



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY

Giulio D'Urso,
G. d'Annunzio University of Chieti and
Pescara, Italy

REVIEWED BY

Daria Khanolainen,
University of Jyväskylä, Finland
Mark Vicars,
Victoria University, Australia

*CORRESPONDENCE

Nicola Hay
✉ nicola.hay@uws.ac.uk

RECEIVED 26 January 2024

ACCEPTED 07 May 2024

PUBLISHED 05 June 2024

CITATION

Hay N, Davies E and Sapouna M (2024)
Teacher responses to racially motivated
bullying in Scotland.
Front. Educ. 9:1376017.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2024.1376017

COPYRIGHT

© 2024 Hay, Davies and Sapouna. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in other forums is permitted, provided the original author(s) and the copyright owner(s) are credited and that the original publication in this journal is cited, in accordance with accepted academic practice. No use, distribution or reproduction is permitted which does not comply with these terms.

Teacher responses to racially motivated bullying in Scotland

Nicola Hay*, Elisabeth Davies and Maria Sapouna

School of Education and Social Sciences, The University of the West of Scotland, Paisley, United Kingdom

Racially motivated bullying remains pervasive across Scottish schools. Teachers have a critical role in nurturing a safe and inclusive environment and preventing stigmatisation and oppression by intervening when a racially motivated bullying episode occurs but also by actively developing an anti-racist climate within their school by providing an anti-racism curriculum and advocating on behalf of minority ethnic youth. Despite the crucial role teachers can play in providing a safe environment, there is a paucity of literature examining the issue. Whilst some limited research is available in England about the barriers to embedding an anti-racist curriculum, there is no research about how teachers respond to racially motivated bullying episodes, the potential barriers to responding, and the processes and factors that influence teachers' judgement calls when a racially motivated bullying incident happens. Similarly, in the Scottish context, there is a lacuna of knowledge about the strategies employed by teachers already within the education system and their perceptions on the support that they need to respond to racist incidents. This study aims to add to our knowledge about this issue by investigating Scottish teachers' strategies when they are confronted with a hypothetical racially motivated bullying incident in their school. Eleven interviews were conducted with a sample of teachers from different levels of education in Scotland. Teacher responses indicated reluctance and, at times, inability to recognise and name incidents as racist. Further data highlighted the reliance on strategies such as using the victim of an incident to educate their peers, one-to-one discussions with both pupils and perpetrators, and a dependence on using their own 'instinct' to appraise an incident and response. Further sub themes emerged, including the perceived influence of generational and geospatial factors on both practitioners and the communities in which they practise and the resounding sentiment that practitioners lack engagement with anti-racist training. Our findings highlight the need to invest in schools, communities, and young people in order to create the social conditions in which teachers' capacities to respond to racism can develop and flourish.

KEYWORDS

racially motivated bullying, teacher responses, Scotland, inclusion, racism and racist incidents

Introduction

There is a growing body of literature that focuses on the role of the teaching workforce in nurturing a safe and inclusive educational environment (Aguirre et al., 2021), embedding anti-racism into the curriculum (Smith and Lander, 2023) and acknowledging ethnic minority pupils' everyday experiences of racism to effectively support young people (Arshad et al., 2016; Arday and Mirza, 2018). However, less is known about how teachers respond when a racist

incident occurs in the school environment. Research by Kollerová et al. (2021) conducted in the Czech Republic found that a collegiate climate between teachers drew on both authority-based interventions and non-punitive approaches to working with the bully to foster behaviour change. Research by D'Urso et al. (2023) found that due to limited knowledge of inclusive teaching practices, teachers in Italy were unable to recognise racist and homophobic bullying when they occurred and often avoided dealing specifically with incidents related to sexual orientation. Whilst the findings by Paljakka (2023) suggest that teachers in Austria are often able to identify both verbal and physical bullying single incidents that did not require repetition to be recognised as bullying. Research in the UK has identified that teachers experience discomfort and a general lack of confidence when addressing racist incidents (Arshad, 2017; Smith and Lander, 2023). However, these studies fail to consider the strategies employed by teaching staff when responding to racist incidents, the potential barriers to responding, and the processes and factors that may influence teachers' judgement calls when a racist incident occurs. The present study addresses this gap by exploring teacher responses to hypothetical racist incidents through the use of vignettes. The findings from the study are then reported, and implications of these findings are considered.

Background

Racially motivated bullying is defined as bullying motivated by prejudice against someone's actual or perceived race, ethnicity, culture, citizenship status, or religion (Tippett et al., 2010). A terminological shift has however been suggested, problematising the use of 'bullying' in favour of 'racism' or 'racist incident' in order to delineate between the act and the perceived motivation as often teachers have been found to address the behaviour under the umbrella of bullying without addressing the racism itself (Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, 2022).

A recent report by the Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (CRER) found that racially motivated bullying is one of the most common manifestations of racism in Scottish education with 1,198 instances of racially motivated bullying reported in Scottish schools in 2020/2021—up from 409 in 2016–2017 (Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, 2022). These figures are alarming and illustrate the importance of providing a safe environment for pupils. Teachers have a critical role in nurturing a safe and inclusive environment and preventing stigmatisation and oppression (Scandurra et al., 2017; Aguirre et al., 2021). This role is not just confined to intervening directly when a racially motivated bullying episode occurs but extends to the development of an anti-racist climate within their school by providing an anti-racism curriculum and advocating on behalf of minority ethnic young people (Smith and Lander, 2023).

Ethnic minority students' perception of supportive teachers is associated with greater levels of self-esteem and lower levels of depressive symptoms (Bayram Özdemir et al., 2021). However, there are also reports that students hesitate to tell teachers about their racist bullying experiences because they perceive they will do nothing (Sapouna et al., 2023). Even worse, in some cases, teachers are personally involved in their own students' victimisation (Sapouna et al., 2023). Pearce (2014) notes that there is a lack of commitment to challenging racism in English schools, although she explains that this reluctance to engage with issues of race sometimes arises from an

acute sense of the complexity involved in talking about racism and racist incidents. In the last set of published survey results of newly qualified teachers in England, few teachers felt well prepared to teach pupils from 'across all ethnic backgrounds' and only 39% felt confident to 'teach pupils for whom English is an Additional Language' (Smith and Lander, 2023).

Teachers can get anxious about discussing racism in class out of fear of causing offence or 'getting it wrong' (Smith and Lander, 2023). To combat this anxiety, they sometimes avoid talking about race through drawing on notions of colour blindness (Smith and Lander, 2023). However, critiques of colour-blind racial ideology by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) or colour-evasiveness¹ (see Annamma et al., 2017) argue that when one ignores race, there is the potential to overlook racism and discrimination. Notwithstanding, to celebrate multiculturalism and the adoption of colour-blind policy and practice in the UK, racism continues to negatively impact educational engagement and achievement (Gillborn et al., 2017), with teachers demonstrating low expectations for ethnic minority pupils. For example, research by Gillborn et al. (2012) found that teachers often associate 'black' with 'disabled status', thereby illuminating the need for 'colour consciousness' within teaching practices. This institutional level of racism is further evidenced in the experiences of minority ethnicity students and racial bias in teachers' grade predictions during the pandemic (Hemady and Assan, 2020). Any programme of education or approach to addressing racist incidents then must be underpinned by the recognition of the pervasiveness and persistence of racism in education. However, it is thought that initial teacher training in its current form does not adequately prepare teachers with the knowledge and skills to tackle racism and racist incidents (Davies, 2021).

Indeed, research by Smith and Lander (2023) demonstrated that module content only included anti-racism work that was delivered as a one-off educational input or a standalone anti-racist workshop. However, Hadjionnou and Hutchinson (2010, p. 92) argue that 'long-term theoretical coursework' combined with practical experience is required to 'prepare teachers effectively'. A programme of sustained learning delivered in a scaffolded manner may also address teachers' lack of knowledge and confidence in addressing racism in schools and their ability to implement an anti-racist curriculum (Smith and Lander, 2023).

Issues surrounding initial teacher education identified by Davies (2021) included the marginalisation of 'race' within educational input. This reluctance to disrupt deficit viewpoints and support student teachers to develop critical race consciousness was sometimes found to be due to the pressure associated with student satisfaction surveys and an increasingly marketised higher education system. Davies and Crozier (2006) further identified that teachers experienced time constraints as a barrier to tackle equality issues and limited access to school-based experts on equality issues and the geographical context. Similarly, research by Horton et al. (2020, 2023) exploring the factors that prevent teachers from addressing bullying more widely found that

1 There have been calls amongst CRT/DisCrit Scholars arguing for the term colour-evasiveness to replace the colour-blindness as the latter is considered to be a racial ideology that conflates lack of sight with ignorance and promotes ableism (Annama et al., 2017).

this may be attributed to this resource scarcity in the way of a lack of time or staff support.

There, however, appears to be a limited appetite to redress these issues permeating through the policy and practice landscape in the English context. Addressing racism and promoting race equality appears to have been diluted within policy across the national curriculum (Department for Education, 2014a) and within Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011). There is no longer a statutory duty to report and monitor racist incidents as per the *Race Relations Amendment Act (2000)*, but teachers are expected to uphold 'Fundamental British values' (Department for Education, 2014b). Without policy, strategy, and statutory and good practice guideless serving as a beacon to teachers, teachers do not have the resources and capacity to develop racial literacy, and this impedes their ability to recognise and respond to racism and racist incidents (Smith and Lander, 2023).

Research has shown that teachers often feel confused between the need to be supporting all students equally and recognising and addressing the reality of ethnic minority students' lived experience of racism in education (Arday and Mirza, 2018). Low levels of racial literacy amongst teachers can contribute to low teacher expectations and stereotyping of Black students which, in turn, may lead to low academic engagement and attainment creating a perpetual cycle of inequality (Smith and Lander, 2023). Whilst limited research is available in England about the barriers to embedding an anti-racist curriculum (Smith and Lander, 2023), there is no research about how teachers respond to racially motivated bullying episodes, what the potential barriers to responding are, and the processes and factors that may influence teachers' judgement calls when a racially motivated bullying incident occurs.

The Scottish context

Scottish classrooms have become increasingly diverse across ethnic, religious, and linguistic lines. Between 2010 and 2019, the number of ethnic minority pupils in Scottish schools rose from 33,929 to 57,859. There has also been an increase in the number of young people who speak English as an additional language from 28,610 in 2010 to 61, 818 in 2019 (CERES, 2023). Such increases illuminate the need for a largely white, middle class, and monolingual teaching workforce to develop critical race consciousness, awareness on how to report and respond to racist incidents within the schooling environment, and the theoretical knowledge to embed anti-racism into the curriculum.

The Scottish Government (2016) set out its commitment to dealing with racism in the classroom through the Race Equality Framework. The framework sets out a race strategy from 2016 to 2030 and includes considerations of both initial teacher education and career-long professional learning, wherein teachers are 'encouraged to actively learn and develop the skills to meet pupils' needs (Scottish Government, 2016, p. 54). How this is framed, however, places racial literacy skill development responsibility solely at the feet of teachers themselves. Similarly, the *General Teaching Council for Scotland's Standard for Full Registration (2021)* requires teachers to commit to the principles of social justice across a range of protected characteristics. None of the document, however, considers the needs of the teachers themselves such as the time and capacity in

order to engage with racial literacy educational inputs. Indeed, Hick et al. (2012) found that there are labour constraints evident in initial teacher education which restricts lecturer capacity to engage with racial justice issues in any real depth.

A few initiatives have been developed to address these concerns such as increasing the diversity of the teaching workforce (Scottish Government, 2018). More recently, an anti-racism framework for initial teacher education in Scotland has been constructed to build racial literacy amongst trainee teachers and disrupt the centrality of whiteness within the curriculum (Mohammed, 2023). Whilst further developments include the development of a professional development offering titled 'Building Racial Literacy' (BRL), a programme targeted at qualified teachers and delivered by Education Scotland (Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, 2022). Since the launch of 'BRL' in December 2021, four cohorts of teaching practitioners have completed the professional learning programme, with each iteration running for 4 to 5 months (Education Scotland, 2017). However, a recent Freedom of information Request (The Scottish Government, 2022) revealed that there is no intention to roll out the programme to all schools across Scotland. This is problematic as a major theme identified by *Scottish Parliament's Equalities and Human Rights Committee inquiry (2017)* was that teachers required support in developing the skills and capacity to address prejudice-based bullying perpetrated by both young people and teaching professionals. It is thought that this decision perhaps reflects an economic and market-based approach to decision-making within teacher education (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016).

Further concerns relate to the findings by *Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2022)* who demonstrated recording and monitoring of racist incidents across Local Authorities to be inconsistent and patchy, thereby raising concerns related to learner confidence in reporting racism and leading to the under-reporting of racist incidents. Despite *Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2022)* calling for the mandatory recording and collation of data of racist incidents within education institutions, there is still no statutory duty for schools or authorities to record these at national level. It is thought that the lack of a statutory duty in recording incidents may diminish the responsibility that teachers feel in reflecting on how they not only record racist incidents but also how they respond to racism when it occurs.

It is hoped that these issues will be addressed through the recent creation of a Stakeholder Network Group that is supporting the development of national policy work. The Scottish Governments' Anti Racism in Education programme (AREP), formerly the Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme (REAREP), operates with four subgroups. Each of the subgroups has a specific focus in developing approaches to address racism within Scottish Education; *Curriculum Reform, Racism and Racist Incidents, Diversity in the Teaching Profession and Education Workforce, and Education Leadership and Professional Learning*. The work of the group is vital, and they have raised poignant concerns regarding current provision which may lead to poor outcomes for ethnic minority young people who are victims of racism (Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, 2022). These outcomes include the narrowing of life chances and diminished physical and mental health that ultimately impacts on young people's engagement and attainment within education (Hopkins et al., 2015; *Scottish Parliament Equalities and Human Rights Committee, 2017*).

The current study

Given the negative impact that racism has on young people within Scottish schools, there is a surprising lack of understanding about the strategies employed by teachers already within the education system and their perceptions on the support that they need to respond to racist incidents. What little is known emerged during the delivery of continuous professional development sessions to teaching staff. These professional learning sessions were based on the research conducted by [Arshad et al. \(2016\)](#) who focused on the everyday experiences of minority ethnic young people. These sessions revealed that whilst teachers felt confident in addressing overt racist incidents (the use of racist terminology in name calling), they were less adept at identifying and addressing low-level racism (micro-aggressions; see for example [Sue, 2010](#)). Whilst this research is valuable in that we have gleaned a deeper understanding of teachers' ability to recognise racist incidents and how they feel when dealing with manifestations of racism, there is, however, a paucity of understanding in how teachers respond and the strategies that they employ to tackle racism.

Reflections by [Arshad et al. \(2017\)](#) demonstrated that Scottish teachers often express discomfort when engaging with issues related to racial differences and racism. She also argued that teachers often tackle inequalities and base their practice solely on intuition rather than drawing on theoretical frameworks or social justice praxis. It is believed that this lack of engagement by teachers at an intellectual and conceptual level may result in inconsistent and *ad hoc* practice ([Arshad, 2017](#)). There are limitations to Arshad's reflection however, as she bases her observation on 'teachers [she had] met over the years' ([Arshad, 2017](#), p. 4) which may not be considered a robust methodological approach thus limiting the external validity of the findings. Further research based on the voices of teachers themselves is therefore needed to understand the strategies that they employ when responding to racism and racist incidents.

As evidenced above, although there have been a few important initiatives such as increasing the diversity of the teaching workforce and the development of a framework for initial teacher education, racism and racist incidents continue to impact young ethnic minority pupils' educational experiences ([Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights, 2022](#)). However, there is no research on how teachers respond to the incidents, the potential barriers to responding, and the processes and factors that may influence teachers' judgement calls when a racist incident occurs. To this end, this study aims to add to our knowledge about this issue by investigating Scottish teachers' strategies when they are confronted with a hypothetical racially motivated bullying incident in their school. It is important to explore the teachers' perspectives to understand the barriers and motivators that shape how and when they choose to intervene and discuss racism in their class. By investigating teachers' perspectives, we can examine both the local understandings of racially motivated bullying and the broader discourses within which they are constructed ([Anagnostopoulos et al., 2009](#)).

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative methodology and utilised vignettes and semi-structured interviews to collect data. Vignettes can

be instrumental in providing a rich context that reflects teacher responses to racist behaviour directed towards diverse learners. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of teachers in Scotland recruited from the researchers' networks. The vignettes and research questions addressed in this study focused on delineating teachers' perceptions of:

- Their experiences and responses to three hypothetical racist incidents;
- The barriers that constrain their efforts to address racism and the facilitators that enable them to address racist incidents when they occur;
- The training and support that they feel would enhance their ability to respond to racism and racist incidents.

Participants

Participants who took part in the current study were 11 teachers (nine female and two male) drawn from both primary and secondary teaching settings across four Scottish Local Authorities; Fife, Mid-Lothian, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Perth and Kinross. Two participants were currently employed in promoted posts within their schools. One participant identified as mixed ethnicity, whilst 10 others identified as White Scottish. Participants ranged from 3 to 29 years in teaching service. The spread of practitioner localities, teaching service periods, and stages provided a representative sample of Scottish teachers within the capacity of this study.

Procedure

The use of online interviews provided a wider geographical reach in participant recruitment. The approach also required less time from teachers overall to participate amidst their already heavy workload. Participants all had existing access to and experience in utilising Microsoft Teams given the nationwide use of 'Glow', a government-funded digital learning environment utilised by all schools. Teachers who were asked to read three short vignettes about hypothetical students. The vignettes were designed to elicit their perceptions of the stories through a series of questions. The vignettes drew on different ethnic and citizenship status groups. The first one focused on racism directed towards a young Traveller pupil in the school cafeteria. The next two vignettes focused on young people who had recently settled in Scotland after fleeing violence in Syria and Ukraine, respectively. Teachers participated in semi-structured interviews online via Teams, ranging from 30 to 60 min of duration between September and October 2023. It is recognised that gaining a comprehensive picture of how teachers embody and enact policy and practice within education settings does not provide the rigour that an ethnographic study could provide; however, due to the unpredictable nature of when or where racist incidents occur, gaining a focused set of observations was not possible.

Interviews were video recorded and transcribed verbatim. Analysis of the interviews involved the researchers immersing themselves within the data through the reading and re-reading of transcripts before coming together to discuss salient themes, thereby enhancing 'interpretive convergence' ([Saldana, 2009](#), p. 27). [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) six phases of thematic analysis was applied to the

interview transcripts. First, codes were generated, and overarching themes were identified in the data. The initial themes were then re-examined and the coding framework was refined. The final thematic map was then checked for coherence with the research questions, literature, and Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, and 1986) theoretical orientations. The purposive sampling process was continued until sufficient amount of data was gathered to reach saturation (Fusch and Ness, 2015).

Positionality

In considering the potential for social desirability bias, we will first turn to consider the insider–outsider dichotomy (Bhopal, 2010; Bucerius, 2013). The interviewing researcher's 'insider identity' as a primary school teacher allowed for the research participants to feel more comfortable. This identity created a safe space for the research participants, who often drew on and alluded to shared experiences as teachers. In considering the interviewing researcher's 'outsider identity' due to their mixed ethnic background, one must consider the pervasive nature of racism, in which it is an ordinary and everyday experience (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). Racism reared its head across multiple interviews, thereby nullifying any attempts by some of the teaching practitioners to demonstrate social desirability bias.

Theoretical orientation

Teachers' responses were analysed using Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, and 1986) ecological framework as used in previous research (Horton et al., 2023). The ecological system model emphasises the need to understand the bidirectional influences present between an individual's development and their surrounding, interrelated environments. According to this framework, teachers' perceptions of the incident that affect their response are influenced by individual factors such as personal experiences of discrimination, students' interactions with students or teachers (the microsystem), interactions between the students' different microsystems, such as relations between teachers and parents (the mesosystem), contexts in which students do not actively participate in such as decisions taken at school level (the exosystem), societal norms and their impact on student relations (the macrosystem), and changes over time that affect the other systems (the chronosystem; Horton et al., 2023).

Ethical considerations

Considerations of anonymity and confidentiality were considered during the data gathering process and throughout the analysis and reporting stages to ensure that teachers and individual schools across Scotland could not be identified. All transcripts and recordings were stored as encrypted files which were in line with General Data Protection Regulation (European Parliament, 2016), and ethical approval conditions made by the University of the West of Scotland's Ethics Committee. The study was approved by the University of the West of Scotland's School of Education and Social Sciences Ethics Committee.

Findings

Recognising and naming racism

A common theme that emerged across almost all teacher perceptions of the vignettes is that teachers were generally unable to identify the hypothetical incidents as racist incidents. Indeed, only one teacher who participated in the current research identified all three vignettes as racist incidents.² Instead of identifying these vignettes as racist, teachers often considered them to be unkind or rude acts that did not abide by the school values in relation to respect and kindness. As Teacher 5 stated:

I think again, as a human, you, you probably would just, make it clear that those kind of comments are not necessary or things like that.

Similarly, Teacher 2's response to the vignette relating to Charity is as follows, a member of the Travelling community:

The word smelly, for anybody to be called that, that's not nice. Kids come up to you all the time with name calling, and that's my approach to everything is highlighting why the behaviour is not right, why it's disrespectful and reinforcing that we want to be respectful and kind to each other.

As can be observed from Teacher 2's response, she has limited cultural awareness of common tropes and stereotypes directed towards Travellers. Moreover, she also manages to conflate a racist incident with a transgression against school values tied to respect and kindness. Teacher 4, on the other hand, perceived the vignette relating to Charity as 'banter' between young people.

Well, yeah, it could just be children's banter. So, it could be I would just walk past and think, oh, they're all in the same class and that's just the way they communicate with each other. So I would have just walked past and ignored it.

Interestingly, teachers were more likely to be able to recognise the incident relating to the Ukrainian refugee Ivan as racism as opposed to the racism perpetrated against the Syrian refugee Fatima. Teachers often perceived the racism directed towards Fatima as young people demonstrating 'curiosity' regarding her head scarf in the vignette. It is thought that this ability by teachers to recognise the racism experienced by Ivan could be due to increased media reporting surrounding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Teacher 4 reflected on the following:

I think probably just from knowing a lot more about the situation in the country, because it's current news. Thinking about poor Fatima from Syria, I feel as if I should know a lot more about the Syrian situation. I know a little bit, but I feel as if the Ukraine one is much

² Teacher 1 identified Fatima's incident as racism; Teacher 4 recognised Ivan's incident as racism; Teacher 8 recognised racism against Charity the Traveller but all other vignettes were not recognised as racist incidents.

more in everybody's minds. [...] if we're going to be thinking about a bullying incident, that would be a bullying incident because they're looking for something about him that's different. And I know, poor Fatima was different, but I didn't see that in the same respect because it was more of a curiosity. But when somebody's actually laughing at somebody else because of, you know, how they speak or how they look, then it's something that you don't want the children to think is acceptable and to continue.

The inability of these teachers to recognise an incident as racist may be a function of subjective perceptions about what racism is, as well as limited cultural awareness (macrosystems) and opportunities for the building of racial literacy through professional development (exosystems) (discussed in sub-theme 'Barriers to responding'). It is important to note that this inability to recognise racism extended beyond the vignettes presented to teachers and emerged in discussions related to actual racist incidents that had occurred within the school environment as illuminated by Deputy Head Teacher 10 who stated:

One of our probationary teachers who was Muslim, was at the copier and one of the boys walked down the corridor and just pointed out and went ewww a brown person. I was this probationer's mentor and also deputy head teacher. So she did come to me with it. And I think what was, what was hard for a lot of our staff was they didn't understand why that bothered her so much.

Finally, a key finding within the current research is that teachers generally only identified an incident as racist bullying when it occurred frequently.

There was an incident last year where a boy seemed to target a girl from Syria and on a number of occasions. Now it wasn't the words that he was saying, he wasn't using any derogatory racist terms, but it seemed like he was targeting her. So just in the playground he would hurt her, and kick, punch. Because it was a reoccurring incident the head teacher obviously had to speak to parents in that situation—Teacher 1.

I've never had to deal with racist bullying but I've had to deal with racist remarks in the past, like the odd comment, but never what I would term as bullying because my definition of bullying is over a prolonged period of time, and I've never had to deal with that. Just the odd comment here and there—Teacher 8.

If it's something that happens again, that's where I would start taking things further—Teacher 7.

From this perspective, by including racism under the umbrella of bullying policy within the school climate (microsystem), teachers may be less likely to identify and name an incident as racism. The current findings suggest that teachers appear to construct a hierarchy of incidents, whereby some forms of racism are considered less serious (i.e., name calling vs. physical attacks), and even for some of the more overt racism, the frequency of the act determines whether it is reported.

Strategies employed by teachers in response to a racist incident

The repertoires of strategies that teachers generally drew on when dealing with a racist incident included 'using the oppressed as educators', 'one-off anti-racism talks or assemblies', relying on instinct or intuition (microsystem), drawing on school values (exosystem), and 'deferring to the senior management team' (exosystem). To begin with, one of the more concerning strategies identified by the current research is that when teachers responded to racist incidents, they often used the young victims themselves as anti-racism educators.

So actually getting Fatima herself, if she felt comfortable to do it or actually just to speak to the class—Teacher 4.

If there is someone in the class that is of an ethnic minority, they're quite forthcoming and they want to share it and they want to celebrate it. So I kind of go on off the back of that as an educational thing and they lead the learning—Teacher 6.

From this perspective, the responsibility for addressing racism is placed at the feet of the young victims themselves not only to educate those who have perpetrated racism but also to educate members of the teaching team. From this perspective, educating against racism remains within the microsystem, wherein the young victim of racism is responsible for building the racial literacy of his or her peers and teachers.

Other strategies often adopted by teachers include one-to-one talks with the perpetrator, the class, or wider school assemblies (microsystem). These talks are generally centred on school values, wherein teachers emphasise the importance of respect and kindness, whilst at other times, there may be a focus on addressing racism.

That's my approach to everything - highlighting why the behaviour is not right, why it's disrespectful and reinforcing that we want to be respectful and kind to each other is important. [...] then had that chat with the rest of the class and explaining maybe a culture or a practise and reinforcing that respect values? It's kind—Teacher 2.

It is thought that teachers often defer to the school values (exosystem) by discussing respect and kindness as there may be issues in recognising racism. This approach may also be adopted as it is thought to be more age and stage appropriate. When racist incidents were identified, teachers more often than not opted for a one-to-one conversation with the young person as Teacher 8 reflected on a racist incident that had occurred within his school environment:

*He was going walk about saying N**** N**** N****. I was just starting off saying that was really inappropriate what you were saying. I said, first of all, do you know what that means? And I said, 'well, do you know why people might get offended by that'? And he's like, 'yeah'. And I said, 'well I'm not having that in my classroom. You're not walking around saying that word'.*

Teacher 1 drew on a whole class one-off approach in response to Ivan, the Ukrainian refugee's vignette:

In that situation, I would talk to the children just about how we're all different, how we all might have different accents, whether we're from Ukraine, whether we're from outside of the EU, whether we are from England or different parts of Scotland, we all have different accents and ways of speaking—Teacher 1.

In response to an incident of actual racism within the school environment, Teacher 7 also adopted a one-off educational input delivered to the whole class to address the incident. He stated:

In the past, I was working with a class who were using a few racial slurs too often. [...] So for me, it was an opportunity to talk about oppression and things at the Olympics.

Generally, the aforementioned responses may be partly influenced by teachers' reliance on instinct or intuition. A few of the research participants (N=4) often mentioned relying on their instincts or intuition rather than drawing on theoretical frameworks or literature pertaining to 'what works'. As teacher 1 stated:

I think instinct wise I would address it as a whole class and it be more about inclusivity and things like that. The issue is just the lack of education around it and how to tackle it. Probably because like I said, I would use my instinct and I would use my own knowledge, but that maybe doesn't go far enough.

Teacher 5 echoed a similar approach in terms of acting and responding on instinct:

I think it's an instinct, probably as a human you would respond let's not make comments like that.

The current findings indicated that in a number of instances across the vignettes and through the recollection of racist incidents that had taken place across teachers' respective school environments, young victims of racist abuse were often used by Teachers (N=8) as anti-racism educators. Teachers also generally deployed one-off anti-racism or value-based talks with either the individual, class, or through the medium of a school assembly.

Overall, when incidents of racism within the school environment were identified, this recognition was often contingent on the frequency, nature, and severity of the racist behaviour. In these cases, teachers often reported the incident to the Head Teacher of their respective institution. Following on from this, the incident was usually recorded on SEEMIS, an education management information system employed on behalf of Local Authorities across Scotland, and both the victim and perpetrator's parents were notified.

However, once teachers reported the incident to senior management, it appeared that the senior management team often did not circle back with teaching staff, debrief them, or use the experience as a learning opportunity for staff as reflected in the excerpts below:

I can't say I've had enough experience of it. When it goes to senior management, you don't get much, feedback or what has happened after—Teacher 1.

In both cases the pupil was reported to management and in one case the parent was informed and called up to school and they had a

meeting about the seriousness of it. I don't know what happened in the other case—Teacher 4.

Responses from members of the senior management team (Depute Head teachers) who participated in the current research gave further insights into how the incidents were dealt with from their vantage point. As Depute Head Teacher (participant 9) stated:

I spoke to both the parents and, heard how they felt about it. Then I had to record it on SEEMIS and go back to the parents and let them both know that it had been recorded. We then had to readdress it a week later just to make sure everything was fine, settled and everyone was kind of happy that the whole incident had been dealt with appropriately.

A second Depute Head Teacher (participant 10) who took part in this research demonstrates the utilisation of the approaches discussed above, whereby the frequency and severity of the behaviour determine whether official channels are employed as she stated:

If there then is a racial undertone to it, or if there is something that is then continuing or is kind of coming from a place of malice, then there would be the procedures. I would have to record that officially and I would have to go down the official routes. But we tend to record these things almost unofficially and to try and build that picture. So especially when there are children that we know are either prone to using racist language or have been involved in racist racial incidents before.

If the frequency or severity of an individual's behaviour determines whether an incident is reported, this means that there will be a severe under-reporting of racist incidents on the SEEMIS system thereby rendering the statistics pertaining to racist incidents released by Local Authorities (exosystem) problematic. Further compounding the issue is that these figures will be informing the development of the Race Equality Framework and decisions related to racial equality within Scottish Government (macrosystem).

Following on from this, the Depute Head Teacher then places the responsibility for dealing with racism and the delivery of anti-racism education within the school environment solely at the feet of teachers themselves as she stated:

But it's down to the class teachers essentially, if they are in their class and to make those learning opportunities happen—Teacher 10.

As mentioned previously, two of the research participants are currently in Senior Management positions. Despite their respective roles, neither indicated that they would draw on theoretical frameworks or programmes of education to support teaching staff and young people alike to address the racist behaviour. From this perspective, teacher responses are influenced by the exo-level decisions taken by the senior management team in sourcing, managing, and making available educational resources and continued professional development opportunities to enhance their practice in the wider community and provide those learning opportunities for young people within the classroom.

Barriers to responding

The third theme was emerged from participant narratives related to teachers' perceived barriers to responding to racist incidents which were further coded into the following sub-themes: 'lack of policy, training and knowledge' at individual school (exosystem) and government level (macrosystem), 'generational and geo-spatial diversity factors' (chronosystem and exosystem), and 'parents (mesosystem)'. Teachers often felt that they had not received adequate training to respond to racist incidents appropriately. It is pertinent to note that none of the participants stated that they had engaged in the 'Building Racial Literacy' programme or indicated awareness that the programme was available to practitioners in Scotland. This lack of knowledge and racial literacy, particularly related to terminology, impacted teachers' confidence and their ability to deal with incidents effectively as demonstrated through the excerpts below:

I've not had any training. I've not had enough experience to know what the right thing would be to say. What wouldn't be the right thing to say [...] I just lack knowledge on what the right terms are to use, and you know to not upset anyone, to not give out false information to children who then might take it back to their parents or to other children—Teacher 1.

But in terms of actually dealing with it, I think I would be frightened of using the wrong language—Teacher 4.

I think especially the language of different racial kind of ethnicities, it's quite hard because in the last kind of 10 years, it's changed a lot. So you don't want to say the wrong thing and you're aware young people might go back home to mums and dads and you may be used more of a historical word for it—Teacher 6.

Teacher 10 recalled that during a recent Depute Head Teacher Equality and Diversity training day, there appeared to be an unease amongst those in senior management positions pertaining to the correct terminology to use as she stated:

We did have a Depute's day where we all got together and it was all about equality and diversity and the policy that is hopefully going to be written. But again everyone was so on their toes trying to make sure they didn't say the right, the wrong thing or the right thing or offend somebody. It was all very very face value and it wasn't deep enough. And I think my own understanding of the issues, the topics, the lack of diversity, I find that really tricky.

As can be observed from the excerpts above, a number of teachers (N=9) attempt to be reflective in practice around language and terminology. However, without the opportunity to develop their racial literacy through meaningful programmes of education to become familiar with this terminology, their confidence to address racism may be impeded.

Teachers also generally felt at a loss with limited knowledge of individuals and organisations that they could potentially draw on to support both their own practice and offer educational inputs for young people themselves (exosystem). Two teachers had stated that they had attended a one-off anti-racism education event with Show Racism the Red Card, but generally teachers could not name organisations that could provide support. Resource scarcity in the way of external agencies able to provide anti-racism support, and education can serve as a barrier

to responding to racist incidents. Whilst having to deal with these incidents within the micro-system of the classroom and school environment, teachers are at a loss with regard to external agency resources to draw on due to exo-system level decisions regarding funding allocations to schools and NGO and the training available to teachers.

Indeed, teacher concerns related to a lack of policy and guidance (exosystem) emerged from almost all teacher narratives, with only one school appearing to have an anti-racism policy in place. The excerpts below highlight the need for the urgent development of anti-racism policy and good practice guidelines for teachers to draw on:

I think more so again if we had guidance as a whole school scenario for example, if it was something that we thought needed to be targeted, which I do probably think is something that needs to be addressed as a whole school. If we were kind of given that guidance and support as well as to how to approach it, I think I would feel a lot more confident—Teacher 5.

I think national and local policy needs to be much tighter to support and guide teachers with their practise in this—Teacher 2.

Teacher narratives point to macrosystem and exosystem factors related to a lack of anti-racism policy and good practice guidance across the school climate, the Local Authority, and Scottish Government that influence their ability to respond to racism within the microsystem school setting.

It is also thought that in some cases amongst the teachers who participated in the current study, their concerns surrounding terminology may be related to the second sub-theme: 'generational and geo-spatial diversity factors'. Through the interviews with teachers, it appeared as generational language that had become normalised in some communities and almost minimised as not offensive (chronosystem). For example, the longest serving teacher in the current research, Teacher 4 alluded to the historical and intergenerational use of racist word within her family and wider community as she stated:

I mean I'm old enough to have had parents and grandparents who didn't think twice about using racist language but they weren't being racist. It was just language that they used. You know, right down to where my Gran went to the corner shop.

Whilst the lack of diversity within these communities was drawn on amongst a number of the participants to explain their lack of racial literacy or knowledge, thereby serving as a barrier to responding to a racist incident appropriately. This lack of geo-spatial diversity (exosystem) coupled with limited training to develop racial literacy therefore means that teachers will have a dearth of strategies to draw on when trying to deal with racism.

So it imakes it quite difficult and I mean I have a limited knowledge of all of this as well. I feel as if I'm teaching it as best I can to the children but I've been brought up in [...] and I don't have that multicultural dimension to my life—Teacher 4.

I think from the schools that I've been in it's been a really small number of kind of ethnic groups within the school. So it's not something that was maybe encountered as much So I probably couldn't give any kind of successful strategies or stories that were that were available there—Teacher 5.

We just don't have a diverse population and I think that is part of it. When you learn in the moment, it can be a lot easier—Teacher 10.

Illustrating the importance of exosystem diversity and macrosystem-level social norms, analysis suggests recognising and responding to racism was closely tied to the lack of diversity within a given school environment or wider area (exosystem) and intergenerational perceptions (chronosystem) regarding what racism is. As a result of these factors, teachers appear to have limited skills related to racial literacy and even less experiential knowledge pertaining to how to respond to racist incidents. This finding is concerning as all of the school environments that teachers have been drawn from in the current research did have young ethnic minority people (circa 5%–20%). Moreover, as Scotland becomes a more diverse country, teachers will need to develop these skills in order to safeguard and protect young people from racism and racist incidents.

The final sub-theme to emerge under the umbrella of barriers to responding to racism is the influence of parents. Teachers often expressed nervousness when having to escalate the incident and inform both the victim and perpetrator's parents (mesosystem). Narratives pertaining to reporting the incident to the victim's parents again involved discomfort about employing the correct terminology, not wanting to cause any further offence and the perception there is no justice when an incident occurs. Teachers also relayed feeling awkward when having to discuss the incident with the perpetrator's parents and their distress then further being compounded due to parental reactions. On the one hand, parents could be supportive and would address the racism behaviour demonstrated by their child. On the other hand, however, parents sometimes reacted negatively towards teachers, refused to recognise the incident as racist, or supported their child as these intergenerational and geospatial beliefs were accepted as a social norm (macrosystem and chronosystem).

According to Teacher 6, speaking to the victim's parents would be an area of discomfort as it is perceived there are no real consequences to racism. She stated:

I would have to then talk to the parents and I'd find that quite uncomfortable. Because there isn't really consequences to racism. There's phone calls home in the hope that the behaviour changes, but there's not.

Similarly Teacher 9 shared the resistance she faced by speaking to the parents of a young person who had perpetrated racism within their school environment. Teacher 9 recalled:

I think the number one thing is definitely the parents. I spoke to both their parents as well and the girl's mum who made the comment. She was straight away not very happy that I had to record this but also not happy that the daughter had said these things, but was very quick to say that she wouldn't of understood what she was saying or what she meant.

Teacher 9 went on to discuss that Teachers often feel as though they would not be protected when raising a racist incident with the perpetrator's parents as she stated:

It's a really sensitive area for staff to tackle. Because we're not protected. I think there's, like I've been saying, parents can easily turn around and say no, it wasn't and you've just accused my child of this.

A similar parental resistance was also recalled by Teacher 10 who had to call parents due to their child publicly calling out an individual's skin colour repeatedly:

So we had spoken to his parents, but they were very adamant that, oh, he's just pointing out a fact.

Teacher narratives demonstrate that parental responses to racism and racist incidents may indeed serve as a barrier. This analysis reveals the extent to which mesosystem-level relations between teachers and parents influence the microsystem-level work of teachers. From this perspective, the mesosystem in the way that the home and school environment interact influences interactions and responses to racism within the microsystem.

Whilst teachers have to deal with racist incidents within the microsystem setting of the school environment, the current section illuminates how their responses are shaped, constrained, and influenced by a range of factors. Teacher responses to racist incidents in the microsystem are influenced by interactions between other teaching staff and senior management teams which are, in turn, shaped by school values and a dearth of anti-racism policy guidance (the exosystem) and interactions between stakeholders within respective Local Authority areas in the exosystem. These inter-related systems are also embedded and shaped by the macrosystem and accepted social norms about race and ethnicity, which is shaped by historical perceptions of what constitutes racism which changes over time (chronosystem), yet teachers have had limited time (exosystem) to engage with and develop literacies around these changes to embed into their practice (microsystem).

Discussion

In this study, we have explored teacher responses to both hypothetical and lived racist incidents within the school environment and the strategies teachers employ when addressing racism. In discussing the findings, we return to the interrelated systems of Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, and 1986) ecological framework as used in previous research (Horton et al., 2023). It is important to note that none of these systems exist within a vacuum, and there was a considerable degree of overlap. In recounts of responding to racist instances in schools as well as responses to the vignettes, teachers focussed on the role and responsibility of young people themselves (usually the victims), the instinct of staff and where available, school reporting procedures to address racially biased incidents. Participants continuously referenced individual school-based approaches to tackling racism, with only one participant raising an experience of local authority level anti-discrimination training for senior leadership staff. Exosystem and macrosystem level supports were sparse in discussion, and it is evident that there is no embedded curricular demand or national legislation that specifically calls for robust and explicit anti-racism education. Teacher responses highlight an onus on race-based education in response to the occurrence of incidents (assemblies, one-off restorative discussions) as opposed to an embedded curricular approach, which would facilitate a preventative as opposed to a reactive approach. At present, anti-racism does not feature within the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence Benchmark documentation, which is used to plan for learning experiences across the breadth of the curricula (Education Scotland, 2017). Moreover, it

appears as parental influence (mesosystem) and a perceived lack of protection (exosystem) constrain teachers' willingness to respond appropriately to racist incidents when they occur.

The reticence to acknowledge the vignettes as racist incidents is indicative of race evasiveness as opposed to actively anti-racist practices. Denigrating both vignettes and recounts of real-life incidents, teachers often employed the use of non-race related terminology such as *curiosity, disrespectful, and lack of understanding* rather than identifying them as racist. Colour-blindness, colour-evasiveness, or racial avoidance are arguably a 'justification of inaction' (p.155) that maintains the inequality of power (Annamma et al., 2017). This is evident in the discussion with Teacher 4 who suggests that one of the vignettes may be representative of 'banter' and uses this as a justification to disregard the incident. By consciously or unconsciously removing race as an integral facet, the incident can be addressed through more familiar, comfortable, de-politicised language and socially normative concepts of school values, kindness, and respect—all examples of reoccurring language used by teachers within this study.

Whilst this demonstrates the operation of race evasive approaches at the micro- and meso-levels, this issue is also evident in the tacit or reticent approach of Scottish policy in addressing systemic race and racism at the macrosystem level (Meer, 2020). Neither of the teachers referenced national policy in their narration of how racism has been or should be tackled nor did they reference the influence of specific anti-racism training or robust local authority guidance. Whilst one NGO was highlighted for historical involvement in schools by two participants, no other agencies or NGOs were recognised in collaborating with their schools or their local authorities at this time.

It is interesting to note that the frequency and severity of a young person's behaviour determined whether racism was named. This is problematic and lends further support to calls by Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2022) to remove racism from under the umbrella of bullying. This change was proposed as Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2022) argued that teachers tend to address the behaviour under the umbrella of bullying without addressing the racism itself. Based on the current analysis, teachers appear to define bullying in terms of frequency in relation to repeated behaviour. Teacher definitions are contrary to the current Scottish Government (2017, p. 10) approach and guidance to anti-bullying, which highlights that 'while the 'behaviour' may occur once, the threat can be sustained over time', in its definition of bullying. The current findings indicate that teaching staff rely solely on incidents occurring over a sustained amount of time. Moreover teachers may not respond to or record individual incidents of racist behaviour despite the MacPherson (1999). This is problematic, following the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and the recommendations made by the MacPherson (1999); a racist incident has been defined as any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or a bystander (macrosystem). As can be observed, the legal framework defining a racist incident does not include considerations of how frequently an incident occurs for it to be deemed racist. From this perspective, the majority of schools within the current study did not appear to base their policies and definitions on respective anti-bullying and anti-racist government policy documents, thereby overlooking macro- and exo-system-level Scottish Government and Local Authority legislation to guide practice.

The analysis reflects how the lack of training resources in the macro- or exo-system levels such as racial literacy development programmes affects how teachers respond to racism and racist incidents (Hick et al., 2012). The current analysis demonstrates that limited opportunities to both engage in and draw on programmes of education (exo-system) constrain teachers' ability to respond effectively to racist incidents within the microsystem. Moreover, without training based on best practice, teachers will not have the ability to lay the pedagogical groundwork for long-lasting behaviour change. The lack of available training may however be tied to a dearth of coherent anti-racism policy within the school environment.

Across all micro-system settings presented from the school environments above, it was apparent that teachers had no race-related pedagogical or social justice frameworks to embed in their practice and often relied on one-off-talks or assemblies. Research, however, suggests that this approach is unlikely to reduce prejudicial or racist behaviours (Campbell and Hay, 2018) or may even lead to negative impacts if not valued at a systemic level, planned for, collaborative and embedded in practice as opposed to maligned with restorative, deficit, and reactive opportunities instigated by racism and racist incidents (Marcus, 2023). Indeed, McBride (2015) suggests that a programme of sustained education over an extended period is more likely to change prejudicial attitudes.

There were also limited resources within the exo-system for teachers to draw on such as anti-racism education or support organisations to offer educational inputs to young people and teachers alike. All of these factors are however contingent on exo-system level funding and directives from Local Authorities and macrosystem-level funding from Scottish Government. Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2022) review of local authority policies and reporting procedures regarding racially motivated bullying confirms the nationwide inconsistency in providing reliable and robust frameworks for practitioners. As can be observed from the current findings, structural elements connected to the exo- and macrosystem levels shape and constrain teachers' ability to respond appropriately within the micro-system and therefore result in teachers relying on their own instinct or intuition instead of race-related pedagogical or social justice frameworks when responding to a racist incident. This finding lends support to Arshad et al.'s (2017) earlier reflections which suggested that teachers often tackle inequalities through intuition rather than drawing on theoretical frameworks or social justice praxis which results in *ad hoc* practice.

Turning now to consider generational and geospatial diversity, social norms and perceptions of what constitutes racism (macrosystem) and the changing landscape regarding appropriate terminology have changed considerably (chronosystem). In support of the current findings, research conducted by Ross (2018) suggests that racism is often explained as a generational concept, whereby older generations were more likely to be racist. Similarly, Arshad et al. (2017) recognises the role of intergenerational understandings in perpetuating racial myths, stereotypes, and validating microaggressions in Scotland. It appears that the practitioners in this study also rely on this generational explanation, despite intentionally or unintentionally propagating overlooking or condoning racism themselves within interviews which lends support to critical race theorists who hold that racism is an ordinary everyday occurrence and not aberrational (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017).

Moreover, the teachers in the current study also lean on the lack of perceived diversity within their respective schools and

communities to justify their lack of racial literacy. A predominantly white teacher workforce has been recognised as a fundamental challenge in addressing race and racism in Scottish schools by both students themselves and at government level (Meer, 2016; Arshad et al., 2017; Scottish Government, 2018, 2021; Guyan, 2019; Intercultural Youth Scotland, 2021). The legislative and policy landscape has, however, not kept up with the pace of these geospatial diversity changes. Limited guidance within the exo- and macro-system-levels thereby impacts on teachers' confidence and ability to respond within the micro-system of the school environment. Indeed, these factors influenced whether teachers would intervene in a racist incident as well as the nature of the intervention. To this end, teacher responses are embedded in and influenced by the various interrelated systems including school values, rules and policies (exosystem), national policies, laws and definitions (macro-system), and shifting terminological understandings of racism (chronosystem).

Echoing findings of the study by Horton et al. (2023) investigating teacher responses to bullying more broadly, the teachers in the current study perceived the mesosystem-level interactions with parents to be a significant barrier to addressing racism within the micro-system. The teachers often experienced distress and discomfort when having to contact both the victim and perpetrator's parents. In relation to the victim's parents, teachers were often concerned about employing the correct terminology and sometimes felt they were letting the family down due to the perception that racist behaviour is never truly tackled. This was often due to the reaction of the perpetrator's parents who, at times, condoned the behaviour or did not see it as racist and therefore did not address it. In some instances, the perpetrator's parents did acknowledge that the behaviour was racist but often reacted negatively when they were advised that the incident would be recorded officially. Teachers also perceived that there to be a lack of protection within the school environment which increased discomfort and reluctance to raise the incident with parents. It is also worth highlighting that teachers may feel a lack of protection within the exo- and macro-level systems should take the steps to deal with a racist incident. This perceived lack of protection may then also be inhibiting their willingness to deal with a racist incident when it occurs. Moreover, whilst teachers may respond to incidents within the microsystem setting of the school, behaviour change amongst young people will be influenced by mesosystem decisions taken by parents.

This study postulates for radical shifts in the race paradigm in order to lead change at all levels of Scottish education. Young (2018) correlates the reluctance of public services to face institutional racism with the unhelpful construction of the term 'racism' as an individual flaw or insult. To address racism and racist incidents effectively within Scottish schools, the responsibility of leading anti-racism education and tackling incidents when they arise should not be placed solely at the feet of young people and school staff. It is argued that increasing the racial literacy and competency of practitioners at all levels through robust and clear guidance, policies, accessible, and mandatory training will give rise to valued curricular and pedagogical measures to support the development of more socially just school communities, in turn, hopefully minimising racist incidents but also reducing contention over notions of frequency, nature, and severity of cases to inform a more reliable and accurate recognition and reporting of racism and racist incidents. Macro-level institutional accountability from government and local authorities is required with commitment to investment into exo- and meso-level training, NGO partnerships, procedures, and directives.

Limitations

The methodological approach adopted within this research has yielded great utility in exploring and understanding the strategies teachers employ in addressing racism and the barriers that may constrain these attempts. A particular strength of the study is that it draws on participants from Scotland and allows for a rare glimpse into the social justice issues facing teachers in more rural settings. It is limited in the sense that the research was conducted online with a relatively small sample of teaching staff ($N = 11$), and the findings are therefore not generalisable to the broader population (Vasileiou et al., 2018). However, our findings can contribute to a better understanding of how teachers identify an incident as racist, their professional development needs, the impact of school level, local authority, and wider government policy and how this influences the management of racist incidents within the school environment.

Conclusion

Our findings demonstrate that teachers struggle to recognise racism and often reframe racist incidents through more de-politicised language and socially normative concepts of school values, kindness, and respect. However, it is clear from our findings that teachers' ability to recognise and respond to racism is severely constrained by the lack of clear exo- and macro-level policy frameworks, accessible training, and legislative directives. This suggests that further engagement with anti-racist practices in education is required at the macro-level before teacher attitudes and responses to racist incidents can improve at the micro-level.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the University of the West of Scotland Ethics Committee. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

NH: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. ED: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. MS: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated

organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2024.1376017/full#supplementary-material>

References

- Aguirre, A., Moliner, L., and Francisco, A. (2021). "Can Anybody Help Me?" High School Teachers' Experiences on LGBTphobia Perception, Teaching Intervention and Training on Affective and Sexual Diversity. *J. Homosex.* 68, 2430–2450. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2020.1804265
- Anagnostopoulos, D., Buchanan, N. T., Pereira, C., and Lichty, L. F. (2009). School staff responses to gender-based bullying as moral interpretation: An exploratory study. *Educational Policy*, 23, 519–553.
- Annamma, S. A., Jackson, D. D., and Morrison, D. (2017). Conceptualizing color-evasiveness: using dis/ability critical race theory to expand a color-blind racial ideology in education and society. *Race Ethn. Educ.* 20, 147–162. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2016.1248837
- Arday, J., and Mirza, H. S. eds. (2018). *Dismantling race in higher education: Racism, whiteness and decolonising the academy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Arshad, R. (2017). Diversity and social justice – beyond motherhood and apple pie. *Scott. Educ. Rev.* 49, 3–13. doi: 10.1163/27730840-04901002
- Arshad, R., Botterill, K., Hopkins, P., and Sanghera, G. (2017). Minority ethnic young people: confident negotiators. *Race Equal Teach* 34, 5–9. doi: 10.18546/RET.34.2.02
- Arshad, R., and Moskal, M. the Educational Institute of Scotland (2016). Racial Equality and Scottish School Education: Ensuring today's young people are tomorrow's confident citizens. Available at: <https://www.ceres.education.ed.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/CERES-Briefing-4-FINAL4.pdf>.
- Bayram Özdemir, S., Özdemir, M., and Elzinga, A. E. (2021). Psychological adjustment of ethnically victimized adolescents: Do teachers' responses to ethnic victimization incidents matter?. *Eur. J. Dev. Psychol.* 18, 848–864.
- Bhopal, K. (2010). Gender, identity and experience: researching marginalised groups. *Women's Stud. Int. Forum* 33, 188–195. doi: 10.1016/j.wsif.2009.12.005
- Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3, 77–101.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Recent advances in research on the ecology of human development. *Development as action in context: Problem behavior and normal youth development*. 287–309.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard university press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American psychologist*, 32:513.
- Bucerius, S. (2013). Becoming a 'trusted outsider': gender, ethnicity, and inequality in ethnographic research. *J. Contemp. Ethnogr.* 42, 690–721. doi: 10.1177/0891241613497747
- Campbell, L., and Hay, N. (2018). Organisation case study of show racism the red card Scotland. *Radical Commun Work J* 3.
- Centre for Education for Racial Equality Scotland (CERES) University of Edinburgh (2023). Enhancing racial and linguistic equality in education – Scotland and wider UK. Available at: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/education/rke/making-a-difference/championing-race-and-linguistic-equality> (Accessed 1 November 2023)
- Coalition for Racial Equality and Rights (2022). *Racially motivated bullying: Policies and recording in Scotland's schools*. CRER: Glasgow.
- Cochran-Smith, M., Ell, F., Grudnoff, L., Haigh, M., Hill, M., and Ludlow, L. (2016). Initial teacher education: what does it take to put equity at the Centre? *J Teach Teacher Educ* 57, 67–78. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2016.03.006
- D'Urso, G., Fazzari, E., La Marca, L., and Simonelli, C. (2023). Teachers and inclusive practices against bullying: a qualitative study. *J. Child Fam. Stud.* 32, 2858–2866. doi: 10.1007/s10826-022-02393-z
- Davies, J. (2021). Opening the "can of Worms": preparing teachers to address issues relating to "race". *Front. Educ.* 5:489407. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2020.489407
- Davies, J., and Crozier, G. (2006). Diversity and Teacher Education: Research into Training Provision in England. University of Sunderland, mULTIVERSE. Available at: <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20101007160719/http://www.multiverse.ac.uk/viewArticle2.aspx?contentId=12268>
- Delgado, R., and Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory: An introduction*. 3rd Edn. London: New York University Press.
- Department for Education (2011). Teachers' Standards. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards> (Accessed 30 October 2023).
- Department for Education (2014a). The National Curriculum in England: Complete Framework for Key Stages 1 to 4. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4> (Accessed 30 October 2023).
- Department for Education (2014b). *Promoting fundamental British values through SMSC*. London: Department for Education.
- Education Scotland (2017). Benchmarks. Available at: <https://education.gov.scot/curriculum-for-excellence/curriculum-for-excellence-documents/curriculum-for-excellence-benchmarks/> (Accessed 11 January 2024).
- European Parliament (2016). Regulation (EU) 2016/679 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data on the free movement of such data.
- Fusch, P., and Ness, L. (2015). Are we there yet? Data saturation in qualitative research. *Qual. Rep.* 20, 1409–1416. doi: 10.46743/2160-3715/2015.2281
- General Teaching Council for Scotland (2021). The Standard for Full Registration: Mandatory requirements for registration with the General Teaching Council for Scotland. Formal Enactment 2 August 2021.
- Gillborn, D., Demack, S., Rollock, N., and Warmington, P. (2017). Moving the goalposts: education policy and 25 years of the black/white achievement gap. *Br. Educ. Res. J.* 43, 848–874. doi: 10.1002/berj.3297
- Gillborn, D., Rollock, N., Vincent, C., and Ball, J. (2012). 'You got a pass, so what more do you want?': Race, class and gender intersections in the educational experiences of black middle class. *Race Ethn. Educ.* 15, 121–139. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2012.638869
- Guyan, K. (2019). *In sight: The perceptions and experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic young people in Scottish schools*. Scotland, Edinburgh: Intercultural Youth Scotland.
- Hadjiioannou, X., and Hutchinson, M. (2010). Putting the Gback in English: preparing pre-serviceteachers to teach grammar. *Engl. Teach. Pract. Crit.* 9, 90–105. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ912625.pdf>.
- Hemady, C., and Assan, T. T. (2020). *Covid in colour: The experiences of young black and people of colour scots during the pandemic*. Intercultural Youth Scotland.
- Hick, P., Arshad, R., Watt, D., and Roberts, L. (2012). *Promoting cohesion, challenging expectations educating the teachers of tomorrow for race equality and diversity in 21st century schools*. Edinburgh: HE Academy.
- Hopkins, P., Botterill, K., Sanghera, G., and Arshad, R. (2015). *Faith, ethnicity, place: Young people's everyday geopolitics in Scotland*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Newcastle University.
- Horton, P., Forsberg, C., and Thornberg, R. (2020). 'It's hard to be everywhere': teachers' perspectives on spatiality, school design and school bullying. *Int. J. Emot. Educ.* 12, 41–55. Available at: <https://www.um.edu.mt/library/oar/bitstream/123456789/65096/3/v12i2tm3.pdf>.
- Horton, P., Forsberg, C., and Thornberg, R. (2023). Juridification and judgement calls: Swedish schoolteachers' reflections on dealing with bullying, harassment, and degrading treatment. *Educ. Inq.* 1–14. doi: 10.1080/20004508.2023.2170016
- Intercultural Youth Scotland (2021). *Silence, Truth & Antiracist Thought intercultural youth Scotland's report for the UN decade for people of African descent 2021*. Scotland.
- Kollerová, L., Soukup, P., Strohmeier, D., and Caravita, S. C. (2021). Teachers' active responses to bullying: does the school collegial climate make a difference? *Eur. J. Dev. Psychol.* 18, 912–927. doi: 10.1080/17405629.2020.1865145
- MacPherson, W. (1999). *The Stephen Lawrence enquiry. Report of an enquiry by sir William*. London: The Stationery Office.
- Marcus, G. (2023). 'And still I rise' in G. Marcus and PeerS. Van de *Anti-racism in education: Stories of growing activism*. Great Britain: Critical Publishing.

- McBride, M. (2015). *What works to reduce prejudice and discrimination? A review of the evidence*. Edinburgh: Scottish government.
- Meer, N. (2016). *Scotland and race equality: Directions in policy and identity*. Edinburgh: Runnymede Trust.
- Meer, N. (2020). Race equality policy making in a devolved context: assessing the opportunities and obstacles for a “Scottish approach”. *J. Soc. Policy* 49, 233–250. doi: 10.1017/S0047279419000187
- Mohammed, K. (2023) The national anti-racism framework for initial teacher education. Scottish council of deans education. Available at: https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_934784_smxx.pdf (Accessed 21 March 2024).
- Paljakka, A. (2023). Teachers’ awareness and sensitivity to a bullying incident: a qualitative study. *Int. J. Bullying Prev.*, 1–19. doi: 10.1007/s42380-023-00185-7
- Pearce, S. (2014). Dealing with racist incidents: what do beginning teachers learn from schools? *Race Ethn. Educ.* 17, 388–406. doi: 10.1080/13613324.2013.832936
- Race Relations Amendment Act (2000). C. 34. *UK Government*. Available at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/34/notes/contents>.
- Ross, A. (2018). Young Europeans: a new political generation? *Societies* 8:70. doi: 10.3390/soc8030070
- Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. London: Sage.
- Sapouna, M., de Amicis, L., and Vezzali, L. (2023). Bullying victimization due to racial, ethnic, citizenship and/or religious status: a systematic review. *Adolescent Res Rev* 8, 261–296. doi: 10.1007/s40894-022-00197-2
- Scandurra, C., Picariello, S., Valerio, P., and Amodeo, A. L. (2017). Sexism, homophobia and transphobia in a sample of Italian pre-service teachers: The role of socio-demographic features. *J Educ Teaching*. 43, 245–261.
- Scottish Government (2016). *Race equality framework*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2017). *Respect for all: The national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland’s children and young people*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2018). *Teaching in a diverse Scotland: Increasing and retaining minority ethnic teachers in Scotland’s schools*. Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament.
- Scottish Government (2021). *Teaching in a diverse Scotland: Increasing and retaining minority ethnic teachers – 3 years on: Progress and final report*. Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2022). *Building racial literacy Programme: FOI release*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Parliament Equalities and Human Rights Committee (2017). *It is not cool to be cruel: Prejudice-based bullying and harassment of children and young people in schools*. Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament.
- Smith, H., and Lander, V. (2023). Finding ‘pockets of possibility’ for anti-racism in a curriculum for student teachers: from absence to action. *Curricul J* 34, 22–42. doi: 10.1002/curj.177
- Solórzano, D. G., and Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical race methodology: counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education. *Qual. Inq.* 8, 22–44. doi: 10.1177/107780040200800103
- Sue, D. W. (2010). *Microaggressions in everyday life: Race, gender, and sexual orientation*. London: Wiley.
- Tippett, N., Houlston, C., and Smith, P. K. (2010). *Prevention and response to identity-based bullying among local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales*. London: Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- Vasileiou, K., Barnett, J., Thorpe, S., and Young, T. (2018). Characterising and justifying sample size sufficiency in interview-based studies: systematic analysis of qualitative health research over a 15-year period. *BMC Med. Res. Methodol.* 18:148. doi: 10.1186/s12874-018-0594-7
- Young, C. (2018). “Changing the race equality paradigm” in *No problem Here: Understanding racism in Scotland*. ed. N. Davidson (Edinburgh: Luath Press Limited).