DECOLONISING THE CURRICULUM WITHIN UK HIGHER EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF ACADEMIC PERCEPTIONS IN A POST-1992 UNIVERSITY

by

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ABSTRACT

Decolonising the curriculum became the focus of UK Higher Education (UKHE) following student campaigns to change the dominant Eurocentric focus in terms of pedagogy, learning experiences and intellectual contributions. The influence of UK government initiatives, from Prime Minister Initiatives (PMI) in 1999 and 2006, through to AimHigher Excellence Challenge (2001) were examined and provide a historical background within which the case study organisation, Peak University, is situated. The theoretical framework of Postcolonial Theory and Interest-convergence were used to examine the UKHE system to illustrate where issues of knowledge, power, complicity, and resistance are present within its structures. Interviews with academics across business and humanity disciplines were undertaken together with a student focus group and survey. Data revealed that heavy workloads, limited support, and direction from senior management, as well as access to marginalised and underrepresented knowledges were barriers to transformative change. Academics displayed a good understanding of the need for change to the curriculum to address the increasing diversity of the student body, but also demonstrated frustration in relation to the leadership and direction provided. As such this study extends previous theoretical understandings of race in education and the interplay with knowledge and power. It is recommended that this study be extended beyond Peak University to other institutions and organisations engaging in anti-racism work.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BLM	Black Lives Matter
BME	Black Minority Ethnic
CLS	Critical Legal Studies
COIL	Collaborative Online International Learning
CRRE	Centre for Research in Race and Education
CWS	Critical Whiteness Studies
CRT	Critical Race Theory
DPR	Development and Performance Review
ECU	Equality Challenge Unit
EDI	Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Agency
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IaH	Internationalisation at Home
IES	International Education Strategies
IoC	Internationalisation of the Curriculum
KEF	Knowledge Excellence Framework
KPA	Keele Postgraduate Association
KUCU	Keele University College Union
LTA	Learning, Teaching and Assessment
LTAF	Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework
OfS	Office for Students
PMI	Prime Minister’s Initiative
REC	Race Equality Charter
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SU	Student Union
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework

TNE	Transnational Education
UK	United Kingdom
UKHE	United Kingdom Higher Education
UKHEI	United Kingdom Higher Education Institution
UKRI	United Kingdom Research Institute
US	United States

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of my research, the context in which it is situated, and outlines the nature and purpose of my investigation. I then move onto an overview of the influence of government policies and neoliberalism on the higher education sector before focusing on the calls to decolonise the curriculum and its implications and challenges within UK Higher Education (UKHE). I present background context to the chosen organisation, which has been given the pseudonym Peak University. After exploring the current context of the case study organisation, I present the research aims and objectives, providing the rationale and justification for my investigation as well as my contribution. Lastly, I present the structure and summary of the subsequent chapters.

There are two practical issues at play within UKHE. Firstly, there are issues of race and racism, particularly structural racism which are implicated in the BAME awarding gap. The term BAME itself is contested as it helps to categorise groups and highlight the inequities they face, but can also be argued to be demeaning, wherein judgements about superiority/inferiority of ability, skills and knowledge are assumed (DaCosta et al., 2021). It is the inequities within the UKHE structures and curriculum that are being challenged through the call to decolonise, which makes BAME an appropriate term to use in this research. Secondly, there are the issues of academic time and workload and wider institutional agendas which link to the neoliberal approach in which UKHE is situated, explored further in Chapter 2. Decolonising the curriculum provides an opportunity to review what is being taught, the lens and perspective that knowledge is viewed through and to broaden the approach used within UKHE. Decolonising work seeks to be more inclusive and to speak to the varied lived experiences and knowledges that are seldom acknowledged within UKHE, explored further in Section 2.7. To commence this exploration of the wider challenges and to view decolonisation efforts within UKHEIs I will begin with some background to defining what is required to decolonise the curriculum and then situate it within the current UK Higher Education sector.

1.1 Decolonising the Curriculum

The term decolonisation comes with a diverse range of definitions, understandings and aims, as well as resistance. Due to its historical associations and political implications, it is an often-contested terminology. There are two key aspects of decolonising work which relate; firstly, to the way the world is viewed, the shaping force of colonialism and racism in modern society, and secondly, a focus on undoing the appropriation of land (Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancioğlu, 2018). It is the former aspect that is the focus of this research as intellectual decolonisation seeks to identify the diverse ways of knowing and thinking that have been marginalised or excluded from normative practices within UKHE and to reclaim ideas of knowledge production (Zembylas, 2022). Decolonising the curriculum, and indeed the university, seeks to challenge and decentre the Western or European model of education that is prevalent within UKHE, to challenge the structures at play so that marginalised voices have an equitable position within the UK curricula which is explored in more depth in Chapter 2.

Furthermore, there remain challenges and questions as to whether the university itself should be focusing on decolonisation as there is a danger that the term is diluted or embedded into the language and discourse within UKHE where the meaning is akin to reconciling guilt and little action is taken to change the status quo. The absorption of the term often negates the depth of understanding and the implications of what it means to decolonise. Tuck and Yang (2012) strongly argue against this absorption stating that decolonisation is not a metaphor, as it has specific political aims and, as such, is not a means to containing or allaying colonial guilt. The challenge for universities therefore is how will they implement decolonisation of the curriculum when it is such a contested term and manage this within the everchanging political agenda of the UK government. It is, therefore, important to turn to the role and influence the UK government has on higher education in the UK and to explore the background to the current UKHE context.

1.2 Government Influence on Education

To gain an understanding of the context within which UK universities operate, it is necessary to evaluate the influence that UK government policy has on their agenda and priorities. It is recognised that policy discourse has the ability to effectively marginalise or silence certain voices whilst making others dominant or authoritative. Ball (1993: 14) argues that policy, or collections of policies, exercise power over both truth and knowledge production as a form of discourse. It can, therefore, also be argued that through policy discourse the identification of "what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority" (Ball, 1993: 14) has ensured the dominance of a Western or Eurocentric model of education. The relationship between the UK economy and education policy has a long history dating from the nineteenth century and beyond (Garratt and Forrester, 2012). The UK, like many other countries i.e., USA, Canada, Ireland, and Australia have developed national policies to attract international students, which enables the UK government to structure the HE sector, institutions and the country to compete in the global education market, with the UK being the second largest destination country for international students (UNESCO, 2022). Through its history of colonisation, the UK has benefitted from international students' attendance at UK universities as it is seen as one of the best in the world. As such UK Higher Education Institutions (UKHEIs) are competing in the recruitment of valuable assets, namely international students, due to the economic benefits that have been identified through government policy initiatives. The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) was created to focus on "supporting and enhancing the competitive strength of the sector" (HESA, 2023) and it is their responsibility to collect, verify, and publish, data about the UK higher education sector so that students, UKHE providers, the Office for Students (OfS), the UK Research Institute (UKRI) and the Secretary of State for Education are provided with information that will assist with both course selection and the UKHE providers themselves. According to HESA in 2021-22 over 679,970 students from around the world attended university in the UK of which 120,140 were from the EU and 558,825 were non-EU (HESA, 2023; UUK, 2023). The figures for international students have increased annually which demonstrates the attractiveness of UKHE and why the UK government continues to focus on the competitive nature of the UK education sector.

The UK government undertake regular reviews of education and it is generally agreed that the restructuring of UK education began in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher's government (Ball, 1997: 259). Following a neoliberal strategy, the focus was on performativity and economic benefits which required the "privatisation, liberalisation, and an imposition of commercial criteria in any residual state sector" (Jessop, 1994: 30). The public sector, and therefore education, within the UK began to focus more on measurement in terms of quality, efficiency, standards of excellence and was exposed to market forces and competition both nationally and internationally. The neoliberal approach to UKHE continued throughout the 1980s onwards however it is arguably in the 1990's through New Labour's Higher Education policy that a series of initiatives were introduced to increase international student numbers. There are three main stages whereby national policies on international students in the UK can be found: the Prime Ministers Initiative (PMI) Prime Ministers Initiative 2 (PMI2) and the Coalition's International Education Strategy (IES). Firstly, the Prime Ministers Initiative (PMI) introduced in 1999, supported the increase in the number of international students in UK education "in recognition of their importance in fostering international relations and bringing long-term political and economic benefits to the UK" (Enslin and Hedge, 2008:113). The aim of this policy was to secure the UK as a top education provider in the global marketplace, in recognition that countries such as Canada and Australia were gaining market shares in international student numbers.

As UKHE was considered to be over reliant on public funding, PMI afforded universities with the opportunity to become more entrepreneurial and business focused albeit creating hyper-competition within the education sector. The initiative aimed to attract 50,000 additional international students within 6 years (British Council (BC)) and was a way to finance the governments' objective of widening participation, encouraging higher numbers of the UK population into tertiary education, without increasing taxes (Garratt and Forrester, 2012). Both PMI and

PMI2 are examples of two neoliberal practices. Firstly, economic commercialisation through the increase in the funding model of “user-pay principle” which has led to higher fees for international students and increases in tuition fees for Home/EU students (Wai Lo, 2016: 763). Secondly, through managerialism wherein government requirements for higher participation rates in tertiary education have increased.

The restructuring of funding following the Dearing Commission in 1996 meant that this newly semi-privatised education environment gave more popular universities an unfair advantage as they became richer, creating a stratified university system. The second Prime Minister’s Initiative (PMI2 Connect) in 2006 invested £27 million with the sole purpose of attracting full-fee paying international students (Tannock, 2013) with recruitment targets set at 100,000; additional requirements were for universities to expand the number of countries sending large numbers of students to the UK, to improve student satisfaction ratings as this was also considered a weakness, and to improve employability, and grow partnerships (DIUS, 2009; UKCISA, 2011a). It is widely recognised by the UK Government and UKHEIs that international students continue to provide large sums of revenue to the UK economy with figures showing an increase from £31.3 billion to £41.9 billion between 2018/19 and 2021/22 (HEPI/Kaplan International Pathways/Universities UK International/ London Economics, 2023). The figures themselves suggest that the government focus is driven by the financial benefits primarily and not about the quality or experience of the international students being targeted by these initiatives.

1.3 Neoliberalism in Higher Education

Neoliberalism stresses the importance of self-interest and free market operations as a basis for most efficient and just forms of society. It is defined as a “complex, often incoherent, unstable and even contradictory set of practices that are organised around a certain imagination of ‘the market’ as a basis for the universalisation of market-based social relations, with the corresponding penetration in almost every single aspect of our lives” (Ball, 2012:18). Within the UKHE sector this has often resulted in cutbacks to the state funding provision, often working through the use of colour blind language and dismissing the importance of race and racism within policy analysis (Gillborn, 2014). Success is seen as a reflection of merit, hard work and belief that private provision is inherently superior, thereby hiding the level of inequality present under such beliefs. The UK government initiatives, discussed in Section 1.2, signalled a change in focus whereby knowledge became a commodity which would enhance employability and provide opportunities for better jobs. This, in turn, has led to the mass demand for HE (massification) and societal needs for highly educated personnel (Mavelli, 2014). As a reflection of this shift the language used within UKHE to refer to students also changed to question whether they were consumers and subsequent research ensued (Brooks et al., 2016; Killick, 2009). The language of consumerism has been particularly prevalent since the fee reforms of 2012 which is unsurprising due to neoliberal approaches to the UK education market that commenced under Thatcher's government (Bunce, Baird and Jones, 2017).

The marketisation of HE and the significance of international students' mobility has led universities to become more business focused, and to view students in accounting terms rather than what they embody (who they are as people) in order to pursue the financial revenue needed to survive (Warwick, 2014; Gale and Hodge, 2014). This neoliberal globalisation of knowledge, which refers to the undermining of institutional practices focused on social, intellectual and ethical quality in favour of economic motives, has helped to hide the inequalities that lie within it, as access to UKHE is not equal (Mavelli, 2014; Burke, 2012; Shahajan, 2014). This approach leads to what Zipin et al., (2003) refer to as "habituated aspirations" which emphasise the perceived deficits of students' social-structural positions in society, in comparison with and by the dominant group. In UKHE academic practice is commodified and academic staff performativity is measured based on comparison and output. The neoliberal approach to knowledge emphasises that what is learnt is practical and economically useful in the marketplace i.e., skills and services in a knowledge economy; that learning is about performing in certain ways in order to achieve specified outcomes; and that quality is assured by measurable accountability processes (Ball, 2004; Brooks et al., 2016; Zepke 2015; Codd, 2005).

Growth of this nature and its sustainability requires the alignment of policies and resources from UKHEIs as well as the commitment of university staff. PMI Phase I and II focus on the “quality of the student experience” but do not consider or explore the experiences and perceptions of the academic staff who are required to provide this level of education, engaging with intercultural competencies, encouraging dialogues and debates, nor the access to support or resources they need (Trahar and Hyland, 2011). The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Research Paper No. 128 (2013: 7) clearly identifies that “the aim of recent policies has been to attract the brightest and the best students to the UK for study purposes, but at the same time to tackle immigration abuse in the student route”. Government policy itself is contradictory when referring to international students and depends on whether the context is immigration and visas, economics and fees, or soft power and nationality (Merrick, 2013). Education policy in the UK has always been at odds with economic and migration policy as where financially the UK wants the fees and additional sums that international students provide, the immigration policy sees international students as a problem, abusing the system, and therefore seeks to decrease numbers by making it more difficult to gain entry and generally deter students from considering the UK as an easy option. One such initiative was the Points Based system introduced in 2008/09, with Tier 4 applying to international students whereby UKHEIs act as sponsors and are assessed on the outcomes of visa applications, student progress and successful course completions. This approach attempted to support PMI and PMI2 which focused on increasing international student numbers, whilst at the same time meeting the needs of an immigration policy change to increase control, all of which continues today.

Educational policy in the UK has been incorporated into an agenda that views the construction of the knowledge worker as its raison d’être (Patrick, 2013) as both a neoliberal approach and a focus on the knowledge economy provide a strong influence on the UK education sector. The knowledge economy, whilst a contested approach, has a shared understanding that education is the driver for economic success, growth and therefore development which provides countries with a competitive advantage within the global market (Patrick, 2013: 2). It is therefore the economic value of both what the UKHE sector produces in terms of courses, degree outcomes and rankings that is at the forefront and as such knowledge has become "objectified, measurable and transferable" (Brancaleone and O'Brien, 2011: 506) with disciplines themselves having differing economic value. As can be seen in the education policies discussed in section 1.2, and the massification of UKHE, it is the UK government's policies and initiatives that mould and influence how the knowledge economy is implemented within higher education. UK Government initiatives drive the policies and practices within higher education in terms of funding, mass recruitment, measurement and performativity including the targeting of underrepresented groups, however, these same initiatives have created more challenges and evidence of inequality, both for international students and, more specifically, for UK based students. It is for this reason that I will now move to focus on race in education, the challenges to structural and institutional racism and the implications for UK based ethnic minority students and their degree outcomes.

1.4 Race in UK Education

The transition from an elite HE to the massification of HE has benefited those from richer backgrounds. Despite being viewed as a vehicle for social mobility, it has succeeded instead in reproducing class relations and patterns of privilege (Shiner and Noden, 2015; Brown and Hesketh, 2004). Whilst most UKHEIs have a diverse student body, questions are being asked in terms of attainment for Black students in particular and why they are not achieving the same level of degree as their white peers; including research and discussion into the factors that may influence racial inequalities. The factors are multifaceted and can range from socio-economic status, work and family commitments, and/or cultural differences, demonstrating intersectional challenges based on both class and race (McDuff, Tatam, Beacock and Ross, 2018). Race and racism in UK education is a contested terrain with challenges made against both its existence and the effect it has on degree outcomes, access to employment and wider society. With the 2019 election of a Conservative government, led by Boris Johson, the debates around race inequality in UK education accelerated, with campaigns to silence calls for a diversified and decolonised curriculum as well as attempts by the UK government to remove the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as it is perceived as divisive (Department for Education, 2022; Gillborn, McGimpsey and Warmington, 2022). In October 2020, during Black History Month a debate within the House of Commons saw the Conservative government declare that it was “unequivocally against” the concept of Critical Race Theory. The argument was against calls to decolonise the curriculum in favour of a more comprehensive representation of Black history itself. Kemi Badenoch, the Equalities Minister at the time, clearly stated that the government does not want school teachers “to teach their white pupils about white privilege and inherited racial guilt” (Guardian, October 2020).

It is recognised that racism can be manifested in a range of different ways, from a personal perspective in terms of prejudice, ideas, and beliefs about specific ethnic or racial groups, through to institutional racism where racism is embedded into the practices and policies that result in different outcomes based on ethnic groups (AdvanceHE, 2021: 5). Whilst there is recognition that individuals may be racist, have racist ideas or perspectives, the concepts of institutional racism and structural racism are contested, particularly by the UK government led by Boris Johnson (Gillborn et al., 2022; Weale, 2022; Wynn-Davies, 2022). However, recognition was initially gained through the Macpherson Report (1999) which investigated the police handling of the murder of Stephen Lawrence, a young black man, as it resulted in the police force recognising themselves as being institutionally racist. There is consensus that the Macpherson Report was a key turning point in the UK public’s understanding of the concepts and this focus influenced other public sector bodies, including the UK education sector. The report defined institutional racism as:

> "The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes, and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people” (Macpherson Report, 1999: para 6.34).

As such, attention was drawn to issues of both institutional and structural racism within UKHE and whether this was at least part of the reason for such differing degree outcomes. UK higher education is therefore being challenged to change the differing and predominantly lower levels of achievement of ethnic minority groups in terms of degree outcomes and classifications awarded – namely the “stubborn” awarding gap, by looking at the structures, systems and practices in place and who they are designed to support. Structural racism refers to:

> “The systems and structures in which the policies and practices are located, interacting with institutional culture, environment, curriculum, and other ’norms’, and compounded by wider external history, culture and systemic privilege that perpetuate ‘race’ inequality” (AdvanceHE, 2021: 5).

Challenges to racial inequalities are not new, however in response to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and subsequent challenges surrounding structural racism within UK institutions the UK government commissioned an investigation. In March 2021 the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities (CRED) released a report, often referred to as the Sewell Report, named after its chair, Dr Tony Sewell. The commission was tasked to investigate disparities across a wider range of sectors including education, employment, crime, policing, and health. Emphasis was on data predominantly with the findings evoking a series of mixed reactions. Whilst there was recognition of bias within the institutions the overall finding of the report was that “the UK had become open and fairer” (2021: 6) and that the UK was not structurally racist. The commission made it clear that due to the challenges of measuring bias within culture the use of terms such as structural racism was unhelpful and subjective, preferring to focus on “observable metrics” to analyse the causes of the issues, but also areas of improvement. In essence, rather than tackling the causes of the differing levels of degree outcomes, the report preferred to state that this was not due to structural racism but was more subjective, and due to ethnic minority groups feelings of belonging within those institutions. The focus on metrics also suggests that the neoliberal logic, which began with Thatcherism in the 1980s, continues in the UK today (see Section 1.2).

There has been some critique of the Sewell Report as the overall message in relation to education was that racism plays a very small part in the inequalities at play and that other factors, mainly socio-economic status, has greater influence.

Tikly (2021) argues that the report directly feeds into existing “culture wars” following the severe effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on widening educational inequalities and seeks to add into the “levelling up agenda” (2021: 3). The appointment of the Commission members and, in particular, Sewell himself, was questioned as many had openly stated that they did not believe that institutional racism existed. Therefore, the report continues to have contested and controversial findings due to existing bias and claims that the focus was on quantitative data. The emphasis on statistical data itself was challenged in a paper by the Centre for Research in Race and Education (CRRE) in 2021 wherein the deficit discourse is highlighted. The paper problematises the use of data; firstly, through the Sewell report’s refusal to validate lived experiences, and secondly, in how the quantitative data was selected and used. Quantitative data can act as a “garbage can”, thereby including too many differing factors, which minimises the focus on race and racism by default, where data can also be manipulated and discarded to fit the requirements of the research (2021: 2). In addition, the CRRE paper identified a correlation between teachers’ low expectations of students from minority ethnic backgrounds, and the curriculum that is taught to them, which is considered “outdated” and one which does not represent the diversity of the student body. The CRRE (2021) response provides a direct link to decolonisation work as it highlights the need to review not just what is being taught, but also who is teaching it, and whether they are representative of the students, their experiences, their background, and their knowledge.

The Sewell report itself makes 24 recommendations grouped into four themes: build trust; promote fairness; create agency; and achieve inclusivity and whilst I do not intend to discuss all of them, there are one or two areas that are important for the context of decolonising the curriculum. Promote Fairness recommended a focus on “educational success for all communities” which is a direct link to the challenges of the Awarding gap wherein it was identified that ethnic minority students are more likely to drop out of UKHE, achieve lower-level degrees, and therefore, lower earnings. However, the report recommendations do not go far enough to challenge the Western dominance in terms of structure, or the HE environment in my opinion. I contend that without recognising the role and dominance of the white Eurocentric model of education in the UK, the Sewell report provides a series of vague statements which are open to interpretation. As a result UKHEIs can provide a series of statements or actions, which do little to change the status quo.

The Achieve Inclusivity theme focused on the curriculum being taught across the education sector with recommendations to “tell the multiple, nuanced stories of the contributions made by different groups” (2021: 14) promoting a more inclusive approach which, in itself, suggests that decolonising the curriculum needs to be a focus. The Sewell report does little to improve on the current situation and in fact could be argued to have set back the work that the Macpherson Report (1999) sought to achieve with regard to institutional and structural racism within UK institutions. Instead, the Sewell report seeks to minimise or silence the issues around race and racism within UK public institutions, potentially as a reaction to the UK governments dismissal and denial of the terminology used within Critical Race Theory, such as white supremacy and white privilege. Just as structural racism was discounted in the Sewell Report, so too was white privilege as it was considered “highly controversial and contested”, “counterproductive and divisive” (CRED, 2021: 36). However, to decolonise the curriculum there must be recognition of the dominant voice within it, inclusion of the multitude of marginalised voices that exist within “all communities” and acknowledgement of how white privilege plays a role within the UK education sector, which is the focus of the next section.

1.5 White Privilege

Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) initially focused on how white racial privilege impacts the lives of people of Colour and how they experience racism, particularly within education (Baldwin, 1963; Matias and Boucher, 2023). The study of whiteness has, however, changed to focus not on those who are disadvantaged by whiteness, but on those who identify as white and how they understand the privilege it provides them. This approach changes the emphasis so that the lens focuses on the dominant group, and the structures, power and knowledge that maintain their position of privilege. White privilege is the concept that white people accumulate advantages over others by virtue of being white (Leonardo, 2004) and within the education sector it is probably better known through the work of Peggy McIntosh's "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (1988). It is appropriate at this juncture to address the use of non-capitalised "white" in this research. Whilst from a stylistic perspective both "white" and "Black" should be capitalised as they are names of groups, there is recognition that Black holds more significance in terms of history and culture as well as lived experiences of discrimination based on skin colour (Laws, 2020; Perlman, 2015). It is these lived experiences of marginalised and underrepresented groups, and their knowledge, that are missing from the Eurocentric curriculum, and I have therefore chosen to only capitalise Black in recognition of this inequity. As illustrated in McIntosh's work there is often the suggestion within studies on race that white people do not know much about race and can often claim ignorance of what they do not know or have not experienced. By ignorance I refer to the notion, or "myth", that white people don't think of themselves in terms of race and are therefore innocent when structures of race and racism are discussed (Leonardo, 2008: 110). It is argued that the unspoken knowledge of race (or ignorance) affords white people privileges over minority groups.

The term white privilege, itself, presents some challenges as firstly it draws attention, and therefore discomfort, to those who have not previously been defined by their race, as it seeks to challenge the dominant group, their power and control. Secondly for those who come from poorer or lower socio-economic backgrounds the word privilege would not ordinarily apply as it suggests that they have not struggled through life, which is generally not the case. White privilege is an emotive term for the white majority and often evokes defensive actions, or statements, which in itself does little to engage a conversation on the challenges within UKHE, the Eurocentric curriculum and knowledge that is presented and promoted. It is however, agreed by scholars (Lin, Kennette and Van Havermaet, 2023; Colins, 2018: 39), that many white people have struggled, do not have access to the same opportunities and that not all privileges are unearned so whilst it may appear a catch all phrase its purpose is to attract attention to the racial inequalities and the dominant ways of seeing, knowing, and thinking within UKHE.

It is this latter understanding of white privilege and the role it plays both within UK society, but also within the UKHE environment, that supports the argument that the education sector is not just biased in favour of whiteness but actively enforces it through the policies and practices, systems, and structures (Nixon, 2013; Hill and Rosskam, 2009; Unterhalter and Carpentiar, 2010). The purpose of my research is to discover academic understandings and perceptions of decolonising the curriculum and the impact it has on academic practice. Part of this exploration will require academics to explore their own position, background and knowledge and how it influences what they teach and whether they recognise any forms of privilege, power relations or other aspects that affect the approaches they take but also the structures at play within UKHE (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996). As discussed in section 1.2 the UK government plays a key role in influencing the priorities and policies within UKHE which, for the most part, are for the benefit of the UK economy. Despite the massification of education, the increase in targets for attracting both international students and those from underrepresented groups, what is taught within UKHEIs and those who teach it reflect the white majority in the UK. Through its colonial past the UK has secured itself a dominant voice within the Eurocentric curriculum, however it is one which is now perceived to be "pale, male and stale" as it does not provide a polyvocal approach to education and does little to adapt to the diversity of the student body and their lived experiences (Doharty, Madriaga and Joseph-Salisbury,2021). None more so than the curriculum itself which is recognised as Eurocentric or Western and one which does not represent the voices or traditions of centuries old ways of seeing, understanding, and explaining reality as it only reinforces the dominant group. Following renewed student campaigns to decolonise the curriculum, the UKHE sector is being called on to review its practices and recognise the knowledge hierarchies that are disadvantaging students from underrepresented groups, which is the focus of the next section.

1.6 The Awarding Gap

It is recognised that UKHEIs have achieved some success when it comes to widening participation with a higher proportion of UK ethnic minority students attending universities than their white counterparts. This expansion however presented a new challenge in that the level of success achieved by the ethnic minority group once at university created an attainment gap, as they do not fare as well, with statistics showing that these students achieve lower-level degrees, have less chance of both graduate employment and employment in general (McDuff et al., 2018: 79-80). As the UK government focuses its attention on the knowledge economy and the neoliberal market, the emphasis is placed on the individual learner as they carry the means of production, namely their intellect, with them and it becomes the role of UKHE to shape that intellect for economic growth (Peters and Reveley, 2012: 4). When the individual learner's knowledge falls short of the expected standard, that of a Eurocentric model of education, then they are perceived as holding some form of deficit. The deficit is then applied to both international students and UK based students alike, with emphasis placed on minority ethnic groups in particular. It is this focus that coined the term attainment gap, which has subsequently been changed to the Awarding gap to remove the deficit focus from the student.

There is recognition that the widening participation agenda has revealed the awarding gap whilst also acknowledging that the causes are multi-faceted and not easy to pinpoint due to the nature and diversity of the student body. The Office for Students (OfS) (2019) has defined the attainment gap in relation to students who "are less likely to achieve the same results compared with their peers". AdvanceHE identifies that over the years of reporting the awarding gap, which is the difference in degree outcomes between white students and ethnic minority students, has remained "stubbornly wide" (Advance HE, 2019/20). In 2003/04 the gap was 17.2% but reduced to 13.3% in 2018/19 with a subsequent decrease during the Covid-19 pandemic of 3.4% reducing the gap to 8.8% in 2021 (UUK, 2022). However, it is important to note that changes to assessment practice during the pandemic may have influenced the reduction in the gap at that time. More recently Advance HE have provided statistical reports for academic year 2022-23 which have indicated that the awarding gap has fallen back to pre-pandemic levels of 10.7% which suggests that the reduction was only a temporary phenomenon (Advance HE, 2023).

Widening participation in UKHE has been part of the UK government's policy for over twenty years or more, as it supports not just the increase in UK student numbers within the sector but also those from underrepresented groups. It achieved particular importance with the AimHigher Excellence Challenge in September 2001 as the Labour government at the time recognised that tertiary expansion was only increasing student numbers from richer backgrounds and was, in fact, widening the gap, not reducing it. With the introduction of AimHigher the focus became students from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds promoting a neoliberal logic of the benefits to individuals in terms of job prospects and better salaries (DfES, 2006). Whilst the initial focus of UK education policy began with increasing international student numbers it progressed to underrepresented groups, encouraging them into higher education with limited change made to the lens or perspectives presented in the curriculum and therefore it is an important aspect of the UK education sector that needs to be explored. Decolonising the curriculum requires the decentring of European knowledge as it recognises that the "gaps" that are now the focus of most UKHEIs relate to what is being taught, whether students from underrepresented and minority ethnic groups can both see themselves in the curriculum, but also feel a sense of belonging within the UKHEI itself. I contend that simply opening the door to education does not mean individuals will be successful, whether they are UK based or international, as this only follows the neoliberal logic of meritocracy and that working hard equals rewards. If the curriculum that you are being taught does not reflect your lived reality or give you the opportunity to explore a range of perspectives and lived experiences that you can relate to, then only those that are represented will succeed.

Government initiatives in education are based on both economic motives and social justice, but it is argued they only benefit one group due to white dominance in the neoliberal framework (Mavelli, 2014: 863). Students' academic culture is in no way uniform or homogenous, particularly with the increasing numbers of working class and ethnically diverse students entering HE within the UK, however the academic culture delivered largely remains the same, to reflect the dominant white middle-class male (Bhambra et al, 2018; Doharty et al, 2021; Mirza, 1995) which is explored further in Chapter 2. From the outset students are differentiated, often based on fee status, into categories such as Home, EU or international, creating the perception of difference based on a range of background, cultural, educational, geographical and economic factors. These categories, or differences, separate students into those who fit the traditional model or idea of student, and those who don't, which can lead to assumptions about ability, knowledge and understanding. The inequalities in terms of pedagogical practices focus on cultural superiority as they cater for the dominant group by providing a Eurocentric curriculum (Marginson et al., 2010; Lee & Rice, 2007; Montgomery, 2010). It is therefore argued that racial inequalities can be seen throughout all aspects of the UKHE system, structures, and processes and more recently focus has turned to the differing levels of attainment across racial groups. UKHEIs are now being measured on the level of achievement of all racial groups, however, as identified by the CRRE (2021: 2) paper this can be a challenge. Firstly, quantitative data and statistics are regularly questioned in terms of reliability and validity as they tend to be more useful for mapping broader trends. Secondly, and more importantly, the modelling of data on the role of racism is often reduced to a sub-category rather than recognising the intersectional influence it has on the other factors such as socio-economic status and income.

Due to the mounds of evidence demonstrating that students from ethnic minority backgrounds are not faring as well, it is suggested that there are more issues than purely a student deficit discourse can explain and as such the context of UKHE, UKHEIs and educational or academic culture have become the focus of attention. Questions have been raised about the UKHE curriculum and whether it "speaks" to the lived experiences of all students and what changes academics need to implement to decrease this gap in awards. As a result, the UKHE sector has started to explore the educational environment that ethnic minority groups are expected to adapt, assimilate, or fit into, with questions surrounding student belonging and identity as well as the structure, policy, and practices within the UKHE environment that may influence racial inequalities. It is therefore important to address how and where the calls to decolonise originated in the UK and why, which is the focus of the next section.

1.7 The Call to Decolonise

Whilst in colonial times it was the elite members of various countries who were able to benefit from UKHE, as already discussed this has been greatly expanded over the past few decades through various UK government initiatives from international mobility and widening participation agendas. It is, therefore, argued that UK higher education rather than breaking down oppression, actually helps to reinforce it. The advantages of international study are viewed as much more than the academic qualifications themselves and include the social benefits of gaining new knowledge, skills, and education in another place that matters. It is the increasing numbers of international students and those from minority ethnic groups, that has prompted a campaign from both students and staff to decolonise the curriculum, to remove the white dominance in terms of teaching and learning, and to hear the voices of underrepresented groups within the curriculum in order to provide equality and better opportunities for all students to succeed in tertiary education (Le Grange, 2016). Within the UK context campaigns from students such as *"Why is my Curriculum white?"* and "*Why isn't my professor Black?"* have drawn attention to the Eurocentric focus of the curriculum and argued for change. Decolonising the curriculum requires UKHE, in all its constituent parts, to examine the ways in which colonialism has shaped knowledge and educational systems, and indeed continues to do so (Doharty, Madriaga and Joseph-Salisbury, 2021).

If UK education is viewed using Young's (1990) five faces of oppression – exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence then the place to begin would be to look at the curriculum itself as a means of oppression as it is the pedagogic practices that support the production and reproduction of culture and therefore are a tool for the dominant group to remain in control (Bernstein, 2004). In order to counter this cultural imperialism, UKHEIs and the academics within them need to understand the role and power of the curriculum and seek to include curricula and programmes that both reflect and raise awareness of societies “consisting of intercultural, multinational and multilingual groupings, as well as tackling issues of oppression and domination such as racism, sexism and so on” (Young, 1990: 148).

A UK university education is seen as the pathway to upward social mobility for individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds and seen as a route for national prosperity for both developed and developing countries. Whilst UKHEIs have recognised, to some extent, the growing diversity in the classroom this has manifested itself in the pursuit of an “internationalisation” agenda where international case studies, trips abroad and collaborative partnerships are seen as a valid tool to achieve this approach (Cheng et al., 2016; Yemini and Sagie, 2015). It does not, however, lead to epistemic diversity wherein indigenous knowledges from around the world are encouraged and debated and where all students have the opportunity to see themselves in the curriculum being delivered (Becker, 2009; Burnapp and Zhao, 2009;Leask, 2015; Smith, 2014). UKHEIs consistently promote an Internationalisation agenda but there are arguments that state that it is not just about international students, it focuses on helping non-mobile local students handle the world of business, developing skills to better understand and work with diverse groups and cultures etc.

Internationalisation does not go far enough to broaden out a very monocultural approach to knowledge which is where decolonising the curriculum comes to the fore. Decolonisation work seeks to decentre and displace the exclusive focus on Western knowledge and fundamentally change the epistemic basis of the curriculum so that no single culture dominates (Le Grange, 2016; Mclaughlin and Whatman, 2011; Smith, 1999). A practice has been introduced across UKHEI wherein the reading list is targeted for academics to assess which authors etc., are being included, however, this is an overly simplistic, purely reactive approach which does little to change the practices embedded into academic practice and delivery (Hilliard, 1992; Mezirow, 2003). Decolonising work is not simply removing white authors and replacing them with “alternatives”, but it is an approach that seeks to explore past ways of thinking, seeing, and knowing and creating new ones and I contend one that cannot be viewed as a series of quick fixes, or tick box exercises.

1.8 Case of Peak University: Overview and Background

The main aim of my research is to carry out an in-depth investigation of academic perspectives on the decolonisation of curriculum within Higher Education (HE). To achieve this, I am taking a single case study approach by selecting my employing organisation of Peak University, which is a post-1992 UK university located in the East Midlands. The university's history can be traced back to the mid-1800s and it gained university status in 1992. The university is proud of its long-standing reputation for teaching excellence and is the only university in the city and county. The university provides programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level as well as short courses and foundation degrees across most academic disciplines. Unlike other UKHEIs the university has not set up international campuses and has chosen to partner with institutions around the world, who deliver their degree programmes, validated by Peak university. Peak is classified as an applied university which means it differs from the traditional university model as the emphasis is on practical knowledge and skills, rather than a research-oriented approach. It therefore provides opportunities for high-level practical skills, offering a closer route to careers and interests of students who are expected to become part of a highly trained workforce and contribute to the knowledge economy. This in turn aligns with the strategic framework and the three pillars discussed below, thereby contributing to national economic growth in the UK. As such Peak University has predominantly focused on teaching, which remains consistent today, however over the last few years there has been growing recognition that in order to remain competitive, and indeed to grow, the university needs to seek out further opportunities in terms of its research profile and income generation, as well as increasing its international student numbers. Peak was a unique university when I first joined as an academic as it had a predominantly white academic body and majority white students, with very little focus on recruiting international students. Internationalisation was part of their agenda, but it mainly focused on trips abroad for the UK based students to provide them with opportunities to become global citizens.

As can be seen in Table 1 Peak University is still predominantly white in terms of both its staff and student bodies with only minor changes in demographics.

Category	Staff Data 2022	Comments	Student Data 2022	Comments
		Gender		
Male	41%		38%	
Female	58%		62%	An increase of 1% has continued this year
Other	1%		No data	
		Race		
BME	13%	An increase of 1% from previous year	22%	
White	85%		64%	
		Disability		
With Disability	9%		18%	
Without Disability	90%		82%	

Table 1: Staff and Student Data (Source Annual EDI Report 2022)

Peak's Strategic Framework 2018-2030 was launched in June 2018 and was designed to provide "foundations and direction on which to plan, perform and succeed in a changing and globally dynamic environment". The framework consists of three pillars [1] which are broadly defined as:

1. Provision of a high-quality learning environment so that graduates can make a positive contribution to society and achieve their ambitions.
2. Responsibility to the local community, for supporting and improving the skills, health, and wellbeing of students today and in the future.
3. Offering and creating opportunities for access to education and providing an enriching experience for all students.

[1] The pillars consist of more concise, punchy statements but have been rephrased in order to remain anonymous and meet ethical requirements.

The framework links into the curriculum which has been developed, and is developing, based on the changes required by the external environment. Reflecting various UK education policies, Peak University has an institutional promise of better social mobility, an education that is inclusive, equitable and open to everyone who has a desire to learn (Strategic Framework 2018-30).

1.9 Decolonising Work at Peak University

Following the BLM protests and the challenges to racial inequalities in education many universities quickly rolled out statements about being anti-racist and making a series of commitments to decolonising the curriculum. However, several universities, such as Keele, Kent, SOAS University of London, and University College London (UCL), already had student-led grassroots decolonising movements. Indeed, it was UCL where the campaign “Why isn’t my professor Black” was initiated, swiftly followed by the student-led video “Why is my Curriculum white?” in 2014.

The emphasis was clear that this was a student led campaign, and therefore a series of manifestos were officially launched such as Keele’s Manifesto for Decolonising the Curriculum in June 2018 which came from their Student Union (SU), Keele Postgraduate Association (KPA) and Keele’s University College Union (KUCU). As a result of these campaigns, staff guides were introduced to support academics in their engagement with this contested terrain as it was recognised that it would be beneficial for the diverse student body for example Decolonising SOAS: Learning and Teaching Toolkit (SOAS, 2018), Inclusive Curriculum Framework (Kingston University London, 2020) and Decolonising the Curriculum: Teaching and Learning about Race Equality (University of Brighton, 2019). At the institutional level, Peak University produced and disseminated anti-racism statements with the actions thereafter falling in line with governmental and OfS requirements for the most part, focusing on more diversity, equality, and inclusivity training for staff and “decolonising” the reading lists. To date engagement with students at Peak University and their understanding of decolonising the curriculum appears limited, with little exploration of student feelings or demands in this subject.

Alongside the “anti-racism” work, all UK universities are required to produce an Access and Participation Plan every four years which requires UKHEIs to set out plans to improve opportunities for underrepresented and disadvantaged groups in terms of access to, and achievement in degree outcomes as well as better progression routes after graduation. Peak’s Attainment Policy clearly identifies that all staff are required to understand the awarding gap and to “take responsibility for role-specific activities to eliminate them”. In addition, the Attainment Policy provides a series of statements about the curriculum itself:

- The University’s decolonised and diverse curriculum values a wide range of frameworks, traditions, and knowledges from across the world.
- Academic practice is rooted in principles of equity, diversity and inclusion informed by performance and progress data.

Working groups were organised within colleges and schools targeting the awarding gap issues as this became a key focus for the university and was initially high on the agenda. To some extent this has been diluted to address the changes in the external environment with a new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework (LTAF) being introduced in 2022 that identified five factors of student success with a view to academic achievement, retention, and progression of students, as well as employability after graduation. All of which falls into the same categories identified in the earlier discussions around the Awarding gap and, to some extent, an inclusive curriculum and experience within the UKHE environment. The five factors identified are:

- Sense of Belonging,
- Sense of Purpose,
- Self-Efficacy,
- Resilience,
- Engagement.

An important question therefore is why are universities now focusing on internationalisation, and internationalising, or decolonising, their curriculum? What is the purpose and for whose benefit? How will academics manage this approach in terms of their understanding of decolonisation or internationalisation and how will it manifest in their teaching and practice? As my research will be focusing on academic perceptions of decolonisation it is important to discuss the research aims and objectives and to consider my contribution to the field which will be reviewed in the following sections.

1.10 Theoretical Underpinning

It is in this context that my research began as I am very aware of the language used in reference to international students, the difference in degree outcomes and the perceptions of some academic staff when teaching them (see section 3.6 on researcher positionality). Postcolonial theory was used as the underpinning framework as it has a direct link to decolonising work due to its multi-faceted nature and complexity. Postcolonialism within UKHE seeks to decentre the Western or Eurocentric knowledge and to redress the imbalance of power between the colonised and the coloniser so that all voices and experiences are represented within education (Bhambra et al., 2018).   It is therefore an appropriate framework to underpin the research and utilise to evaluate the impact of decolonising work on academics and their practices within Peak University.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) was initially considered as the theoretical framework for this research as it focuses on racism and inequality and neoliberalism has been criticised for silencing complex inequalities and the power relations existing in society as it represents a “white/Anglo/European” standpoint (Rose 1999; Bauman, 2005; Luke, 2010). There are five central tenets to CRT which are the permanence of racism; white supremacy; storytelling and counter-storytelling; interest convergence; and intersectionality (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998; McCoy, 2015). CRT was considered too broad and, therefore, after reviewing literature which focused on decolonising work in education (Ahmed, 2006; Gillborn, 2006; Shain et al., 2021) the tenet of interest-convergence was selected as the main tool to evaluate the motivation for internationalisation and decolonisation policies and activities. Combining postcolonial theory and interest-convergence provides a complementary approach to assess the structures, policies, and motivations of the chosen UKHEI, together with the understanding and practices of the academics navigating this contested terrain.

1.11 Research Aims and Objectives

I am particularly interested in exploring academics knowledge and understanding of internationalisation and decolonisation, in terms of the curriculum. Therefore, the focus is upon investigating their perceptions, experiences and views of this approach and the impact on their current teaching practices, based on their own backgrounds, and expectations of UK education. The rationale for this choice is one of personal experience, having been an academic for a decade, having taught in another post-1992 university and seen an increase in the deficit perceptions and comments made about international students, all of which has led me to question what we are teaching and for whose benefit. My study seeks to address the overarching research question of “What are academic staff perceptions of decolonising the curriculum?” by focusing on the following research questions:

Research Questions:

Q1.What is the understanding of the motivation for internationalisation or decolonisation policies and activities?

Q2.To what extent does decolonisation of the curriculum affect or impact academic staff?

Q3.What are the ethical and power issues underpinning the decisions and directions to internationalise or decolonise the curriculum?

1.12 Justification and Contribution

I have a personal interest in the subject matter of my research as I am an academic and have had experience of teaching a diverse study body for over ten years and have seen how the deficit models and discourse about students may have influenced their achievements and success. It is my first-hand experience that has influenced my decision for this research and my own perception that UKHE is doing a disservice to these students, exploiting them for their financial value and giving very little back. Being embedded in the academic culture and context of my research, has led me to analyse my own approach to curriculum as well as those of my colleagues and this supports my research design in what I would class as a somewhat unique university; that being one that has not sought to increase international student numbers until more recently. The purpose of my thesis is to understand and review top-down directives, communication, understanding and the approach to decolonising the curriculum that has been disseminated to academics.

When I initially began exploring research and literature which focused on international students, the main focus appeared to be that of assimilation and the need for students to adapt to the UKHE environment, even though many authors referred to the differences in educational practices and environments that students come from. The work, however, did not go far enough to explain the challenges, or the changes needed to improve the degree outcomes of international students. The deficit focus was readily applied and went against what I felt was missing from the students' experiences within UKHE. Therefore a gap emerged and it was only when I began to review research carried out around pedagogy, knowledge and the curriculum (Apple, 1990, 1993; Ball, 1993, 1997, 2012) and the rationale for UKHEIs to focus on internationalisation (Knight, 2004; Knight & de wit, 2018; Leask and Bridges, 2013; Warwick, 2014; Warwick & Moogan, 2013) that a clearer focus for my research was identified as it related more to the curriculum and what is being taught. These themes are discussed further within the literature review in Chapter 2 and drawn into the evaluation of the approaches undertaken by academic staff in Chapter 4.

With UKHEIs focusing on the Awarding gap it became clear that the impact of the curriculum was not just evident in international students' outcomes and success but that something far deeper was at work. I, therefore, began to assess the structures that were in place, not just the academic practices. I started to examine influences of race and racism in education, which led me to CRT, postcolonial theory, and the work of Gillborn (2006); Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995); Rizvi and Lingard (2010); Bhambra et al., (2018) and then subsequently to the work of Le Grange (2016) and Smith (1999) regarding decolonising the curriculum. These authors provided a foundation from which I was able to assess how academics, who are not familiar with the terminology, or the application of decolonising work, perceive them and put them into their practices (see Section 4.3). The literature review (see Section 2.10) focuses on academic perceptions, presenting a series of challenges at work which formed part of the interview questions. However, the challenges of decolonising work, the changing UKHE priorities, as well as other influences on academics' time and workload are evidenced in the interview conversations. Much research has already been conducted on racism in UK education and has brought greater recognition and understanding of the challenges of minority ethnic or underrepresented groups, however the focus is often at school level. My research focuses on a single UKHE institution which has not, until recently, engaged in decolonising work and therefore I add a unique perspective as I explore the challenges from academics who are not actively engaged with the work and who are only just coming to terms with the meaning and understanding of what is required of them.

I contend my research is of relevance to academics, students and senior management within the UK higher education sector at this time and in the future as internationalisation and decolonisation work continues to be a focus for survival. It provides an opportunity to evaluate the challenges from an academic perspective including the role that senior leaders both can, and need to, play in order to support colleagues in achieving and embedding the various stages of decolonising work into practice whether that is in the academic content, the design and delivery of materials or their everyday interactions with a diverse student and academic body. Furthermore, my research will provide Peak University with an in-depth evaluation of what academic perspectives exist around the notion of internationalisation and what it means to truly decolonise the curriculum. Whilst I accept that my findings cannot be generalised to other UKHEIs, particularly if they could be argued to be further ahead of Peak University, my research will add to the growing body of knowledge of postcolonial theory, CRT and in the field of decolonisation. Finally, my research has the potential to stimulate thought and debate about academic perceptions of international students, ethnic minority and underrepresented groups within UK education and may influence the way they are taught, the curriculum that is presented as normative, and the approach to decolonising the university.

1.13 Chapter Summaries and Structure

Chapter Two presents a critical review of key literature relating to my chosen theoretical framework of Postcolonialism and the tenet of Interest-Convergence within Critical Race Theory as it provides attention to the role that racism and equity play within the higher education context. Postcolonialism and Interest-Convergence will be discussed as part of the literature review as they address the various ways that racism is manifested and how oppression has been established and is perpetuated and this approach fits within the context of decolonisation and internationalisation. The literature review focuses on two main themes: the politics of knowledge and the awarding gap as these both highlight the challenges of the European model of education and how it has dominated the sector affecting student outcomes and academic practices. In addition, academic perceptions, workload challenges and the ever-changing priorities within UKHE are evaluated.

Chapter Three provides a review of the methodological approach, research framework, philosophical influence and research design and its appropriateness to my research aims and objectives. A discussion on the data collection methods and my role as an insider researcher is explored as I navigate the use of both postcolonial theory and CRT.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the academic interviews, student survey and focus group conducted which are critically analysed to identify the emergent themes. Discussion and examination of the findings against each of the research objectives is undertaken and supported by underpinning theories of Postcolonialism and Interest-Convergence within CRT and evaluated against the literature from Chapter 2.

Chapter Five provides a summary of my research and the contribution made as well as the implications for Peak university and the wider HE context. Further research needs are identified within the field of decolonising the curriculum and limitations of my research are addressed.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a critical review of literature focusing on internationalisation and decolonisation of the curriculum in higher education, in particular situating it within the theoretical frameworks of Postcolonial Theory and the tenet of Interest-convergence within Critical Race Theory. There are two main areas for consideration within this review, firstly the politics of knowledge and secondly the Awarding Gap (previously named the Attainment Gap) that interconnect demonstrating some of the challenges of decolonising the curriculum. Postcolonial theory provides an appropriate framework to explore decolonising the curriculum, what constitutes official knowledge, who dominates and, to a large extent, dictates the power structures that oppress some forms of knowledge in favour of a Western model of education. Equality issues within education systems, challenges to the construction of knowledge and power as forms of oppression are not new, however, there has been a renewed student campaign to recognise the diversity of the student body within UKHEIs and adjust the curriculum to meet their values, knowledge, and experiences. Due to more recent calls from students themselves UKHEIs are moving towards decolonising their curriculums in order to remain competitive. Through the Critical Race Theory (CRT) tenet of interest-convergence the claims of UKHEIs for decolonisation will be explored as well as the drive to reduce the awarding gap. Interest-convergence is an appropriate framework to assess both "how" UKHEIs are attempting to address the awarding gap and to decolonise the curriculum but also "why" they are doing so? What are the drivers for this focus but also who benefits from this change? UKHE is situated within the context of neoliberalism and has a long history of success and domination in education, second only to the USA, so why seek to change a curriculum that has benefitted them for centuries?

The chapter will begin by examining Postcolonial Theory of education and Critical Race Theory before focusing specifically on the tenet of interest-convergence as the framework for the politics of knowledge and knowledge production. Secondly a review of the key literature will be undertaken on the origins of internationalisation, its historical role in the curriculum and the link to colonialism, through to its application in contemporary UKHE. The review will then move on to the call to decolonise together with the barriers to action with a specific focus on academic perspectives and practices.

2.2 Postcolonial Theory of Education

Before commencing an examination of the theoretical framework, it is important to identify the disciplinary differences between postcolonial and decolonial theories. Both focus on the European invasions into their lands, they seek to challenge the coloniality of power and the associated coloniality of knowledge, however they originate from different geographical locations (Bhambra, 2014:117). Decolonial theory originates from the work of diasporic scholars from South America and predominantly focuses on that geographical location from the 15th century onwards. Postcolonial theory focuses mainly on the 19th and 20th centuries and originates from diasporic scholars in the Middle East and South Asia, with a focus primarily on those locations. Postcolonialism is an epistemological and theoretical approach that seeks to decentre, challenge, and disturb Eurocentric knowledge, processes, and systems by centring those oppressed by colonialism (Shirazi, 2011: 279). As an academic field, postcolonial theory studies the impact that colonisation has had, and continues to have, on both cultures and societies across the world. It seeks to address the complicity of imperialism and colonisation and to disrupt the focus on Western reason to the exclusion of all others. Many postcolonial scholars have emphasised the imbalance of knowledge and power within the field of education with a focus on the social, political, economic and cultural factors which have influenced former colonised countries. Gatekeeping mechanisms, such as that of a dominant Western/Eurocentric curriculum are a means of controlling what knowledge is available and who has access to it which in turn ensures that not all knowledge and flows of information are perceived as equal. Postcolonial perspectives seek to inject non-Western knowledges into UKHE as a means of a more just and equitable approach to education.

Postcolonial theory focuses on the effects of colonisation, the inequality of structures and practices. It seeks to examine and explain privilege, domination, oppression, struggle and subversion related to power and knowledge. This approach provides me with a framework to address my concerns over the dominance of a Western/Eurocentric curriculum that does not speak to the lived experiences of either international students or underrepresented student groups. Postcolonial theory calls into question Western knowledge construction, truth and intellectual authority. Truth and knowledge rest on the power to produce, regulate, circulate and consume information. Colonial empires established the European model of education around the world including the conceptions of curriculum, pedagogy, language and religion (Bhambra et al., 2018). The narrow Eurocentric focus of the curriculum frequently ignores the divisions of colonialism, how it creates the divide between privilege and disadvantage, as it only focuses its lens outwards on the colonised, not the restrictions that have been put in place. The dominance of the Western/European model of education has been imposed onto the non-western world through colonisation despite countries such as China having their own established academic traditions. During the period of "decolonisation" in the 1940s as part of the transition to independence, recruiting colonial elite, from countries such as India and Africa, to UK education centres for bureaucratic training was common practice and whilst it is generally regarded as the start of international student migration, it is also criticised as being a new form of colonialism (Stein and Andreotti, 2016). The basis for the recruitment was aimed at supporting the colonised nations towards independence and self-government, however, it is argued that what occurred was a continuation of the structures and curriculum from European countries, such as the UK and France, onto former colonies (ibid, 2016). Lomer (2017) argues that the colonial logic of student recruitment lives on in a combination of "diplomacy" and "soft power" where international students are "of long-term benefit to the UK, because they develop positive attitudes and lasting ties which lead them to exert influence in Britain's interest in their home country" (2017: 595). Therefore, they are not just an initial source of revenue but also a political form of reinforcing the unequal status quo. Internationalisation has further reinforced this dominance through specific policies and programmes, like PMI and PMI2 (see section 1.2), undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions to cope with or exploit former colonies in the name of educational and social mobility (Altbach, 2004:6).

It has been argued that the production of knowledge commences with ordering or classification so that comparisons can be made. Ordering therefore requires a reference point, which in this case is the European model of education as the benchmark standard, and to which all other forms of education and knowledge are then assessed. In the current context the reference point is the Global North, and it is this focus that has dominated and still dominates UKHEIs today, dictating whose knowledge is perceived as valid and the contents, pedagogic practices and assessment approaches within the UKHE curriculum and the Western/European university model (Jansen et al., 2013). Therefore, in order to listen and respond to calls to decolonise the curriculum UKHEIs must first address the colonisation, marginalisation and oppression of knowledge that has resulted in a monocultural approach to education. Postcolonial theory assists in this regard as it aims to remove restrictions on marginalised knowledges and to create avenues for new knowledge production and creation.

Subjugation and dominance form a fundamental part of the export of the Western/European university model as the economic benefits assisted in the funding of the UKHEIs and this is no different today as the UK relies heavily on international student numbers for the economic benefit of its people, particularly when Home student numbers decrease periodically (see section 1.2). UKHE is governed by systems, processes, and discourses and in order to decolonise the curriculum it is not sufficient to simply identify alternate valid forms of knowledge because much as in the past, the lens used to evaluate them will still be the Western system which marginalised them in the first instance. In order to take a postcolonial approach, academics are required to unlearn “white privilege and deficit thinking” (Subedi and Daza, 2008: 4) as this is considered to be the way forward to a transformative UKHE. Postcolonial theory together with Interest-convergence offer an analytical framework that provides an evaluation of what constitutes knowledge but also the privilege it affords academics, how academics perceive decolonisation work and the unequal power structures that create barriers to implementation.

2.3 Critical Race Theory

Whilst Postcolonialism has a longer history of challenging the Eurocentric status quo in education, CRT transitioned from Critical Legal Studies (CLS) into the field of education in the mid-1990s through Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) critique of the inequities in the education system, and how race remained untheorized within education, particularly in relation to the role of racism and white supremacy. The purpose of CRT was not to represent a racial theory per se, but to provide a space for Scholars of Colour to theorise race and racism (Cabrera, 2019), challenging Eurocentric values, and the inequalities of power along political, economic, racial and gendered lines. It is therefore perceived as a tool to interrupt racism and forms of oppression. Whilst it can be argued that there is no single canonical statement of CRT, there are certain elements that have emerged as the five central themes that characterise the movement: with the main focus on the normative nature and subtleties of racism. It is also a critique of liberalism, which points to the failure of notions such as "merit", "neutrality", and "colour-blindness", terms that are widely used within government policies on widening participation to illustrate fair and just practices, but which actually do the opposite, instead ensuring the continuation of racial inequality (Gillborn, 2009: 126). CRT does not seek to solve dilemmas, but rather to problematise them so that activities and the conditions therein are questioned with a view to action and response (Deleuze, 1987:88). There are 5 tenets: the permanence of racism; white supremacy; storytelling and counter-storytelling; interest convergence; and intersectionality (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998) and two major methodological concepts and tools. The first is the concept of white supremacy and the second is the belief in the concept of storytelling. Ainsley (1997:592) states that:

> "[By] 'white supremacy' I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-

> white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings."

It is argued that the dominant group justifies its power with stories that "construct reality in ways to maintain their privilege" (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995:58) or present it in such a way that it is designed to confuse the receiver and will therefore be rejected or ignored. CRT scholars identify two differing approaches to reality – namely the dominant reality that is perceived as "normal" to most and a racial reality, which has been censored or suppressed, that is ignored or untold as they do not fit with the perceived social norms (Delgado,1995). CRT requires HEIs to recognise that the traditional knowledge transmitted through higher education was developed primarily by persons from the dominant, white, male, power structure, wherein indigenous voices were silenced.

The focus of British governments and UKHE is on international relations and competition, the interests of the elite and the changing demands of the labour market and not on the benefits or disadvantages of racial groups despite the rhetoric around it. It is widely recognised that diversity within UKHE is achieved through the increasing focus and recruitment of international students, who are either from an elite social background, or are wealthy enough to afford the increasingly higher fees that international students attract (Bhambra et al., 2018). Non-white students are encouraged through the government's widening participation agenda (see Section 1.2) to join UKHE, however the focus on self-funding students, rather than offering scholarships, places an additional burden onto them to work alongside their studies, and family commitments, in order to finance their education. Therefore, it could be argued that racism exists within UKHE as it has a long history from colonialism through to present day education reforms, such as PMI and PMI2, and the media coverage during the Covid-19 pandemic where there is a clear focus on retaining and attracting international students back onto UK campuses (BBC, 2020; UUK, 2022). Counter-storytelling, therefore, can be meaningfully utilised as a tool for "exposing, analysing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of the racial privilege" (Solorzano and Yosso, 2002:32; see also Delgado, 1999). Counter-stories can include notions of tokenism, which is defined by Hubain et al, (2016: 952) as when students of colour are only acknowledged when issues of race or difference are discussed and then expected to contribute extensively and act as representatives of their race or group. This approach clusters all minority ethnic students together despite the fact that they are no more a homogenous group than white students. CRT scholars have tended to focus on education systems in general terms, and carry out more in-depth analysis of schooling systems, however there is growing interest in UKHE and the inequalities that lie therein. Thus, a CRT informed analysis of internationalisation, strategies, and subsequent calls for decolonisation, will assist UKHEIs in their goals to be more truly inclusive and diverse, challenge the current academic culture and rationale for meeting targets of increasing international student numbers, and help academics understand their role in not just preserving but further embedding the unequal status quo (Hiraldo, 2010).

CRT is an appropriate theoretical framework for this research as it focuses on racism and inequality, and neoliberalism has been criticised for silencing complex inequalities and the power relations existing in society as it represents a "White/Anglo/European" standpoint (Rose 1999; Bauman, 2005; Luke, 2010). A key goal of CRT is to unmask and reveal racism in its most ordinary and common forms (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lopez & Parker, 2003), using it to expose and disrupt racism. From both a CRT and a postcolonial perspective the term education has normative implications due to the fact that it implies there is something worthwhile and valuable being transmitted intentionally however it requires deeper analysis as to what that something is and whose values are being privileged due to the power relations at play (Rizvi and Lingard 2010: 71).

CRT authors agree that the passive or active choice to accept the superiority of "whiteness" only helps to continue the system of privileges, domination and ultimately the exclusion of the "other". It is argued that throughout history each of the different academic disciplines, from history, psychology, anthropology, biology, geography, philosophy, religion, literature etc. have all been used to justify racism and colonialism (Pine and Hilliard, 1990). Colonialism provided a format to control the information that was disseminated through society and education systems as it was able to distort, fabricate and suppress any information or voices that did not conform to the single, authentic image that it wanted to portray. As the colonial masters were white, male, Anglo/Europeans they were able to limit the access to information that was contrary to the agreed view, thereby negating the voices of the "other". It is the growing understanding of this approach to education in the UK that have students responding to and campaigning for a change in the curriculum. Therefore, Postcolonial theory and CRT offer a framework where themes of knowledge and power, complicity of colonialism and resistance are analysed based on the interviews undertaken with academics (see section 4.6) and then applied to decolonising work in UK education. The use of CRT provides a critique of the status quo however due to its focus on current practices it is insufficient to address decolonial work on its own. As such, Meghji (2022: 651) suggests employing a theoretical synergy so that a "both and" approach is taken rather than a synthesis or hierarchical approach to theories. Using a theoretical synergy of Decolonial thought, Postcolonial theory and CRT as a framework exposes how Western culture has produced the ideology of the Global South as inferior (Thomas, 2000), together with a contemporary focus on race and racism within UK education.

2.4 Interest-Convergence

As previously identified, CRT has five tenets, however, for the purpose of this research interest-convergence will be the main focus. Interest convergence was presented by Derrick A Bell (1980) to explain why attempts to address racial inequalities tend to promote and benefit white people and only benefit people of colour when it is in the interest of said white people. Therefore, whilst the call to decolonise the curriculum has been seen as a response to student campaigns, from an interest convergence perspective, the degree to which it has been embraced is reflective of how it will/would benefit the dominant group. UKHEIs have taken to openly accepting their role in colonial history, at least in part, not because they have become anti-racist but because they will continue to benefit financially if they encourage diversity and seek to decolonise the curriculum. Whilst most HEIs now have an internationalisation strategy, if not a statement or declaration for the decolonisation of the curriculum, this does not necessarily translate into anything more than a stronger focus on recruitment and marketing (Warwick and Moogan, 2013; Ledesma and Calderon, 2015). UKHEIs make a number of statements in relation to the strategies they are employing especially as students were campaigning for changes in terms of decolonising the curriculum and the awarding gap. Based on the research of Ahmed (2006) it can be argued that UKHEIs make “speech acts” wherein claims are made “about or on behalf of an institution” which can be visual, textual or vocal and in which the UKHEI is given a character, feelings and the ability to make judgements (Ahmed, 2006:104). Ahmed’s research was based around racism, anti-racism and more specifically a review of race equality policies and how the speech acts themselves alter the perception of the claim, changing it from an action which has yet to be performed into a non-performative with limited action taking place, if at all. These speech acts are seen to have four approaches: admissions, commitments, performances and descriptions. Each of these approaches has challenges as Ahmed identifies that by recognising (admission), for example, racist practices the language used acts as a non-performative wherein making the statement suggests that the act of being racist has been overcome, which is not in reality the case. In other words, the cause may have been identified and tasks required to make changes however there is limited evidence that any action is taken, and no changes embedded, thereby not altering the unequal status quo.

Decolonising the curriculum requires a fundamental and holistic change for UKHEIs and whilst many have made statements to suggest that this work is being undertaken, there are challenges as to whether these are mere statements and non-performatives that do little to support ethnic minority groups or if in doing so actually benefit the dominant group. In addition, research has highlighted and questioned whether the word decolonising should even be used by UKHEIs as it becomes little more than a buzzword with limited meaning or action (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Dar, Dy and Rodriguez, 2018). For my research and following the approach undertaken by Shain et al., (2021) I am following the tenet of interest-convergence. As identified the concept of interest convergence is useful for analysing UKHEIs claims about decolonising the curriculum and the strategies that are being implemented across the UKHE sector. In a similar vein I will use interest convergence to assess whether the policies and practices within this university are advancing decolonising work, from an academic perspective. Shain et al., (2021) explored the level of resistance to, and embracing of decolonising work within UKHE where for the most part the focus is on small group, discipline, or departmental level rather than the wider institution. They contend that institutional responses relate to three strategies: “strategic rejection, reluctant acceptance, and strategic advancement of “decolonising” (2021: 2). Strategic advancement is argued as a result by some UKHEI management to both recruit and retain students in the first instance following external pressures of Brexit, economic challenges, and Covid-19 restrictions. It is argued that it may also be perceived as a watered-down approach to decolonising as no changes to structure, processes and pedagogical practices are made which support the dominant model of education. Through my own research I will use the themes of knowledge and power, complicity of colonialism and resistance to evaluate if the approaches undertaken at Peak University have changed pedagogical practices or whether a series of speech acts have been implemented at the institutional level.

UKHEIs benefit from decolonising statements as they continue to seek international diversity in their institutions in financial terms, with the student body allegedly benefitting from the cultural diversity and as a further bonus the HEIs ranking in league tables may increase due to this change. The current challenges of a post-Brexit period as well as the Covid pandemic impacted UKHEIs and as they emerge from these challenges, they have been looking to bolster any financial losses by increasing international student numbers in their recruitment campaigns. From my reading it is argued that campaigns to decolonise or internationalise the curriculum however will be short lived if the statements are not embedded and implemented in all aspects of UKHEIs strategies, curriculum and pedagogic practices and this is why it is vital for academics and professional service staff to be engaged and active in the process (Doharty, Madriaga and Joseph-Salisbury, 2021).

Many universities have committed to anti-racism work, equality and diversity initiatives for example the Race Equality Charter (REC), however the commitment is sometimes perceived as an action in itself but is fraught with issues of tick-box exercises, EDI training and other practices which do little to change the status quo (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020). There is, however, a need to focus on the emotional reactions and resistance from academics due to white privilege. To make matters more confusing, the concept of white privilege itself is under frequent debate and has been challenged within British politics as it is contested as "extremist" in approach. Following on from the Sewell Report (2022) there has been much debate and resistance towards the term white Privilege, and this could be seen to be a challenge for anti-racism work (see section 1. 5). It is therefore not surprising that there is confusion and a lack of understanding of these new concepts with research identifying white apathy, white fear, white melancholia, white rage, white guilt, and white shame amongst the common emotional responses of white teachers (Spanierman and Cabrera, 2015). These emotions can manifest in discourses of denial (Picower 2009), silence (Mazzei 2008) colour-blindness (Bonilla-Silva 2010) avoidance (Gay and Kirkland 2003) individualism (DiAngelo 2010) or victimisation (Matias 2016) which adds to the challenges of Internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC) and decolonisation work at all levels of higher education. Therefore, the UKHE sector is in many ways mirroring the political context with areas of acceptance, challenge and resistance to the calls for decolonising the curriculum and a review of pedagogic practices.

In essence the call to decolonise has been changed within UKHEIs to a more subdued focus on diversity initiatives rather than a take up of the REC, returning to focus on widening participation and where it is understood that "decolonising the reading list" is the best way forward (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020). This approach is argued to be tokenistic decolonisation, wherein it only involves "gesturing toward the exclusion of those from the Global South without going far enough in subverting the exclusion of Southern people and knowledge" (Moosavi, 2020: 348; Zembylas, 2022). It fails to take radical action by taking only subtle or superficial changes as part of what Andreotti et al, (2015) refer to as "soft reform" as it merely introduces or acknowledges voices and contributions from BIPOC/BAME authors and researchers. It therefore does not take any deep level action to dismantle the colonial legacies within UKHE across multiple levels of the university structure and university life and demonstrates elements of “reluctant acceptance” (Shain et al., 2021) by continuing to label non-white knowledge and peoples as others. In addition, there are some scholars who critique the focus on the REC as another tick-box exercise where it is based on data and quotas and by either committing to or achieving the Charter does little to change the institutions focus for a more decolonised curriculum as it does not embed the fundamental changes needed (Bhopal and Pitkin, 2020). It is therefore non-performative as the focus is on being audited and measured (Ahmed, 2006). It could be argued that this is another example of interest convergence whereby the rights of oppressed groups are recognised and legitimised only when they further the interests of the dominant class and of society’s governing institutions and where little additional effort is required or challenge to the status quo.

Postcolonialism and CRT’s interest-convergence have been explored as the framework in which to assess decolonising the curriculum initiatives and motivations with themes of power, knowledge and resistance explored throughout so the focus must move to exploring both internationalisation and decolonisation within UKHE curriculum. The next section will begin with the origins of internationalisation, within the context of the UKHE curriculum before turning its attention to decolonising the curriculum and the challenges in terms of definitions, approaches, and barriers.

2.5 Origins of Internationalisation

The subject of internationalisation has many layers which range from institutional and national policies and strategy, through to issues at the teaching and learning level where students and academics experience it. At the teaching and learning level the focus is on course design, inclusivity, equality, and empowerment as well as the experience of international students (Luxon and Peelo, 2009). Before commencing a review of the academic critiques of internationalisation and its application, it is necessary to examine how internationalisation is defined. Internationalising the curriculum (IoC) is considered to be a construct and not a clearly defined set of best practice with some academic debate and critique about its meaning. The most frequently cited definition of internationalisation at the sector and institutional level is that of Knight as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (2004:11). Knight has however updated this definition as she feels that it is being used as a catch all phrase and has received criticism for a macro-organisational level meaning which is often lost, undefined or confused by many who are required to use it and embed it into their practices (Green and Whitsted, 2018). A somewhat more refined approach in which “Internationalisation of the curriculum is the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the preparation, delivery and outcomes of a program of study” is provided by Leask (2009: 209). This definition has a much closer alignment to the curriculum itself, rather than the more institutional level focus of Knight.

Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC) is perceived differently across and within disciplines, for example pure sciences may view it as outside of their established paradigms, whereas business and humanities may feel it is unnecessary because the discipline is already “international” (Clifford, 2009; Trowler, 2012:10). Arguments stated range from market forces through to restructuring and merging of disciplinary departments into more commonly termed faculties and colleges thereby illustrating the polyvocal approach rather than perceiving disciplines as “independent bubbles” as can be seen in Figure 1.

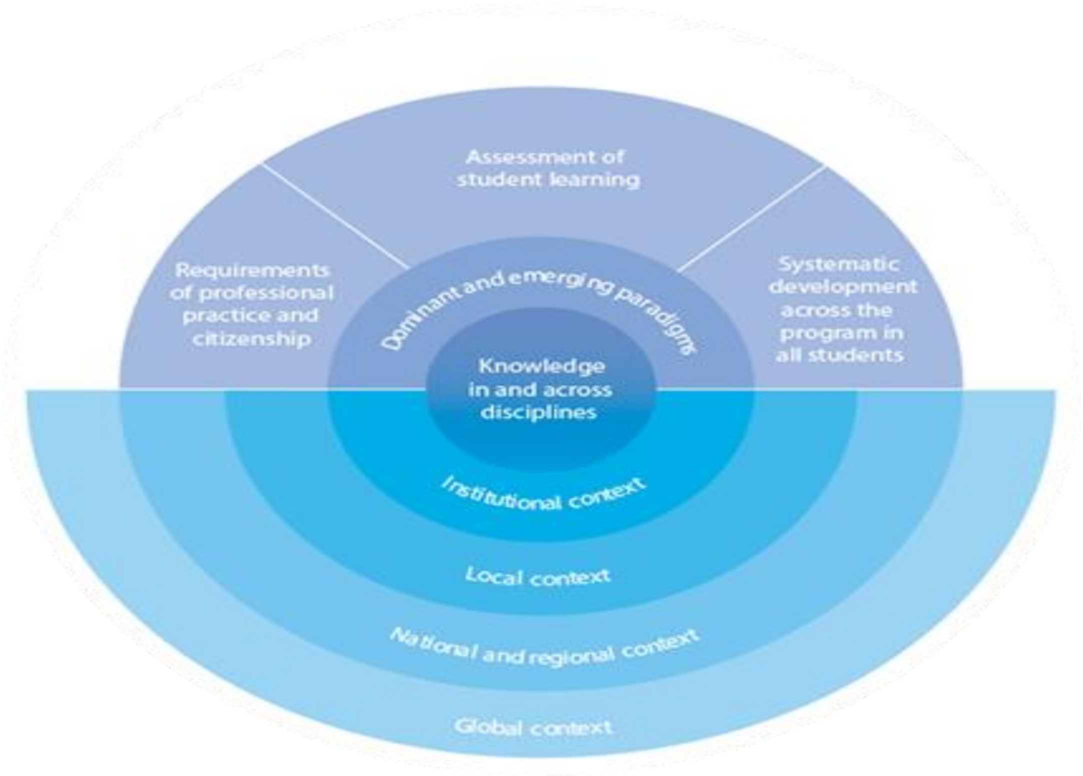


Figure 1. Leask and Bridge's (2013) framework for IoC

Internationalisation has become a key focus in UKHE (see Section 1.3) and more visible in terms of universities setting up centres specifically for the purpose of internationalising their curriculum, their university as a whole and starting to recognise the need for and financial benefits of undertaking this strategy (Ploner and Nada, 2020). International HE in the UK has received various amounts of public interest over the years in relation to political debates over international student numbers and including them in UK immigration statistics. HESA (2023) affirms that the UK hosts large numbers of international students on UK campuses. However, it is also important to note that the UK delivers HE to an even larger number of students overseas through transnational education (TNE). Key trends of both Internationalisation at Home (IaH) and Transnational Education (TNE) require UKHEIs to set up international branch campuses and collaborative programmes to further develop their claim of being international and diverse. TNE is defined as "the provision of education for students based in a country other than the one in which the awarding institution is located" (British Council, 2018). It is, more often than not, set up at the request of the UKHEI who then establishes a relationship with the overseas provider, setting out the programme, its delivery and content, responsibilities of the main parties including administration and then finally the division of the tuition fees. The power and control are fully with the UKHEI as they retain the moderation and awarding capacity for the UK qualification. When focusing on the politics of knowledge TNE is a significant growth area as the UK government committed to increasing education exports from £18 billion in 2012 to £30 billion by 2020 (HE Global, 2016) which presents a significant reinforcement of the dominant Western/European knowledge (Ploner and Nada, 2020; Findlay et al., 2011). TNE represents a more layered understanding of internationalising the curriculum and UK education as it aligns with a neoliberal approach and both the massification and commodification of education which will be explored later in the chapter.

Various authors have questioned the moral and ethical responsibilities of TNE and the global responsibilities of UKHEIs towards international students (Madge et al., 2009; Sidhu. 2006; Stein, 2016) which relates to who is benefitting from this approach. In addition, it is claimed that through government policies and initiatives that TNE would reduce “brain drain” from developing countries and create stronger strategic alliances between home and host countries. Whilst these statements appear laudable there is limited evidence that this is the case, instead it is more likely from my reading that the UK Government benefits from claiming lower immigration figures whilst reaping the economic benefits from the higher tuition fees (Madge et al., 2009; Sidhu, 2006; Stein, 2016). Although TNE has a large number of potential benefits as it removes the need for international students to travel to the UK, attention must be drawn to the fact that it reinforces the status quo of a dominant Western/Eurocentric curriculum that benefits the UK far more than it does the host country itself. Therefore, it can be seen as a case of interest-convergence whereby TNE offers a further opportunity to deliver a Western curriculum and pedagogic practices to a greater audience with the UK gaining the most from the approach. There is limited evidence that TNE or collaborative arrangements are creating opportunities for an exchange of practices, of encouraging investigation and embedding diverse knowledges and experiences.

From the literature reviewed there are clear questions regarding the interactions between the UKHEIs and the host countries' domestic HE delivery, its role in the domestic labour market but most interestingly the level of knowledge of the students attending said HE providers and how these interplay with the curriculum both delivered and assessed. There is a link here to the work of decolonisation; if UKHEIs decolonise the curriculum and include marginalised voices and knowledge then what is taught and assessed within TNE would speak to the diversity of the student body regardless of what country they are taught in. TNE should be focused on collaboration and not a unidirectional or monocultural approach to knowledge, particularly when so many UKHEIs offer collaborative partnerships with HE providers across the world. Peak University engages in TNE so any focus on decolonising the curriculum must extend itself out to the international HE providers, but more importantly include them in the discussions. Rather than controlling the narrative and the knowledge, it should be a two-way exchange, which in turn would assist the academics in the UKHEI develop a polyvocal curriculum.

2.6 The Politics of Knowledge

Coloniality within education is based on the assumption that there is "a single path of human progress and of the universal value of Western knowledge" (Stein et al, 2016: 4). This is however contested by Apple (1990, 1993) wherein the concept of "official" or legitimate knowledge is challenged based on the fact that the groups who determine which knowledge is selected reflects those who have power in society and therefore it cannot be neutral. What can be argued is that UKHE discourse has a history of promoting a single authentic way of "knowing" within disciplines which further reproduces subordination and marginalisation of diverse experiences and backgrounds, creating the deficit model of student who fails to understand and engage. It is this subordinate/dominant relationship that has dictated what counts as knowledge, how it is assessed and in what way but also who is "empowered" to teach it (Apple, 1990, 1993). Whiteness is not only a racial identity but just as importantly it is viewed as "the marked signifier of deservedness" and has been identified as historical and political products based on human designation of racial categories (Sullivan (2014:11). Within the field of education, it is also a signifier of power both within the structural norms, the knowledge favoured within the curriculum and who has traditionally been the deliverer of that knowledge. Both Postcolonialism and CRT aim to dismantle the legacy of what/how knowledge is produced, taught, and considered as legitimate. They challenge the dominance of a single path of knowledge and also who is delivering that knowledge and how it is assessed, seeking to improve attainment gaps, and the deficit approach towards marginalised students.

Higher education is a key player in reinforcing the hegemonic power of the coloniser so that the producers of what is considered "official" knowledge represent the dominant groups' biases, interests, and worldviews. Therefore, through a process of what has been described as objective and unbiased or scientific method, forms of nondominant knowledge have either been incorporated, appropriated, or eliminated (Stein, 2017; Parson and Weise, 2020). Whilst colonisation itself shapes knowledge, discourse, and language, it is important to note that knowledge is not fixed and is itself fluid in that it shapes, integrates, and appropriates other knowledges and cultures. The scientific approach claims to use a "common sense" approach wherein who, what knowledge and what practices are considered as normative and natural and through this process identifies everything else as the "other". By the use of othering, colonisation and colonisers categorise through the use of language, teaching practices and cultural identifiers and reinforce this through the curriculum which continue to "reify, recreate, and transmit the effects of colonization" (Asher, 2009: 8).

Cognitive justice requires the decentring of all knowledges so that they can coexist and be equitably compared rather than having one central knowledge that all others are measured against. Said (1993), a founder of postcolonialism, developed contrapuntal inclusion as a means to interpret colonial texts from the perspective of both the coloniser and the colonised. Whilst contrapuntal reading has a focus on literature it could also be applied to all disciplines so that different perspectives are interpreted simultaneously, analysing how they interact with each other, the impact of imperialism and also the resistance of it. Within the field of education this could be focusing on a particular initiative within UKHE or its history and bringing together differing voices, experiences, interests as well as identities so that they are intertwined. No one voice would be dominant, and it would allow students and academics to explore similarities but also gaps; in essence opening up the discussions and exploring the implications for a range of peoples and groups. This provides academics and students alike with an approach to interpret different perspectives simultaneously, to create an awareness of both what is said, what isn't said but also the history and background involved. It would also provide academics with a tool to assess how international or decolonised their curriculum is in reality. This in turn aims to give legitimacy to knowledges from the Global South rather than reducing them to cultural differences only. It involves what Mignolo (2009, 160) refers to as "epistemic disobedience" which is the act of moving away from what is perceived as universal knowledge and truth, that of the Eurocentric curriculum in this instance. Decolonising the curriculum involves much more than changing parts of the content within modules and programmes. it must also involve challenging and changing the dominant, Western approach to curriculum. One approach identified is for teacher and student to "walk in both worlds" or follow a "two-way approach" to teaching/learning, aligned to Said's contrapuntal inclusion wherein indigenous and Eurocentric ways of knowing are examined equally (Le Grange and Aikenhead 2017: 33). In other words, using the strengths of multiple knowledge systems and leaving the learner to choose which aspect is appropriate based on their own personal lived experience and history.

Questions arise regarding the use of "official knowledge" and the lack of engagement with or tailoring of pedagogy to fit the local audience. Said (1978) pointed out that education is never harmless, as it is always closely interwoven with politics, where social norms and the production of knowledge takes place within a matrix of domination and power. Epistemological diversity is not encouraged, with many Western universities responding to the challenge to diversify by pursuing an internationalisation agenda. According to Edwards et al., (2003) international awareness, international competence and international experience are keys to curriculum internationalisation which supports Apple's (1990, 1993) challenge to the concept of "official" knowledge. Awareness means fostering an understanding that knowledge does not emerge from a single cultural base and requires that teaching be integrated with international examples, cases and perspectives. Competence means building cross-cultural interaction into student university experience. Within this approach there may be some incorporation of global perspectives and case studies, interaction with international students either on campus or through the use of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) projects whereby universities in the UK collaborate with EU/International universities so that students from each HEI can explore topics from differing perspectives and contexts. Whilst on the face of it these may appear to incorporate international perspectives, they do not go far enough to embed a change in practice into the curriculum and support more of an add-on approach. These internationalisation strategies are often limited in scope (Becker, 2009; Burnapp & Zhao, 2009; Woodfield & Middlehurst, 2009; Leask, 2015; Smith, 2014; Khoo, 2011), and it can be argued are another form of colonialism as they create a convergence of styles and a homogenised globalised curriculum that still privileges and strengthens the dominant West and western knowledge.

Consideration of curriculum content, the means of delivery, and the choice of assessment tend to follow a Eurocentric approach where there is little to no adaptation to differing cultural contexts or the socio-economic needs of the host country (Becker, 2009; Burnapp & Zhao, 2009; Woodfield & Middlehurst, 2009; Leask, 2015; Smith, 2014; Khoo, 2011). This can be further compounded by the use of flying faculty where transfer of knowledge is mainly in one direction, that of the West, onto the host country and their students. It is the case that most universities around the world originate from the medieval European model of university, with only a few exceptions being University of Al Azhar and the University of Al-Qarawiyyin who were the first universities established in the Middle East and North Africa, previously referred to as the "cradle of higher education". Non-Western countries had the medieval model of education imposed on them during colonisation, with some countries such as Japan, who were not under colonial rule, choosing to adopt the Western model as well (Altbach and Selvaratnam, 1989). The medieval

European model had Latin as its official language, today it is English, thereby continuing the dominance of Western power and knowledge.

Collaborative partnerships support the dissemination of trends, degree systems and what is considered to be “official knowledge” from the West into universities around the globe. As very little has changed, when academics are required to adapt their approaches to fit the new campuses or collaborative partner needs, there appear to be tensions around the time and effort necessary for this task and which once again demonstrates the normative nature of western academic approaches to teaching and learning and a dominance of Western/European knowledge and cultural capital (Jones and Brown, 2007; Sawir, 2013). A common approach to resolve this issue is to recruit international academics, providing UKHEIs with bilingual or multilingual staff, without the need for change from the main academic body which acts as another form of interest convergence. Scholars have critiqued this approach due to recognised limitations as it replicates aspects of interest-convergence and also homophily as appointments of staff with overseas experience often means non-white, non-British academics who then face the same challenges as their students but from an employment perspective. It also makes the assumption that those “international” academics have not been taught either in or from a Western or Eurocentric approach to learning and therefore knowledge, which would negate the very purpose of their recruitment (Carroll and Ryan, 2007; Mak and Kennedy, 2012; Niehaus and Williams, 2016; Sawir, 2011). Critiques of current UKHE practice argue that rather than taking a symbolic perspective of internationalisation which is driven by economic and sectoral competition, UKHEIs need to focus on a transformative approach which explicitly embeds international concerns into ways of thinking and doing in all aspects of management and policy initiatives, through to staff and student recruitment and curriculum (Welch, 2002; MacKinnon and Manathunga, 2003; Volet, 1999).

At this point it is important to differentiate between the terms internationalisation as defined by Knight (2004) and decolonisation as whilst there are some similarities, the approach to the curriculum is somewhat different. Whilst I am using the term internationalisation at present, an understanding of what decolonisation involves is needed, as part of the aims of both postcolonial theory and CRT are to disrupt the permanence of racism within society, and in my case within the UKHE context and rehumanise marginalised knowledges and experiences.

2.7 Internationalisation and Decolonisation of the Curriculum

Internationalisation has been addressed in terms of its origins and background, so it is now important to move into the current context and the academic critiques of these phenomena. Kitano (1998) identified that early attempts to internationalise the curriculum did little to disrupt mainstream perspectives and practices. Later initiatives focused on inclusive curricula aiming to address the diversity in the classroom, however, this too has not been enough due to the call for decolonisation of the curriculum by students themselves. Kitchin (2014) noted that there is a long history of government, businesses, science, and citizens producing and utilising data and census strategies to monitor, regulate, profit from and create the world according to a particular scientised reality – that of the West and western knowledge. According to Cheng et al., (2016) there is increased awareness of the importance of internationalising the curriculum in HE (Yemini and Sagie, 2015) and it has been perceived as a key approach in developing students' global perspective of their subject area, and the competences they will need in their future career.

The OECD (1995 6) describe curriculum internationalisation as "an international orientation in content, aimed at preparing students for performing (professionally/socially) in an international and multicultural context, and designed for domestic students as well as foreign students." However, there are a number of academic critiques of internationalisation as they claim that it perpetuates coloniality through its levels of hyper competition, commercialisation, self-interest and status due to the increasing use of both national and global ranking systems (Pashby and Andreotti 2016; Clifford and Montgomery 2017; Knight and de Wit, 2018). Internationalisation became a focus of universities as part of the PMI initiatives in the UK however there is debate about what the term means, and each university uses the phrase to mean different things. Internationalisation tends to be the key word used, although decolonisation has been a common term in more recent academic discussions (which perhaps is seen to create a more emotive/defensive response by the dominant white/Anglo/European academic body) and is defined by Killick (2009:8) as:

> “delivering a student experience (principally but not exclusively through the formal and informal curriculum) that will enable our graduates to develop such a global identity along with attributes to enable engagement (agency) beyond the traditional subject discipline and across the university”.

It is noteworthy that Killick’s approach is based on creating “global citizens” and the rationale for undertaking internationalisation of the curriculum within the context of neoliberalism. There is some agreement that in the early days of internationalisation a simplified approach was taken with a creation of courses which contain pieces of international content for the sole purpose of giving the degree some form of international certificate and to justify the use of the term international, thereby making it more attractive for the global marketplace. From an academic critique, the effect is a piecemeal approach to curriculum internationalisation referred to as the “infusion approach” (De Vita and Case, 2003; Tonkin and Edwards,1981; Cogan, 1998; Leask, 1999). There is general consensus that this approach focuses solely on the Western learning philosophy and is reductionist, not inclusive, which creates a form of neo-colonialism, thereby still privileging dominant values.

Decolonisation has a long history from anti-colonial independence movements in colonised countries through to the emergence in the early twentieth century of anti-colonial and liberation scholars in Africa and India challenging the Eurocentric domination of knowledge and seeking intellectual freedom (Arday and Mirza, 2018). To some extent the call to decolonise the curriculum and the university is following similar lines with mostly peaceful protests and campaigns from students to remove the Eurocentric approach to curriculum and to include marginalised voices (see section 1. 5). Within the field of education decolonisation has no single definition and there are various approaches set out. The consensus is that decolonisation work has several elements with variations depending on the scholar however for the purpose of my thesis I am using Smith’s approach (1999) which identifies the following elements: deconstruction and reconstruction, self-determination and social justice, ethics, language, internationalisation of indigenous experiences, history and critique (Smith, 1999). Deconstruction involves a deeper level of review of current materials and knowledge being used and assessing what has been written correctly, presented through a distorted perspective or uses a deficit version of people's experiences to assess the validity of the sources, what context is being presented and why. The emphasis is that this is a process, not an event that happens once only. From my reading on the subject, it does not mean a superficial approach of replacing one author for another but a more meaningful review wherein all voices, experiences, and contexts are included providing students with the opportunities to explore different life and world views in order for them to decide which speak to them and their realities (Le Grange, 2016). It becomes an opportunity for marginalised students to rediscover and explore their own history, culture, language, and identity and set it within the contemporary world. This, therefore, is the reconstruction of both knowledge and the curriculum wherein both students and academics are involved in creating the historical and contemporary challenges that are explored. Self-determination, social justice, ethics, and language therefore challenge the dominance of a single approach to knowledge, as well as a single dominant language of English, and seek to create a more internationalised knowledge that can then be protected and disseminated around the world, recognising the struggles of those who have been marginalised. History and critique require the full commitment of both academics and students alike in that they all represent the voices of the colonised within the curriculum, to study and recover the past in order to inform the present, and to represent a transformative style of education for all HEIs to follow and include in their strategies.

Whilst Killick and Smith's approaches may appear to focus primarily on the curriculum the emphasis is somewhat different. Killick seems to suggest more of an add-on, or integrative aspect to it, in terms of simply including "other" perspectives into existing curricula without questioning what is currently being delivered, whereas Smith's approach is far more fundamental and seeks to get to the root of curriculum and the pedagogy behind it; in essence starting from scratch with no single dominant perspective. The curriculum is rarely questioned because it provides a good education without accounting for the benefits that white people accrue as a result and although "our values" are discussed as part of the analysis of the curriculum, it is not clear who Killick is referring to, as the lens from which the values and curriculum are viewed may not challenge the status quo. It is far too easy to classify courses as diversified or cross-cultural/international, but the reality of the content chosen and delivered is more related to Killick's approach in terms of only using superficial materials that do not promote deeper learning and reflection, keeping the dominant anglo-centric approach to knowledge acquisition thereby negating an inclusive approach. As such UKHE could be accused of continuing both economic and cultural imperialism due to information in the form of education and knowledge flowing from north to south, which in turn leads to manpower and financial capital flowing from the south to the north in a bid for social mobility (Marginson 1993: 178-79, 1997: 36-38; Tootell, 1999; Joseph, 2011: 241). From my perspective there is a relationship between internationalisation and decolonisation as both seek to enable an understanding of culture, with decolonising work seeking a greater focus on race, whiteness, knowledge production and positions of power. Internationalising the curriculum has been slow to embed "international, intercultural or global dimensions" into the curriculum, tending to rely on an add-on approach, using case studies, trips abroad etc., and predominantly viewing them from a Eurocentric lens. Therefore, decolonising work can support and develop the internationalisation agenda so that UKHEIs can engage with, and challenge, the inequalities within the curriculum and the sector and deliver a curriculum that speaks to the diversity of the student body.

At the institutional level research has shown that there is a high level of dissatisfaction among academic staff who describe their employment as "an unmanageable workload; a poor work/life balance; having to undertake an unreasonable amount of administrative work; and suffering considerable job-related stress" (Bexley et al, 2013: 391). This is evident in the strikes and industrial action undertaken by academics during 2018-2023 based on pay equity, casualisation of employment contracts, terms and conditions including pension schemes, and the recent marking boycotts occurring across the sector. Green and Schoenberg (2006) and Sanderson (2011) emphasise the role of academics as instruments of institutional change. Given their importance they can have a positive influence as “primary agents in the internationalization process” (Friesen, 2012: 2) or they can inhibit it as “fence-sitters or sceptics” (Green and Mertova, 2014: 670). Trahar et al (2016) refer to academics as a “wicked problem” because of their often-reported resistance to IoC with past research showing that academics are often unsure about handling discussions relating to cultural diversity within classroom settings. Sue et al (2007) cited high levels of stress and uncertainty, high levels of emotional reactivity, perceptions of verbal microaggressions (Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009) or displays of cultural privilege by some participants (Boysen and Vogel, 2009) leaving academics drained and confused, or in some cases unaware of offensive comments made and unable to act appropriately.

Decolonising knowledge within a university context involves a deep sense of recognition on the part of academics of the dominant anglo-centric focus, a removal of what has been coined as the “pale, male and stale” approach to curriculum and “a challenge to colonial forms of knowledge, pedagogical strategies and research methodologies” (Mclaughlin and Whatman, 2011: 367). It is this approach that will be explored as part of my research and the perceptions of academic staff to what may currently seem “alien” or unknown materials, history, and pedagogy.   Education and values are connected and are there to shape society but what shape do we want and who decides is a question that I am interested in as part of my research. More importantly is the question of who is the “we” that makes the decisions as current practice is based on white, middle class dominance and if the approach is more of an add-on rather than a deconstruction of said curriculum, then this may result in a homogenous globalised curriculum (defined in section 2.8) that still privileges and strengthens an already anglo-centric dominant group and knowledge that does not allow for other voices to participate and be valued (Khoo, 2011; and Leask, 2015).

2.8 Curriculum in Neoliberal Higher Education

Curriculum was first invoked by Pinar (1975) from the Latin term *“currere”* which means “to run the course” and is significant as it focuses on the individual experience. Pinar accepts that the concept is complicated because we are all different, however the aim is to move away from a pre-determined course in favour of an individual focus on how the course is run based on context, interactions with other human beings; their life story understood through academic study. Pinar's approach connects with decolonisation following a similar approach to Smith's (1999) elements as it seeks to construct or reconstruct the individual rather than having one prescribed way of knowing or doing (2011). This approach opens up creativity, experimentation and allows difference to be valued for its innate worth. The current approach to curriculum is reactive in that it reinforces the status quo and the dominance of the colonisers so that one way of knowing becomes "the way of knowing" (Apple, 1990; 1993).

Curricula itself has been influenced in terms of the knowledge that is included or excluded within teaching and learning. By excluding diverse perspectives and only viewing knowledge through a Eurocentric lens the curriculum acts as a form of what has been termed "epistemological racism" (Scheurich and Young, 1997) which seeks to legitimise ways of knowing from a single white perspective. Curriculum has three elements to it which are explicit, hidden, and null. Explicit is what students receive i.e., module framework, readings, assessment guidelines etc.; the hidden is what students learn about the dominant culture of a university, the academic culture and value reproduction; null is what is left out, not taught, or learned which is predominantly the voices of indigenous or non-white peoples (Le Grange, 2016). In order to highlight the "hidden" and include the "null" academics are required to confront their own personal values and beliefs, alongside a range of sometimes contradictory institutional and sectoral demands and priorities. Academics are committed to their disciplines due to years of investment in developing knowledge and skills, which forms part of their identity (Becher, 1989). They have received the dominant pedagogical practice through their own formal schooling, and it is therefore the most familiar to them and holds value. It is this pedagogic action that becomes the hidden mechanism for both inclusion and exclusion under the remit of merit and is reproduced within the curriculum and context delivered in the classroom. The curriculum should provide students with a "truthful and meaningful rendition of the whole human experience” (Hilliard, 1992: 13; Mezirow, 2003) which does not focus on quotas of authors from ethnic minority backgrounds or case studies in order for balance but one that focuses on validity. The add-on approach of underrepresented authors does little unless the readings provide new perspectives, ways of knowing and new values.

It is recognised that the curriculum has been reshaped to fit within the notion of internationalisation in order for UKHEIs to remain competitive within the global market and gain position in the context of world rankings (Nixon 2013; Hill and Rosskam, 2009; Unterhalter and Carpentiar, 2010) with very little change to the dominant voice of Western/European education. However, when the curriculum is also shaped by neoliberalism this places additional pressure on universities to compete for the “best students” and seek global recognition (Gyamera and Burke, 2018: 453). Whilst neoliberalism focuses on skills, employability and meeting the needs of the neoliberal market, decolonisation goes further as it also seeks to understand the relationship between learning and developing human virtues. Caution is needed as neoliberalism hides inequalities, and without evaluation internationalisation practices could result in new forms of colonialism, which will result in various methods of control of ex-colonies and exertion of influence. Within UKHE, this would mean that rather than creating an inclusive education system with indigenous voices heard to meet the needs of all learners, it would instead continue the legacy of models derived from colonial masters.

There are a range of obstacles to a postcolonial or decolonised approach as UKHE is governed by a culture embedded in neoliberalism, with outcomes, degree attainments, module grades etc set out within specific courses. It is argued that the neoliberal approach prevents changes to the traditional UKHE systems due to the commodification of knowledge (Lorenz, 2012) coupled with the continued governmental practices of funding cuts and increases in performativity measures that have become hegemonic within HE. In addition, gatekeepers, such as publishers, control academic knowledge as they decide who can access the academic research through both a cost system and access to university library systems; they reinforce the lens through which the knowledge is validated and support the Eurocentric model of education.

In 1980 a significant change occurred within UKHE when the British government introduced a full-cost fee policy for international students. This has been seen as conferring the final status of international students as “the other” group in UKHE. Whilst I do not want to focus on the experiences of international students as such, it is important to mention the approach of “othering” as this features within internationalisation and the production of the dominant style of curriculum, as well as marginalising not just international students but diverse groups of students. For the majority of people of colour, the world that they live in is neither neutral nor objective and the challenges of racism, power inequality, difference and otherness are constant reminders of this. CRT provides a lens to understand the multifaceted ways that racism exists and operates as a normative process within the field of education.

Popular rhetoric suggests that HE is the great equalizer and affords life opportunities, particularly to those who, regardless of circumstances, “work hard” however this meritocratic approach is full of racist assumptions as it does not consider that hard work alone is insufficient to succeed and reduces marginalised groups to “others”, as can be seen with the approach and perceptions of international students. (Patton, 2016; Arday and Mirza, 2018; Madriage and McCaig, 2019). Therefore, international students are permitted access to UKHE not solely based on academic merit but on the basis that they can and do pay higher fees, which can be viewed as interest convergence. It therefore falls to critical theories and frameworks such as Postcolonialism and CRT to trouble the practices and conditions of inclusion, relationships of domination and deficit models without which deeply rooted and normative approaches remain unchallenged and form the status quo. Policy initiatives within UKHE have been shown to have predominantly neoliberal economic foci and seek to provide a barrier to decolonisation of the curriculum through the use of vague internationalisation agendas, this will be explored further in the next section.

Therefore, whilst non-white students are encouraged to join HE through widening participation agendas and International students enter the UK to join a new educational system seeking an advantage and social acceptance, the reality for most is that they have been “othered” from the beginning and never manage to remove this label. Within CRT whiteness draws most of its power from “othering” (Gillborn, 2005: 488) as it ensures the “naturalisation” of whiteness in terms of what is official knowledge (Apple, 1990, 1993) how it is taught and therefore assessed, so that it becomes the norm from which other races stand apart and in relation to which they are defined. Ahmed (2000) develops this further through the process of “strangering” whereby expelling and/or welcoming of difference highlights or creates the stranger in the first instance. Inclusive practices therefore make marginality and difference visible (Stiker, 1999) whilst at the same time normalising privileged ontological and epistemological practices and policy.

Much of the existing literature on international students is focused on them assimilating and coping with the challenges of UKHE experience. The focus is rarely on the systems that impact on their academic success and experiences (Yao et al., 2019). The emphasis is placed solely with the students themselves and utilises the deficit model to explain the negative experiences that they may receive. This is true of BAME or non-white students, who also experience a curriculum that does not value their cultural background and knowledge, which affects not only their sense of belonging and engagement in UKHE but also their degree classifications. Focusing on how to approach the teaching of international students clearly classifies them as the “other” indicating that they are different or deficit in some way, and the use of the term international in itself supports the notion of difference, whilst at the same time homogenising all international students together (Madge et al., 2009). This is also true of contested terms such as BAME or ethnic minority as it pulls groups of individuals together as one homogenous cohort. Othering is a way to define the Western world from the contrasting “us versus them” perspective (Said, 1978; Yao et al., 2019: 39; Spivak, 1985; Riegel, 2016), as it helps to objectify, generalise, and provide a negative perception of groups as they are positioned within unequal circumstances. Othering provides opportunities for unequal power relations, romanticised ideas of cultures and stereotyping which lead to deficit models and symbolic capital dominated by the West. UKHE therefore can be perceived as a violent context of subjection that reproduces inequalities as normative; placing students in circumstances where they not only acquire explicit knowledge from the curriculum but also come to realise their own positions within societal orders (Steinbach et al., 2020). Therefore, CRT can be expanded beyond a UK or US focused theory which seeks to analyse and make aware the racialised experiences of domestic racial groups and be expanded to include international students who are clearly victims of othering, just by the category given to them to make visible their differences.

Gillborn (2010: 4) argues that whilst not all white people are equally privileged, what CRT does is “view white-identified people as implicated in relations of racial domination” (ibid) as they benefit from their whiteness in some way. White therefore equals the norm and everyone else is categorised as the other. White culture is considered normative within UK society and white supremacy can be seen in three specific areas relating to both international students and non-white students namely, the privileged position of white British values, the pervasiveness of English as the dominant language, and the assumption of either assimilation or acculturation in order to achieve within UKHE students (Yao et al., 2019). International students who enter a new educational system seek a way into advantage and social acceptance, however many still remain outside the mainstream by having been “othered” and this is also true of non-white UK students who do not have the same background or shared experiences of their white peers. Said (1978) identified othering as the way to expose or highlight the weaknesses of marginalised groups to emphasise the strength claimed by those in positions of power. This is further stressed by Adkag and Swanson (2018:73) as the “effect of othering means that all except one’s own culture are regarded as valueless and insignificant”.

The human capital value of education has been recontextualised as a private good which is tied to a market-oriented commodification of knowledge within universities, underpinned by a repositioning of universities as entrepreneurial enterprises. The obsession with numbers and measurement has become the focus of discussions and presentations on internationalisation and is a recurring theme in several universities’ policy documents as HEIs are rated based on the REF, TEF and KEF tables (Akdag and Swanson, 2018: 69). Over the past few decades UK government policies and practices have focused on cutbacks and this has facilitated the neoliberal colonisation of HE with the narrative that private investment was the only means of funding universities (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Amsler, 2011) leading to increases in HE fees, private revenue generation and partnerships at home and overseas. It is this neoliberal approach that Is generally agreed to have resulted in students transformed into consumers.

Whilst the call for decolonisation of the curriculum may be being heard by some, there are no clear requirements as to how this can be achieved or how it will be measured. It is not clear what, if anything, academics understand by the term decolonisation or what the requirements of them may be, as there is general consensus that it is not a one size fits all approach. Just as Knight’s definition of internationalisation of the curriculum has been criticised for being process-based and that it fails to provide either instruction or detail as to how to develop initiatives (Trevaskes, Eisenchales and Liddicoat, 2003; Enequist, 2005), the concept of decolonising the curriculum is in a similar position. The difference is that the initial call to decolonise is aimed at organisational as well as individual academic level. As such the Eurocentric curriculum is created, presented, and delivered in a multitude of ways across disciplines so there is no specific or generally accepted understanding of how to go about it. Neoliberalism has emerged as a “common sense” discourse, influencing both government and institutional policies and has become an important aspect within HE policies. Neoliberalism created economic frameworks, creating privilege, hiding inequalities, promoting free trade and free markets which has reshaped higher education across the world (Harvey, 2008; Marginson, 1997). The heart of neoliberalism has an ethos that normalises “individualistic self-interest, entrepreneurial values, … consumerism” (Barnett, 2009: 270) and “economic participation” (Wainwright et al. 2011; Mavelli, 2014). Brown (1995) and Noble and Davies (2009) have shown that cultural capital in the form of education is often a key marker of social inclusion. Entering the university system is not enough as success is achieved via university rankings, degree classifications and the curriculum is of central importance to students' sense of belonging and engagement (Thomas, 2012).

The dominant narrative on meritocracy suggests that anyone can attend university/higher education however to succeed is a different matter. The goal of education is to "enable people to develop the critical analytical tools necessary to understand oppression and their own socialisation within oppressive systems and to develop a sense of agency and capacity to interrupt and change oppressive patterns and behaviours in themselves and in the institutions and communities in which they participate" (Bell, 2007: 1). Whilst universities are subjected to the effects of globalisation and governmental initiatives, they are also considered to be developers of cognitive capital and most importantly promoters of the knowledge economy therefore it would appear apt that internationalisation and decolonisation of the curriculum would form part of the strategies and agendas of UKHE. There is widespread recognition of the diversity and increasing numbers of non-traditional students that now make up classroom cohorts and the need to review and change the curriculum in light of the varied learning and motivational needs of those who attend HE both at home and internationally as a result (Wingate, 2015; Beighton, 2018). It is therefore necessary to address how neoliberal higher education has influenced curriculum, how it is understood and implemented but more importantly how the European model of education is affecting the degree outcomes of BAME students, which is the focus of the next section.

2.9 The Awarding Gap

Research has demonstrated that academic faculty are the forerunners of curriculum change and development, with changes in teaching and learning practices only occurring when academics are ready to engage and implement them (Green & Schoenberg, 2006; Clifford, 2009; Bell, 2004). It is, therefore, important to consider the academic perceptions and practices that influence and impact on academic outcomes as they form a large part of the change required within the campaign to decolonise the curriculum. It is these academic norms, which may appear obvious to academics, that can either help or hinder students' achievements as they are rarely explicitly stated and are, in general, more widely known to those whose families have been to university. It is an individual's culture that affects their perspective on how teaching and learning should be undertaken, and indeed what should be included.

Neoliberalism requires a meritocratic conception of equality and as such if people have the same level of merit, then they should have the same chances of success and therefore the perception is that any differences are due to talent and effort alone, or lack thereof. However, it does not take into account group disparities in the form of race, gender, social class or geographical location and is blind to the social factors that have a strong influence on achievement in education and beyond. As a response to these challenges in the 1980s and 1990s the Conservative Government made claims about the only fair approach to education policy was to be "colour blind" (Gillborn, 2005:493) however the claims might be considered non-performatives as UKHE must now address the issues of the awarding gap between ethnic minority groups, predominantly focusing on the achievement of black students in comparison to their white counterparts. Inclusive education requires a radical pedagogic change however it is often replaced with a more neoliberal approach related more to integration, normalising practices to focus on economic needs and social cohesion (Higgs, 2016; Liasidou, 2012).

There is an argument that UKHEIs deliver programmes to an increasingly diverse group of students however there has been resistance to change to meet the needs of minority groups. There is little evidence that where diversity courses are delivered student perceptions change, instead there is reinforcement of the status quo of dominance and inequity (Leask, 2015; Kember, 2000; Chalmers and Volet, 1997). According to Ladson-Billings (1998) the lack of inclusivity in the academic curriculum encourages the idea of colour blindness which is counterproductive. Research has shown that students from historically marginalised racial/ethnic, cultural and economic groups enrol in HE and never complete their degree or achieve the classification they aimed for. The awarding gap, or attainment gap as it was initially labelled, was first introduced as a means to identify and understand why these groups were underachieving compared with their white counterparts. Part of the arguments for this disparity or gap was based on a student's "cognitive, motivational, or circumstantial deficiency" - in other words the deficit was based on student features and not the content of the curriculum, the perceptions of the academics and their role in the students' success (Perun, 2020: 219, Bell, 2007). The fact that it was first termed the attainment gap connects with the neoliberal ethos of meritocracy, placing the responsibility and the gap itself with the student. The change to the awarding gap, which on the face of it removes the deficit perspective of the student, also has its limitations as this may suggest that it is the way the degree is assessed and then awarded for example the process itself, rather than what is contained within the curriculum.

There are existing tensions and contradictions within the field of education and in relation to CRT. When we consider the awarding gap and the underperformance of Black students, in particular, it is, for some, considered to be the "burden of acting white" (Ogbu, 2004). Academics come with their own experiences and perceptions, and this affects the perceptions of their world, their space, and their learning journey. As part of this, academic cultures, as defined by Cortazzi and Jin (1996: 76), are the "systems of beliefs, expectations and cultural practices about how to perform academically" and these impart the notions of success, talent, and deficit models in relation to students' abilities. From a CRT perspective the academic culture and beliefs can be argued to be a result of the functions of white supremacy whereby those who do not meet the expectations are viewed as inferior (Ladson-Billing & Tate, 1995). There are theories which focus on assimilation and argue that the more minoritised groups assimilate with society the better they fare in terms of education and income. These, however, have their own contradictions as proven by Solorzano & Yosso (2002) in their research on LatinX and have a tendency to focus on the deficit discourse, placing the onus on the individual to assimilate to the dominant culture and discard their own cultural background. Within the field of education, it therefore requires a move away from the deficit model, and instead encouraging all students to bring their whole selves to the classroom, through decolonising the curriculum and for academic faculty to engage with culturally relevant pedagogy.

Although attainment has been improving across all groups, the gap between them has not significantly narrowed over recent years, with some groups increasing the gap. Research by the HEA and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) 2008 showed the importance of the curriculum (in broad terms) and particularly learning, teaching and assessment (LTA) practices, and highlighted the need for further research to explore how students perceive and experience marking practices, assessment, feedback; student-lecturer and peer interactions; and how course design and pedagogic practices might maximise attainment. Issues highlighted were problems of segregation, low teacher expectations, undervaluing or under-challenging of BME students, attitudes based on linguistic competence and discriminatory practice inherent in LTA activities and student support.

Part of the challenges identified in the literature is the need for academics to recognise and focus on problematising one's teaching style rather than accepting the normative approach of teaching and learning practices wherein students or cohorts find themselves alienated and excluded by the norms held within disciplines and/or institutions. The ways of "knowing" in order to teach across cultures and the recognition that individuals from different backgrounds have been taught and learn differently requires academics to practice avoiding using a pedagogised "other" approach (De Vita, 2001; Atkinson, 2015). It is this focus on non-UK/EU approaches to teaching that set non-white and international students as different and frame them as being deficient in some way. Where issues of race or ethnicity are acknowledged within education policy it is based solely on a focus of underachievement, or a denial of racism as a potential cause of differences (Archer and Francis, 2007; CRED, 2021). At the same time this approach hides the very inequalities that affect different ethnic groups thereby placing responsibility for achievement at the feet of minority ethnic individuals (Archer and Francis, 2007: 1).

Internationalisation therefore can be either symbolic, focusing on the financial needs and the strategies implemented by the institution in order to remain competitive and economically viable or they can be transformative. It is this transformative approach that critics of current UKHE practices such as MacKinnon and Manathunga (2003), Volet (1999), and Welch (2002) appear to seek as part of their research. The aim therefore is for internationalisation to be explicitly embedded into routine ways of thinking and doing, in policy and management, staff and student recruitment, curriculum and programmes (Welch, 2002) however the role of the academic, the willingness to change practices to achieve internationalisation and most importantly decolonising the curriculum must continue to be examined.

2.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has undertaken a critical review of internationalisation, decolonisation, othering and curriculum within the neoliberal context before reviewing academic perspectives and practices. A combination of Postcolonial Theory and CRT's Interest-Convergence are the chosen theoretical frameworks and as such the literature was examined to assess the policies and practices in play. The next chapter will set out the research design framework that is appropriate for my research study as well as examining the limitations and challenges relating to my choice of method.

Chapter Three: Research Design, Theoretical Framework and Data Collection

3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the theoretical and methodological framework that underpins my research and the philosophical influences within the design. I begin by stating my overall research aims and the context they are situated within to clearly identify the link between my research questions, underpinning theoretical framework and research design. As discussed in Chapter 2 the chosen theoretical framework for my research is predominantly Postcolonial Theory as well as the tenet of interest-convergence within Critical Race Theory (CRT). Postcolonial Theory seeks to decentre, challenge, and disturb Eurocentric knowledge and as such is an appropriate choice to assess UKHE approaches to decolonise the curriculum, coupled with CRT which seeks to challenge the permanence and ubiquity of racism and make individuals aware of white privilege. CRT was established in the USA within Critical Legal Studies by Ladson-Billings and Tate in the 1970-80s and subsequently moved into education in the 1990s where it has gained traction through the work of anti-racists by drawing attention to the disparity in outcomes between white and minority ethic groups. My research follows a similar method to that of Shain et al., (2021) as I use interest-convergence to explore the approach used. However, whilst Shain et al's research involved experiences of a diverse group of both academic and student participants across nine universities within England, the participants in this research are within a single UKHEI where I am employed as an academic. The main aim of my research is to carry out an in-depth investigation of the perceptions of academic staff within Peak University in relation to the call to decolonise the curriculum in order to highlight the challenges to Senior Leaders.

The use of both postcolonial theory and CRT provides a clear framework for my research as they are both forms of resistance to oppression within societal, political and economic systems which are relevant to the UK education sector. They form the framework of my research as they challenge the status quo of the UKHE system, its claims to neutrality and objectivity. The study is based on Peak University which at the time of the study was asking its academics to decolonise the curriculum. My research focus is upon exploring the experiences, perspectives, views, and opinions of academics in relation to the current curriculum and how decolonising it will support non-white students. In Chapter 2 it was identified that the purpose of curriculum was to represent and focus on the individuals' experience within the course studied (Pinar, 1975). However, it is also clear that no single agreed definition exists, and curriculum is often used to refer to the collection of subjects offered by an education provider comprising an area of specialism, for example, the engineering curriculum or the chemical science curriculum. Whilst the literature reviewed refers to the curriculum, as does the call to decolonise, for the purpose of my research I recognise that all disciplines and subjects are, and should be, different in order to represent the diverse student body and the knowledges within them. In terms of my own research, I contend that decolonising the curriculum is not just the subjects or the content taught in classrooms across various disciplines within UKHE but also incorporates the teaching processes or pedagogical approaches as well. Pedagogy focuses on what academics do to influence learning and how it is developed using theories, research, practice, experience, and political drivers as well as reflection and as such they cannot be excluded from the research (Alexander, 2001; Jiang and Kosar Altinyelken, 2020). Therefore, my use of the term curriculum is broader than just the content or materials. My study seeks to address the overarching research question of What are academic staff perceptions of decolonising the curriculum? by focusing on the following research questions:

Research Questions:
Q1.What is the understanding of the motivation for internationalisation or decolonisation policies and activities?
Q2.To what extent does decolonisation of the curriculum affect or impact academic staff?
Q3.What are the ethical and power issues underpinning the decisions and directions to internationalise or decolonise the curriculum?

3.2 Research Framework

Epistemology is concerned with what is known about the social world and involves discussion and debate in relation to which approach is the most appropriate for the study that is being undertaken in social science. CRT does more than just interpret racism; it actively offers ways of conducting research to challenge the objectification of race and racism. It is argued that CRT's epistemology and methodology are bound together in the claims about race in education through its use of historiographies, narratives, storytelling, and counter-storytelling as well as its background in critical legal studies (Leonardo, 2013: 602). CRT accepts that Western epistemology distinguishes between objective facts, such as ethnic minority children have less access to appropriate resources and are more likely to leave university with a lower degree than their white peers, and subjective stories. CRT acknowledges the facts are evidence based, however, it also recognises the power of the narrative behind them, for example, the deficit model of thinking and perceptions of minority children as difficult to teach and educate that supports the status quo (Leonardo, 2013: 603). Postcolonial theory seeks to critique and decentre the discourses that constitute colonial relations and to remove the dominance of a monocultural approach to Western education. As such evidence has shown that social research has a history of misrepresenting marginalised groups as they use a European/Western lens to examine indigenous groups culture and worldview with the aim of maintaining the privilege of the researcher (Said, 1979; Smith, 1999). My approach is to examine how the actions and priorities undertaken at Peak University were perceived by the academics, the understanding of the motivations for internationalisation and decolonisation, together with the influence of power and privileges working within UKHEI structures and systems.

The theoretical framework used for this research follows what Meghji (2022: 651) refers to as a "theoretical synergy" so that where there are gaps or blind spots in one theory, another theory can be incorporated to address them, without the need for synthesis or hierarchy. Both Postcolonial theory and CRT seek to expose the insufficient integration of historically subordinate populations into dominant systems, whether legal or education based (Thomas, 2000: 1198). Postcolonialism has focused on showing how the West has created and perpetuates the idea of the Global South as being 'inferior' whereas CRT focuses on the structures, systems and narratives that feeds into this, thus making them ideal for a synergistic approach. I had initially focused on CRT and interest-convergence as the theoretical framework for my research (see section 1.10), however, I recognised that this was not sufficient as the focus on decolonising the curriculum was not solely a UK issue; indeed, the student campaigns originated in former colonies such as South Africa, and therefore a more international and global approach was needed. CRT is critiqued for focusing on US and UK approaches, whereas both Postcolonial and decolonial theories have international and global foci, therefore a theoretical synergy of these theories was deemed appropriate. The use of Postcolonial theory provided a more globally oriented approach and together with CRT offered a stronger, historical and contemporary theoretical framework. CRT offers the contemporary critiques of race and racism, challenging the status quo, whereas decolonial thought recognises the temporal connections between the past and present, and how the colonial logic continues to shape the future (Meghji, 2022). Therefore, in order to understand academic perceptions of decolonising the curriculum, it was necessary to use a framework that examines the dominant Eurocentric curriculum and knowledge production of the past, present and future, which both CRT and Postcolonial theory provides.

An interpretivist paradigm was applied to this research study as the use of qualitative data was vital to developing a deeper understanding of the views, opinions, feelings, and perceptions about the curriculum and calls for it to be decolonised. The concepts of power and inequality due to colonisation and white Western/Eurocentric dominance within UKHE curriculum form part of my research which fits within the interpretivist approach as it is subjective, due to the fact that I am part of the culture and environment I am studying. Blaikie defines interpretivism as the study of social phenomena which "requires an understanding of the social world that people have constructed and which they re-produce through their continuing activities" (2017:124). The premise of interpretivism is that reality is socially constructed, and this fits both with the research objectives but also the research framework of postcolonial theory and CRT/interest-convergence. The central tenet of interpretivism is that people are constantly involved in interpreting the changing world that they exist within. This is true of academia where strategic frameworks are updated and amended based on external factors and actors' requirements which range from the Office for Students (OfS) through to priorities set by the United Nations, the UK government etc., especially with the requirement for UKHEIs to increase their rankings both nationally and internationally.

UK Higher Education is an important influence on what constitutes knowledge and whose knowledge is viewed as legitimate which is part of the focus of this research (see Section 2.6). It is therefore implied that there is a relationship between what is known, and the knower, and the call for decolonising the curriculum presents a challenge for academics, their learning and knowledge which is why they are the focus of my research (Leonardo, 2013). An interpretivist approach accepts that knowledge is everywhere, it is ever changing and is constructed through social interactions. As such various types of information are valid and can be placed under said heading (Thomas, 2017), which provides a greater depth of understanding. Postcolonial theory and CRT fit within this approach as they recognise racism is a social construct and do not seek to solve it, but to bring the surrounding issues to the individual's attention, which in my research will be Peak University academics and Senior Leaders.

Methodology underpins the framework for research into race and racism as it questions and challenges the reality of factors such as institutional and structural racism (see section 1.4) (Leonardo, 2013). Both CRT and postcolonial theories proceed from the position that racism, and therefore oppression, not only exists but that it is embedded into the social and political structures in society, including education. In section 1.2 it is highlighted that the UK government, in particular the more recent Sewell Report (2021), clearly state that structural racism is not present within UK institutions and reject the teaching of CRT within education as it is perceived to be divisive. There is similarity between Leonardo's (2013) research on schoolteachers and my own as academics and students within UKHEIs mediate structures, interpret them, and create meaning out of them. It is the challenge of what constitutes reality and the recognition that it is not subjective; instead, it is interpreted through frameworks, especially within racialised research. As such both academics and students interpret their experiences and the curriculum based on their own subjective reality (Leonardo, 2013: 600). My approach relates to sense making, as academics and UKHE seeks to interpret the reality of decolonising the curriculum and the effect on marginalised student groups and their attainment.

The research for this thesis was a qualitative study, using in-depth semi-structured interviews with academic staff across two discipline areas: Business and Humanities (see Section 3.10 for a detailed discussion of data collection methods). In addition, Senior Management roles, Internationalisation Department roles and Library staff were included in the sample to gain a broader approach across different areas of the university. Interviews, which lasted between 45 minutes and one hour, were deemed more appropriate for this type of research because they provided opportunities for probing the feelings, opinions, and practices of individual academics, whilst also exploring their lived experiences. A small sample from the student body was included later into the study to provide further context for my own thinking and approach.

3.3 Case Study Research

Case study research requires the researcher to investigate a real-life context and focus on the "how" and the "why" of the situation (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2014). Using a case study approach provided me with the opportunity to ask questions, to assess the perceptions, understanding and implementation of decolonising work from an academic perspective in a single UKHEI rather than making assumptions about the motivations, power, and privilege at play within UKHE. Together they spotlight race and racism in the research design, the data collection, and the analysis undertaken (Smith-Maddox and Solórzano, 2002). A case is those phenomena seen from one particular angle and using a small case study has its benefits as it is a trade-off between breadth i.e., number of sites/academics and the depth of the study itself.

Intrinsic interest and generalisation are not the primary concern. Case studies are defined as “an empirical inquiry that:

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when
- the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2014: 16).

Using an explanatory case study design, I focused on the “how” and “why” (de Vaus, 2001) of internationalisation and decolonisation initiatives within a single UKHEI to explore academic perceptions of both. Case study design is an iterative process and as such the methods used reflect the use of intrinsic or instrumental interests (Stake, 1995:4). Intrinsic relates to interest in the case itself and instrumental is where a case is chosen to explore an issue or research question determined on some other grounds. Whilst there were intrinsic interests as Peak University was unique in terms of its staff and students, the case study design followed more of an instrumental approach as it related to why and how academics navigated the requirements to decolonise their curriculum. My research is theory-led as it explores a case through the lens of CRT/postcolonial theory as my aim was to accomplish something other than understanding academics within Peak university. It was a case to provide insights into a particular issue, that of racism and dominance in the UKHE curriculum. It is case study research as I focused on a specified population, that of academics in a single UKHEI as the parent/universe of cases and the academics within Business and Humanity disciplines etc, where I am also situated, are the case population for my sample (see section 1.8). Within case study research there is a question of bounding. As I chose to use a small group of academics as cases for my research then part of the process I have undertaken was to distinguish them from the rest of the academic body who are outside of my research, thereby setting the context for my case study (Yin, 2004: 31). This is reflected by Bechhofer and Peterson (2000: 51) who state that “from the point of view of research design, we need to be guided by relevant theories when we are choosing cases – or, in other words, choosing locale and group”. Although I interviewed academics within

Business and Humanities, they do not represent all academics in those fields within Peak University, nor do they represent the academics in the other discipline areas who were not part of the sample.

The academics at Peak University are predominantly white, middle-class Anglo/European and it is only in the last couple of years that there has been a slight increase in recruiting academic staff from across the world, partly to start addressing the internationalisation of the university itself. Therefore, a more holistic approach to my investigation of this case was made through use of multiple methods with the case remaining central. My objective was to carry out an in-depth study of academic perceptions of decolonisation of the curriculum, drawing inferences by piecing together small fragments of information, looking for comparisons and similarities. Case study isn't about a particular method it is trying to make sense of the case through contextualisation and investigation, which has been referred to as "intelligent noticing" (Thomas, 2017) and this lends itself well to my research and sample.

The primary purpose for undertaking a case study is to explore the particularity, the uniqueness, of the single case (Stake, 1995) as there are unique characteristics and context that Peak university and its academics found themselves situated in (see Table 1 for demographic data). Case study in the context of evaluation has more difficulties than traditional social sciences. As there is an interpretivist influence in my research approach, this required both myself and the academics (subject) to be the instruments to measure the phenomena which involved both observation and interviews. There are advantages to case study as it can "close in" on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice, which is why qualitative methods were used. Therefore, my research was analysed using descriptive inference, whereby I sought to understand a phenomenon based on a set of observations (Flyvberg, 2006). This approach was ideal for my research as I was able to fully submerge myself into the academic culture and environment as it is one that I was both situated in and familiar with, due to the nature of my role as an academic. Therefore, as I was exploring academic perceptions, and being one myself, I was able to undertake the role of participant as observer, within the academic environment, not just in classrooms, but in staff meetings, School Away Days and other training/social events as well as reviewing Peak's Strategic framework 2018-2030, email communications etc. where discussions of an academic nature occurred.

3.4 Qualitative Research

One of the assumptions of qualitative research is that the research has an interest in meaning or how people make sense of the world they operate in (Merriam, 1998: 19-20) which in my study is how academics make sense of the requirement to decolonise the curriculum, what it means to them and their practice.
Piecing together data from direct observations, interviews, focus groups as well as facts relevant to the stream of events is relevant because context is important (Franz and Robey, 1984; Stone, 1978). I used a range of data, such as the Strategic Framework 2018-2030 (see Section 1.8), various staff meetings and Away Days that focus specifically on the topics of internationalisation, international students, the Awarding Gap, and the curriculum to inform and add to the primary research undertaken.

Internationalisation, whether it be the curriculum or the institution itself, is an evolving process and does not happen overnight and this is particularly true of decolonising the curriculum as it is a much more in-depth and transformative change process. Using a small case study design for my research also allowed me to use triangulation in my methodology, which is a technique designed to compare and contrast different types of methods in order to gain more in-depth insight into academic perspectives. As such, when analysing and writing up my research the interpretation of data was important, together with the acknowledgement of my background and sociohistorical context. I can only describe what I saw, and I used observation, interviews, and documents to evaluate what I found. Face-to-face interviews are dominant within qualitative research and have been described as "gold standard" by some researchers (Barbour, 2014). The methods themselves need to be complementary in their approach so that, for example, in-depth interviews with academic staff did not affect my relationship with colleagues and allowed me to identify group norms and beliefs. The order and timing of the methods was important as my main focus was on the academics themselves, however over time it became apparent that the voice of students was not being addressed, either by myself or the university as a whole, which was contrary to the fact that it was the student calls for a decolonised curriculum that started this work.

Bryman and Bell (2015:406) refer to more practical issues of researchers losing sight of their goals due to the level of involvement and participation in their own study. As an academic I was already embedded into the environment I was researching however with the new focus on decolonising the curriculum there was the additional expectation that I would become a member of the newly formed steering groups, who all had their own agendas, which meant that I could have been easily distracted from my own research aims and objectives, in order to meet theirs. As the initial interviews were conducted during the pandemic there was a clear focus in the minds of the academics, however as time passed and a return to campus became the norm there was evidence that this was no longer a priority, and later interviews demonstrated the distance and loss of focus. Within interpretivism the researcher still seeks to place the data collected and analysed within a theoretical framework, that of Postcolonial theory and interest-convergence, rather than just trying to show how individuals interpret the environment they exist in, and this poses a challenge within the research itself. Within research there are subsequent issues relating to informed consent of participants which Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) identify that whilst participants are aware that research is being undertaken and this fact is made explicit at the outset "it is not uncommon for participants quickly to forget this once they come to know the ethnographer as a person" (2007: 210). However, in my case there were numerous references to me and my research and within my own Department and School I was referred to as the person who "knew" about decolonising the curriculum. I was initially asked to feed back into every team meeting about any discussions/working groups etc that I attended, however this quickly disappeared from the agenda on return to campus and has since changed in favour of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG's).

Undertaking research based on race in education involves reflexivity on my part which required me to understand my own biases and where a researcher "actively engages in critical self-reflection about his or her potential biases and predispositions" (Johnson and Christensen, 2011: 265). It is through reflection on my own experience and activities as an academic that I came to this research topic and therefore, only in the process of engaging with academic perceptions of internationalisation and decolonisation have I become self-aware and reviewed the strategies I use to address bias. Reflection is "a way of thinking deeply and carefully about self within the context of one's practice" (Johns, 2013: 2) so how I conducted myself both with academic colleagues, my superiors and the Senior Leaders as well as with the international students I was teaching, needed to be reflected upon. Schön (1983:17) suggests that reflection is the gateway to knowing and responding to the issues of everyday practice which is an important aspect of my own research. The concept of reflection requires researchers to consider their positionality throughout the process and I now move to this area for further discussion.

3.5 Insider Researcher

It is important, at this stage, to address positionality as it assumes that knowledge is situated in relations between people (Thomas, 2017) and as I have undertaken research within my own organisation my role, my background and experience needs to be addressed. In addition, this was also considered when I was interpreting the results so that any bias I may have or any influences from Peak University were clearly stated; therefore, my own value position must be explicitly explored and considered in the research process. Reflexivity identifies that researchers' backgrounds, their socio-historical and their values influence and shape their orientations. It also suggests that all social science research is in some form participant observation in that it involves participating in the world (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 15). There are, of course, critiques and challenges of insider research, not least of which is bias.

There is a need within research to be objective but being an insider is more subjective. It has been argued that an insider researcher's perception is "narrowed, as too much is familiar" which in turn limits objective analysis, awareness, and critique of social and cultural structures (Aguiler, 1981: 15). The fact that the choice of subject was based on personal experience as an academic and the focus on colleagues in academia will raise questions of “insider bias” (van Heugten, 2004: 207). Whilst this may be relevant, my experience and interest also provide insight into the challenges within academia and I was aware of my own biases when conducting interviews, seeking to avoid influencing the discussions or making judgements about the participants or the responses. As an academic within Peak University this approach fits my research study well as when I initially commenced the data collection process, I was still somewhat an outsider due to only recently joining the university, I was also very familiar with the environment and was therefore immersed in it to some extent. I was fortunate that I was able to participate, engage in and with the change in focus to decolonising the curriculum as Peak University and the academics themselves were coming to terms with the concept and the extent of the change needed. Academic culture was not a new environment for me and therefore the meanings of the behaviour, actions, events, and contexts of the groups I worked with were both familiar and central to understanding their reactions. My task therefore was to uncover the meanings behind the discussions, and I therefore needed an insider’s perspective so that I could both conduct interviews but also observe the interactions in a natural setting; one in which I also participated.

Part of the rationale for using more local discussions was related both to voice and to access. Whilst it is assumed that being an insider equates to easy access this was not the case (Merriam et al., 2001). My initial interactions with my own School and College grew over time as more colleagues became aware of my area of research. I was largely accepted by my colleagues as a novice researcher but also a holder of information in relation to the new agenda on the Awarding Gap, and as such invited to be part of several Steering Groups. Whilst it has been noted that such relationships may impact on the research, its interpretation, and analysis, the limited knowledge I had of colleagues within Business may have reduced the effect in terms of responses. Although it was a potential challenge, it also provided a level of homophily with the people interviewed as they have a similar background and experience to me (Ladson-Billings, 2005). The academics who volunteered within

Humanities were unknown to me, either personally or professionally, but were keen to be involved in the research itself. Centrally, however, there was more of a power struggle with the former Learning and Teaching Excellence Centre and whilst I was able to find out about some research being undertaken by the Strategic Insights Team, despite several attempts to be a part of this, or to be able to view the results, my requests were largely either ignored or rejected. I accepted this position as I am not an expert in the field, but on reflection questioned who, or what, they assessed as valuable in terms of both knowledge and positionality in order to be part of their research team.

As an insider researcher I was able to ask meaningful questions and had an authentic understanding of the challenges perceived by the academics, and management who participated in this study (Merriam et al., 2001; Chavez, 2008). This was made clear during and following the Covid-19 pandemic where UKHEIs and academics were thrown into the calls for decolonising the curriculum and were attempting to understand the impact and requirements of them. As previously stated, the research was conducted within my own institution, and this creates a possible issue of familiarity in which Geer (1984) highlighted the difficulties. The main problem was that it was all so familiar that it was, at times, difficult to single out events that have occurred, when they happened right in front of me. Throughout the process it was made clear there could be challenges in terms of writing honestly about my own institution however there was, and is, no attempt to assess areas of good or bad practice; my research seeks to focus on future directions for senior leaders based on the responses received from staff. The responses are by no means a full representation of all academic staff, but I have aimed to provide a fair and balanced representation of viewpoints at that specific point in time. However, undertaking research within my own organisation may not provide Peak, or the academics themselves with information they want to hear, so I was mindful of this, and reviewed my approach as part of my reflective practice. A reflective and reflexive approach to research is important within interpretivism, particularly when using a theoretical framework of Postcolonial Theory and CRT, due to the focus on race, privilege and dominance within education.

3.6 Reflexivity and the Politics of Research

It has been argued that research has a social function, which could be to preserve the status quo or legitimate it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:17) however it can also be used to challenge the unequal status quo, which is the purpose of my research situated with the framework of CRT and postcolonial theory. As part of my research, it is important to identify that I am a white, British, female employed as an academic within Peak University where the study was conducted and acknowledge my role, my position, and my biases, in order to identify my own personal knowledge. I work in UKHE and have been successful in my various academic and professional achievements. I recognise that I have been educated in Western/Eurocentric traditions of knowledge and potentially implicated in their enduring structures of inequality as I am conducting research and teaching at a UK university. My research study embodies insider research in that as a researcher I hold prior knowledge and understandings of being an academic, which is the group I chose to study, as well as being a member of said group. I therefore play both roles simultaneously; that of researcher and researched. As such it is important to explain my background to give insight into my research as I am the instrument of observation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

My own racial positionality played a role in this research as I am a white person who has spent the majority of my life in majority white settings. I did not consider the role it played until I began teaching a diverse, and particularly international study body some twelve years ago. I moved to Peak University five years ago and therefore despite having taught large groups of international students at my previous institution, I was faced with a different proposition at Peak University. At the university my teaching has been limited to the small numbers of international students that are currently recruited onto undergraduate programmes, although this has changed considerably over the last 12 months with a major increase in international student numbers; a phenomenon seen across the UKHE sector, not just at Peak University. That said I had already a wealth of academic experience teaching international students based in my previous institution and it was this experience that led me to my research topic and the academic perceptions in relation to an increasingly diverse student body. For me this added an additional aspect that I had not previously considered as I was under the impression that all UKHEIs actively recruited large numbers of international students, so it was a surprise to be met with a very local, predominantly white student and academic body.

My initial focus when embarking on my doctorate was the deficit discourse surrounding international students and their abilities within UKHE. As I explored Critical Race Theory during my doctoral studies, I came to realise that the deficit model was not just applied to international students and that race was a factor. It was through my initial discussions and interactions with international students over the past decade, getting to understand the challenges they faced from their perspective, not a deficit perspective, that I started to reflect and act on my own practices. My history and background meant that I engaged in the process described as simultaneously embracing whiteness while erasing it as a specific cultural location or worldview (Moon, 1999). I engaged in and learnt from other academic colleagues that I was supposed to complain about international students, about having to continually repeat the same point, to state language deficit as a reason for poor grades and lower levels of achievement and to some extent the need for "dumbing down" of the curriculum in order to include these students.

My research formed out of my desire to change the approach I took to my teaching practices and sought to benefit the international students I was teaching. This expanded through the research undertaken during my doctorate to include all students and coincided with more forceful calls from students to decolonise the curriculum. When I was first employed at Peak University, I was not aware of others who were looking at this area and indeed most colleagues I spoke to had no idea what I was referring to at that time. The subsequent Covid-19 pandemic, the media focus on the Black Lives Matter movement and decolonising the curriculum became a focus for the UKHE sector. Prior to this, and during the pandemic when we moved teaching online, I had recorded a presentation for the Festival of Learning which focused on decolonising the curriculum however there was little indication that it was a priority. Once the call for decolonising the curriculum was heard at Peak University more emphasis came through and staff training was the focus. I was invited to deliver part of a session related to Decolonising the Curriculum and the Awarding Gap in December 2021. Due to the particularity of these events, they cannot however be generalised as they were specific to that cultural setting. Whilst I was actively involved as a presenter in a training session on how to approach decolonising the curriculum, I was also observing the behaviour and reaction of the participants in the event. It was difficult to observe fully as the session was held online during the Covid-19 lockdowns and therefore most participants were not visible, but the silence and the gaps presented some behaviours, i.e., white fear, white fragility etc., (Picower, 2009; Gay and Kirkland, 2003; Mazzei, 2008; Spanierman and Cabrera, 2015). The main source of information was from the online chat, which again was silent after the initial delivery and reaction of the first presenter as it demonstrated the emotive and volatile nature of the topic. The use of words such as “offensive” and “offended” by the first presenter effectively stopped any meaningful discussion of the issues and understanding short. The discussions that occurred after the training were more pertinent as they highlighted the level of discomfort of the academics should they be faced with a similar situation in the classroom.

Both during the training and following it I reflected on my own practices but also why I was asked to present. For the most part I was not included in activities and discussions and various academic staff were brought in from a former Learning and Teaching Excellence Centre, and elsewhere as “experts”. Those who were presenting were consistently from a white UK/Eurocentric background and it made me reflect once again on whose knowledge was being promoted and for what reason. Decolonial work and anti-racist approaches are not meant to elicit guilt about white privilege and racism, instead they are there to foster insight into oppression and a desire for equality however I observed that some of the interactions within the training session were particularly emotive, creating a more hostile environment. The conversations that took place afterwards with colleagues related to having difficult and uncomfortable conversations, but I started to question my role. I do not consider myself an expert in this area, and as a novice researcher I started to question if I was the right person to carry out this research. Do I as a white female have the right to use CRT and challenge institutional practices?

3.7 Politics of Positioning

During my research on positionality and reflexivity I came across an article by Davis and Linder (2017) in which they question whether white Women should be involved in using CRT in research and pedagogy and see it as a form of interest-convergence in and of itself. As a result, I spent some time reflecting on their words and on whether CRT was the right approach and framework. I felt that despite the challenges and the commentary that white women jump on the bandwagon in order to be seen as “good” this was not the role I was playing or wanted to play, nor was it the purpose of my research. As Pillow (2003) states people belong to many different and intersectional groups, attempting to match the researcher and the researched does not mean that power relations have been minimised. In addition, the majority of the academics interviewed, and indeed the academic body at the time of conducting my data collection, were indeed white, therefore I would argue that it was right for me to undertake this research. For the most part my voice was rarely heard as there were many others putting themselves forward as “experts”. I continued to reflect on my own practices and instead decided to focus at a more local level, having informal conversations about pedagogical practices after the interviews, challenging some of the discourse and statements about “dumbing down” and language deficits of students.

The politics of knowledge production recognises that a relationship between social position and epistemic position exists. As the theoretical framework for my research is based on postcolonial theory this presents both personal and professional challenges for me as I must acknowledge my own complicity. For Spivak (2012) this means leveraging your position, not “lamenting on the past or making excuses”. Firstly, I acknowledge that I have been successful both in my educational achievements and career through the UKHE system and secondly, I am an employee of the same UKHE system that perpetuates oppression against underrepresented groups. In order to understand the concepts and depth of change required to decolonise the curriculum, I therefore need to question my pedagogic practices, engage with a multitude of ways of knowing and seeing the world; and become comfortable with “uncertainty, plurality, and conflict” (Biccum, 2018: 121; Stein, 2018:11). I therefore seek to be an ally within research in race relations, especially within UK education.

3.8 Allyship in Anti-racism Research

Many scholars argue that white faculty should reflect on how they benefit from white privilege before they commence their attempts to support minority ethnic and underrepresented groups of students. Creating a level of self-awareness will assist white faculty to support at both the institutional and the personal level and to act as role models to other white individuals (Lin, Kennette, and Van Havermaet, 2023). As a white female academic I recognise the responsibility I have to unlearn the practices that have been instilled in me during my own education, to use my circle of influence, both staff and student based, to dismantle racism within UKHE. Allyship is about challenging the status quo using both verbal commitment and action to disrupt the negative assumptions and deficit perceptions of minority ethnic groups as well as breaking down the systems of oppression (Gillborn, 2006), whether structural or institutional (see section 1.4). Mignolo (1995: 5) introduced a concept of “locus of enunciation” that being the position “from which one speaks” as well as the position that is taken on an issue. Whilst I consider myself an ally, I am also mindful that as a novice researcher my research questions would be considered somewhat “safe” under Mignolo’s concept. However, I am not, and have not sought recognition for my research and have not included marginal voices for career advancement purposes. My research is focused on a very white middle-class faculty and university.

As a member of the academic faculty I have specific advantage, namely my position of authority, financial stability (Lin et al., 2023) and I recognise that white privilege does not mean all people who identify as white are equally privileged, I recognise that colonialism has affected cultures in different ways and therefore I cannot view all people, or students, as a homogenous group. The work of Lin et al., (2023) is particularly salient as their main aim was to address the disparity in educational and degree outcomes in the US, which directly relates to the decolonising work I am focusing on. A key area that is identified is for academics not to become white saviours and see themselves as the rescuers of underrepresented groups as this does not benefit either group or create a sense of belonging. It can be seen in Peak University's framework that the "sense of belonging" is now present with the focus on creating an environment in the classroom where all voices are heard, if they want to be.

3.9 Recruitment and Participants

It is important to address the choice of sample here. There are many options available in terms of sampling and whilst it might be argued that mine was convenience sampling, i.e., that I carried out research in a university I already worked for and on academics I either knew or was familiar with, I argue that my choice was actually one of purposive sampling. The context that I work in is important as I have highlighted that Peak University is a post-1992 that is proud to be known as a local university. It is only in the last few years that the need for international student numbers to increase has come to the top of their agenda, as well as being more research focused and therefore it was somewhat unique in that it had not followed the neoliberal market orientations of many other universities. Therefore, I used purposive sampling to find the kind of university which has not simply followed the trends of others and was seeking to pace itself in terms of addressing a growing international student body.

As my research approach was interpretivist in nature the decision to focus on small samples which were purposefully selected was appropriate. Patton (1990:169) observed the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases provide opportunities where I was able to learn a great deal about the issues surrounding decolonising the curriculum from an academic perspective which was the central purpose of the research. Therefore, my contention is that it was not convenience sampling, but my choice related to the context of a very local university and their interpretation and approach to the campaigns from students to decolonise the curriculum. When I began the interview stage of my research, I knew only a small number of academics within my discipline and the majority were only casually. My study was conducted across academic staff within Business and Management and the Humanities over a two-year period. Whilst calls were sent out across the university these were the only academic disciplines that responded. This highlights that my insider-ness was conditional to the areas where I had interactions with members of staff, especially as a new employee with a small network initially.

Recruitment was on a voluntary basis and emails were sent out to Heads of Discipline (HoD) requesting their assistance in disseminating my request for participants. All academic staff had been in post in Peak University for at least 12 months, some considerably longer. At the time of conducting the interviews, I knew the majority of my participants as colleagues. I was able to relate well with all participants and was able to ensure that the boundary between friend/academic and researcher was not overstepped at any point. There were some challenges as there is a central unit, Strategic Insights and Planning that sends out surveys, conducts focus groups with students etc., however although I met with them and found out that a central research survey was being sent out to assess the lived experience of black students, I was excluded from that team and was not able to view the results.

The academics within Peak are proud of the university and the comments and concerns about increasing international student numbers were familiar ones I had heard for many years in my previous institution. Whilst there is convenience sampling in that the majority of the interview participants were in my own School and therefore may not be representative of the faculty at large in the university or higher education, the sampling was also purposeful as they were at the start of the journey into decolonising the curriculum, focusing on the awarding gap and the initiatives that were being introduced at the university. All the participants were familiar with internationalisation as a UKHE agenda and therefore were able to assess the perceived or actual differentiation with decolonisation initiatives needed for this study, as well as information-rich experiences and understandings of this new agenda.

Table 2 below provides an overview of the demographics of the interview participants across the different discipline areas.

Table 2: Demographic Data of Interviewees

Participant No.	Gender	Job Title	Years at Peak	College /Department	International Experience
M01	Male	Senior Leader	4	Business	Yes
M02	Male	Senior Leader	5	Business	Yes
M03	Male	Senior Leader	2	Internationalisation Dept, Business	Yes
M04	Male	Manager	2.5	Internationalisation Dept, Business	Yes
VPE1	Female	VP Education	3	Union of Students	N/S
L01	Female	Academic Librarian	8	Library	N/S
A01	Male	Senior Lecturer	1	Business	Yes
A02	Male	Senior Lecturer	3.5	Business	Yes
A03	Male	Lecturer	5	Business	Yes
A04	Male	Senior Lecturer	15	Business	N/S
A05	Female	Senior Lecturer	6	Business	No
A06	Female	Lecturer	3	Business	Yes
A07	Female	Senior Lecturer	2.5	Humanities	N/S
A08	Female	Senior Lecturer	6	Humanities	Yes
A09	Female	Senior Lecturer	16	Humanities	Yes
A10	Female	Senior Lecturer	20	Business	N/S
A11	Female	Senior Lecturer	3	Business	No
A12	Female	Senior Lecturer	16	Business	No
A13	Female	Senior Lecturer	1	Business	No
A14	Female	Lecturer	1.5	Business	Yes

The sample consisted of 14 academics full-time across two colleges, a Subject Librarian, a Union of Students Vice President, and Internationalisation department colleagues. The academics at Peak themselves are predominantly white, middle-class Anglo/European and it is only in the last few years that there appears to be a slight increase in academic staff from across the world, partly to start addressing the internationalisation of the university itself and as part of the assessment for the Race Equality Charter which Peak University was actively seeking. Therefore, a more holistic approach to my investigation of this case was made using multiple methods with the case remaining central. My objective was to carry out an in-depth study of academic perceptions of decolonisation of the curriculum, drawing inferences by piecing together small fragments of information, looking for comparisons and similarities. Although I understood what decolonising the curriculum entails, I did not offer a definition of the term, preferring to elicit understandings and meanings from the interview participants. The aim of the research was to capture the perspectives of decolonising the curriculum, how it was being understood and defined as well as implemented within Peak University, which is presented in Chapter 4.

Piecing together data from direct observations and interviews, as well as facts relevant to the stream of events, is relevant because context is important (Franz and Robey 1984, Stone, 1978). I used a range of data, such as the Strategic Framework 2018-2030, various staff meetings and training sessions that focus specifically on the topics of internationalisation, international students, and curriculum to inform and add to the primary research data that was undertaken. As I am using an interpretivist approach to my research, this requires both myself and the academics (subject) to be the instruments to measure the phenomena which usually involves both observation and interviews. The research was viewed considering the complex relationships of political, methodological, and epistemological principles that constitute the field of evaluation (Simons, 1987:62). Therefore, my research was analysed using descriptive inference, whereby I sought to understand a phenomenon based on a set of observations (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

3.10 Data Collection

Qualitative research seeks to explore and describe complex textual counts of the “life worlds” of the participants and their perceptions of meaning. Research questions that seek to explore human experiences are studied through analysing textual data collected in interviews, focus groups, and documents, as well as reflective accounts following training sessions. It is therefore complex, multifaceted and carries meaning on a series of different levels. A semi-structured interview process was carried out for the majority of the data collection. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted via MS Teams, partly due to Covid-19 restrictions and then subsequently due to time constraints and access. The interview schedule began with an open question for participants to provide background to their own position, roles and experiences within UKHE. Questions then moved more specifically onto internationalisation and defining their understanding of decolonising the curriculum, the approaches and initiatives used within their own academic practices but also the support available from Peak University in terms of developing their skills and knowledge. The questions were designed to probe existing practices, understanding of internationalisation, decolonisation and how this might affect their current practices. The final section focused on communication from the university relating to decolonising the curriculum, the awarding gap and any training or support provided to academics. Verbatim transcripts were produced from the recordings of the interviews and thematic analysis was carried out to enable key elements of perceptions and understandings to be identified.

3.11 Analytical Methods

Analysis of the raw data from verbatim transcripts of interviews was carried out to form themes in order to further abstract the data and to assess underlying meanings. It has been argued that transcription is beset with interpretative difficulties, so I took the decision to transcribe the interviews and focus group myself in order to get closer to the data. A thematic analysis was undertaken from the interview transcripts. An inductive coding approach was used for analysis to discover the themes from the responses received. This approach was used as it is data-driven wherein the data is coded without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame (Braun and Clarke, (2006). As such the data was transcribed into printed form, notes were made about recurring points, categories were identified based on the content, and these were then developed to write up the findings and analysis. Coding was used to manage, identify, and sort through the wealth of data provided by the interviews in order to assist with the analysis. Interviews were the predominant method chosen as they provided opportunities to examine academic behaviour, verbal, and non-verbal cues within the chosen context.

Thematic analysis is one of the more common techniques used within qualitative research as it involves the identification of patterns, which form the overarching statements or themes used by the researcher. Thematic analysis is predicated on the high degree of confidence about the reliability and the trustworthiness of the responses received in interviews and focus groups etc. It allows the researcher to define and describe a participant's reality.

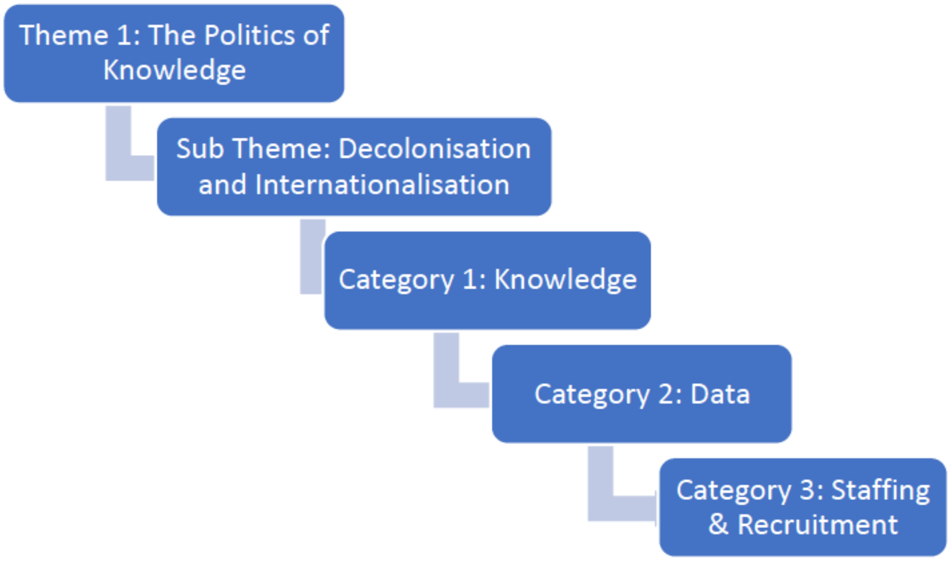
Table 3: Coding Structure and Categories from academic interviews

Main Theme	Sub Theme	Subcategories	
Politics of Knowledge	Decolonisation and Internationalisation	Knowledge	"I feel I am rather trapped in that path having learnt myself, you know, cos I did my undergraduate degree and my Masters degree and learnt those theories, concepts and models and I am conscious I am probably using that same body of work, you know, and repeating it,"
		Data	"We have to start somewhere, and I think you are alluding to this being a key issue at the moment, but I'd like to see more figures and how they would like us to decolonise the curriculum. So that's what I'm looking for really, what should we be doing and I'm looking for guidance and I can't see any at the moment"
		Staffing & Recruitment	"And I think in some respects I have observed in the business school over the last months a change in the composition of staff. And I presume that this is a deliberate, a sort of, and it might be due to the contacts and personal recommendations."
Awarding Gap	Academic Perceptions	Workload & Support	"I do think sometimes it can be difficult to access support at times, there is a lot more we could do if we didn't have such big teaching loads, we could do a lot more with the teaching than we do but I think so much of the time, and this isn't about support, you are firefighting, simply because you're just having to get through and deliver what you need to deliver, get the students through the coursework, get them through the exams, erm, and you often don't have the time."
		Professional Identity & Recognition	"I think there is a further element to it as well, which is if you want to enact some form of cultural change and we want to get buy in then whilst altruism should be

			the driver for it, I think there should be some form of recognition, erm some form of reward”.
	Training, Toolkits and Processes	Reading Lists	“So, if you have decolonisation in your reading list but you don’t use them, then it’s a complete and utter waste of time, all you’ve got is a tick box. So, you’ve got to be careful that we don’t set ourselves as, erm, an institution which is just embracing tokenism because its popular.”
		Leadership	“… it is important that those risks are taken by the leaders as well as people at the bottom of the food chain. There's this inclination to push it down and then all the risk gets bottled at that lower level, you know, and then people are rightly fearful because they don't see the level of risk being taken at these other levels”
		Time	“I don’t do as much as I should, a lot of that is largely because of time and ease of accessibility of materials.”
		Pressure & Responsibility	“So, I feel that possibly, erm, you know, if our efforts don’t result in the response and change in the awarding gap then we might be to blame, be held responsible and it doesn’t make you feel very comfortable about the whole situation, because you think well you’ve got to change the mindset of a range of people …”

Coding can be used to identify a single word, short phrase, or sentence within the responses in order to identify key patterns and themes. These codes produce a sense of the data which can then be assigned a value based on different perspectives, experiences, and reflections. However, in my own research I have used larger segments as part of the coding process as individual sentences or short phrases were insufficient (Saldaña, 2015). Part of the process involved identifying categories identified in Table 3, as this approach allowed me to communicate the substance of the themes.

Figure 2: Thematic Coding and Categories (Adapted from Lochmiller, 2021).



The aim of the first cycle of coding was to identify meaningful and potentially relevant sections of text for review which involved colour coding each transcript to connect the data with the research aims. A clear focus was the differentiation in meaning between internationalisation and decolonisation, however additional subjects of reading lists, development and performance reviews, assessment, staff recruitment, time, workloads, quality assurance, support and strategy also came through. Due to the volume of text across the interviews a second cycle was undertaken so that the broader topics could be refined and sorted into more focused themes that related to the two main areas at work in my research, namely the politics of knowledge and the awarding gap. Upon review of the data in cycle 3 I found that participants cited their professional identity, their knowledge and how it had influenced their status and the implications of unlearning that knowledge (Lochmiller, 2021). In the second and final phases I asked similar questions to that of Lochmiller (2021: 2036) in order to select both the main points to analyse but also the responses that identified areas of convergence and divergence in understanding and perceptions such as:

- How do the categories support the development of the theme?

- To what extent is the theme supported by the perspectives of multiple participants?
- What areas of agreement/disagreement does the theme include?
- Which quotations or examples offer the most compelling support for the theme?

Qualitative analysis is considered intense, engaging, challenging, and contextualised in approach as the focus is observing, interpreting and analysing the way academics were understanding the motivation for particular internationalisation and subsequent decolonisation activities. Due to the nature of the topic both emotional aspects such as sympathy, confusion, frustration as well as hierarchical aspects and inequalities were evidenced in the conversations. As part of the research process and analysis I undertook peer debriefing across a range of different groups and times as this is considered to be an opportunity to think critically about my research, my findings and the discussions I have observed across a range of settings.

3.12 Ethics

Whilst it is part of the understanding of interpretivism that "it is the job of the social scientist to gain access to people's "common sense thinking" and hence to interpret their actions and their social world from their point of view" (Bryman and Bell, 2015: 30) it does not negate the ethical issues of this approach. Within any research the focus of ethics and its impact on the study are necessary. This is an important consideration when interpreting and reporting the results as when it is purely descriptive there is the likelihood that the identity of the informants/participants will be evident to others (Bazeley, 2013; Basit, 2010; Johnson and Christensen, 2011). Through the cycles of analysis, I reviewed my approach so that any comments or statements made that might identify individuals were removed or summarised by myself so as to avoid ethical issues of confidentiality.

As previously stated, I am aware of the subjective nature of my research and the challenges of using an interpretivist approach. However, there are subsequent issues relating to informed consent of participants and the use of participant observation. As Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) identify that even though participants are explicitly made aware that research is being undertaken, “it is not uncommon for participants quickly to forget this once they come to know the ethnographer as a person” (2007: 210). Throughout the data collection period I was also able to reflect on a variety of team meetings within Business and one in Humanities, College away days, Steering group meetings and training events. Whilst the participants were aware of my research, and were reminded of this at different intervals, it is possible that the familiarity with myself as an academic negated their concerns.

Ethical approval was obtained prior to the commencement of the research. All staff and student members within Business and Humanities were contacted by the researcher via email with participation being voluntary. Written consent was provided by each participant prior to the interviews which were recorded by agreement. The academic interviewees were asked to provide demographic data such as length of time teaching and more specifically their time at Peak University, current and previous responsibilities, international experience of living/working overseas, training in teaching and learning initially to develop a picture of the backgrounds of the individuals.

3.13 Chapter Summary

An evaluation of the appropriate research design framework was carried out based on postcolonial and critical race theory. Due to the interpretivist approach taken a review of the use of appropriate research tools was discussed in relation to race based research. As a white, female, academic it was important to provide insight into my positionality, the politics involved in positioning as well my role as insider researcher and the relationship to being a race ally.   Methodologies and methods were examined to assess the use of interviews to gain viewpoints from a range of sources and an evaluation of the appropriateness of and rationale for the chosen sample was carried out. The data collection process, thematic analysis and coding were explained and presented to provide a clear rationale for the choice of themes and categories used in the interpretation and transcription of the responses.

Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I undertake a critical discussion of the findings based on analysis of the interviews, survey and focus group conducted. As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2) both Postcolonial theory and the CRT tenet of interest-convergence provide the theoretical frame for my work. An interpretivist approach was taken for this research as it accepts that knowledge is socially constructed (Blaikie, 2017). This approach fits well within the context of decolonising the curriculum as it seeks to deconstruct, reconstruct and rehumanise knowledge marginalised as a result of colonialism. Interviews were the predominant method chosen as they provided opportunities to explore academic perspectives within the chosen context. Each interview began with background to the individuals' experience as an academic both at Peak University (see Table 2 in Chapter 3) as well as at other HEIs in order to assess their level of understanding of their role but also their own lived experiences, from which they could draw upon.

For the purpose of analysis and discussion I will begin with the politics of knowledge and the challenges perceived therein, the issues of power and inequality that may prevent full engagement by academics in order to decolonise the curriculum. I present a critical discussion and the extent to which the first research question of *"What is the understanding of the motivation for internationalisation policies and activities?"* has been answered. Due to the interconnected nature of the topics, and the inductive approach taken in my research, the themes overlap throughout, however, to provide a structure the research objectives have been used as a framework so that whilst the complexity is acknowledged, insight into the challenges and the perceptions can be highlighted. The discussion and analysis will then move onto the second main theme of the awarding gap and the understanding of what is needed to embed the culture change and a range of knowledges into the curricula rather than enacting a series of "speech acts" or non-performative actions (Ahmed, 2006) thereby limiting decolonising work.

4.2 Politics of Knowledge

It is widely recognised that UKHEIs benefit from statements made about being international or providing manifestos and strategies that state they are ”decolonising” their curriculum. They claim that the student body benefits from the cultural diversity and as a bonus for the UKHEIs, their ranking in league tables may increase due to this change. The question therefore is whether these statements and strategies are understood, implemented, and embedded by academics in their curriculum and pedagogic practices or do they act as non-performatives (Ahmed, 2006). A non-performative is a statement that suggests an action has already been undertaken, or is completed, when it has not. Whilst many UKHEIs put out statements about decolonising the curriculum Peak University chose not to do so, although they did engage with some of the anti-racism statements. The rationale provided was the drive for the Race Equality Charter mark (REC) however what followed was a “speech act” as the focus was on the REC and demonstrating:

> *“our progressive organisation …. we will be proud to evidence that in terms of the different areas of the criteria so it’s not just word of mouth”* (M01).

It was made clear that unlike Keele University there would be no manifesto or similar approach launched at Peak. However, during the interviews there were mixed responses about Peak’s approach with some academics recalling messages whilst others were unaware of any. In addition, a few academics questioned the motivation behind the approaches across the sector and why it was the focus at the time of the BLM gaining media attention following the murder of George Floyd.

> “*One could argue it might be the flavour of the month, so to speak. I mean universities are reacting to this because they want to be seen to be doing the right thing. So, they may have their own agenda there, you know, in terms of being seen to be doing the right thing but is it really embraced and embedded?”* (A06).

> *“I think there appears to be an interest since the Black Lives Matter Movement I would say because the moment that happened, I noticed a lot of the university’s advertising materials changed. I noticed the emphasis on the BLM movement and more use of the terms anti-racist and things like that, but I was not aware for example that the university has an anti-racism policy, which I had no idea about, but I do now”* (A09).

The promotion of anti-racism statements relates to strategic advancement (Shain et al., 2021) wherein UKHEIs use them to attract and recruit students at a time when economic pressures and the Covid-19 pandemic were hitting the UKHE sector financially. Peak set out statements in its Attainment Policy (see section 1.9) which clearly identify the Peak's curriculum as being "decolonised and diversified", which is important as it suggests that this work has been completed yet in comparison with the interviews, this appears to be far from the case (Ahmed, 2006). Therefore, when I focus on decolonising the curriculum the language or narrative used is important as this demonstrates that Peak University engages in speech acts. I will discuss later in the chapter aspects of training and academic practice, but it is important to note that within the discussions there was a clear line drawn between the dominant knowledge and that of the "other" which is creating a barrier to a more holistic approach. I contend that this is contrary to postcolonial perspectives as the focus should be on decentring the Eurocentric approach to knowledge, processes, and systems, not just adding them onto an existing system (Shirazi, 2011, Bhambra et al., 2018). The interview responses highlighted phrases such as "radical", "alternative" and "deficient" when academics were referring to their understanding of decolonising the curriculum, which further reinforces the othering of topics, authors, knowledge, or practice. In comparison phrases such as "reliable" and "comfortable" were used in relation to the content, materials and sources currently used, thereby creating a normative approach, whether intentionally or not.

UKHE is governed by a culture that focuses on merit, attainment via degrees, grading, league tables and ranking both at home and globally. Following the Blair Labour government years and the PMI and PMI2 policies the massification of higher education resulted in funding cuts to tuition fees and increased competition between UKHEIs at home and globally for student numbers. This hyper competition and emphasis on bringing in international students due to the fees and economic benefits is clear from the interview discussions. From both an academic and a management perspective there is a clear reflection of the current strategies at play:

> "*Internationalisation, well that's a completely different situation because we are international, and it seems to me that we're doing a lot on internationalisation because that's where the money is. So, to me internationalisation is more about attracting overseas students to come to the university because they have higher fees"* (A06).

> "*International recruitment and strategic partnership are important so that's where revenue comes from, so we have to do that. IaH are very important especially in the world that we live in today. I think relative to the colleges, the fact that we have dedicated that as a strategic priority is clear"* (M03).

Both comments identify the benefits of international students purely from a financial position however it is the latter that sees it more as a strategic priority. This clearly indicates that one of the main reasons international students are permitted entry is because it benefits the UKHE sector and is a clear example of interest-convergence. The UK government, through initiatives such as PMI and PMI2 (see section 1.2), actively encourages recruitment of international students because it is in the UK economy's interest to do so. The statements taken from the interviews highlight that the strategic focus moved to one of anti-racism during the media attention on the BLM movement so that UKHEIs would not lose out financially, especially following the financial impact of Brexit. Although academics are fully aware of the financial benefits that international students bring to the UK economy, the strategic priorities are driven by management, and by UK policy makers. I would therefore argue that the focus on international student recruitment remains part of the colonial logic, and a means to reinforce the unequal status quo (Stein and Andreotti, 2016; Lomer, 2017). The emphasis from a neoliberal perspective has and still is on student numbers and the continued exertion of colonial power rather than focusing on the curriculum and its impact on achievement.

The curriculum is rarely questioned because it provides a "good education without accounting for the benefits that accrue for White people …" (Brown, 2004: 325) so the change in approach to decolonise what has and is still considered to be the way of "knowing" presents a number of both personal and professional challenges which were revealed within the interview responses. Whilst knowledge is recognised as fluid there remains the dominant Western/Eurocentric approach that is perceived as “official knowledge” with all others perceived as subordinate. Most universities around the world originate from the medieval European model of university (see Section 2.5) which was imposed onto non-Western countries during colonisation, and it is this model that continues to dominate. This approach judges all knowledge through a Western/European lens, dictating what is valid and what is not. To achieve both an internationalised and, more importantly, a decolonised curriculum, there is a requirement for academics to both understand the power of “official” knowledge and to take action by tailoring it to the local student audience and all its diversity. From both the academic and management interviews it was clear that there was some recognition of the challenges to the content delivered and that the current approach needs to change.

> “*I think I’m conscious that the curriculum that we take for granted and that we talk about - academic sources - we instinctively go to European publishers especially UK, US and maybe France. Erm, we think of them as referenceable material and as reliable, and by the same token we must therefore think that anything that isn’t UK, US or European isn’t reliable. Erm, and I think that’s the viewpoint that’s come about historically over time. I think it’s time that we challenge that, that belief, and I think it’s not, I don’t think its deliberate, its unintentional and us being a bit blinded to everything in the world*” (A05).

> *“Although we are not teaching history but in one sense we are because a lot of what we teach is brought on the history of the subject we’re teaching whether it be the history of economics or other things and clearly if we go back to the pioneers of business they are going to be from a certain strata of society because other people would not have had the opportunity to be involved so the people we refer to as the great entrepreneurs, are our great academics of the past and we are not going to have that diversity”* (M02).

What struck me with the comments made by M02 was the recognition that there are structures in place that influence the level of opportunity people and groups had throughout history, but there was limited recognition that this is due to structural racism or how this continues to influence UKHE. Instead, interviewees consistently challenged where the materials would be sourced in order to decolonise the curriculum and emphasised the need for greater effort to find them. There were also questions around how academics would be able to assess the merits of this “new” material as the dominant approach is one of peer-reviewed and REF based materials that set the benchmark for quality. Whilst as an academic I both understand, experience, and appreciate these challenges, I contend that it is the responsibility of the UKHEIs and policy makers to address the gatekeeping mechanisms in place that determine what knowledge is available. There was a point raised about the idea of a "meritocracy of concepts and theories insofar as we treat all concepts and theories equally regardless of their origin" (A02) and whether the students themselves would accept these sources. Whilst the call to decolonise the curriculum was led by students, at Peak University this does not appear to be the case, as there was limited knowledge of any student initiatives, demands or statements.

It was argued that there is in effect a popularity contest in terms of what constitutes "official" knowledge (Apple 1990, 1993) and therefore what is perceived to be quality, legitimised material whether mainstream or not and to what extent it should form part of the curriculum.

> "*It's very difficult to unpick something that is societal, it's there from, well it's there from the minute the person enters education …. and as an academic, in particular, when I have 12 weeks to wax through a curriculum that is already packed to the gunnels, how can I have the time to stop and go now let's introduce some radical literature? Oh, that's interesting I used the word radical!"* (A11).

In order to truly decolonise, decolonising research has identified that academics need time to develop a much deeper transformative curriculum, to unlearn "white privilege and deficit thinking", challenge traditional views so that students have opportunities not just to see the world in their own context but also to consider new ways of thinking, new knowledge and rediscover ways of knowing (Subedi and Daza, 2008). One of the ways that UKHEIs are addressing the challenges around indigenous knowledges that are missing from the curriculum, seeking to reduce the awarding gap and to address the calls from students themselves such as "*Why is my curriculum white?"* and "*Why isn't my professor Black?"* is to actively recruit staff, both academic and professional services, who are from BME and international backgrounds. This is true of Peak University where the staffing has changed slightly as can be seen in Table 1. The change in academic staffing has been noticed by the interviewees and seen as a positive step in terms of diversity and the knowledge they bring with them. There are, however, questions and to some extent assumptions made in that the "diverse" staff have been educated in a non-Western or Eurocentric model of education.

> "*And I think in some respects I have observed in the business school over the last months a change in the composition of staff. And I presume that this is a deliberate, a sort of, and it might be due to the contacts and personal recommendations. I was glad to see the diversity because when I started, I did notice that it was very white and it was also quite a mature faculty, in terms of age, so we were all sort of white, middle class, sort of 40+ age groups, so I think there have been good strides made there"* (A06).

The following response also provides an element of interest-convergence as whilst it recognises the lens from which the curriculum is viewed and the cultural background that will be brought into the classroom and teaching, it also highlights that the effort is therefore not on the part of the UK based academic to make those changes.

> *"I think the other way around this, erm, is to increasingly internationalise the academic staff and if we bring people in from, erm, different educational backgrounds that are able to offer their perspectives as well and in some respects I would feel more comfortable erm with someone for example from, I don't know, a South East Asian ethnicity and educational background being able to describe some of the theories and concepts which originate from that area, rather than myself trying to appropriate for my own understanding what somebody else might have thought, recognising that these things are culturally bound in any case so I would put it in a very western or anglocentric interpretation of something else I am reading that is coming from a different region and that itself is problematic"* (A02).

It was strongly advocated during the management interviews that the university requires an academic body that reflects the diversity of the student body as this was considered "one of the best ways" to bring in people "with different perspectives, different knowledge" (M02). I would, however, argue that international recruitment, whether staff or student based, only goes so far as to address the changes needed and does not go far enough to fully challenge the racial hierarchies at work. Whilst changes to the diversity of both academic and professional service staff have been seen as a positive move by the university there are still concerns from academics, as being from an ethnic background or a non-UK academic does not necessarily mean that they will be more equipped to decolonise the curriculum and it could therefore be argued that this is a further instance of interest-convergence. As discussed in Chapter 2 there are critiques of this approach as it assumes that the "international" academics have not been taught in a Western/Eurocentric curriculum which in turn negates the very rationale for their appointment.

> "*I think probably we are one of the most diverse colleges in terms of staff composition. So, once we have started the conversation it is easier for colleagues to come forward and they are the low hanging fruit that you can actually tap into straight away before there's training … I will be encouraging that, and I will also be encouraging colleagues to be able to talk to their peers and ask how are you doing this?"* (M01).

This approach also highlights the role that non-white academics are expected to play and the burden it places on them. As Shain et al., (2021) identified due to the differing approaches to decolonising work UKHEIs are able to label activities, such as recruitment, without actually embedding, or changing, structures or systems that perpetuate coloniality (2021: 6). Postcolonial theory focuses on the effects of colonisation, the inequality of structures and practices however by focusing on appointing international staff as a means to hit diversity targets or to appease calls to decolonise the curriculum, I would argue does little to change the power structures that are already at work. In essence this approach does little to decentre the colonial logic and does not address the challenges of structural racism, which were discussed in section 1.4. The comments provide a snapshot of the perceptions and initial understanding of the rationale for the need for change, however, as the interviews progressed the challenges from an academic perspective became very apparent. To assess these challenges in the context of decolonising the curriculum it is important initially to assess the academic and senior management perceptions and differences between internationalisation and decolonisation of the curriculum.

4.3 Internationalisation and Decolonisation

The interviews commenced with a discussion around their understanding of internationalisation which was generally considered to be a more readily defined approach and was more in line with Leask's (2009: 209) definition of it being "the incorporation of an international and intercultural dimension into the preparation, delivery and outcomes of a program of study". With the creation of a Head of Internationalisation role within the Business School, the university has clearly identified the need to focus on the international student market. Peak had previously been considered a local based university with low numbers of international students compared to other UKHEIs as the focus was on the local community and region. As the majority of academics interviewed were in the discipline area of Business, there was a general understanding of the objectives of internationalisation based on past experiences which was perceived to be:

> "*Firstly, it's about having a more internationally diverse student cohort. Secondly, it's about trying to increase international opportunities for our own students either to go and study overseas or alternatively to work collaboratively with non-UK or EU students and I think thirdly I do, do see internationalisation in terms of internationalising the curriculum and that isn't necessarily the same in my interpretation of decolonisation"* (A02).

This, however, has not been the perception from all interviewees as some resistance to international student recruitment was observed. It is important to note that Peak was a very white university in that both the student body and the academics were predominantly white and local to the area, and as can be seen from the data in Table 1 this is still largely the case. The university prides itself on being a university for the local community so the change to increase international student numbers in order to remain competitive within the neoliberal UKHE market was significant for some as can be observed in the following discussion:

> "*When I first started there was some reluctance, and there was some staff asking why we are getting international students, and I've been doing webinars with them, but I think we are all on the same page now"* (M04).

Whilst the need for more international student numbers has to some extent been acknowledged there appears to be in different disciplines pockets of “reluctant acceptance” (Shain et al., 2021) which is important to note because if internationalisation is not fully embedded then how can Peak fully engage with decolonising work or make statements to that effect? Internationalisation is a key focus of UKHE with universities setting up campuses in other countries and collaborating with overseas partners for the purpose of IaH and TNE. Peak is no different in that respect as they were using IaH and collaborative partnerships in a range of countries prior to the increase in international student numbers at the UK campus. Peak University’s approach is a combination of the two as collaborative partners as well as trips abroad are regularly cited as priorities for internationalisation. From a management perspective the following is the approach taken:

> *“There are 5 themes which are: supporting internationalisation of academic perspectives; what the markets look for, looking at progression rates, partnerships, Internationalisation at Home and international experience. I think, erm, decolonisation and internationalisation go hand in hand, that’s the way I see it. If you want to have an internationalised institution, then you’ve got to have a curriculum that denotes the international institution. You can’t internationalise without decolonising the curriculum … I think decolonisation has a lot of historical connotations, but internationalisation involves the present and current international frameworks and alternatives”* (M03).

I was struck at the time by how internationalisation and decolonisation were perceived by senior management. It felt as though internationalisation was a more palatable term and was more widely accepted within the Business discipline. This may have been why collaborative partnerships were the main approach used as it kept the international students at arm’s length. Decolonisation of the curriculum, however, requires a much deeper focus as it is an ongoing conversation. As can be noted Peak’s focus is on the incorporation of global perspectives, interactions with international students and collaborative partners. From the interview conversations held there were a lot of assumptions made by management that all academic staff were following an internationalised curriculum. However, when this is compared with the curriculum used with collaborative partners a case of interest-convergence is more apparent as it does not take into account the collaborative partners are using the curricula set by Peak and UKHEIs in general. There is more emphasis on convergence of styles and curriculum, thereby reaffirming what constitutes as “official knowledge” which supports the dominant Eurocentric focus (Apple, 1990; 1993). It can be argued as another form of colonialism as it only provides a Western/Eurocentric knowledge base and the only people who benefit are the dominant West (Stein and Andreotti, 2016).

Colonial empires established the European model of education around the world; internationalisation has further reinforced this dominance through policies and programmes to exploit former colonies in the name of educational and social mobility (Altbach, 2004). There is only evidence of a unidirectional flow of knowledge and when I questioned this approach in a staff meeting, I was informed that the contracts with the collaborative partners did not require the partners to inform the knowledge being taught but to deliver what is set by the academics at Peak University. This approach is not dissimilar to that of other UKHEIs, however, at a time when academic staff are asking where they can find the diverse knowledge required to both internationalise and decolonise the curriculum, UKHEIs do not appear to want to change the status quo. It was also made clear that there were no forthcoming plans to change this approach in the future. Therefore, I would argue that internationalisation can be seen as a form of neo-colonialism, replicating the unequal status quo and reinforcing the dominant Eurocentric approach to knowledge and education.

Whilst internationalisation was generally agreed in terms of the initiatives and expectations of academics for their academic practices, the focus on decolonisation of the curriculum provided evidence of a somewhat lesser understood approach. It is important to stipulate here that where other scholars such as Shain et al., (2021) have undertaken research on activists and academics involved in decolonising work, my research sample is not the same. Instead, my sample are academics and management who are new to the concept of decolonising the curriculum and the majority are coming to understand what decolonising work is, and what it means for their practices. An important aspect of decolonising the curriculum is the understanding that it is not a one size fits all approach and that it will and should be understood in different ways across discipline areas. There is recognition that attempting to define it so that it is the same for everyone creates a barrier to action.

Decolonising the curriculum is a new concept for some, whereas for others the term itself is contested due to the interpretation and emotive responses it generates. The response below summarises some of the challenges present both within academic discussions and society. There was a clear indication from several academics that the phrase decolonisation is open to interpretation and can cause problems and misunderstandings. There were comments made that it challenges feelings, context, and beliefs and "what it means to be British" (A11).

> *"Erm, ok, so I think the principle of decolonisation is fine if you were to almost remove that word and say, 'should curriculum be broader and take a more holistic view of contributions wherever they may come from in the world?' then that is something I can support. I think the use of the word decolonisation is problematic and I think it perhaps stigmatises an issue, it perhaps gives the opinion that in some way, the way that things are currently taught are deficient and that I feel a little less comfortable with"* (A02).

However, when compared with an academic who has experience of decolonising knowledge and the curriculum outside of UKHE there is a distinctive difference in approach.

> *"So, decolonising for me is centring different perspectives that were previously othered. Now in trying to do all of that for me decolonisation is at its heart rehumanising. So, colonisation tried to dehumanise certain people, so decolonising is rehumanising for me. So, it is instilling an understanding in myself as an academic that, erm, the lived realities of those that have not been centred previously are just as important as those that have been centred"* (A14).

The first response above is an interesting perspective as it implies that the approach needs to broaden out and include more texts, materials, and experiences. The use of the word deficient, however, suggests an element of protectionism in that the common-sense approach to "official" knowledge must remain and all others are to be add-ons or integrated somehow without the dominant group losing their position within the curriculum. This goes against the work of decolonisation scholars and postcolonial theorists who see decolonisation as containing several elements requiring challenges to the dominant approach, the lens from which they are validated and presented and the context of that knowledge and experience (Smith, 1999). There is limited, if any, reference to a deconstruction of the current knowledge, materials, and pedagogy as A05 referred to academics being "somewhat blind to everything in the world", even when we are aware that we are teaching a Western approach to students. In comparison, the second comment focuses more on the marginalised group and the aim to "rehumanise" them so that they are recognised in the curriculum, but it also demonstrates a much more fundamental and personal approach to the challenge of decolonising. There was a slightly different perspective which highlights the challenges and limited understanding of what is required of academics, and which suggested that the approach was a removal of the dominant approach.

> "*My initial understanding was actually kind of putting more perspectives into the UK's and the western kind of world's colonial erm understanding of the colonial aspect but then I, when I got engaged with it more I think my understanding now is actually to remove the kind of Westrocentric, and I know that's not a fair term, because you know, it's got also America, got Australia, got other places, that have different … but to remove that kind of perspective from the literature"* (A01).

The approach above (A01) can be potentially harmful to discussions around decolonising the curriculum within UKHE as it requires a line to be drawn between a specific race/dominant knowledge and another race/knowledge which reinforces "othering". This approach only creates a narrative that we are superimposing another race's way of doing things upon a university or dominant group. This also does not reflect the approach, or elements regarded to decolonise the curriculum, as it is neither an add-on approach nor is it to completely remove a Western approach. Postcolonial theory seeks to decentre and challenge the Eurocentric knowledge, not to remove it completely (Shirazi, 2011). Therefore, the understanding reflects the level of confusion over the approach needed, which is reflected in the fact that there is not one agreed definition and no single approach to decolonise the curriculum as it is recognised that it must be subject or discipline specific.

The emphasis that is missing is the opportunity for students to explore subjects from different life and world views, assessing historical and contemporary approaches and then applying them to their own context and lived experience. Unfortunately, throughout the time I was conducting research, Peak University carried out limited interaction with students on decolonising the curriculum and when speaking with the VP Education it was clear that this was a new area for exploration within their role, although it was part of the previous VP Education's focus. Whilst universities, such as Keele, actively engaged with students to create a consortium of staff and students to embed decolonising work (Decolonising Keele Network), there was little evidence that Peak were engaging in the same way. In essence, any decolonising work was being carried out without student involvement, which questions how the call to decolonise was being interpreted and the actions being taken.

In addition, there were those academic staff who did not feel that cultural perspectives, or decolonisation of the curriculum, applied to their discipline area. As the literature suggests discipline areas such as Business are more open to including international perspectives and reflecting a globalised, although somewhat homogenous, curriculum. Harder or more scientific based subject areas have been shown to find the call to decolonise a difficult approach to incorporate.

> "My module is mathematical modelling, so it doesn't lend itself to a cultural point of view because the technique either works or it doesn't and as it works it, it, doesn't matter who, who came up with the theory, it's just true" (A04).

The historical context of the modelling or why other approaches and models were not explored as part of the curriculum was not considered an important facet of the module, subject area or a part of students learning. This brought to mind the fact that those academics in the sample had volunteered however, no one came forward who did not agree with decolonising, or anti-racism work, and therefore their perspectives are missing from this analysis. From the sample interviews with academics, it was very clear that whilst some had a reasonable understanding of the approach and changes needed, they were predominantly coming at it from a range of differing perspectives. Whilst decolonising the curriculum has been identified as having several elements, the focus on the “deconstruction” stage appears to be quite limited throughout the responses as there appeared to be a reluctance to disrupt the status quo. I would, therefore, argue that internationalisation was a more palatable concept as it did not require a change to the dominant Eurocentric knowledge.

Across the management level interviews it was clear that decolonisation of the curriculum was a common thread according to M01 which was being addressed at the university level to conserve resources through a centralised approach. The discussions and comments centred around data collection and analysis to inform the next steps required. It was recognised that decolonising might not suit all disciplines, but some local level practice and implementation was required. This has subsequently transitioned into the new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework (LTAF) (2022) where five factors are identified with implied or inferred practices to support students’ sense of belonging, with no clear explanation or suggestion as to how this will be achieved. When coupled with the Attainment policy there are areas of non-performativity as statements are made that suggest that these actions are already taken, that the curriculum is both diversified and decolonised, when the interviews highlight that this is not the case. By focusing on conserving resources, data analysis and in essence transferring responsibility to the academics, I would argue that the university management are assessing how much they need to do to claim that they are decolonising, whilst at the same time not going far enough to challenge the power structures and racial hierarchies within the UKHE sector.

4.4 Curriculum in Neoliberal Higher Education

Due to the massification of UKHE following the 1980s full-cost fee policy for international students by the UK government and subsequent widening participation agenda there is wide recognition that the student body has become more diverse. The emphasis in terms of the literature has been that both international students and marginalised students must assimilate and adapt to manage the challenges of UKHE. This is reinforced by using a curriculum that does not value their culture, their background, or knowledge, and from the outset defines them as the “other” group, which is largely perceived as homogenous (Riegel, 2016; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1985; Yao et al, 2019). The increase in student numbers, reporting mechanisms and measures of achievement and success all influence the role and expectations of academic staff within an ever-changing UKHE sector. Across the interviews with academics a key focus was time to find the materials needed to start decolonising the curriculum and their practices, as this was greatly emphasised in the discussions. Senior Leaders demonstrated that they were very aware and recognised that some of the challenges facing academics are that they:

> *"only know that curriculum, as that's what they've learnt, that's what they were brought up with*" (M02).

As identified in the literature review in Chapter 2, when focusing on the curriculum there are 3 elements to understand: explicit (module framework, readings, assessment guidelines), hidden (what students learn about the dominant culture) and null (what is left out, not taught, or learned). Decolonisation contrasts with neoliberalism as it seeks to understand the relationship between learning and developing human virtues rather than just the needs of the market. However, the focus on employability and skills development is an easier fit to the current system as UKHE is in a position wherein not everything on a module can be decolonised because we are still required to report, and be measured, by the OfS on the number of students who gain appropriate employment within a colonised system. Therefore, the neoliberal approach must still be catered for as we equip students to understand, and navigate, the differences so that they can adapt in the work environment itself.

> "*I mean I would agree with that obviously there is a range of issues there and they are highly political in terms of substance and also the government, we see their attitude to teaching history for instance. They don't want to have mentioned the slave trade and a revisionist view of the British Empire and that's a cultural issue*" (M02).

There are many government influences on UKHE (see section 1.2) that dictate how they are measured which also influence the strategic priorities and agendas of universities. Despite the Sewell Report (2021) indicating that structural racism is not evident in the UK there are clear challenges to this as can be seen in the current disparity of outcomes across racial groups which is why the UKHE is focusing on the awarding gap and the unequal degree outcomes for minority groups.

4.5 The Awarding Gap

Studies have shown that students from marginalised racial/ethnic, cultural, and lower economic groups are less likely to complete their degrees or achieve the higher lever classification they were seeking (AdvanceHE, 2019/20). As such the UKHE sector focuses on a measurement and performative approach and the awarding gap follows a similar method. It was introduced to identify, but also understand, why there was a disparity in achievement at degree level between different racial groups. Initially it was focused on students and their deficit features as a means to explore the issues, however, it has subsequently moved to focus on the degree itself and potentially the content. This is, however, still questionable as it suggests that the deficit is in the way the degree is assessed, or how the award is conferred, rather than the contents of the curriculum. During the management interviews discussions were held about the priorities and to what extent decolonising the curriculum and/or the awarding gap was the main focus were explored.

> *"I think, well as you know, it's very much a live issue across the university and not just across the college. We've identified an awarding gap, but we don't necessarily understand the cause of that awarding gap and because I think the causes behind awarding gaps are many, various, interrelated, and complicated things. So, for me things like decolonising the curriculum also starts with reading lists, starting to think about how we assess it and that this is the starting point - this is not an endpoint*" (M02).

The discussion provided some insight into the dilution of decolonising work into more focus on diversity, inclusion and especially the reading lists, a topic which will be explored in 4.6. The Awarding Gap has for many become the main focus of decolonising work as it is the measurement for UKHEIs in terms of retention, progress, and change, in addressing the gaps between ethnic groups (Shain et al., 2021). From a strategic perspective and from the history of education being assessed based on various league tables and rankings in REF, TEF and KEF, it is not surprising that UKHE has shifted to focus on the awarding gap, something which is measurable and quantifiable. It was argued at management level that the awarding gap challenges the view that a lot of students from different backgrounds bring with them issues that are ingrained when they arrive, and therefore there isn't much the university can do about that.

> *"I think again there are different schools of thought out there. On the one hand there is the view that the issues that students from different backgrounds bring with them is not the problem of the university. How much can the university do to compensate for that? I don't buy into that as such. It is very easy to say the university systems are fair and we treat everyone the same because this assumes that everyone is the same and has the same needs" (M02).*

It was recognised that universities make a lot of statements about the fairness of the systems and practices (Ahmed, 2006), and that everyone is treated the same but that follows the neoliberal logic and does not take into account that not everyone is the same, has the same start in life, or access to the same sources or opportunities. The awarding gap is very ethnocentric in approach as are all the priorities and agendas within UKHE as they are set to meet the requirements of UK employers.

A large part of the responses from management focused on the awarding gap rather than decolonising the curriculum which evidenced aspects of strategic advancement (Shain et al., 2021) and the dilution of decolonising work to be more aligned with diversity and inclusion. The discussion focused on the data, what was being represented, and the challenges facing the university to keep the curriculum valid and engaging for students. The awarding gap predominantly focuses on ethnicity but there was recognition that the data at Peak University was also highlighting another issue:

> *"There is a significant gap on gender when we look at our recent figures but also our female students are outperforming our white male students by a considerable area. It is not consistent across the university, and it is not consistent across programmes but overall, at the college level female students do significantly better and that, I find that interesting as well*" (M02**).**

Whilst it is expected that management should be looking for trends in the data it was interesting to observe some of the comments focus back on what a UK curriculum should focus on and who it should be seeking to engage with. As can be seen in Table 1, there are more female students at Peak University than male so this may have an influence on what the data itself is showing. It could be argued that there are further areas of interest-convergence as decolonising the curriculum is only considered useful if it supports “young, white males from deprived backgrounds” (M02) based on the following premise:

> “*So, if we're addressing the attainment gaps, we need to do more than just look at decolonising the curriculum because that might solve the issues for one particular attainment group, but it won't, it won't actually solve all and it might create others, which may become apparent from it”* (M02).

What struck me with this statement was the emphasis on decolonising work potentially creating issues for some groups, which also demonstrates a lack of understanding of what the work entails. What it highlighted to me was that any actions taken would be assessed based on perceived issues, rather than seeing decolonising work as a benefit for all students. This approach demonstrates the limitations to focusing on quantitative data only and highlights the misconception of decolonising work and how it can benefit all students. The CRRE (2021) paper discussed how a focus on quantitative data can act as a “garbage can” wherein the inclusion of too many differing factors dilutes the focus on race and racism by default. Without the follow up of qualitative data, the “deconstruction and reconstruction” of the curriculum will not be undertaken as decolonisation work requires qualitative data to get to the heart of the causes. I contend that a source of qualitative data that would help guide both academics and Peak University in their decolonising work, are the students themselves, which to date have largely been excluded. Focusing solely on attainment rates and gaps does not provide additional data, such as the reasons for drop-out rates, as identified in the following comments:

> *“Also, what I saw previously, decolonising a student who very much want or need a decolonised system are not necessarily students who don’t pass assessments, so it’s not about student success, it’s about student retention. So, the students who want a decolonised curriculum are students who fall away before the assessment 9 times out of 10, they don’t make it all the way through”* (A14).

In addition, the Union of Students challenged the reliance on data and what is being measured.

> "*My question is also how accurate is the data? Like I was under the impression the awarding gap affects every single black student at the university. It doesn't, its only Black Home UK students, it excludes international students etc., and I think it's being picked up more by the OfS"* (VP01).

Decolonising the curriculum was seen to add value but as one of many different things, as it was felt that the impact could be "relatively slight" because it is difficult to achieve and there is no quick fix. In addition to what is being taught, and who is in front of the students, another area of concern and debate centred around assessment. With the introduction of the new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Framework in 2022 the focus has moved to key areas of sense of belonging, sense of purpose, self-efficacy, resilience, and engagement. The emphasis and one of the priorities, is in reducing the awarding gap, after all this is one area that the OfS is using to measure fairness in UKHE. Priorities at Peak University have since expanded to having an equitable approach, whilst also addressing employability, and sustainability initiatives, to improve the ranking of the university in the various league tables. Therefore, with the multiple foci, academic staff are questioning where this might affect their approach to assessment and curriculum design. Reflecting on the approach at Peak university one academic was particularly aware of the range and type of assessments being used and how it is an area of focus for the awarding gap.

> *"I can tell you that the university is way ahead of teaching and learning of many institutions that have very traditional approaches. For example, types of assessment are very much, are very narrow in many higher education organisations. And we think that ours are narrow, really? Go and have a look, you know, and I am aware that types of assessment is one of the areas that have been considered erm, can have an effect on student achievement, yeah. But that doesn't necessarily mean that we got it right because that's not the reason why we did it, I think*" (A10).

Internationalisation and having a decolonised curriculum are seen as ways to support retention, engagement, and progression of students, however, the reality is that whilst these statements are made, it is the role of the academic to implement them into their teaching practices. As identified in the comments of A10 there are practices in place that assist students, however, much more is needed to meet the student calls for a decolonised curriculum. The focus will therefore now turn to critically discuss the extent to which research question two *"To what extent does decolonising the curriculum affect or impact academic staff?"* has been addressed. Academics have a major role to play in decolonising work within UKHE as the deliverers of knowledge within the classroom. As has been discussed there are clear differences in opinion about what decolonising means and how this might be achieved so it is an important aspect of the interviews.

4.6 Academic Perspectives

I will return here to the earlier points raised about internationalisation (IoC) and decolonisation of the curriculum briefly. IoC is recognised differently depending on the subject or discipline area and whilst the more scientific based disciplines do not view it as part of their curriculum it is generally accepted as an established element within business and humanities (Clifford, 2009; Trowler, 2010). It is therefore pertinent to address some of these perceptions as the sample of academics and students within my own research are from both Business and Humanities subject areas. Leask's model (Figure 1) demonstrates how disciplines play a central role in shaping academics' knowledge, assessment practices, and the structure of the programme of study which lies within contextual layers at the global, regional, national, and institutional level. If academic's engagement with IoC is considered to be a personal transformative process then decolonising work must go further, however, due to the differing interpretations of decolonising the curriculum and the recognition that it will not be the same for each discipline area, it is not surprising that from the interviews conducted academics are at different stages of understanding and implementation.

As the focus of my research is academic perceptions of decolonising the curriculum this section will focus on the challenges, pressure, and recognition perceived by academics when carrying out their roles before moving onto the final section which will focus on training, support and leadership identified as part of the interview processes. As an insider researcher I was in a unique position to carry out both the interview and undertake participant observation within training sessions and activities across the university. This approach meant that I was immersed in the environment which I was studying and could engage more fully in interview conversations, as they were events I was familiar with and could gain further insight. From the discussions held with academics the major difficulties that came to light were large classes and a much more diverse student body due to large influxes of international students which have previously not been the norm at Peak University. Issues surrounding student background, language skills, and lack of information regarding students' additional needs formed part of the challenges identified. Whilst competing demands of research, income generation, supervision and publishing were mentioned the emphasis was on the huge increases in teaching workloads which were creating obstacles with increasing priorities. Therefore, when discussing how academics approached decolonising their materials, their teaching and delivery it was clear that time and resources were of major concern.

> *"I don't do as much as I should. A lot of that is largely because of time and ease of accessibility of materials. It's very easy for me to, erm, use a lot of the course materials and textbooks and journal articles which are currently available. So, in order for me to decolonise the curriculum I think I need to be given time to do sufficient research and look at the range of materials out there" (*A06).

As has been highlighted time and access to materials is a concern for all the academics interviewed. During the course of the interviews there was evidence of reflective practice from the participants as they examined their own background and knowledge, and the influence it had on their academic practices and pedagogy. Evaluating positionality appeared not only to involve ongoing internal critiques of their pedagogical decisions, their educational backgrounds, and contexts where the participants readily asked themselves "could I have done that differently or listened better," but also to include interrogating what their whiteness has allowed them take for granted. Whiteness refers to those who identify as white and how those individuals understand the advantages and privilege it provides them with. It therefore requires the individual to understand the power and structures within society, including education, that offer an advantage over other racial groups. White privilege is a concept that has received a lot of criticism (see section 1. 5), including rejection by the UK government as it brings attention to the dominant group in UK society, who have not normally been identified based on their race or colour. It also seeks to address the racial inequalities that are provided due to the dominant group and within UKHE the focus of a Eurocentric curriculum as “official” knowledge. Due to the dominance of the European model of education comments and challenges from an academic perspective related to trying to “shoehorn” decolonising their materials and teaching within Eurocentric contexts and unlearn years of knowledge.

> *“I’m not by any means nervous about it, I’m not scared of it but I feel I am rather trapped in that path having learnt myself, you know, cos I did my undergraduate degree and my Master’s degree and learnt those theories, concepts and models and I am conscious I am probably using that same body of work, you know, and repeating it. So it is, so for me, the feeling I’m trying to get, it’s unfortunate for me, not very natural to be using all of these, erm, you know, a more diverse range of materials. I do have to consciously think, erm, you know, what have I got here and what do I have to do?”* (A05).

Whilst reflecting on practice demonstrates some understanding of what is required by academics, it is a very basic approach to decolonising the curriculum. The comment above highlights some of the challenges in terms of what is considered natural to an academic and their practices based on their own capital and status and the familiarity with the dominant ways of “knowing” however there was limited reference to how that might be reflected in how marginalised groups who enter UKHE might be impacted. There are also suggestions of interest convergence in the recognition that the knowledge that they currently have is seen as a form of currency within neoliberal UKHE and any changes would need to be in their own interests and not challenge the unequal status quo.

> *“There is the responsibility on myself and our tutors to broaden our own knowledge and that takes time, and we should have it. To a certain extent we teach what we have been taught and what we have learnt ourselves and that informs our thinking and fills a lot of our content and material. I think there is some cost in that you, you invested time in learning this material that has enabled you to have, erm, a level of success academically and professionally that puts us in a position that we can now teach it. So, to suddenly take the view of okay I now need to broaden my knowledge base that perhaps places less reliance on the things that have got me to where I am today; that I think is quite problematic to do”* (A02).

For the most part the academics welcomed the opportunity to explore a range of knowledges, however, as can be seen by the comments made by A02, there needs to be some form of benefit in taking the time to find the materials. There are issues of power, support, and direction as well as expectations from leadership in order to make these changes possible. As previously discussed, decolonising work involves not just transformation of the curriculum, but also the structures and systems in place that both encourage and engage staff to address the diverse needs of the student body. The research objectives for my thesis interconnect and therefore whilst the focus is on academic perceptions of decolonising the curriculum, there also needs to be acknowledgement, and a critical discussion of the directives set by senior management that influence what is achievable. Time and resources came through very strongly in the interviews but so too did the strategic direction and the expectation of support from the top level. In conjunction with the second research objective, this section will now address research objective 3 – *"What are the ethical and power issues underpinning the decisions and directions to internationalise or decolonise the curriculum?"* The focus will be on training in place for decolonising work as well as the processes and systems that encourage the changes needed.

4.7 Training, Toolkits and Processes

Formal, structured workshops are the mainstay of most UKHEIs and have advantages from an institutional perspective due to their easy measurement and accountability, however, with a process that is so much more developmental and reflective, an alternative approach is required. The interview responses highlighted that decolonising the curriculum is not a simple or a short-term process, but that some direction from senior management is required. One initiative that has been instigated at the university, like many others before it, is to "decolonise" the reading lists. There were mixed views to this approach which related to time, once again, being "forced" to undertake further training, but also that the approach is tokenistic and considered by some as a tick box exercise only, without the requirement to fully embed it. A much clearer rationale is provided by A14 which highlights the complexities as discussed in Chapter Two.

> *"So, if we get it right to do our decolonising reading lists etc we should understand that we are not trying to create consensus by including different viewpoints because then we are just reinforcing the Western/Euro perspective or indeed we are flaunting one perspective for another and it's not about that. Decolonisation is also not about supplanting a colonised system for another system of difference, it's about allowing all to operate on the same playing field and erm realising its not just one that is useful, its many that is useful, specifically if we are looking at specific contexts as well"* (A14).

This is also reflected in the approach taken by the library as they have taken an active role in the decolonising the curriculum agenda in part to assist academics to both source the "alternative" materials but also how to approach the reading lists. From an Academic Librarian's perspective there is also a need to change mindsets when evaluating sources:

> *"I think then academics in universities in general need to get around this whole mindset of you know sort of branded products are better and publishing in big name journals is the way to go, even the REF doesn't really help with that. You know open access really is the way forward and bypass the larger publishers and its one of the few solutions really"* (L01).

It was also recognised that along with the Eurocentric dominance in the curriculum there is also a dominant approach when it comes to materials, textbooks and sourcing information and that part of the power lies with the large publishing houses as they cater for a Western audience and as such cater for the UK, US and the Global North markets.   I contend from a postcolonial perspective, that publishers are a gatekeeping mechanism as they control what knowledge is available, in what language and who has access to it, thereby promoting the knowledge from the Global North across the world.

> "*One of the major issues we are having at the moment is about e-books. It's that not everything is available as an e-book, you know, only about 10% are actually available as e-books and the vast majority of the material that gets put on reading lists is from quite a narrow list of publishers, you know and they tend to be the big publishers and the disadvantage with that is that they are all pretty much, without exception, US and UK publishers, with a very particular audience, with a very particular angle. To get that more international flavour is when you are more restricted because they are smaller publishers. They don't have the scope; they are even less likely to have e-books and things like that"* (L01).

As discussed, time is a key factor for any deep reflective practice to occur. Peak, like many other universities, provides a range of training tools and workshops for academics for both compliance and personal development purposes. Following the campaigns and calls to decolonise the curriculum additional staff training was provided in the form of racial awareness, unconscious bias training and staff group videos entitled “Let’s Talk About Race” wherein discussions were held about “white privilege”, “Race and Racism”. The videos were not part of the formal training programmes and to date had only attracted approximately 15% take-up, which in itself, highlights questions about time, communication and dissemination but also interest-convergence due to the multitude of other initiatives that have since come to the forefront. It is a strong indication that racial inequity at Peak is not taken as seriously as it should be and could go much further. During the course of my research and data collection a series of discussions were held, firstly via a training session within the Business School and then each college set up steering groups to focus on the Awarding Gap, with academic staff volunteering based on their level of interest. Team meetings were found to have an agenda item of “decolonising the curriculum” for approximately 12 months but these soon disappeared when newer priorities were introduced. It was therefore important to discuss and assess the level of support academic staff felt was being provided, and where they felt it should be coming from. With some interviewees commenting on the useful reminders in Team meetings, others felt that the level of support from the university as a whole was limited, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.

> “*I don’t feel supported by the university. I do feel kind of isolated to a certain extent within my job, again the current situation does not help, does it? So, I feel it is up to me to sort this out, it is up to me as the module leader; it’s up to me as it’s my material and stuff like that. I don’t feel supported, but I do recognise that there are people who are doing it and who I can go to and that there are people doing things in the university is a good sign, in their jobs. I always feel that they are probably doing the things out of their own interests though. I don’t necessarily think it is the university doing it…. so, I suppose I would say support from my point of view would be for the university to consciously and actively give me that preparatory time to make sure that I am looking at it”* (A05).

The response above highlights responsibilization within UKHE and particularly at Peak University. Responsibilization, in the context of UKHE, is the way that powerful structures, such as those within universities, who should be accountable, make individual academics seem responsible for their own and others' wellbeing and by default make them feel guilty for not doing "good enough". This is further reinforced by the comments below as the emphasis is on the individual to find out for themselves.

> "*In terms of what's offered, you have to look hard for it, but it is there, but it's kind of mine and your job to find stuff. I think that the challenge is that it's not clear, it's not focused and it's not practical generally what I see. Yeah, there are resources out there but it's about mindset and approach which is fine, and I get that but, you should have other things as well, such as here are some examples, or here are some tools, or here is some research, you know, and that appears to be the missing bit"* (A03).

It is no surprise, therefore, that academics are seeking a quick fix approach and seeking guidance from the university itself. Decolonising the reading lists is just one example wherein a fairly quick approach is undertaken, easy to set up, but no real evaluation of its effectiveness, or whether it has changed practices. It was therefore surprising from my perspective, to see an Attainment Policy that clearly states that Peak University has a decolonised curriculum. I, therefore, question whether decolonising the reading list was seen as a form of action by Peak. On reading the policy it made me reflect on the "how" and the "why" and whether this simplistic approach was seen as "good enough" thereby placing the emphasis back onto the academics, without disrupting the unequal status quo (Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2014). Unsurprisingly the interviewees had a lot to say about the level of support provided, where it should come from, and how it should be communicated, but also recognised that there was no easy answer.

> *"I suppose I think the support is there, and obviously it's quite incumbent on us to ask for help if we need it and I think it should be that way. I do think sometimes it can be difficult to access support at times, there is a lot more we could do if we didn't have such big teaching loads, we could do a lot more with the teaching than we do but I think so much of the time, and this isn't about support, you are firefighting, simply because you're just having to get through and deliver what you need to deliver, get the students through the coursework, get them through the exams, erm, and you often don't have the*

time. I don't know what the answer is to that, I don't know there is one, I think that just is the nature of the business we are in. I think there is support there but you've got to go and find it" (A11).

"I think the university can go a little bit further in its support to make it clear that nobody knows, there's not a single decolonised being on this earth. So it is okay if you are on one side of the scale and want to move up to a more decolonised self and decolonised curriculum to not know what you are doing and to need more support. That's the first step to change the narrative to 'you're not a bad person, it's okay to be wherever you are and its okay to be not fully onboard with decolonisation, what are you on board with and where do you think there is value to be had with this?" (A14).

Whilst steering groups were in place across schools and colleges, there were additional challenges for some academic staff in terms of admittance and acceptance into the groups and research being undertaken. An interesting aspect that was revealed was where academics had put themselves forward for groups and initiatives but had largely been ignored.

"*I've been to several research groups, the social research groups and put my name forward but it's never taken any further, do you know what I mean? It's like "we're looking at it and thanks very much for your interest, for coming along" but they don't actually include you in anything and I find it's as though they are happy with what they are doing, and they don't have to involve academics in the process. That's the feeling I get, I put myself forward and no one has ever taken it forward. I've never been asked to look at any figures or get involved with it in any way, it's like oh well, we'll deal with it ourselves, thanks very much"* (A04).

From my own reflections, despite carrying out this research and discussing it with colleagues I, like A04, was not invited to research groups or wider university initiatives until much later. Whilst initially the university may have wanted to consolidate research, knowledge, and experience of academic colleagues in order to progress the decolonisation agenda, the segregation or limiting of who can have access to these groups does not support a progressive organisation. At a time when academics are looking for support to understand what this means for them and their curriculum, there were clear limitations and knowledge of the level of interest and expertise in this particular subject area.

Some of the responses were specifically in relation to the mandatory training requirements set by the university. However, as these are more for compliance purposes such as unconscious bias, they are more about meeting sector/government standards and interest-convergence in the forms of tick-box exercises.

> "*I think it becomes you have to do your ethnic and diversity training every year which is tagged on at the end of the year. I don't know that it is really part of our staff training as much as a tick box at the end of the year, to say yes, we do that. Here's an hour's training*" (A04).

There were also challenges as to who was delivering the training, what the purpose was and whether anything changed as a result of the training from an organisational perspective. During the data collection period a training seminar was held where 4 staff, including myself, presented what decolonising the curriculum meant for academics, practice-based approaches and mechanisms were discussed. As part of the discussion a question was asked as to how we can decolonise when the labour market the students are going to be entering is still very much based on neoliberal or colonial logic. In my opinion it was a valid question and reflected the complexity of the issue however the first presenter reacted in a defensiveness manner to the question and repeatedly stated that they were "offended", and this is the context for the comment below.

> "*I mean I think encouragement is the way forward, because like all of these things I think you have to show examples, you have to show some leadership, we have to show, you have to try to allay fears. I mean like that's one of the things that really upset me about that training because I think what it did was to create fear and the reaction played across the discussion and I thought from a senior professor I thought that was not helpful. Erm, I don't know that it was deliberate, but it was said, it wasn't helpful because what that does is cause people to worry about asking questions, discussing in the open discussion arena with their colleagues, let alone with their students because people emailed me and said I can see I can talk to my colleagues but how do I talk to students?"* (A10).

Whilst the awarding gap, racial inequalities and decolonising work can provoke emotive reactions, this was one example of how the discussion was shut down rather than encouraged and no further sessions were organised following this. It demonstrated aspects of white fear, white guilt and white shame (Spanierman and Cabrera, 2015) due to the defensive response from the first presenter which then resulted in silence from the academics attending the session. As indicated by A10, the first presenter's negative response caused the academics in the training seminar to worry about the reactions, and unpleasant feelings, they may experience if they engage in anti-racist discussions. Rather than engaging in the discussion and exploring how we as academics can engage in these discussions with students and help them to explore the challenges, whilst understanding it ourselves, no further discussions were held. It is also important to note one aspect that was and still is missing within all of the seminars, training sessions and the steering groups held at that time is the inclusion of students. From the beginning of my research, I was aware that students were not being encouraged to participate and any research was conducted on the students, not with them. By not involving students in decolonising work, which is a student-led campaign, suggests that Peak may only be willing to do enough to be seen to be undertaking decolonising work.

> *"I think we had some training once for a staff development day and there were black students, and they were saying that they had no positive role models but then we did nothing with it. So, I just thought tokenism, that was an Away Day. For internationalisation there was some professor from HE and I could basically have written on the back of a stamp what he actually said. I didn't think he was very informative, and I was quite disappointed how simplistic it was. So, I think we need to do more, and I think we need to be made much more aware of what is actually out there. I think there was a conference I went to, the Festival of Learning ….. that I made a few notes on. There was a lot of interesting stuff there, but I think it should have been mandatory*" (A06).

Having explored the perceptions and challenges of academic workloads, time, and resources the discussions moved onto the more process-oriented side of academia. Questions focused on the strategy in place, particularly when seeking to decolonise the curriculum and the strategies in place in terms of quality assurance and validation processes.

> *"What we should have, you know, is that those that are up for modification, that we need that challenge, that is where the university can come in and say how is this decolonising the curriculum? … that, erm, that would be an*

> *opportunity to look at that sort of thing so that from the very start of the planning process the challenge is there and making sure there is a range of materials in that I guess"* (A05).

A contradictory approach however is that all learning is assessed and must meet the required standards and benchmarks, which in themselves restrain what can be achieved.

> *"I learn in a particular way, and I have a cultural background of learning in a particular way. Does that mean that we need to assess in multiple ways? which I know is the strategy that the university is going and again there is the practicalities of that. This is always the thing isn't it, these are always good ideas but practically how do we do that with the timescales we have, with the numbers we have? Let's be honest, with the quality restrictions? So very often I think as academics we want to do something, we want to try something new, but we are restrained by the quality processes from doing that because we have to check the learning outcomes*" (A11).

There is clear recognition from the academics that whilst having academic freedom to design programmes is both good practice and beneficial the role of the university and its processes should be to challenge the dominant Eurocentric approach to teaching, learning and assessment, thereby helping to remove the systems and structures of structural racism present. Rather than seeing the curriculum in terms of Pinar's (1975) "*currere"* where students run the course focusing on individual experiences and lived realities, the neoliberal approach focuses on graduate outcomes and employability and therefore follows a set course applied to all students regardless of their diversity. As such many universities such as Peak are following a more superficial approach without disturbing the status quo.

> "*In my opinion that is where decolonisation works best, if it is worked into rather than tacked onto existing modules but the reason why I feel that, erm, it's a little bit more superficial when we try to do it in the ways that we have sort of explored here and at other places because it really is much more fundamental than we perhaps give it credit for and therefore much more convoluted and I still myself struggle with the term"* (A14).

4.8 Leadership

What is evident from my research is that academic staff are looking for direction and leadership from the senior management level but also across disciplines and schools. Due to the nature of the subject, its complexities, but also the fact that it is often linked to the awarding gap, academics are aware of its importance but also of the implications if it is not enacted appropriately. Whilst there were comments across the interviews about starting with the reading lists because "you have to start somewhere" (LO1) the challenge is where to next, in terms of stages. Steering groups have been set up which actively encourage academic staff to be part of the discussions but as with other points raised if nothing is enacted that it is another form of tokenism.

> "*It's not being actively promoted so I get the impression where it is taking place it is where individuals are championing it in their own particular areas and it's not really gaining traction. I think there is a further element to it as well, which is if you want to enact some form of cultural change and we want to get buy in then whilst altruism should be the driver for it, I think there should be some form of recognition, erm some form of reward. Otherwise, some people will take the view well what is the return on capital employed? What do I get back as a result of this if it is not going to get recognised? So there has to be leadership and a push at institutional level and I don't think it's there at the moment" (*A02).

> "*It is about will the university put its money where its mouth is on this, and that makes it challenging and there are things you can do with the top down saying that everyone has to do this. The way things get cascaded down it gets diluted down. A lot of people get told you have to do this and then nothing happens, and often they don't have the authority or the voice to go further with it"* (L01).

This is an interesting point and relates to comments made about the rationale for decolonising the curriculum and decentring the dominant Eurocentric approach. It suggests that for this to be achieved there must be some form of investment or incentive for academics. There is an element of neoliberalism here in that the effort required should be rewarded, otherwise there is no incentive to change the unequal status quo. Once again it signals that Peak is only willing to go so far but not far enough to challenge the racial hierarchies within UKHE. It is very clear that the interviewees are looking for direction from senior management and this is not forthcoming.

> "*I do think it tells us something about what our role is, I mean it is more than just being an academic, it's about role modelling. It is about professionalism. It is about understanding each other and doing that in an open way, trying to encourage other people to do so as well. I think it's a lot of responsibility isn't it and I do understand why a lot of my colleagues are fearful of this issue because it is easy to be called out and people are fearful of making a mistake, it's easier to be neutral and do little than it is to take action and expose yourself to making a mistake or being misinterpreted and I think that is something that has limited the extent to which we can address this in the past. Now I think that's something we need to think about"* (A10).

The LTAF was introduced in 2022 and can be perceived as a step in the right direction, however there is no toolkit to follow, and the risks are perceived to lie with the academics themselves.

> "*I think probably in the past I would say there's been as I think is commonly identified in the literature a lack of leadership, you know, I mean, it is important that those risks are taken by the leaders as well as people at the bottom of the food chain. There's this inclination to push it down and then all the risk gets bottled at that lower level, you know, and then people are rightly fearful because they don't see the level of risk being taken at these other levels. They don't see it as an organisational change, it's something that is pushed down to the bottom level at the interface, and I do think that is problematic and I'm not sure how that could be dealt with but I don't think it has been dealt with yet."* (A10).

Similar comments were raised across both the Business School and the School of Humanities wherein the risks are with the academics.

> *"We have wanted to be saying these things for a while and we have been asked to do this now, but it has been framed differently as now there is something we have to put on our DPR and something to do with looking at the awarding gap. So, I feel that possibly, erm, you know, if our efforts don't result in the response and change in the awarding gap then we might be to blame, be held responsible and it doesn't make you feel very comfortable about the whole situation, because you think well you've got to change the mindset of a range of people. I don't know if I feel comfortable or responsible for that, or if we can change that, and being put in that position*" (A09).

Alongside the issues and discussions about the responsibilities and risks involved in carrying out decolonising work, there were also points raised about how the university recognises those staff who do engage and embed a decolonised curriculum into their modules and programmes.

4.9 Recognition and Reward

Interviewees felt that there needed to be more guidance and emphasis on the importance of decolonising the curriculum and the relationship or influence on the awarding gap. As such discussions focused on how academics would be recognised for their engagement in this type of initiative in much the same way that employability and student experience were emphasised. Therefore, several academics felt that it needed to form part of the development and performance review, objective setting and to be aligned to the strategic framework and LTAF.

> "*There's a sense of altruism. It's not because the university demands it of me, but I think it's the right thing to do and I think there is an academic curiosity in learning new things otherwise why are we in academia? So, I want to do those things but at the same time I don't think the university formally recognises, erm, the amount of time that is required to do this properly. I think there is a sense that institutions jump on the idea of decolonisation, and it's seen as something, you know, that we say that we do, and you know tick the box, erm, but I don't think there is any kind of meaningful effort that underpins it. I haven't seen any from the university particularly in terms of decolonisation of the curriculum and if there is anything then it is being kept under a bushel"* (A02).

The comment from A02 perhaps highlights a lot of the challenges present when it comes to decolonising work. It alludes to strategic advancement (Shain et al., 2021) once more and challenges why it is not more widely promoted, encouraged and recognised when this work is undertaken as exemplars to other academic staff.

> "*Well, I think there's a reason to do it, isn't there? If it is a policy from the university level and if that policy is highly important then surely as individuals, we should be showing how we are developing ourselves through our DPR in order to achieve a new major shift in our thinking. I'm not saying everybody should have to do it but surely that is a place where you would expect to see people saying and for my personal development, I did this, and I did that, and this is what I've done in my modules to evidence it. I mean I think that's an appropriate place for heads of disciplines to encourage people. I think that we*

> *are actively trying to achieve the goals of the organisation so I think that is a requirement, which, once you choose, there are so many, so you can't do them all, it's a personal thing"* (A10).

Both comments from A02 and A10 highlight the contradictory approaches being undertaken. Whilst decolonising work requires individual effort and reflection, there needs to be direction from senior management. From my own research whilst Peak University initially jumped on the decolonising the curriculum bandwagon, this has subsequently transformed into a focus on the Awarding gap. That is where UKHE, the UK government and regulatory bodies such as the OfS have transferred their attention. Throughout my research it was clear that there was greater emphasis placed on quantitative data and research. This may be because it is easier to interpret, measure, and manage, although there is a danger that it can also be manipulated to reflect the narrative required.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined and considered academic staff perceptions of decolonising the curriculum and to what extent is has an impact on them. Whilst the understanding of decolonising the curriculum demonstrated a mixed approach, challenges were identified in terms of where the "alternative" knowledge would be found. It was clear that IoC was an easier concept to address as it does not disrupt the Eurocentric dominance within UKHE and therefore does not disrupt the unequal status quo, which I argue is a form of neo-colonialism. It also followed that an easy fix was to diversify the academic body by recruiting international staff who would bring their "alternative" knowledge with them, which demonstrated interest-convergence. For the majority, the daily challenges of workload, time, and pressures of being an academic were seen to hinder progress as well as the need for both support and direction at the senior management level, however this was not seen to be forthcoming.

The management perspective focused more on the data itself, which left academics feeling responsible for decolonising work rather than Peak University and policy makers, being accountable. Rather than discussing approaches to decolonising the curriculum, management were more focused on the Awarding Gap as it is measured and which all UKHEIs are required to report on. From a postcolonial perspective Peak's approach does not go far enough, in my opinion, to begin to understand the complexities and action needed to undertake decolonising the curriculum as reading lists and EDI training were the main method chosen. If anything, Peak has presented a series of non-performatives in their decolonising the reading list focus, their anti-racist statements, and their Attainment Policy.

The final chapter brings together my findings in respect the three research questions, identifies and presents my contribution to decolonising work, discusses implications and the limitations of my research as it is based on a single case study: Peak University. In addition, areas for further research and study will be identified.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

The research in this thesis presents an in-depth exploration of the challenges of decolonising work and decolonising the curriculum in particular from an academic perspective at Peak University. By undertaking a critical discussion and interpretation of the academic and management responses I have addressed the following three research questions:

1. What is the understanding of the motivation for particular internationalisation policies and activities?

2. To what extent does decolonising the curriculum affect or impact academic staff?

3. What are the ethical and power issues underpinning the decisions and directions to internationalise or decolonise the curriculum?

This study provides additional insight into the challenges of decolonising the curriculum and offers a perspective from academics who are not actively involved in decolonising work and who were, and, to some extent, still are, coming to terms with the concept and the requirements for their own practices. As identified Peak University was unique at the time of the research as it was largely a white academic body and a white student body and had not fully engaged with recruiting international students as it was proud of being a university for the local community and region. My research provides Peak University with insight into how academic staff perceived the actions and initiatives undertaken following the call to decolonise the curriculum. Whilst training on "decolonising the reading list" was promoted there is limited evidence that this has changed mindsets or practices to date. Therefore, by reviewing the findings of this research Peak University will be able to examine the actions they have already taken, and may be planning to take, in order to deliver a clearer direction for the academic staff to engage with this long-term, transformative change. In addition, my research contributes to the body of knowledge on the challenges and resistance to decolonising the curriculum and examines the strategies and statements made in response to the student campaigns. I also address the ways in which decolonising work has been diluted to a focus on data, diversity in recruitment and the awarding gap. I consider the implications for both academics at Peak University but also the wider HE sector, acknowledge the limitations of my study and provide further areas for research and examination.

Peak University was purposefully selected as it offered the opportunity to view the understanding and challenges from an academic perspective rather than targeting groups who were already actively involved in decolonising work. Whilst extant literature has explored the challenges and barriers to decolonising work, these are mainly based on academic staff and students who are actively engaged, and therefore familiar with what is required. My research focused on academics who were introduced to this concept following the media attention of George Floyd's murder and the BLM drawing attention to racial inequalities. Peak University followed other UKHEIs in making statements about being anti-racist but although pockets of work were being undertaken across the university there was limited integration into the academic culture.

My case study research was based on Peak University and took place over a three-year period. Although I was new to the university when I began my research, over the course of my study I became fully embedded into the culture at Peak and was able to engage as a participant observer within the Team meetings, Away Days, and training sessions during this time. This afforded me the benefits and privilege of observing the complexities of the university and academic daily life, particularly at a time of the Covid-19 pandemic, the challenges of lockdowns, the BLM attention to racial inequalities and the subsequent return to campus and "back to normal". As a white, British, female academic I already had a good understanding of academic culture within UKHE so Peak University, although initially new to me, was an academic environment I was familiar with. In addition, as an insider researcher, I was able to relate to the perspectives of Business and Humanities academics, being one myself and also going through the journey of understanding the need for a decolonised curriculum.

As I have undertaken research within my own organisation my role, my background and experience were addressed in order to acknowledge my position and my biases as well as my own personal knowledge. I recognise that I have been educated in Western/Eurocentric traditions of knowledge and potentially implicated in their enduring structures of inequality as I have conducted research at a UK university where I am employed. As an insider researcher I had access to the internal staff events and the subsequent discussions which informed part of my data and analysis. It was, therefore, critical that I ensured that my participants and their opinions remained confidential following ethical codes of conduct and GDPR. Interview transcripts were reviewed and sections which might identify the individual participants or other persons involved were not used to ensure that the ethical code of conduct was followed.

My empirical data collection predominantly focused on semi-structured interviews with academics, however it developed as it became obvious that the student perspectives and narrative were missing, and this was subsequently included after the first 12 months of data collection.   The empirical data was collected over a three-year period which provided for changes in the understanding of decolonising work, as well as engagement with training opportunities, steering groups and Away Day activities to be identified, explored and analysed.

5.2 Implication of the Findings

This study recognises the role of the academic as a means to engaging in and embedding decolonising work into practice. Whilst the focus has been on the academics themselves the findings have highlighted the need to look more closely at the role of the organisation. Whilst this research does not provide any best practice or necessarily a comparison with other organisations what it does highlight is that there are commonalities in the approach each institution employs. From the Thatcher government through to present day initiatives the drivers of the UK education sector have been the attraction of international students and the massification of UKHE. As such both Postcolonial Theory and CRT/interest-convergence contend that the framing of racism within UKHE is one which is not neutral as it promotes a unidirectional flow of knowledge, that of the Global North to the Global South, ensuring that the unequal status quo remains. Through a neoliberal logic UKHEIs are measured against the TEF, REF and KEF which itself seeks conformity, providing UKHEIs with various badges to further attract students from around the world. Peak University, like many other HEIs, is focused on the Race Equality Charter mark, however, this approach can mean that the university is focused on meeting the criteria and measurement, rather than a much stronger culture change which is embedded into every facet of the UKHEI structure.

The Attainment Policy and training provided to academic staff suggests that action is being, or has been, taken, however, there is limited focus on whether it is the right action. Decolonising the curriculum must be recognised as a complex, multi-faceted change within Peak University which should have social justice at its heart. Whilst it is recognised that there are distinctions in terms of practice across disciplines there must be a clear institutional framework that can be explored, discussed at school and college level and then embedded at the discipline level. To date it is not clear what actions disciplines are taking to reflect upon their epistemic and pedagogical practices. Due to these complexities, decolonising work is therefore not easy to measure, which to some extent has shifted the focus to the awarding gap, as it is identifiable, measurable and reportable; all of which falls in line with current HE practices and government requirements.

My research has highlighted that there are two practical issues at work. Firstly, the issues of race and racism which are implicated in the Awarding gap, and secondly the issues of time, workload and wider institutional agendas which are ever changing. The challenge therefore is that UKHE operates in a neoliberal framework and as such how will decolonising work be possible in this context for HEIs? Whilst UKHE has a vested interest in anti-racism, evident in the myriad of statements and policies made following the BLM media attention, from an interest-convergence perspective, these fall into non-performatives or speech acts (Ahmed, 2006) as neither the UKHEI nor the UK government is seeking to change the structures that are in place or displace their position of power. Whilst universities, such as Keele, have gained a reputation for advancing decolonising work and producing a manifesto of action, concerns were raised by academics at Peak university that more superficial actions or tick box exercises were being undertaken. The difference in approach is that Peak appears to see decolonising work as an add-on with short -term quick fixes opted for rather than a long term, developmental and transformative institutional change. In addition, if academics do not see the recognition for the work they do, particularly, when it is on top of an already heavy workload, it is unlikely to gain traction thereby ensuring that the unequal status quo remains.

The research identifies the ambiguities in understanding the difference between internationalisation and decolonisation, as well as more of a focus on diversity and inclusion initiatives and training. Internationalisation is often perceived to be where international case studies, trips abroad and collaborative partnerships are used to include alternative approaches. Decolonisation focuses on decentring the current Eurocentric approach to knowledge in favour of epistemic diversity wherein indigenous knowledges from around the world are encouraged and debated. Therefore, the requirements of academics to both engage with and take action in order to embed this into the curriculum require a more meaningful dialogue in order to understand the direction of the university. The role of senior management, the support, time and resources needed were highlighted as the main challenges by academics. Direction and shared responsibility by the senior management, including the need to mitigate the risks of getting it wrong were clearly revealed as part of the findings themselves.

5.3 Research Summary and Recommendations

Peak University's approach

Commitment from the Vice Chancellor's group is important, but leadership needs to be more visible. Leadership from the top is also not enough. Focus is needed on giving academic staff time to continuously engage with decolonising work so that it is not just a focus on reading lists. Decolonising work is not an event, it is a longer-term strategic approach and academics must have the time and resources to engage in debates and ongoing conversations within their own disciplines but also across the university.

Avoid non-performative statements

From an institutional perspective, the language and wording used within policy documents needs to be clearer so that "speech acts" such as those in the Attainment Policy are avoided. By including statements that Peak has a "diversified and decolonised curriculum" the university is signalling that the work is complete. It is therefore little more than tokenistic decolonisation (Moosavi, 2020; Zemblyas, 2021) as it fails to take the radical action needed and is superficial at best. However, as stated decolonising work is a not a quick process and therefore it has not been completed.

Using data to engage academic teams

There were clear calls from academics to understand the problem both on a university scale but also on a course level scale so that they can understand their role. Focusing purely on degree outcomes does not address the factors affecting and occurring across a student's journey within UKHE. Whilst Peak's Strategic Insights Team continues to carry out research, there is no real evidence that academic practices are changing. The emphasis on metrics, student achievement at module, year and degree level provides the college and schools with information overall but the deeper, much more rich data should come from the students themselves.

I am not suggesting that research is not important, but I see very little evidence of discussions with students or within teams, other than on an ad hoc basis. The steering groups, various academic groups and networks often work in silos and as such it is up to the individual academic to try to engage with them, but only if they are aware of their existence. It should also not be simply focusing on the quantitative data but also looking at and engaging in qualitative research. In other words, encouraging staff to explore for themselves, as well as being part of steering groups. If the focus remains only on data and research then Peak will engage at a superficial level only, and actions that could reduce or remove racial inequalities in education will be delayed, as it procrastinates over the findings. Decolonising and anti-racism work requires academics to be involved and engaged at all times, not waiting for the next research update to be published before action is taken.

Toolkits or Good Practice?

Whilst some academics may want a checklist or toolkit to support them through decolonising work this does not go far enough. Good practice at discipline, course and university wide level are needed but also across the sector. There are no expectations that Peak should blindly follow what others are doing in the sector, but providing exemplars and forums for sharing practice is valued.

Engage with students

Much of the work being undertaken at Peak is based on academic steering groups, Equality Networks etc., however there is limited engagement with students themselves. It is important to remember that the calls to decolonise came from the student body and giving them a voice is a vital part of the work needed.

5.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

My study's findings might be critiqued because they were collected at a single site, that of Peak University, a post 1992 university and therefore may not be generalisable to other UKHEIs. However, Farquhar (2012) argued that data generated from a single site increases the likelihood that there is greater depth in analysis. The in-depth analysis of academic understanding and experiences of the contested terrain of decolonisation is very relevant to those working in the UKHE sector overall. It may also be of potential interest to those outside of the UKHE sector who are engaged in anti-racist or decolonising work, or within public bodies and organisations perceived as structurally racist.

The participant sample is based on staff self-selected however as they were predominantly from the Business School it is not representative of the wider academic population as there was limited focus on the more scientific discipline areas. It is therefore recommended that the study is extended to include participants from a wider range of discipline areas, especially those who don't agree with decolonising or anti-racism work, as they offer differing perspectives, challenges but also opportunities to explore the benefits of a more holistic approach. The participants were predominantly female which reflects the same gender distribution with the student body, however further research could be undertaken to explore if there are also gendered perspectives at work. Although I did not collect ethnicity data in my research, the majority were of white identified ethnicity. Whilst this may be seen as a limitation, it was reflective of the academic and student body at the time. Given the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, the increased number of international students attending UKHE, and in particular, Peak University's greater focus on these students, as well as active recruitment of a more diverse academic body, cross-cultural analysis is recommended. By engaging in collaborative partnerships and TNE, Peak must also extend their focus to their international partners, not just as potential sources of marginalised knowledge but also as a way to engage in new knowledge creation. Future work in this area needs to understand cultural capital and the student - academic power relationships to explore if the current educational approaches to ethnically diverse students enact the dominant power struggles which exist in society.

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APPENDIX 1 Participant Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Participant Information Sheet

[redacted]

<u>Study title</u>: Decolonising the curriculum within UK Higher Education: A Case Study of academic staff perceptions in a Post-1992 University in the East Midlands

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to discuss it with your line manager or work colleague. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

<u>What is the purpose of the research?</u>

The purpose of the research is to explore academic perceptions, experiences and views of internationalisation and the impact on their current teaching practices based on their own backgrounds and expectations of UK education. Internationalisation in Higher Education (HE) is not a new phenomenon, nor is the requirement to attract increasing numbers of international students as a means for UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to remain competitive within an increasingly marketized education sector. This project aims to review the status quo and the dominance of a Western/European education system through the changes made by universities in their internationalisation agendas.

<u>Why have I been chosen?</u>

You have been invited to participate in this current study as you are an academic within the [redacted]. By allowing me to interview you and discuss your perceptions and experiences of internationalisation could help [redacted] with its internationalisation agenda but also highlight any gaps.

<u>Do I have to take part?</u>

It is up to you to decide whether to take part. Any participation in this research study is entirely on a voluntary basis. You have the right to withdraw from the study up to six weeks after the interview has taken place and must do so quoting your Unique Identification Number (UIN) which will be provided to you once you consent to interview. If you change your mind during the data collection just let the researcher know by emailing you do not need to give a reason for this decision.

What will happen if I decide to take part?

If you choose to take part in the study, I will work with you to identify a suitable time for interview and the most appropriate method, taking into account any social distancing requirements in place and providing the option to interview via Teams, Skype or an alternative approach you are familiar with. You can choose how much or little you share. The interview is expected to take no longer than 30-40 minutes. The type of questions the researcher will ask are as follows;

- What does internationalisation mean to you?
- What does decolonisation mean to you?
- Do you feel your teaching methods are appropriate for a diverse student body?
- Do you integrate international or cross-cultural perspectives within your teaching to internationalise your curriculum?
- Have you ever faced any academic/personal challenges with regard to students from ethnically diverse backgrounds? Which ones and how did you deal with them?
- How do you feel this institution supports you in teaching an ethnically diverse student body?

The interview will be audio-recorded. You will be asked not to mention anyone's name during the discussion to protect other people's identity, however, if you do inadvertently use names these will be removed when later transcribed. After the interview the researcher will type the audio recording into written format and will then analyse all the information and draw out the key themes.

We have a duty of care to protect those not involved in the study, for example, family, friends and work colleagues. We feel the additional consent of taking consent from other individuals would be a burden for you. So due to confidentiality we ask you to avoid mentioning anyone's name.

What are the potential benefits and risks of taking part?

Although no risks are anticipated, if in the unlikely event the interview causes any distress, then with your permission I will ask your line manager to contact you afterwards to offer any support you may need. This study cannot guarantee any benefits to you and you will not be reimbursed for your participation. However, there is potential for this to be a positive and reflective experience, the interview is considered as not too onerous and may be a worthwhile reflective and learning experience.

What if there is a problem?

Taking part in this research is not intended to cause you any problems. However, if you come across any problems during or after our discussions, there are relevant services you may access (resources listed below).

If you have any problems regarding the conduct of the research, please do hesitate to contact the researcher. Formal complaints about any aspect of this research should be addressed to; Dr Reza Gholami, Doctoral Supervisor, University of Birmingham, email:

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

All data will be managed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Data Protection Act (DPA) (2018) and University of Birmingham Research Data Management Policy (2018). After the interview the audio-recording will be listened to and transcribed. Data will be anonymised by using codes on interview transcripts. Data will be protected in a secure facility (e.g. encrypted folder on University system, locked filing cabinet at clinical site). The data from the study will be stored in accordance with GDPR guidance and then destroyed confidentially (three years following study completion).

As this research is being completed as part of an academic course, the other people that will see the anonymised transcript, will be the university research supervisors, Dr Reza Gholami and Dr Sarah Aiston.

If you wish to make a complaint relating to breaches of data protection legislation or you have concerns about the processing of personal identifiable information you may do so in writing and contact details are as follows;

Data Protection and Freedom of Information Officer

Or by emailing:

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research study will be included within the researcher's doctoral thesis. It is hoped the findings of this research study will be published so that it will be made available for other professionals and services to view. The researcher will be happy to provide you with a summary of the research at the completion of the study.

Who has reviewed the study?

This research has been reviewed and received ethical approval to ensure participants' interests are protected.

If I decide to take part what do I have to do?

If you decide you would like to participate in this research study, the researcher will go through the information sheet again to allow you to give informed consent to take part. If you consent to taking part in the research you will be asked to sign a form to confirm that you have given your informed consent and fully understand why the research is being completed, and what is expected of you.

If you would like to discuss anything or have further questions at any time, please contact Michelle Whitworth, Researcher.

Michelle Whitworth

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. This information sheet is for you to keep.

Enc. Participant Information Sheet

APPENDIX 2 Informed Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Decolonising the curriculum within UK Higher Education: A Case Study of academic staff perceptions in a Post-1992 University in the East Midlands

I am a student at the University of Birmingham, and as part of my course I am doing a research project to evaluate academic perceptions of decolonising the curriculum in higher education. I work full-time in the [redacted] Internationalisation in Higher Education (HE) is not a new phenomenon, nor is the requirement to attract increasing numbers of international students as a means for UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to remain competitive within an increasingly marketized education sector. This project aims to review the status quo within the practices of academics at the [redacted] and the dominance of a Western/European education system through the changes made by universities in their internationalisation agendas.

With your permission, I would like to interview you to discuss your perceptions of decolonisation and internationalisation as an academic and how it may influence your academic practices.

I will not be sharing the personal information I collect from you with anyone and the information I collect for my research project will be kept private. Any information held will have a unique identification number (UIN) instead of your name. After my write up, all information I have collected will be destroyed. Each participant will receive a summary of the results.

If you would like to take part in my study, this record will indicate your agreement to take part in the interview for the research project entitled 'Decolonising the curriculum within UK Higher Education: A Case Study of academic staff perceptions in a Post-1992 University in the East Midlands'. Your signature on this form indicates your agreement with all of the statements below.

- I agree to take part in the project
- I have had the chance to see information about the project and to ask questions
- I agree that what I say during interviews can be quoted in reports or presentations about the research project, as long as my name, institution and any identifying features are not included.

[redacted] know that I have the right to withdraw from the study up to six weeks after the interview has been conducted. If I withdraw, I understand that I will be asked what (if any) information about me can be used in the study. Please state your unique identification number when requesting to withdraw and send your request to

UIN ______________________

Name______________________________________

Signed_____________________________________

Date_______________________________________

Contact Details: (Please circle preferred method of contact)

Mobile Number: __________________________

Email address: ___________________________

Michelle Whitworth

Enc. Participant Information Sheet

APPENDIX 3 Initial Academic Interview Plan

Decolonising the curriculum within UK Higher Education: A Case Study of academic staff perceptions in a Post-1992 University in the East Midlands

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - TOPIC GUIDE

Introduction, overview of study, consenting:

Thank you for seeing me today and offering to take part in this study. I would like first to outline the study so that you are able to decide whether you wish to proceed further (re-cap Participant Information Sheet). Sign consent form × 2 (one for participant and information sheet, one for interviewer).

The interview part of the study, is an opportunity to explore your knowledge and understanding of internationalisation and decolonisation, in terms of the curriculum. The focus is upon exploring your perceptions, experiences and views of this approach and the impact on your current teaching practices based on your background and expectations of UK education.

So, the topics I wish to address are:

1. What are academic staff perceptions of decolonising the curriculum?
2. What is the understanding of the motivation for internationalisation policies and activities?
3. To what extent does decolonisation of the curriculum affect or impact academic staff?
4. What are the perceived ethical and power issues underpinning decisions and direction to internationalise or decolonise the curriculum?

Please feel free to ask questions at any stage during the interview and/or debrief. I might make a few notes in case I want to come back to something later. I want to assure you that your personal information will be kept confidential, only viewed by myself, and that data will de-identified to a geographical region in England and your role.

Interview Discussion/Debrief: Topics/questions:

1. Background information on the interviewee.

- Current role and any prior relevant roles/responsibilities, training, duration in education/teaching in HE.

2. Views on understanding and awareness of internationalisation and decolonisation of the curriculum:

- What does internationalisation mean to you?
- Do you consider this university an internationalised institution? Why/Why not?
- What does decolonisation mean to you?

3. Views on teaching practices:
   - Do you feel your teaching methods are appropriate for a diverse student body?
   - Do you integrate international or cross-cultural perspectives within your teaching? Why?
   - How do you challenge students to explore cross-cultural perspectives within your discipline?
   - Do you adjust teaching materials/curricula to suit international students' needs?
   - Has your teaching changed to accommodate the increased number and varying needs of international students?

4. Challenges faced as an academic teaching a diverse student body:
   - How do you think your life experience, whether personally or professionally, has influenced the way you teach students from diverse ethnic backgrounds?
   - Do you feel your experiences and status make you a good role model for your students?
   - In your experience, what is the best way to engage students from a diverse background?
   - Have you ever faced any academic/personal challenges regarding students from ethnically diverse backgrounds? How did you deal with them?

5. Institutional support and approaches to internationalisation
   - How do you feel this institution supports you in teaching an ethnically diverse student body?

6. Finally, is the anything else you would like to add, about anything else, before we close?