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# Protocol for a Systematic Review of the Experiences and Mental Health Outcomes of BAME Academics in Non-Traditional Higher Education

 Obohjemu Oberhiri Kennedy, PhD

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

Christian Atabong Nchindia, PhD

Faculty of Business Management, Global Banking School, University of Suffolk, Manchester Campus, United Kingdom

Charles Leyman Kachitsa, PhD

Faculty of Business Management and Enterprise, Global Banking School, Leeds Trinity University, Manchester Campus, United Kingdom

Supriya Subhadarsini Sahoo, PhD

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

Oluwadamilola Tayo, MPH

Faculty of Health, Wellbeing & Social Care, Global Banking School, Oxford Brookes University, Leeds Campus, United Kingdom

**Corresponding Author: Obohjemu Kennedy Oberhiri, PhD**

**ABSTRACT:** The experiences of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) academics in higher education institutions have garnered increasing attention due to persistent disparities and challenges faced by these groups. This protocol outlines a systematic review aimed at exploring the experiences of BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions. The review will synthesize existing literature to identify key themes, challenges, and opportunities encountered by BAME academics in these non-traditional settings. The systematic review will follow established guidelines,

including a comprehensive search strategy across multiple databases such as PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science. Inclusion criteria will focus on peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and reports that examine the experiences of BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions. Studies will be selected based on relevance, methodological rigor, and the richness of data on BAME academics' experiences. Data extraction will involve detailed coding of study characteristics, participant demographics, and key findings related to the experiences of BAME academics. Thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring patterns and themes across the selected studies. This approach will allow for a nuanced understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions. The findings from this systematic review will provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of BAME academics, highlighting areas for policy intervention and institutional support. By identifying best practices and areas needing improvement, this review aims to contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable higher education environments. The results will be disseminated through academic publications, conference presentations, and stakeholder engagement to inform future research, policy, and practice. This protocol underscores the importance of addressing the specific needs of BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions and aims to foster a more inclusive academic landscape.

**KEYWORDS:** BAME Academics, Alternative Higher Education, Systematic Review, Diversity and Inclusion, Academic Experiences.

### INTRODUCTION:

#### Problem Statement

The experiences of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) academics within higher education institutions have become a critical area of scholarly inquiry, particularly in the context of ongoing efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion. Despite numerous policy initiatives aimed at addressing racial disparities, BAME academics continue to face significant barriers that impede their career progression and overall academic experience. These challenges could be more pronounced in alternative higher education institutions, which include non-traditional and less research-intensive universities. Such institutions, while offering unique opportunities, also present distinct obstacles that warrant thorough investigation.

The literature on BAME academics consistently highlights a persistent underrepresentation in senior academic and leadership positions, reflecting broader systemic issues within higher education. Studies have shown that BAME academics face structural and cultural barriers, including institutional racism, lack of mentorship, and limited access to professional development opportunities (Arday & Mirza, 2018; Bhopal, 2020; Rana et al., 2022). These barriers not only hinder career advancement but also contribute to a sense of isolation and marginalization among BAME faculty members (Rollock, 2019; Ishaq & Hussain, 2022; Harris & Ogbonna, 2023).

Alternative higher education institutions, characterized by their diverse student populations and often innovative approaches to teaching and learning, provide a unique context for examining the experiences of BAME academics. These institutions may offer more flexible career paths and a greater emphasis on teaching excellence, yet they also grapple with resource constraints and less established research infrastructures (Smith, 2021). The intersection of these factors creates a complex environment in which BAME academics navigate their professional journeys.

The need for a systematic review of the experiences of BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions is underscored by the growing body of evidence documenting the challenges faced by these individuals. For instance, research has revealed that low priority status profiling of BAME faculty and institutionally racist structures in higher education institutions (HEIs) are key challenges facing BAME academics plotting career pathways to senior leadership roles (Felix, 2022; Tiatia-Siau, 2023; Mkwebu, 2024). Additionally, the intersection of race and leadership is further exacerbated by the structural and cultural inequalities that pervade within universities, often at the expense of ethnic minorities who are rarely afforded continuing professional development and mentoring (Arday & Wilson, 2021; Thomas & Mikel, 2021; Verma, 2022).

This systematic review protocol seeks to synthesize existing literature on the experiences of BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions, with a particular focus on identifying key themes, challenges, and opportunities. Employing a rigorous methodological approach, this review will contribute to a deeper understanding of the unique experiences of BAME academics and inform the development of targeted interventions to support their career progression and well-being. The findings will have significant implications for policy and practice, highlighting the need for inclusive and equitable academic environments that recognize and address the

specific needs of BAME faculty members.

This research protocol underscores the importance of addressing the systemic barriers faced by BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions. By exploring their experiences through a comprehensive review of the literature, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the coping mechanisms and support structures that can enhance the academic and professional lives of BAME faculty. This work will contribute to the broader discourse on diversity and inclusion in higher education, advocating for meaningful change that promotes equity and excellence for all academics.

### Objectives

**Primary Objective:** To systematically analyse and synthesize existing evidence on the experiences of BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions, with a focus on recruitment, retention, progression, job satisfaction, inclusivity, and mental health outcomes (anxiety, depression, etc).

**Secondary Objective:** To compare the experiences of BAME academics in alternative higher education providers, such as the Global Banking School (GBS), with their experiences in conventional universities, particularly in terms of career progression opportunities, job satisfaction levels, and mental health outcomes (anxiety, depression, etc).

### REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are the systemic barriers faced by BAME academics in conventional universities?
2. How do alternative higher education institutions provide inclusive and supportive environments for BAME academics?
3. How do the career progression opportunities, job satisfaction levels, and mental health outcomes (anxiety, depression, etc) of BAME academics differ between alternative and conventional higher education institutions?
4. What are the unique challenges and opportunities for BAME academics in institutions like GBS?

### METHODS

#### Main Outcomes

The main outcomes are as follows:

1. **Career Progression Opportunities:**
  - Definition: The availability and accessibility of opportunities for BAME academics to advance in their careers within higher education institutions.
  - Measurement: This outcome will be measured through qualitative data from interviews, surveys,

and case studies that report on promotion rates, access to leadership roles, and professional development opportunities.

- Timing: Measurements will be taken from studies that report on career progression over various time periods, including longitudinal studies where available.
2. **Job Satisfaction Levels:**
  - Definition: The overall contentment and satisfaction of BAME academics with their job roles, responsibilities, and work environment.
  - Measurement: This outcome will be assessed using standardized job satisfaction scales, qualitative interviews, and surveys that report on factors such as work-life balance, recognition, and support from colleagues and administration.
  - Timing: Measurements will be taken from cross-sectional and longitudinal studies that provide data on job satisfaction at different career stages.
3. **Health Outcomes:**
  - Definition: The physical and mental health status of BAME academics, including stress levels, burnout, and overall well-being.
  - Measurement: Health outcomes will be measured using validated health assessment tools, self-reported health surveys, and qualitative data from interviews and focus groups that discuss stress, mental health challenges, and coping mechanisms.
  - Timing: Measurements will be taken from studies that report on health outcomes at various points in time, including during significant career transitions or after specific interventions.
4. **Inclusivity and Supportive Environment:**
  - Definition: The extent to which alternative higher education institutions provide an inclusive and supportive environment for BAME academics.
  - Measurement: This outcome will be assessed through qualitative data from interviews, surveys, and institutional reports that discuss policies, practices, and cultural aspects that promote inclusivity and support for BAME academics.
  - Timing: Measurements will be taken from studies that provide data on inclusivity and support over different time periods, including before and after the implementation of specific diversity initiatives.

These outcomes will be systematically analysed and synthesized to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions, highlighting areas for improvement and potential interventions to enhance

their career progression, job satisfaction, and overall well-being.

### 3.1.1 Effect Measures for Main Outcomes

The effect measures for the main outcomes are as follows:

1. Career Progression Opportunities:
  - Effect Measure: Odds Ratios (OR)
  - Definition and Measurement: The odds of BAME academics achieving career progression (e.g., promotions, leadership roles) compared to their counterparts in conventional universities. This will be measured using data from qualitative studies and surveys that report on career advancement rates.
2. Job Satisfaction Levels:
  - Effect Measure: Mean Differences (MD)
  - Definition and Measurement: The difference in mean job satisfaction scores between BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions and those in conventional universities. This will be measured using standardized job satisfaction scales and surveys.
3. Health Outcomes:
  - Effect Measure: Relative Risks (RR) and Standardized Mean Differences (SMD)
  - Definition and Measurement: The relative risk of adverse health outcomes (e.g., stress, burnout) among BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions compared to those in conventional universities. Additionally, standardized mean differences in health assessment scores will be used to compare overall well-being. These will be measured using validated health assessment tools and self-reported surveys.
4. Inclusivity and Supportive Environment:
  - Effect Measure: Risk Differences (RD)
  - Definition and Measurement: The difference in the proportion of BAME academics reporting an inclusive and supportive environment in alternative higher education institutions versus conventional universities. This will be measured using qualitative data from interviews and surveys that discuss institutional policies and practices.

These effect measures will provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of BAME academics, highlighting areas for improvement and potential interventions to enhance their career progression, job satisfaction, and overall well-being.

### Additional Outcomes

The additional outcomes are as follows:

1. Mentorship and Professional Development:
  - Effect Measure: Proportion Differences (PD)
  - Definition and Measurement: The difference in the proportion of BAME academics receiving mentorship and professional development opportunities in alternative versus conventional universities. This will be measured using qualitative data from interviews and surveys that report on access to mentorship programs, workshops, and training sessions.
2. Work-Life Balance:
  - Effect Measure: Mean Differences (MD)
  - Definition and Measurement: The difference in mean work-life balance scores between BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions and those in conventional universities. This will be measured using standardized work-life balance scales and self-reported surveys that assess factors such as workload, flexibility, and personal time.
3. Perceived Discrimination and Microaggressions:
  - Effect Measure: Relative Risks (RR)
  - Definition and Measurement: The relative risk of experiencing discrimination and microaggressions among BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions compared to those in conventional universities. This will be measured using qualitative data from interviews and surveys that report on incidents of discrimination, microaggressions, and overall workplace climate.
4. Sense of Belonging and Community:
  - Effect Measure: Standardized Mean Differences (SMD)
  - Definition and Measurement: The difference in mean scores for sense of belonging and community among BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions versus conventional universities. This will be measured using standardized scales and qualitative data from interviews and surveys that assess feelings of inclusion, support, and community engagement.
5. Research Productivity and Impact:
  - Effect Measure: Mean Differences (MD) and Citation Counts
  - Definition and Measurement: The difference in mean research productivity (e.g., number of publications, grants received) and impact (e.g., citation counts) between BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions and those in conventional universities. This will be measured using bibliometric data and self-reported surveys that report on research

activities and achievements.

These additional outcomes will be systematically analysed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of BAME academics, highlighting areas for improvement and potential interventions to enhance their professional development, work-life balance, and overall well-being.

### 3.2 Eligibility Criteria

- Inclusion Criteria:
  - o Studies focused on BAME academics in higher education, particularly in the UK.
  - o Research on recruitment, retention, progression, job satisfaction, inclusivity, and mental health outcomes (anxiety, depression, etc) for BAME academics.
  - o Literature on alternative higher education providers.
  - o Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and policy reports.
  - o Studies published in English.
- Exclusion Criteria:
  - o Studies not focused on BAME academics.
  - o Literature on non-academic staff or students.
  - o Studies unrelated to higher education settings.
  - o Non-English language publications (unless translated versions are available).

### Databases and Search Strategy

The PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021) would be adhered to. The search is scheduled for January to March 2025.

- Academic Databases:
  - o Scopus
  - o Web of Science
  - o PubMed
  - o ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre)
  - o JSTOR
  - o ProQuest (e.g., Dissertations & Theses Global)
  - o Google Scholar
- Grey Literature:
  - o Policy reports (e.g., from Advance HE, UUK, or the Equality Challenge Unit)
  - o Institutional reports from alternative providers like GBS.
  - o Government publications and diversity studies.

### Reference Lists:

- o Review references from key studies identified during screening.

The search string for PubMed, using Boolean operators and keywords, is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Search String for PubMed**

("BAME academics" OR "Black Asian Minority Ethnic lecturers") AND ("higher education" OR "universities" OR "alternative providers") AND ("recruitment" OR "progression" OR "diversity" OR "inclusivity") AND ("job satisfaction" OR "mental health outcomes")

Database-specific syntax for advanced searching (e.g., truncation, wildcards) would be used, employing special characters or techniques to refine and enhance your search queries in databases. For example:

1. Truncation: This involves using a symbol (often an asterisk \*) at the end of a word root to find all variations of that word (Salvador-Oliván et al., 2019; Adamson et al., 2022; Coburn, 2024). For example, searching for *educat\** will return results for education, educator, educational, etc.

2. Wildcards: These are symbols (such as ? or #) used within a word to replace one or more characters (Zhang et al., 2021; Hill & Chen, 2024; Tosco, 2024). For example, searching for *wom?n* will return results for both woman and women.

The search string would be piloted on one database and refined as needed.

### Screening and Selection Process

- Stage 1: Title and Abstract Screening
  - o Team members review titles and abstracts to exclude irrelevant studies.
- Stage 2: Full-Text Screening
  - o Retrieve full-text articles for studies that pass Stage 1.
  - o Apply inclusion/exclusion criteria rigorously.

### Data Extraction

To select studies for inclusion in the systematic review on the experiences of BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions, a comprehensive search strategy will be employed. This will involve searching multiple databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC, using a combination of keywords and MeSH terms related to BAME academics, higher education, and alternative institutions. The search will be limited to peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and reports published in English.

The selection process will follow a two-stage screening

approach. In the first stage, titles and abstracts of identified studies will be independently screened by two reviewers to assess their relevance based on predefined inclusion criteria. Studies will be included if they focus on the experiences of BAME academics in higher education institutions, specifically alternative or non-traditional settings. In the second stage, full-text articles of potentially relevant studies will be retrieved and independently assessed by the same reviewers. Any discrepancies between reviewers will be resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer.

Data extraction will involve collecting detailed information from the included studies using a standardized data extraction form. The data to be extracted will include study characteristics (e.g., author, year, country), participant demographics (e.g., ethnicity, gender, academic position), study design (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods), and key findings related to the main and additional outcomes (e.g., career progression, job satisfaction, health outcomes, mentorship, work-life balance, perceived discrimination, sense of belonging, research productivity).

The data extraction process will be conducted independently by two reviewers to ensure accuracy and consistency. Extracted data will be recorded in a secure, centralized database, and any discrepancies will be resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer. The extracted data will then be synthesized and analysed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions.

#### **Quality Assessment**

Several key characteristics of the studies will be assessed:

**Study Design:** The type of study (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods) and its methodological framework.

**Population:** Demographic details of the participants, including ethnicity, gender, academic rank, and institution type.

**Interventions/Experiences:** Specific experiences or interventions related to BAME academics, such as mentoring programs, career progression, and institutional support.

**Outcomes:** The primary and secondary outcomes measured, such as career satisfaction, retention rates, and perceived barriers.

**Setting:** The context of the study, including the geographical location and type of higher education institution.

**Data Collection Methods:** Techniques used to gather data, such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups.

**Funding Sources:** Information about the funding sources to identify potential conflicts of interest.

For assessing the risk of bias and quality of the studies, the following tools will be used:

**Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Checklists:** For evaluating qualitative studies, focusing on validity, results, and relevance.

**Newcastle-Ottawa Scale (NOS):** For assessing the quality of non-randomized studies, examining selection, comparability, and outcomes.

**Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Tools:** For various study designs, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of methodological quality.

These assessments will ensure a thorough and systematic evaluation of the studies included in the review.

#### **Data Synthesis**

The data synthesis will involve both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding.

#### **Data Extraction and Preparation**

Data will be extracted using a standardized form, capturing study design, participant characteristics, interventions/experiences, outcomes, and contextual factors. This data will be organized into a database for systematic analysis.

#### **Qualitative Data Synthesis**

Thematic synthesis will be used for qualitative data, involving three steps:

1. **Coding of Text:** Qualitative data will be coded line-by-line to identify key themes and concepts using software like NVivo.
2. **Development of Descriptive Themes:** Initial codes will be grouped into descriptive themes that reflect the main patterns in the data.
3. **Generation of Analytical Themes:** Descriptive themes will be further analyzed to develop higher-order analytical themes, providing deeper insights into the experiences of BAME academics.

#### **Quantitative Data Synthesis**

For quantitative data, a meta-analysis will be conducted where possible:

1. **Assessment of Heterogeneity:** Heterogeneity will be assessed using the  $I^2$  statistic and  $\chi^2$  test to determine the appropriate model for meta-analysis.
2. **Data Pooling:** Quantitative data from comparable studies will be pooled to calculate summary effect

sizes, using weighted mean differences or odds ratios.

3. Subgroup Analysis: Subgroup analyses will explore potential sources of heterogeneity, such as differences in study design or participant characteristics.

#### Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

A narrative synthesis approach will integrate the qualitative and quantitative findings:

1. Summarizing Key Findings: Key findings from both analyses will be summarized in a coherent narrative.
2. Identifying Patterns and Relationships: Patterns and relationships between the qualitative and quantitative data will be identified to provide a holistic view.
3. Drawing Conclusions: Conclusions will be drawn based on the integrated findings, highlighting implications for policy and practice in higher education institutions.

#### Analysis of Sub-Groups

Several subgroup analyses are planned to explore variations in experiences and outcomes. The subgroups will be based on the following criteria:

1. Ethnicity: Studies will be grouped by specific ethnic categories (e.g., Black, Asian, and other minority ethnic groups) to identify any differences in experiences and outcomes among these groups.
2. Gender: The experiences of male and female BAME academics will be compared to explore gender-specific challenges and support mechanisms.
3. Academic Rank: Participants will be categorized by their academic rank (e.g., junior faculty, senior faculty, administrative roles) to examine how experiences differ across career stages.
4. Institution Type: Studies will be grouped by the type of higher education institution (e.g., community colleges, private universities, public universities) to assess how institutional context influences experiences.
5. Geographical Location: The impact of geographical location (e.g., urban vs. rural institutions, different countries) on the experiences of BAME academics will be investigated.

#### Planned Analytic Approach

For each subgroup, both qualitative and quantitative data will be analysed separately and then integrated:

1. Qualitative Analysis: Thematic synthesis will be conducted for each subgroup to identify unique themes and patterns.
2. Quantitative Analysis: Meta-analyses will be performed for each subgroup where data allows, calculating summary effect sizes and conducting subgroup comparisons using statistical tests (e.g., ANOVA,  $\chi^2$  tests).

This approach ensures a thorough and systematic evaluation of the studies, capturing the complexity of BAME academics' experiences and providing actionable insights for improving their representation and support in alternative higher education institutions. The approach will also help identify specific factors that influence the experiences of BAME academics in different contexts, providing nuanced insights for targeted interventions and policy recommendations.

#### RESULTS

##### Reporting

- Will follow PRISMA guidelines for reporting systematic reviews.
- Will include a PRISMA flow diagram to document the study selection process.
- Will be structured as follows:
  - o Abstract
  - o Introduction (background, objectives, and rationale)
  - o Methods (search strategy, inclusion criteria, quality assessment, synthesis approach)
  - o Results (findings, thematic analysis, comparison)
  - o Discussion (interpretation, implications, and limitations)
  - o Conclusion and Recommendations

##### Limitations and Bias

Potential biases include:

1. Exclusion of non-English studies may lead to underrepresentation of non-Western perspectives.
2. Publication bias may favour studies with significant findings, leading to underreporting of null results.
3. Variation in definitions of self-comforting behaviours across studies may limit direct comparisons.

#### TIMELINE AND TEAM RESPONSIBILITIES

The proposed timeframe for the research is shown below:

**Table 2: Research Timeline**

S/N	Week	Activity
1.	Week 1–2	Develop search strategy and pilot.
2.	Week 3–4	Conduct database searches
3.	Week 5–6	Screen titles and abstracts
4.	Week 7–8	Full-text screening and quality appraisal
5.	Week 9–10	Data extraction
6	Week 11–12	Synthesis and reporting

**DISSEMINATION**

Findings will be disseminated through:

1. Peer-reviewed journal publications.
2. Conference presentations in psychology and sociology forums.
3. Executive summaries shared with mental health practitioners and educators.

**REGISTRATION AND REPORTING**

This protocol will be registered in the International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews (PROSPERO). The review will adhere to the PRISMA guidelines to ensure transparency and rigor.

**CONCLUSION**

This protocol outlines a systematic review aimed at exploring the experiences of BAME academics in alternative higher education institutions. Synthesizing existing literature, this review seeks to identify key themes, challenges, and opportunities faced by BAME academics in non-traditional settings. The systematic approach, including comprehensive database searches, rigorous inclusion criteria, and thematic analysis, ensures a thorough examination of the topic. The findings from this review will provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of BAME academics, informing policy and practice to create more inclusive and equitable higher education environments. By highlighting best practices and areas needing improvement, this review aims to contribute to the development of supportive institutional frameworks that address the specific needs of BAME academics. Ultimately, this work underscores the importance of fostering diversity and inclusion within higher education, promoting a more inclusive academic landscape that benefits all members of the academic community.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no funding of interest.

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