university: Student retention, motivation and enjoyment. *Journal of further and Higher Education*, 46(3), 397-408. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2021.1955844

Perez, H. L., & Sabato, E. (2023). Student support services: Perceptions and recommendations for the next generation. *Journal of Dental Education*, 87(10), 1419-1426. https://doi.org/10.1002/jdd.13305

Petrie, K., & Keohane, N. (2019). *Building on success*. Increasing higher education retention in London, The Social Market Foundation

Phinney, J. S. (1990). Ethnic identity in adolescents and adults: review of research. *Psychological bulletin*, *108*(3), 499.

Phinney, J. S. (1991). Ethnic identity and self-esteem: A review and integration. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 13*(2), 193-208. https://doi.org/10.1177/07399863910132005

Phinney, J. S., & Ong, A. D. (2007). Conceptualization and measurement of ethnic identity: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *54*(3), 271.

Phinney, J. S., & Onwughalu, M. (1996). Racial identity and perception of American ideals among African American and African students in the United States. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *20*(2), 127-140. https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(95)00040-2

Pickford, R. (2013). Leadership of the National Student Survey for enhancement. *Quality Assurance in Education*, *21*(4), 344-358. https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-04-2013-0018

Pitam, David. “Black Lives Matter: Students 'Need Support' over George Floyd Death.” BBC News [online]. Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-53024298. [Accessed on 17 June 2020].

Pollard, E., J. Vanderlayden, K. Alexander, H. Borkin, and J. O’Mahony. (2021). *Student mental health and wellbeing*. Department for Education. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Emma-Pollard-2/publication/352855766_Student_mental_health_and_wellbeing_insights_from_higher_education_providers_and_sector_experts/links/60dcba5e299bf1ea9ed28cfd/Student-mental-health-and-wellbeing-insights-from-higher-education-providers-and-sector-experts.pdf

Poloma, A.W. and Szelényi, K., (2019). Coloniality of knowledge, hybridisation, and indigenous survival: exploring transnational higher education development in Africa from the 1920s to the 1960s. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and*

International Education, 49(4), 635-653. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2018.1445962

Pomales, J., Claiborn, C. D., & LaFromboise, T. D. (1986). Effects of Black students' racial identity on perceptions of White counselors varying in cultural sensitivity. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 33(1), 57-61

Portes, A., and Rumbaut, R. (2001). Legacies: The story of the immigrant second generation. Berkeley, California: University of California Press

Pötschulat, M., Moran, M., & Jones, P. (2020). ‘The student experience’ and the remaking of contemporary studenthood: A critical intervention. *The Sociological Review*. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026120946677

Powell, D. R. (2018). Race, African Americans, and psychoanalysis: Collective silence in the therapeutic situation. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, *66*(6), 1021-1049. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003065118818447

Pruitt, F. J. (1978). The adaptation of African students to American society. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *2*(1), 90-118. https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(78)90030-5

Pryor, J., & Crossouard, B. (2010). Challenging formative assessment: disciplinary spaces and identities. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *35*(3), 265-276. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930903512891

Quinn, N., Wilson, A., MacIntyre, G., & Tinklin, T. (2009). ‘People look at you differently’: students’ experience of mental health support within Higher

Education. British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 37(4), 405–418. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069880903161385

Quinn, S. (2024) Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2024. Advance HE. Accessed on 2 November 2025. Available at https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/advance-he/Postgraduate_Taught_Experience_Survey_2024_1732546018.pdf

Raaper, R., Brown, C., & Llewellyn, A. (2022) Student support as social network: exploring non-traditional student experiences of academic and wellbeing support during the Covid-19 pandemic, Educational Review, 74:3, 402-421, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2021.1965960

Rabiee, F. (2004). Focus-group interview and data analysis. *Proceedings of the nutrition society*, *63*(4), 655-660. https://doi.org/10.1079/PNS2004399

Rabionet, S. E. (2009). How I Learned to Design and Conduct Semi-structured Interviews: An Ongoing and Continuous Journey. *The Qualitative Report*, *14*(3), 203-206. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2009.2850

Raby, A. (2020). Student voice in personal tutoring. *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 5, p. 120). Frontiers Media SA. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00120

Rafik Hama, S., Benediktsson, A. I., Hansen, B., Jonsdottir, K. L. S., & Ragnarsdottir, H. (2020). Formal and informal support at Icelandic universities: experiences of staff members and immigrant students. https://doi.org/10.24270/tuuom.2020.29.3

Rahman, S. A., & Alwi, A. (2018). The inclusion of cultural diversity in higher education curriculum design. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research,* 5(2), 87-94. https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.479054

Ramsden, P. (2008). *The future of higher education: Teaching and the student experience* (pp. 1-21). York, UK: Higher Education Academy.

Rana, K. S., Bashir, A., Begum, F., & Bartlett, H. (2022, May). Bridging the BAME attainment gap: Student and staff perspectives on tackling academic bias. *Frontiers in Education* (Vol. 7, p. 868349). Frontiers Media SA. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2022.868349

Reddie, A. G. (2020). Racial justice for the Windrush generation in Great Britain. *The Ecumenical Review*, 72(1), 73-86. https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12488

Rehman, A. U., Bhuttah, T. M., & You, X. (2020). Linking burnout to psychological well-being: The mediating role of social support and learning motivation. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 545-554. https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S250961

Reid, A. (2012). Under-use of migrants' employment skills linked to poorer mental health. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*, *36*(2), 120-125. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-6405.2012.00842.x

Reuters (2023) *Ghana inflation slows for second month in February*, *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters. Available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ghana-inflation-slows-second-month-february-2023-03-15/

Reyes, H. L., & Duran, A. (2021). Higher education scholars challenging deficit thinking: An analysis of research informed by community cultural

wealth. *Journal of Critical Scholarship on Higher Education and Student Affairs*, *6*(1), 6-21

Richards, E. (2023). Exploring the factors influencing young adult carer students' engagement with targeted support in Higher Education. *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education*, (28). 1-24

Richardson, J. T. (2015). The under-attainment of ethnic minority students in UK higher education: what we know and what we don't know. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *39*(2), 278-291. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2013.858680

Richardson, J. T. (2015). The under-attainment of ethnic minority students in UK higher education: what we know and what we don't know. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *39*(2), 278-291. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2013.858680

Ritchie, A. F. (2022). *Predictors of student satisfaction: a mixed-methods investigation in UK higher education* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Central Lancashire).

Rizvi, F., Lingard, B., & Lavia, J. (2006). Postcolonialism and education: Negotiating a contested terrain. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, *14*(3), 249-262. https://doi.org/10.1080/14681360600891852

Ro, H. K., Campbell-Jacobs, B., Broido, E. M., Hanasono, L. K., O'Neil, D. A., Yacobucci, M. M., & Root, K. V. (2024). Faculty allyship: Differences by gender, race, and rank at a single US University. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 31(3), 768-796. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12988

Robbins, D. (1999). Questionnaire construction. *Public Administration and Public Policy*, *71*, 87-98.

Robinson, L. (2009). Cultural identity and acculturation preferences among South Asian adolescents in Britain: An exploratory study. *Children & Society*, *23*(6), 442-454. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1099-0860.2008.00179.x

Robinson, L., and Sykes, A (2014) Listening to Students' Views on NSS Data for Quality Enhancement, *Health and Social Care Education*, 3:1, 35-40, DOI: 10.11120/ hsce.2013.00035

Rodgers, T. (2013). Should high non-completion rates amongst ethnic minority students be seen as an ethnicity issue? Evidence from a case study of a student cohort from a British University. *Higher Education* 66, 535–550 https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9620-1

Rogers, S.,(2025). What's the NSS? *The Complete University Guide.* *https://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/student-advice/blog/what-is-nss*

Rollock, N (2021) "I Would Have Become Wallpaper Had Racism Had Its Way": Black Female Professors, Racial Battle Fatigue, and Strategies for Surviving Higher Education, *Peabody Journal of Education,* 96(2), 206-217

Rowley, J. (2012). Conducting research interviews. *Management research review,* 35(3/4), 260-271.

Sabri, D. (2011). What's wrong with 'the student experience'?, Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 32(5), 657-667. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2011.620750

Sabri, D. (2013). Student Evaluations of Teaching as “Fact-Totems”: The Case of the UK National Student Survey. Sociological Research Online, 18(4), 148–157. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3136

Salmon, M. (2024). The Migration Advisory Committee thinks about skills and long term net migration. *Wonkhe*. https://wonkhe.com/blogs/home-pgt-numbers-are-falling-and-we-dont-really-know-why/

Sam, D. L. (2001). Satisfaction with life among international students: An exploratory study. *Social indicators research*, *53*, 315-337. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:10071086145

Saraisky, N. G. (2016). Analyzing Public Discourse: Using Media Content Analysis to Understand the Policy Process. *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, *18*(1), 26-41.

Saran, R. (2015). *Navigating model minority stereotypes: Asian Indian youth in South Asian diaspora*. Routledge https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315776415

Sargeant, A. M. (2016). Partnerships for success: Working together in higher education for student success. *Collaborate: Libraries in Learning Innovation*, *1*(1).

Saw, G. K. (2020). Leveraging social capital to broaden participation in STEM. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *7*(1), 35-43. https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732219895997

Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. (2008). Loneliness and international students: An Australian study. *Journal of studies in international education*, 12(2), 148-180. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315307299699

Scott, C., Safdar, S., Trilokekar, R. D., & El Masri, A. (2015). International studentsas 'ideal immigrants' in Canada: A disconnect between policy makers' assumptions and the lived experiences of international students. *Comparative and International Education*, *43*(3). https://doi.org/10.5206/cie-eci.v43i3.9261

Sekhon, Y. K., & Szmigin, I. (2011). Acculturation and identity: Insights from second-generation Indian Punjabis. *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, *14*(1), 79-98. https://doi.org/10.1080/10253860903562171

Seuwou, P., Dodzo, N., Osho, Y. I., Ajaefobi, W., Ngwana, T. A., Sarwar, D. & Daye, M. (2022). Widening Participation in Higher Education: Exploring the Factors that Impact on Black Asian and Minority Ethnic students attainment at a Post-1992 University in England. In *EDULEARN22 Proceedings* (pp. 2720-2729). IATED. 10.21125/edulearn.2022.0700

Seuwou, P., Sarwar, D., & Pilkington, A. (2023). The Lived Experience of Black International Students at a Post-1992 University in England: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Academic Resilience. In *INTED2023 Proceedings,* 1345-1354. IATED. 10.21125/inted.2023.0388

Singaravelu, H. D., White, L. J., & Bringaze, T. B. (2005). Factors influencing international students' career choice: A comparative study. *Journal of Career Development*, 32(1), 46-59. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845305277043

Singh, G. (2011). Black and minority ethnic (BME) students' participation in higher education: Improving retention and success. A synthesis of research evidence. *Higher Education Academy*. Available at https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/bme_synthesis_final_1568036653.pdf.(accessed

Singh, G. (2011). Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Students' Participation in Higher Education: Improving Retention and Success. York: *The Higher Education Academy*. Online at www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/inclusion/Ethnicity/BME_synthesis

Slight, C. (2020). Student Experience Surveys, UK. In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Higher Education* (pp. 1430-1433). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Smith, E. (2008). Pitfalls and promises: The use of secondary data analysis in educational research. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, *56*(3), 323-339. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2008.00405.x

Smith, E., & Smith Jr, J. (2008). *Using secondary data in educational and social research*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Smith, S. (2020). What about me? International student attainment in UK higher education. *Higher Education Policy Institute* [online]. Available at https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/02/20/what-about-me-international-student-attainment-in-uk-higher-education/.

Smith, S. S., & Moore, M. R. (2000). Intraracial diversity and relations among African-Americans: Closeness among Black students at a predominantly White university. *American Journal of Sociology*, 106(1), 1-39.

Sofroniou, A., Premnath, B., & Poutos, K. (2020). Capturing student satisfaction: A case study on the national student survey results to identify the needs of students in stem related courses for a better learning experience. *Education Sciences*, *10*(12), 378. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci10120378

Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate: The Experiences of African American College Students. *The Journal of Negro Education,* 69(1/2), 60–73.

Soria, K. M., Boettcher, B., & Hallahan, K. (2022). The effects of participation in recreational activities on students' resilience and sense of belonging. *Recreational Sports Journal*, *46*(2), 184-192. https://doi.org/10.1177/15588661221125201

Sovic, S. (2009). Hi-bye friends and the herd instinct: International and Home students in the creative arts. *Higher Education*, 58, 747-761. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-009-9223-z

Stewart, K. D. (2011). *Understanding Black student perceptions of targeted student support services on a predominantly white college campus* (Doctoral dissertation, Clemson University). https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/all_dissertations/70

Stodolska, M., & Yi, J. (2003). Impacts of immigration on ethnic identity and leisure behavior of adolescent immigrants from Korea, Mexico and Poland. *Journal of Leisure research*, *35*(1), 49-79. https://doi.org/10.18666/jlr-2003-v35-i1-610

Stoll, N., Yalipende, Y., Byrom, N. C., Hatch, S. L., & Lempp, H. (2022). Mental health and mental well-being of Black students at UK universities: a review and thematic synthesis. *BMJ open*, *12*(2), e050720. doi:10.1136/ bmjopen-2021-050720

Stoll, N., Yalipende, Y., Byrom, N. C., Hatch, S. L., & Lempp, H. (2022). Mental health and mental well-being of Black students at UK universities: a review and thematic synthesis. *BMJ open*, *12*(2), e050720. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2021-050720

Student Finance England (n.d.) *Welcome to Student Finance England*. Available at: https://studentfinance.campaign.gov.uk/ (accessed 18.11.2025)

Student Loans Company (n.d.) *What we do.* Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/student-loans-company (accessed 18.11.2025)

Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: implications for clinical practice. *American psychologist*, *62*(4), 271.

Sutherland, J. A. (2011). Building an academic nation through social networks: Black immigrant men in community colleges. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *35*(3), 267-279. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2011.528665

Svendby, R. B. (2024). Inclusive Teaching in Higher Education: Challenges of Diversity in Learning Situations from the Lecturer Perspective. *Social Sciences,* 13(3), 140. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13030140

Szabo, A., Ward, C., & Jose, P. E. (2015, October 12). Uprooting Stress, Coping, and Anxiety: A Longitudinal Study of International Students*. International Journal of Stress Management*. Advance online publication

Tajfel, H. (1981). Human groups and social categories. Cambridge.

Takhar, S. (2024). The student voice: Decolonising the curriculum. *Equity in Education & Society*, *3*(2), 114-129. https://doi.org/10.1177/27526461231192671

Tannock, S (2013) When the demand for educational equality stops at the border: wealthy students, International students and the restructuring of higher education in the UK, *Journal of Education Policy,* 28(4), 449-464. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2013.764577

Taylor, G., & Ali, N. (2017). Learning and living overseas: Exploring factors that influence meaningful learning and assimilation: How international students adjust to studying in the UK from a socio-cultural perspective. *Education Sciences*, *7*(1), 35. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci7010035

Taylor, L., & Kendhi, I. X. (2021). Seeking Equality of Educational Outcomes for Black Students: A Personal Account. *Psychology of Education Review*, *45*(2), 4-16.

Tedam, P. (2014). When Failing Doesn't Matter: A Narrative Inquiry into the Social Work Practice Learning Experiences of Black African Students in England. *International Journal of Higher Education*, *3*(1), 136-145.

Tezci, E., Sezer, F., Gurgan, U., & Aktan, S. (2015). A study on social support and motivation. *The Anthropologist,* 22(2), 284-292.

Thangavelu, A., Partridge, H., Carey, K., O'Sullivan, C., & Lutvey, N. (2019). Evaluating the student experience with enrolment assistance in an integrated student support service program at the University of Southern Queensland. Student Success, 10(1), 99-114. doi: 10.5204/ssj.v10i1.1121

Thelamour, B., George Mwangi, C., & Ezeofor, I. (2019). "We need to stick together for survival": Black college students' racial identity, same-ethnic friendships, and campus connectedness. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 12(3), 266.

Thomas, L. (2020). Excellent outcomes for all students: A whole system approach to widening participation and student success in England. *Student Success*, *11*(1), 1-11. https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.579969882009185

Thomson, A., Hulme, R., Hulme, M., and Doughty, G. (2014). Perceptions of value: assessing the agent/commission model of UK higher education recruitment in Africa. *Africa Review*, *6*(2), 105-120. https://doi.org/10.1080/09744053.2014.914638

Tidwell, R and Hanassab, S (2007) New challenges for professional counsellors: The higher education international student population, *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 20:4, 313-324. https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070701573927

Tight, M. (2013). Students: Customers, Clients or Pawns?. *Higher Education Policy* 26, 291–307 https://doi.org/10.1057/hep.2013.2

Tinto, V. (2006). Research and practice of student retention: What next?. *Journal of college student retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, *8*(1), 1-19. https://doi.org/10.2190/4YNU-4TMB-22DJ-AN4W

Trahar, S., & Hyland, F (2011) Experiences and perceptions of internationalisation in higher education in the UK, Higher Education Research & Development, 30(5), 623-633 https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2011.598452

Trotter, E., & Roberts, C. A. (2006). Enhancing the early student experience. *Higher Education Research & Development*, *25*(4), 371–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360600947368

Uduma, U. O. (2014). The question of the “African” in African philosophy: in search of a criterion for the Africanness of a philosophy. *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions*, *3*(1), 127-146. https://doi.org/10.4314/ft.v3i1.

Ukpokodu, O.N. (2020). Diaspora Migrations: Brain Drain or Symbioses. In: Abidogun, J., Falola, T. (eds*) The Palgrave Handbook of African Education and Indigenous Knowledge.* Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-38277-3_37

United States Census Bureau. About the Topic of Race. Available at https://www.census.gov/topics/population/race/about.html#:~:text=OMB%20requires%20five%20minimum%20categories,Hawaiian%20or%20Other%20Pacific%20Islander.

Universities UK (UUK) and National Union of Students (NUS) (2019) Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #Closingthegap, https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.pdf

Universities UK, (2023). Supporting good practice in student accommodation: considerations for senior university leaders. Available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/supporting-good-practice-student

Uosaki, N., Ogata, H., Mouri, K., & Lkhagvasuren, E. (2015) Career Support for International Students in Japan Using Ubiquitous Learning Log System. (2015) *IEEE 15th International Conference on Advanced Learning Technologies*, Hualien, Taiwan, 78-82, doi:10.1109/ICALT.2015.19

UUK (n.d.) *Introducing UUK*, *Universities UK*. Available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/about-us/introducing-uuk

Vadeboncoeur, C., Foster, C., & Townsend, N. (2018). Challenges of research recruitment in a university setting in England. *Health Promotion International*, *33*(5), 878-886. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dax025

Van Manen, M. (2017). But is it phenomenology?. *Qualitative health research*, *27*(6), 775-779. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732317699570

Waite, L., & Cook, J. (2011). Belonging among diasporic African communities in the UK: Plurilocal homes and simultaneity of place attachments. *Emotion, Space and Society*, *4*(4), 238-248. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2010.08.001

Walker, B. W. (2022). Tackling the personal tutoring conundrum: A qualitative study on the impact of developmental support for tutors. *Active learning in higher education*, *23*(1), 65-77. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787420926007

Wallace, S., Nazroo, J., & Bécares, L. (2016). Cumulative effect of racial discrimination on the mental health of ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom. American journal of public health, 106(7), 1294-1300. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303121

Wallace, S., Nazroo, J., & Bécares, L. (2016). Cumulative effect of racial discrimination on the mental health of ethnic minorities in the United Kingdom. *American journal of public health*, *106*(7), 1294-1300. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2016.303121

Warikoo, N., & Carter, P. (2009). Cultural explanations for racial and ethnic stratification in academic achievement: A call for a new and improved theory. *Review of Educational Research,* 79(1), 366-394. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308326162

Warrener, J., & Douglas, V. (2023). Black Lives Matter in higher education: conversations about race to transform the lived experience of Black (African-

Caribbean) staff in UK universities. *Critical and radical social work*, *12*(1), 22-39. https://doi.org/10.1332/204986021X16772547243037

Watkins, D. C., & Neighbors, H. W. (2007). An initial exploration of what 'mental health' means to young Black men. *The Journal of Men's Health & Gender*, *4*(3), 271-282. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmhg.2007.06.006

Wawera A. & McCamley, A. (2020) Loneliness among International students in the UK, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(9), 1262-1274 https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1673326

Webber, M., Lynch, S., & Oluku, J. (2013). Enhancing student engagement in student experience surveys: a mixed methods study. Educational Research, 55(1), 71–86. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2013.767026

Weeks, M., & Lupfer, M. B. (2004). Complicating race: The relationship between prejudice, race, and social class categorizations. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *30*(8), 972-984.

Whittaker, R., & Broadhead, S. (2022). Disaggregating the Black student experience. In Access and widening participation in arts higher education: Practice and research (pp. 51-72). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Whittaker, R., Broadhead, S. (2022). Disaggregating the Black Student Experience. In: Broadhead, S. (eds) Access and Widening Participation in Arts Higher Education. The Arts in Higher Education. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

Wild, L., and Behar, A. (2022). *Office for Students: National Student Survey Cognitive Testing 2022.* Office for Students. Available from:

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/7661/ofs_nss-cognitive-testing-2022_full-report.pdf

Wiley, C. (2019). Standardised module evaluation surveys in UK higher education: Establishing students' perspectives. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *61*, 55-65.

Williams, C. (2007). Research Methods. *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER)*, *5*(3). https://doi.org/10.19030/jber.v5i3.2532

Williams, H. (2021). The Meaning of "Phenomenology": Qualitative and Philosophical Phenomenological Research Methods. The Qualitative Report, 26(2), 366-385. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/ 2021.4587

Williams, J., Kane, D., Sagu, S., & Smith, E. (2008). Exploring the national student survey: Assessment and feedback issues. *The Higher Education Academy, Centre for Research into Quality*.

Williams, S. N., Thakore, B. K., & McGee, R. (2017). Providing social support for underrepresented racial and ethnic minority PhD students in the biomedical sciences: a career coaching model. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 16(4), ar64. https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.17-01-0021

Williamson, J. A. (1999). In Defense of Themselves: The Black Student Struggle for Success and Recognition at Predominantly White Colleges and Universities. The Journal of Negro Education, 68(1), 92–105. https://doi.org/10.2307/2668212

Wilson, S., Hastings, C., Morris, A., Ramia, G., & Mitchell, E. (2023). International students on the edge: The precarious impacts of financial stress. *Journal of Sociology*, *59*(4), 952-974. https://doi.org/10.1177/14407833221084756

Winstone, N. E., Ajjawi, R., Dirkx, K., & Boud, D. (2022). Measuring what matters: the positioning of students in feedback processes within national student satisfaction surveys. *Studies in Higher Education*, *47*(7), 1524-1536. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2021.1916909

Wodak, R. (2008) Introduction: Discourse Studies- Important Concepts and Terms. In R. Wodak, and M. Krzyzanowski, M. (Eds) *Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences* Palgrave MACMillan

Wong, B., Elmorally, R., Copsey-Blake, M., Highwood, E., & Singarayer, J. (2021). Is race still relevant? Student perceptions and experiences of racism in higher education. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *51*(3), 359-375. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2020.1831441

Woolf, K., Cave, J., Greenhalgh, T., & Dacre, J. (2008). Ethnic stereotypes and the underachievement of UK medical students from ethnic minorities: qualitative study. *BMJ,* 337:a1220, doi: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.a1220

Wu, H., & Leung, S. O. (2017). Can Likert scales be treated as interval scales?—A simulation study. *Journal of social service research*, *43*(4), 527-532. https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2017.1329775

Yaro, I. F., & Smith, J. M. (2024). Black African Students in Predominantly White US Higher Education Institutions: Drivers Influencing Their Identification and

Commitment. *Journal of International Students*, *14*(3), 21-41. https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v14i3.5871

Yi, Y. (2009). Adolescent literacy and identity construction among 1.5 generation students: From a transnational perspective. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, *19*(1), 100-129. https://doi.org/10.1075/japc.19.1.06yi

Yorke, M. (2000). The quality of the student experience: what can institutions learn from data relating to non-completion?. *Quality in Higher education*, *6*(1), 61-75. https://doi.org/10.1080/13538320050001072

Yorke, M. (2009). 'Student experience' surveys: some methodological considerations and an empirical investigation. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 34(6), 721–739. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930802474219

Yorke, M. (2014). The development and initial use of a survey of student 'belongingness', engagement and self-confidence in UK higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41(1), 154–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2014.990415

Yu, C. ming J., Wu, L. yu, Chiao, Y. ching, & Tai, H. shia. (2005). Perceived quality, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty: the case of lexus in Taiwan. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, *16*(6), 707–719. https://doi.org/10.1080/14783360500077393

Zewolde, S. (2022). 'Race'and academic performance in international higher education: Black Africans in the UK. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education*, *14*(3a), 211-226. DOI: 10.32674/jcihe.v14i3

Zhou, Y., Jindal-Snape, D., Topping, K., & Todman, J. (2008). Theoretical models of culture shock and adaptation in international students in higher education. *Studies in higher education*, 33(1), 63-75. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070701794833

Zwolak, J. P., Zwolak, M., & Brewe, E. (2018). Educational commitment and social networking: The power of informal networks. *Physical Review Physics Education Research*, *14*(1), 010131.DOI: https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevPhysEducRes.14.010131

Zwysen, W., & Longhi, S. (2018). Employment and earning differences in the early career of ethnic minority British graduates: the importance of university career, parental background and area characteristics. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *44*(1), 154-172. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1338559