

Tackling teachers' low expectations of Black Caribbean students in English schools

Feyisa Demie

Department of Education, Durham University, Durham, UK

Email: feyisa.demie@dur.ac.uk

Abstract

The underachievement of Black Caribbean heritage students has been a persistent problem facing national policymakers in English schools for many years. Drawing on case study evidence, this article has looked into the experience and views of teachers, parents, governors, and school staff about the effect of teachers' low expectations on Black Caribbean students and the reasons for their underachievement in English schools. Evidence suggests teacher low expectation is one of the factors that hindered the achievement of Black Caribbean students. Low expectations manifest in several ways, including harsher reprimands, racist stereotyping, unconscious and conscious bias, as well as being overlooked to answer questions, and is set in low ability groups. The recommendations from this study are that schools should challenge teachers through training and the effective use of an inclusive curriculum that provides students with knowledge about the histories, cultures, and contributions of diverse groups.

Key words: Teacher low expectations, Ethnic minorities, Black Caribbean achievement, diversity

Introduction

This article is a contribution to the debate about teachers' low expectations in the UK and elsewhere through a case study of Black Caribbean pupils' attainment in an inner London Local Authority (LA) in England. Black Caribbean children have attended English schools for decades and yet relatively few studies have examined the relationship between low expectation and attainment of Black Caribbean pupils. This section looks into what the data and the literature review tell us about teachers' low expectations and the achievement of Black Caribbean students in English schools.

What do the data tell us?

This issue of underachievement of Black Caribbean pupils is of increasing importance for the government to develop its education policy and to provide targeted support for a growing Black Caribbean population in English schools. For over a decade, the school population of Black pupils' number has been growing, and recent statistics show there are currently 90,157 Black Caribbean pupils in England schools. Table 1 also shows 5.7% are Black pupils and 32% of the school population is ethnic minorities (Table 1).

A number of researchers reported the growth of the Black population in the last three decades (Demie, 2015; Demie and Mclean, 2017). They have also given considerable attention to the issue of low achievement of Black pupils in British schools. The review of previous data shows that the underachievement of Black Caribbean students has been a persistent problem facing national policymakers in English schools for many years (Demie and Mclean, 2017; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Strand, 2012). There is now research and empirical evidence that shows that Black Caribbean students do not achieve high standards similar to their White British peers (Demie, 2015).

Table 1. Growth Of Black Caribbean Students in English Schools

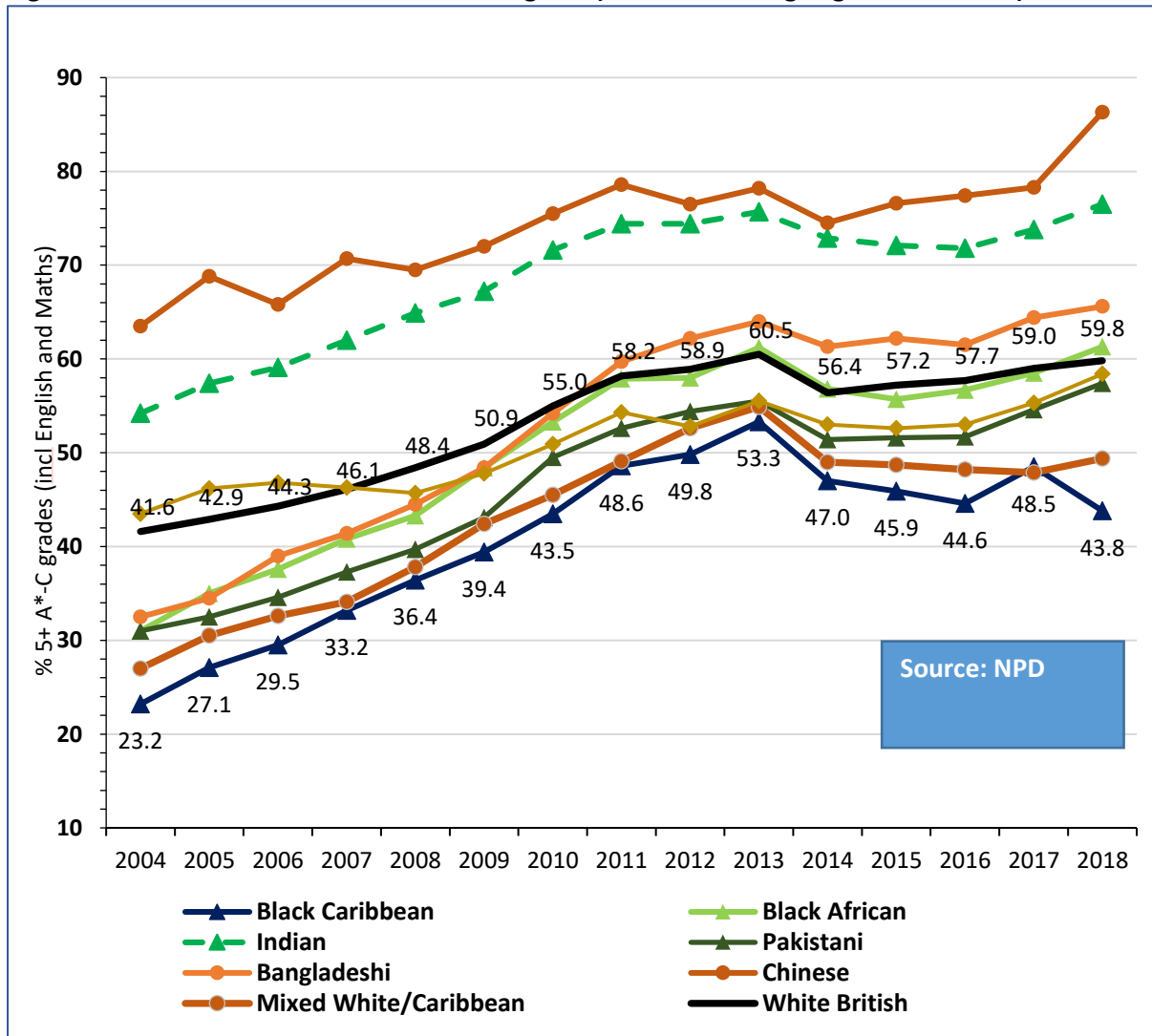
England						
Year	Black Caribbean Pupil No.	School Population	Black Caribbean Pupil %	Black Pupil No	Black Pupil %	BAME %
2000	97607	6757141	1.4%	338260	5.0%	13.4%
2001	99139	6784548	1.5%	249559	3.7%	14.0%
2002	93853	6773076	1.4%	250288	3.7%	14.4%
2003	96100	6736700	1.4%	244900	3.6%	19.7%
2004	93100	6674600	1.4%	252900	3.8%	20.0%
2005	93920	6711430	1.4%	255120	3.8%	20.0%
2006	91660	6655620	1.4%	265680	4.0%	20.5%
2007	88630	6572530	1.3%	271200	4.1%	21.3%
2008	92090	6632900	1.4%	292860	4.4%	21.3%
2009	91650	6584180	1.4%	301960	4.6%	22.5%
2010	91400	6564940	1.4%	312260	4.8%	23.4%
2011	91080	6602770	1.4%	326310	4.9%	24.3%
2012	90095	6626685	1.4%	338755	5.1%	25.4%
2013	89410	6678395	1.3%	351560	5.3%	26.4%
2014	88445	6758750	1.3%	364190	5.4%	27.5%
2015	87125	6845109	1.3%	377086	5.5%	28.6%
2016	85208	6934165	1.2%	388339	5.6%	29.7%
2017	83873	7051365	1.2%	398969	5.7%	29.7%
2018	90157	8092747	1.1%	459357	5.7%	31.9%

Source: DfE

Recent data also show that there has been a marked improvement in the proportion of students attaining five or higher grade passes in the General Certificate for Secondary Education (GCSE). General Certificate for Secondary Education examinations at the end of secondary education in England, but not all ethnic groups shared equally in the overall improvement in attainment at the 5 + A*-C level (See Figure 1). Broadly speaking, Chinese and Indian students are the highest achieving groups at GCSE followed by Bangladeshi, Black African and White British students. Black Caribbean and Pakistani students are the lowest-achieving groups. The national data in England also show that some groups have considerably improved more than others, and Black Caribbean underachievement in education is real and persistent and they are consistently the lowest performing group in the country. The data also show there are signs that ethnic minority students are performing better at school now than they did before. This improvement is due to new generations of minority families embedding themselves more into British culture and appreciating the varied opportunities that are available in British education. Based on this evidence one could argue that ethnic minority pupils will hopefully continually improve their attainment levels simply by being born and growing up in Britain.

However, of real concern is that the gap in the educational performance of Black Caribbean students is larger than for any other ethnic group. This has led a number of researchers to look into the reasons for underachievement in English schools (Demie and Mclean 2017).

Figure 1. Black Caribbean Achievement in England (5+A*-C including English and Maths)



Source: NPD

Source: DfE (2019)

Evidence from review of literature

The reasons for the underachievement of Black Caribbean students are wide-ranging, but a review of education literature suggests teachers’ low expectations and institutional racism (Demie and Mclean, 2017; Strand, 2012) are two main factors. Many researchers cited low teachers’ expectations as one of the key factors to underachievement amongst Black children (e.g. Crozier, 2005; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000; Maylor et al., 2009). Low teacher expectations appear to be influenced by racism, which contributes to black children experiencing problems that can interfere with their performance (Demie and Mclean, 2017; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000).

A number of studies have shown that the role of the teacher is vital in shaping the experiences and outcomes of Black students (Demie, 2019; Demie and Mclean, 2017; Gershenson et al., 2017;

Gillborn et al., 2012; Maylor et al., 2009; Vincent et al., 2012). They highlighted that how racism has played a key role in the underachievement of Black and ethnic minorities students. Racism extends to all groups but affects more Black Caribbean pupils compared to black African, Pakistani, White and Bangladeshi classmates (Demie and Mclean, 2017; Strand, 2012).

A number of recent studies also raised that Black Caribbean student are being subjected to institutional racism in English schools. They argued that this has undermined their chances of academic success (Macpherson, 1999; Parekh, 2000; Strand, 2012). For example, this is revealed in teachers' differential treatment of black children in terms of low teacher expectations and in assessments made about the abilities of Black Caribbean students. Research suggests that teachers' perceptions and expectations of black children's behaviour often influence their decision to put back children in lower sets as opposed to their ability, and more than two-thirds of black students in secondary school are taught separately in lower academic groups, (Gillborn and Youdell, 2000). Strand (2012: 90) also noted similar findings that Black Caribbean students '*are systematically under-represented on entry to the higher tiers relative to their White British peers*', and this has contributed to achievement gaps. He concluded that institutional racism and low expectations by teachers are the main reasons why they were not entering for top-tier exams.

Moreover, many white teachers are not aware of the negative impact of unconscious prejudice and stereotypes. Researchers have argued that teachers sometimes have 'conscious or unconscious stereotypes and assumptions about minority groups and this can impact negatively on students' achievements' (Demie, 2019; Demie and Mclean, 2017; Maylor et al., 2009; Milliard et al., 2018).

Other recent research has also suggests that white teachers may have higher expectations of white and Asian students but lower expectations of black students' academic achievement (Gershenson et al., 2017; Vincent et al., 2012). Black students are disciplined by white teachers and schools more frequently, more harshly and for less serious misbehaviour, and they are less likely to be praised than other students. They are also disproportionately placed in bottom sets because of teachers' lower expectations. As a result, they often receive a less stimulating curriculum and are entered into less challenging exams (Demie, 2019; Strand, 2012; Vincent et al., 2012).

There is now a consensus among researchers in the field that one of the biggest obstacles to raising Black Caribbean achievement is racism and the 'colour blind' approach which has put them at a disadvantage in the English school systems. Others argued about the failure of the National Curriculum to adequately reflect the needs of a diverse, multi-ethnic society (Demie, 2019; Demie and Mclean, 2017; Macpherson, 1999; Strand, 2012).

Crozier's (2005) research also looked into the negative experiences of black students in school as a result of 'becoming demotivated to learn, by a system that they feel has rejected them, or imposed exclusion'. This study provides important evidence on the reasons for the underachievement of Black students in English schools and the need to tackle head-on factors such as low teacher expectations and negative stereotyping of young black people that contributed to black underachievement.

There is also evidence that 'teachers can wittingly or unwittingly affect the performance of students by being openly prejudiced, by being patronising or by having unjustified low expectations of the child's abilities' (Richardson, 2005: 37) based on racial background.

Evidence also shows that Black students and particularly Black Caribbean students are disproportionately put in bottom sets (see Demie, 2019; Gillborn, 2008; Strand, 2012). Students

placed in lower sets suffer from lower expectations and often receive a less stimulating curriculum and are entered into less challenging exams. Where examinations are tiered, this can have the effect of preventing these students from gaining the highest grades.

For example, prior to 2006 the mathematics GCSE had a three-tier system; students entered for the higher exam were able to achieve grades A*-D. Students entered for the foundation tier exam could only achieve grades D-G. White students are twice as likely as black to be placed in the top Maths sets. In London in two-thirds of black students were entered into the lowest tier, where the highest grade they could achieve was a D. In effect, they were marked out for failure before they even sat the paper. (Gillborn, 2008: 96)

Overall previous studies in Britain suggest that many teachers hold low expectations about Black Caribbean children and non-black teachers can have lower expectations of black students compared to White British and Asian students (see Demie, 2019; Demie and Mclean, 2017; Gillborn and Youdell, 2000).

Other studies also reported similar findings and argued that teachers' low expectations were responsible for the underachievement in the USA for African American and Latino students compared to White Europeans. (McKown and Winston, 2008). Ennis' (1998) studies further reported 'that African American students in the USA were academically well engaged in class where students perceived that their teachers had high expectations for them' (see Rubie-Davies et al., 2013 (69: 259). His findings also suggested the students put less effort into classes where they believed that their teachers had low expectations of them.

There are now studies that argue on the academic benefit of the use of a diversified multi-ethnic workforce in schools to reflect the school population. The evidence so far suggests that when the teacher workforce represents different ethnicities equitably, and when Black students were taught by a teacher from the same ethnic background, Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students do better than if they are taught by white teachers with a racist attitude or unconscious bias (Donlevy et al., 2016; Villegas and Irvine, 2010).

Research conducted in the United States (Villegas and Irvine, 2010) suggests teachers from minority backgrounds are particularly likely to:

- 'Have high expectations of the students
- Use culturally relevant teaching (for example, in terms of their use of language
- Develop caring and trusting relationships with students
- Confront issues of racism through teaching
- Serve as advocates for their students, helping them understand and navigate cultural expectations, and may be more willing than their white counterparts to work in schools with high ethnic minorities' (See Milliard et al., 2018: 25)

In a New Zealand study, Rubie-Davies et al. (2013) showed that teachers' expectations were high for European and Asian students when compared with achievement, but not for indigenous Māori. He argued that teachers perform a crucial role in ensuring that the future for these students is as positive as possible, but they have low expectations of other ethnic groups with exception of White European. He argued for the need for high expectations for Māori in New Zealand schooling.

But two key questions that need to be asked from the data given above and a review of literature are as follows: Is low expectation and racism can be the only answer for the reasons to

underachievement of Black Caribbean people in British schools? Why are Black African children performing substantially better than their Caribbean counterparts?

We would argue that while the trend revealed by the data in Figure 1 is cause for concern, raw information, of course, must be viewed with some degree of caution as there is not much context provided such as social class, quality of local schools and parental occupations. The research into the success story of Black African students confirms that it is mostly down to the active role that the families took. This is evident with Nigerian, Ghanaian and Somali parents, and they took in positively reinforcing the importance of education and supporting through their schooling. Some of them are also middle class, professional and high aspiring parents, and they understood the breadth and the importance of the opportunities available to their children in the UK and therefore encouraged them to reach their potential so that they could be successful.

Heidi Mirza (2013) stated in her interview with The Voice newspaper that the different migration patterns of Black African and Black Caribbean people may be a factor. 'There was a large wave of migrants who came to Britain in the 1940s and 1950s from the Caribbean and they tended to find work in blue-collar positions, in factories and on building sites – living in predominately inner-city areas.'

'On the other hand, the majority of Black African migration occurred decades later, and they tended to be more middle-class migrants, more akin to the ideals of university education,' (see The Voice, 2013: 1).

Mirza argued that Caribbean parents have become too reliant on the English education system and need to play a more active role with their children like Black Africans. She argues that: 'Black African parents tend not to rely on English education system, but they use additional tutors for their children to ensure they get good exam grades' (The Voice, 2013: 1).

'We hold schools in such high order that often we defer to education systems. But Caribbean parents need to be more involved. When something is wrong, we need to have a collective voice, to say 'this is wrong' - almost in the fashion of a union.' (The Voice, 2013: 1).

Demie and Mclean (2007) study also attributed the success story of the African students to the high educational aspirations of African parents and strong links with their African communities as one of the main factors why African pupils tend to outperform their peers. He argued that those black African parents and pupils place an extremely high value on, and some have themselves received, a good education and gained professional qualifications either in the UK or in Africa where education is highly valued. African parents tend to use and get a tutor and a mentor to help them out when they are falling behind in their progress. All African parents see good education as the key to their children's future success in life. This is shown in parents' comments:

- 'Africans invest in education because we need it. Back home we do not have the opportunity that these children have. Education makes a way for you'.
- 'My background was such that I wasn't able to go to school due to lack of money. When I sit down with my kids, I tell them I do not want them to have the life I have had. Children now have choices— education is the key. Without education, you cannot earn a decent salary, without qualifications you cannot get a good job. The best thing is to push your children as hard as you can'.

- 'I have taught my children to get an education'. (Demie and Mclean, 2007: 427–428)

This strong value of education and high aspiration for children still remain the key driving forces for parents in supporting their children and schools. They have also argued the importance of home and school early intervention to get students back on track. Many Black African pupils also have parents who went to university in the UK or in Africa or elsewhere. High achievement and aspiration are part of the tradition of their families. Parents still maintain a strong desire for continuing education, and some are doing more graduate degrees after completing the first degree. Partnerships between school and home are actively fostered and maintained by Black African parents. Both teachers and parents have taken responsibility to develop positive outcomes for children learning. There is evidence of a good two-way communication between Black African parents and schools.

It is difficult to compare the African historical experience in the UK who tended to be more middle-class migrants, professional and more akin to the ideals of university education with that of the Black Caribbean, which is affected by class and migration factors who came to work in blue-collar positions, in factories and on building sites – living in predominately inner-city areas. Despite this, Rhamie and Hallam (2010) argued that the parent engagement factor which is seen with Black Africans could be one strategy to change the achievement agendas in England. One key approach they recommended to ensure the Black Caribbean children do well in schools is improving a Home School and Community Model in a British school in which schools' partner with community agencies and allocate resources to provide an 'integrated focus on academics, youth and community development, and community engagement' Rhamie and Hallam, 2010: 164). This should be based on the continuous positive interaction between the home and school where both foster academic excellence and success. This approach recognises the family and community together and they will be responsible to create a 'sense of belonging' and acceptance and fostering achievement and success. It aims also to compensate for low expectations, racism and resources in the school which the Black Caribbean child face in school.

'Academic success for a greater proportion of Black Caribbean children will become a reality when schools, the home and the community work together to develop and nurture academic achievement within a climate of excellence and high expectations.' (Rhamie and Hallam, 2010: 164)

Therefore, we would argue the chance to reach your full academic potential is more about receiving the right support from the parents and within the community as it the case from Black African and Asian students.

Research aims and methods

Overall previous research indicate there is low teacher expectations for Black students compared to White and Asians students in England (Tenenbaum and Ruck, 2007). There is now a growing body of research that confirms teachers expectations of student matter and they can underestimate the academic achievement of student of colour (see Demie 2019; Demie and Mclean 2017; Donlevy et al., 2016; Rubie-Davies et al., 2013; Villegas and Irvine, 2010; Tenenbaum and Ruck 2007). Yet little research has been carried out about the effect of White British teachers' low expectations on the achievement of Black Caribbean students in England.

This research aims to explore teachers expectations of Black Caribbean students in schools. Two research questions guided our study.

1. What are headteachers, teachers, parents, governors and school staff experience with teachers' low expectations of Black Caribbean students?

2. What are the challenges for policy and practice to tackle the low expectations?

Two complementary methodological approaches were adopted to explore performance and the views of headteachers, teachers, governors, parents and school staff, each contributing a particular set of data to the study. Details of the methodological framework are summarised below:

Firstly, an empirical investigation of GCSE was undertaken to draw lessons from the last two decades by examining the achievement of Black Caribbean students in England.

Secondly, case study research was carried out to ascertain headteacher, teachers, parents, governors and school staff views concerning the reasons for teachers' low expectations of Black Caribbean achievement and what practical steps needed to be taken in order to improve their achievement. To select schools and respondents, purposive sampling is used. Purposeful sampling is 'a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources. This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest' (Palinkas et al., 2015: 2). It is a non-random technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. It is also a low-cost, convenient, not time consuming approach for obtaining detailed in-depth information evidence (Bernard, 2002; Cresswell and Plano, 2011; Patton, 2002).

As part of the purposive sampling approach for our study, we conducted interviews with 26 people in 14 case study schools in order to investigate their experiences in education in Inner London. Headteachers had been asked to select at random a mixed group of parents, governors, teachers and school staff for interview.

We would argue that our methodological approach of using a case study is an established research design that is used in various disciplines, particularly in social sciences, to extend the range of information and evidence. It allows a lot of detail to be collected that would not normally be easily obtained by other research designs (see Bassegy, 1999; Bell, 1993; Carey and Asbury, 2016; Demie, 2019; Demie and Mclean, 2017; Stake, 1995). As argued elsewhere,

'The research design is unique for obtaining detailed in-depth information about personal and group feelings, perceptions and opinions, in a way that observation, and questionnaire cannot reveal on their own, and because the findings are so accessible, they can serve a variety of audiences, not only policy makers, school managers and teachers.' (Demie, 2019: 200)

The research into tackling low expectation in schools was conducted in line with the Data Protection Act (2018) and all the interviews and focus group participants were given assurances that their confidentiality and anonymity would be maintained. Thus, schools were given pseudonyms. Care has been taken with all stages of the research process therefore to not only ensure that participants and institutional names remain anonymous, but that the data are kept securely, and individual digital recordings have been deleted or destroyed upon transcription. Headteacher, parents and teachers and staff were given an opportunity at the beginning of their interview to decline from participating once a member of the research team explained the nature of the research.

The findings which emerged from the review of literature, data analysis and case studies are given in the section that follows.

Results

Teachers' low expectations of Black Caribbean students: Headteachers, teachers, parents and school staff experience

Researchers have long highlighted the importance of teacher expectations in facilitating students' learning (De Boer et al, 2018; Rubie-Davies et al., 2013). The studies by Rubie-Davies et al. (2013) and De Boer et al (2018) pointed out that:

'Teachers differed in their average level of expectations for their students in the classroom, and that this was reflected in their teaching behaviour. High-expectation teachers spent more time on providing a framework for students' learning, provided more feedback, questioned their students by using more higher order questions, and managed the students' behaviour more positively compared with the teachers with a low level of average expectations.' (De Boer et al., 2018: 1)

Recent findings suggest that, on average, teachers tend to have negatively biased expectations for the achievement of ethnic minority groups (Demie, 2019; Donlevy et al., 2016; Rubie-Davies et al., 2013; Rubie-Davies et al., 2013; Tenenbaum and Ruck, 2007; Villegas and Irvine, 2010). A number of research studies in the UK also suggested that one of the reasons for the underachievement of Black Caribbean students in schools in England is teachers' low expectations (Demie and Mclean, 2017). Teacher expectations can significantly affect student achievement, and this is now supported by a number of research evidence that confirms that the expectations a teacher sets for an individual pupil can significantly affect the achievement of Black Caribbean pupils (Demie and Mclean 201). Teacher expectations can, for example, be based on students' characteristics such as race, ethnicity and family income level, or indicators of past performance. These expectations can cause teachers to differentiate their behaviour towards individual students, such that teachers set lower expectations for some students, provide briefer (or no) feedback on pupil errors – and less positive feedback after correcting answers – and grant students less time to answer questions or fail to give some students the opportunity to answer. All these teacher low expectations can negatively impact Black Caribbean students' achievement in schools, and it is one of the reasons why we have a big achievement gap between Black Caribbean and White British pupils in the English education system.

There was a mixed response from those we interviewed as to the impact of teachers' expectations on the achievement of Black Caribbean students. A teacher who is of Caribbean recalled that her own teachers had very high expectations of her success:

'I was an Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) child, born and brought up in Islington and went to Girls' School. My partner grew up in Tottenham at the same time as me. He didn't do well at school and didn't go to College or University, whereas I did. High expectations are embedded in you early on – this expectation came from my teachers.'
(Parent D)

Nevertheless, she recognised that this is not the case with some teachers:

'I remember hearing a Black teacher say, 'she doesn't need to go to University'. I said, 'hang on, would you say that if the child was called Annabel'? We should make any child feel that they can go to University. For me, I did not expect my child to do anything other than go to University.' (Parent D)

A number of people interviewed spoke about how they were told by teachers that they would not stand a chance of getting to University or having a career:

'In the 6th form at parents evening, my mum was told that someone like my sister stood no chance of getting to University. She was extremely clever and went on to get

unconditional offers from a number of Universities.' (Parent E)

'My father is black, and my mum is white, and I was brought up by my dad. Teachers told me I wouldn't get anywhere. It knocked my self-esteem and knocked my belief.' (Deputy Head D)

'My friend's child wanted to do A level English, but her teacher did not accept that she was capable of achieving this – she went on to get an A*.' (School Governor F)

'The Careers Adviser said I wouldn't amount to anything and wanted me to go for a lowlevel job, but I thought 'no way.' (Parent D)

When we asked our case study participants if they felt that low teacher expectations were a contributory factor in the underachievement of Black Caribbean students, there was some variation in experience depending where in England, they had attended school. For example, a parent who grew up in West Yorkshire in the 1980s noted:

'I did not feel I was treated any differently as a black pupil because of my race. There was no racism from teachers it was mainly from students in contrast to London schools where there is institutional racism. I think people in London schools have a certain expectation of black students as being less clever and under-achieving.' (Parent C)

This view was born out by a teacher who recalled her own experience of racism and her teachers' low expectations of Black students at a secondary school in the 1970s:

'Racism was overt from teachers and students... Although I had won an 11+ prize I was taken out of the Maths group because we were deemed not to be able to do Maths, even though we were in the top class. I wasn't allowed to go into the 6th form. I wanted to do journalism, but my teacher told my parents that he didn't think I would be successful in it. They were gullible and didn't know the system. In my class there were two Black girls, in the lower sets they were dominated by black students. These students have gone on to be very successful in later life. My teacher told my parents I had to do typewriting and office studies and I was just broken by then. I was young and didn't know how to maneuver through the obstacles in my way. Mum was defensive of us even though she didn't know the system.' (Teacher U)

A Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCOs) teacher who grew up in an army school and attended many different schools in Germany and England stated:

‘I was usually the only black girl with two black parents. School didn’t have high expectations of me, and they almost put me in a special school at age seven years. I woke up at that point and said ‘No, I am not doing that!’ (Teacher and SENCo G)

A Black Caribbean teacher governor in a boarding school in Sussex remarked on the low expectations of supply agency staff who do not expect the Black students at his school to be polite:

‘They do not expect much of the students. Some staff, maybe through fear, do not challenge negative behavior.’ (Teacher/Governor V)

‘I do a radio programme and the person I was interviewing complained about the low expectation that teachers have of children in primary schools – even children as young as 5, 6 and 7 years. The problem starts at primary school.’ (School Governor S)

He continued...

‘You need a staff team who understand the children and expect a lot of them. High expectations – you should believe in them.’ (School Governor S)

In some schools’ students faced different expectations according to the ethnicity of their teachers as the following comment by a parent illustrated:

‘In Year 2 my son had a black, female teacher. She just had high expectations for all the children, and he blossomed for the next two years. Then in Year 4 he had a white teacher who was disinterested.’ (Parent H)

A former Vice Principal of a secondary school in London who was born in Brixton and whose parents were from Guyana added his own experiences of teachers’ low expectations of Black Caribbean students at his grammar school in Battersea in the 1980s:

‘I was amongst the first generation born and educated in this country. Even though I was able to get into grammar school, I remember one incident stood out. I think it affects visible minorities. We had a teacher from Rhodesia who commented to a white pupil ‘People like you should not misbehave because one day you will be leading this country’. From this I gathered I would not be running the country! This is a reason why people get discouraged, they have anglicised names, speak with an English accent and you can see this in operation at interview, they think you are going to be white – from then on you are judged by the colour of your tan.’ (Former Vice Principal, Church leader N)

The Black Caribbean parents we interviewed compared expectations of teachers in their children’s schools unfavorably with their own experiences of attending schools in the Caribbean. For example, a Trinidadian parent who is a Senior Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) Commissioner in a London borough explained how teachers’ expectations are lower here for her own children:

'My son was in Year 2 doing some spellings. I came from a school where you learned tables by rote. We were learning ten spellings with him. He got to a tricky word, and he said 'Mum, I don't need to get it right because I will get a sticker if I get one or two wrong'. In his mind that was good enough. That got me worried because back home in Trinidad you'd never do that you would be aiming to get 10/10!' (Parent E)

Despite her children attending what are regarded as the best schools in their LA, she arranged for privation tuition for them both:

'I got a tutor for my daughter in Year 5 and my son has had a tutor from Year 3, for English, Maths and reasoning. He is a child who has to be told every day to do his homework. He plays football but my thing is you need to study. When we talk about careers, he says he wants to be a footballer. I say, fine, but you need to be able to read to be able to check your contract! I suggested he become a Sports Doctor! Back in Trinidad I do not think I would have to struggle so much to get his homework done because they would push him more at school.' (Parent E)

A parent governor, who was born in the UK but sent to live with an aunt in Jamaica when she was 9 years old, felt she was better off having been educated in Jamaica:

'I went to live in Jamaica when I was nine years old. My mother died and my father couldn't cope with four children, so my sister and I were sent over to Jamaica to live with an aunt. I was living in a small rural place. I adapted. Looking back as an adult, I wasn't properly prepared. My aunt had been widowed after 25 years of marriage and she also fostered children. I was just one of the family and you just get on. I stayed in Jamaica until after my A levels and came back to the UK for my tertiary education, to my father and siblings. Looking at what I saw among Black Caribbean in the UK, their aspirations seemed low, people didn't think they were able or capable. In Jamaica if you want to be Prime Minister then you could, whereas here there was a ceiling. In Jamaica I developed confidence and a 'can do' attitude because expectations were high. Here is a stark contrast as my cousins didn't even think of going to University.'

(Parent Governor F)

A father, who was educated in Jamaica, contrasted his own schooling in Jamaica (where he said his teachers had the highest expectations of students) with his own experience with his son at school in London:

'The first time I realised how ingrained these low expectations are here with teachers, I had to face this with my own son. He had an operation when he was three years old, and this affected his attendance at school. He had 50% attendance because he wasn't well, and the school was contemplating taking legal action. An intervention was made but as this played itself out so many things came out. At secondary school, although my son was only attending 50% of the time he was still getting 'A's and 'B's but the school suggested that my son attend a school for excluded students. Why on earth would you put a child like this with excluded students?' (Parent K)

‘Looking at the situation here in the UK I wonder could it be the subtle messages that students get here that cause them to give up? I have considered this. I remember an incident at my high school with a teacher who insulted us by saying ‘you cannot do it’. I took her to task by getting 100% - she didn’t last long at the school either. I think probably there was such a strength of feeling in our class that we were expecting to learn, to do well, that if someone came in who didn’t expect us to do well, and wasn’t up to the mark themselves, then we wouldn’t take it.’ (Parent M)

‘By the time I found out about the issue it was too late for me to do anything about it. Low expectations and poor communication failed my child. I believe low expectations are institutional.’ (Parent T)

‘In primary schools they broaden children’s horizons, but they shut them down in secondary schools. If we as teachers spoke more in every lesson, that we explain the purpose of what we are doing, then students will understand. When you teach to examinations you miss the point. By Year 10, they should have an idea of what they are going to do. At least have it as ‘I want to go to China’. If their horizons were opened up there might not be such a situation in education. There are teachers who have worked in industry before going into teaching and they do this. It’s a good thing to share this with students and they can relate to the person in front of them – kids love to hear about my interesting life.’ (Teacher and Parent L)

Teachers need greater knowledge about students of Black Caribbean background. They need to know the history of Britain’s involvement in the slave trade, the circumstances which led up to the arrival of people from the Caribbean to the UK and what challenges they faced, such as racism, difficulty in finding housing and employment and which many continue to face today.

Teachers who are keen to work in schools in inner-city areas should receive higher remuneration and housing to retain their services, as a highly professional, experienced staff team is essential for the stability of students whose lives are otherwise chaotic.

‘You need to have a very good team, experienced professionals. Schools simply cannot cope with the challenges students are facing.’ (Educational Psychologist W)

A school governor summed up the views of many:

‘You need a staff team who understand the children and expect a lot of them. High expectations, you should believe in them.’ (School Governor S)

There was a recent example of a headteacher not being mindful of her own stereotyping which caused offence to a Black Caribbean parent, as the following example illustrated:

‘When I went to the school, the teacher was there with the Headteacher and caretaker. The Headteacher asked me to come to her office for a chat. She asked me ‘what Council Estate do you live in?’ ‘Are you a single mother?’ She said: ‘sometimes when children come from single parent families and live on an estate, they are a lot rougher. I told

her that you are extremely racist in what you are saying. I am in education myself and am educated. I asked why all the black children were sitting on one table and being given different homework. My son's teacher was white, from outside London and was totally unable to relate to black children.' (Parent H)

Another parent voiced her concerns about the over-emphasis on slavery in the History curriculum:

'Black History Month – I always raise this with schools; I ask them what they do. They said, 'I am doing slavery' and I said I don't want this, I want something with positive role models. I said you don't have any black positive role models here! So, they employed a Black teacher in my child's class. I said they need black teachers in other classes too.' (Parent I)

Another key reason for low expectation of Black Caribbean children is related to institutional racism. In our case study and school visits, we asked, 'do you believe institutional racism is a factor in the underachievement of Black Caribbean students'?

'Absolutely! How many black policemen have we got, or how many black teachers have we got? You can imagine the difficulties they would face if they joined the police force. I suspect strongly if you went back to the 1970s there would have been teachers who had one or two black children in their class, and they would be called racist names. Racism was probably rife in the 1960s and 1970s. They had an expectation that children were going to be difficult. They expected bad attitudes. It comes right back to people thinking black people are inferior. Even now in parts of this country they think the same.' (Headteacher X)

'When I attended school there were one or two incidents where teachers' behaviour towards a pupil was deemed to be racially motivated. What teachers tend to do is label students. It can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. This has an impact on the black school experience than other ethnic groups' (Parent B)

'Racism does still exist in some parts of London, particularly on white estates in London; in large white areas.' (Headteacher Y)

'I have lived in London for 20 twenty years. ...Racism exists in all. Sometimes I see a bit of racism of West Indians against Africans. As far as parents are concerned, I am quite racist if I tell a black child off and not a white... as they see it.' (Headteacher Y)

A Headteacher governor spoke about her own experiences of institutional racism in schools in the 1980s and 1990s:

'I was teaching in an RC school. The substantive post was going to be advertised. I went to see the Headteacher and spoke to her about my interest in the post. She didn't encourage me to apply. I didn't say anything, but I spoke to my friend who was an Inspector when she visited the school and she told me I needed to move on and get promotion elsewhere. I didn't bother to apply in view of what had happened.' (school governor Q)

However, this wasn't the end of the story, she continued...

‘Several generations of people are told you shouldn’t achieve... you cannot go to University... you have no reason to aspire. Your child is told this and their child the same. That’s a bigger barrier to overcome than for a new immigrant. My hypothesis is if you have been subjected to racism over several generations then this is going to make your hopes and dreams more difficult.’ (School Governor Q)

A School Governor who has been involved in a College of postgraduate students said:

‘There you would think there was no issue with Black Caribbean underachievement. Students from London with Black Caribbean and Asian background formed 40% of our students. The issue was not so much underachievement as they were academically successful but finding it difficult to move on to the next stage of becoming lawyers. I started to look in more detail. I was aware that there were a series of institutional barriers, i.e., being in the right place at the right time with the right people at the right time.’ (School Governor P)

Parents and Headteachers also pointed out that racism still exists that there is a need to tackle heads on:

‘Racism is almost an integral part of this society. An article I read in the newspaper talked about a lady who applied for thousands of jobs and didn’t get an interview and she decided to change her name and made it sound English! There is a lot of stereotyping especially of Black Caribbean boys – especially in the media. If they are showing a black man, they would just choose someone with braided hair and earrings, and this reinforces stereotypes.’ (Parent A)

‘Racism in society is still an issue. Currently it is blatant racism. My daughter works in the same school where she was a pupil, and I am a governor in this Infants’ school. A child came in with some sweets and said they are not for the black children’. My daughter told her to take them back to her mother and tell her to give out the sweets outside the school gate at the end of the day. Another teaching assistant queried why she had said this, and my daughter said, ‘this is a Roman Catholic school and there is no place for racism here.’ (Headteacher Z)

‘Institutional racism is a major issue that affects the achievement of Black Caribbean students.’ (Education Psychologist W)

One would have hoped that institutional racism was a thing of the past, but our findings show that this is not the case. Indeed, the extent of institutional racism was highlighted by a former British Prime Minister who rattled Oxford University when he described its low intake of black students as ‘disgraceful’. Oxford University actually took one ‘Black Caribbean’ person out of a total of 27 black students for undergraduate study in 2009. Nevertheless, everyone seemed to agree with his assertion: ‘*We have got to do better than that*’. In January 2016, further writing in the Sunday Times, about race bias in Universities, he said:

‘Discrimination should shame our country and jolt us to action. I don’t care whether it’s overt, unconscious or institutional; we’ve got to stamp it out.’ (David Cameron, British Prime Minister, 2016)

We agree with the former Prime Minister about the need to challenge racism in education. We would also argue further that institutional racism is one of the factors for low expectation of black students in English schools, and it is important it is challenged if we want to make a difference in the education of black students in Britain.

Discussion

The educating of Black Caribbean students in the UK has historically endured challenges. In the line of previous studies, the data shows that Black Caribbean underachievement is real and persistent with consistently low levels of attainment, and the difference between their performance and other ethnic groups. This study also reveals that significant literature has emerged in relation to the experience of Black Caribbean student's schooling and underachievement, and yet very little consideration has been devoted to understanding Black Caribbean students' experiences of teacher low expectations within education.

Overall, our evidence from the case study interviews reveals the extent to which racial inequalities still mark the lives of Black and ethnic students in British schools. They also show how parents themselves frequently faced crude and overt racism during their childhoods. Parents with whom we spoke identified a number of challenges they had to address during the school career of their children, including low expectations on the part of teachers, racism and institutional racism, and stereotypes of Black students and parents. They also argued the form of racism they faced was a feature in their children's lives and manifestations of racism in schools were now more likely to be subtle. A number of parents interviewed took their concerns to the headteacher and challenged the school when they perceived there to be issues of inequality and racism. However, the evidence also shows that some teachers and headteachers were reluctant to name race and institutional racism explicitly even issues are raised. They are defensive because it may cause trouble in schools.

The evidence from the people interviewed also suggests teachers are not always provided with the tools to address racism or promote equality in the classroom environment, either through initial teacher training or CPD. Most of the teachers had received little or no education with regards to tackling racism or promoting race equality whilst training or teaching. As a result, they do not have the knowledge, skills or resources to be able to deal with these issues in the classroom. Our study highlights that there is a need for widespread training, including in-service training to empower educators in England with the skills and knowledge required to consider issues of race equality in their lesson planning and delivery; to value and acknowledge differences and similarities amongst their students; to tackle racism and to create an environment of openness. Schools have a key responsibility to actively support and engage in raising the expectations of all children to achieve their potential irrespective of their race.

We would also argue that the case study evidence supports the conventional wisdom that teacher expectations matter and BAME pupils are likely to receive lower calculated teacher assessment grades compared to their White British peers. We also find that White British teachers, who comprise 86% of the vast majority of educators in the English education system, have far lower expectations for black pupils than they do for similarly situated white pupils (Demie and Mclean 2017). This evidence suggests that raising pupil's attainment, improving teacher expectations, eliminating racial inequality and hiring a more diverse teaching force are worthy approaches to tackle low expectations in schools.

Conclusions

This article has looked into the views of teachers, parents, governors and school staff about the reasons for underachievement and the effect of teacher low expectations. We conducted interviews with 26 people in order to investigate their experiences in education in Inner London schools. The people we interviewed reported that they had experienced low expectation and racism as Black students in varying forms in school and that teacher low expectation and institutional racism is one of the factors that hindered the achievement of Black Caribbean students. Many pointed out the forms of teachers' low expectations which have contributed to this underachievement, and which manifested itself most harshly in the form of being overlooked for answering questions, harsher reprimands, racist stereotyping, low ability grouping and exclusions. This still persists and teacher low expectations and race equality is an issue for all schools in England.

There are many reasons to challenge low expectations and racism and promote race equality in schools. The school teaching workforce is predominantly White British, and they may feel out of their depth tackling racial issues due to their background and lack of understanding of discrimination, racism and diversity issues (Demie and Mclean 2017). As a result, research has shown that black students are disciplined more frequently, more harshly and for less serious misbehaviour and that they are less likely to be praised than other students.

The headteachers, parents, teachers, governors and education psychologists' interviews also suggest that racism in society is still an issue, and it is a major factor that affects the achievement of Black Caribbean students. Schools should ensure that the teaching ethos of the school is reflected in the different cultures of the community served by society. It is also important schools promote equality and diversity in the classroom to address racial inequality. We would argue that there is a need for equality classes to become a key part of teacher training courses in a bid to reflect the growing diversity of British schools, but research shows that in England teachers are not always provided with the tools to address racism or promote equality in the classroom environment, either through initial teacher training or CPD.

Recommendations and implications for policy and practice

The research findings of this study have implications for policy and practice. We would argue that this research paper provides valuable insights and shows the need to address teacher expectations of Black Caribbean students in educational practice. Clearly, the current approach is unacceptable from a social justice perspective, and we hope that the use of the findings of our research might help to contribute to putting the issue of teacher low expectation and racism back on the map for education policy and teacher education. To tackle these issues, we would suggest a number of recommendations for government policymakers and practitioners.

There is evidence from our research there is a lack of an inclusive curriculum in schools. The government needs a curriculum that reflects Britain's rich cultural diversity and challenges institutional racism. We would argue that in the British context, multicultural education should be the main vehicle for addressing educational inequalities of different racial, ethnic and social-class groups. It should place an emphasis on equality of opportunities with the curriculum on offer being inclusive and provided by a teaching workforce that reflects the diversity of the community the school serves. The curriculum should also provide students with knowledge about the histories, cultures and contributions of all groups. A number of other researchers have also arrived at a similar conclusion (Demie, 2019; Gillborn, 2008)

There are also recommendations for schools. It is important that all children in English school systems are able to achieve their potential, whatever their ethnic and cultural background. Schools should challenge low expectations and racism using a diverse multi-ethnic

workforce that reflects the community served by the school. The evidence from this also suggests that diversity in the school workforce is particularly critical for those schools where there is a high number of ethnic minority children and there is a need to develop strong recruitment, retention and promotion for black staff in school.

The evidence from our study and elsewhere also makes a case for teachers training and educational programme to be more deliberate about preparing White British teachers for multicultural education and to teach students from all ethnic backgrounds. It is important that all teachers have access to robust and quality Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training to meet the educational needs of black students and understand the importance of race equality (Riley et al., 2019). There should be also unconscious bias training for all staff in the school including headteachers, teachers, governors, as well as learning support and office staff. Such training and initiatives, as argued by researchers that looked into Whiteness, racism, ethnic diversity and education (see Farine-Wu et al., 2020 and Riley et al., 2019) will help White teachers to prepare to work in multicultural schools and to improve their knowledge on race and diversity while meeting the varying academic needs of ethnically diverse students. We also recommend more training that focus on exploration of systematic racial biases and explicit racial behaviours and how they manifested in organisations, training on white privilege that relates to the workforce, good practice training on race equality in education and training on understanding multicultural education and the importance of diversity and anti-racism and inclusive curriculum training for teachers and school leaders. Such training not only useful for white teachers but also help in improving awareness of racism and diversity in any organisations that related to education.

Future research agenda

Finally, the evidence from this study suggests that institutional racism plays a key role, and unconscious prejudices affect the way they are disciplined by Black Caribbean students and how their work is assessed at school. Our study on teachers' low expectations, racism and its negative impact on Black Caribbean students are not complete. One of the weaknesses of this study is its small scale. The case study was designed as an in-depth scoping exercise in order to examine some of the issues in relation to teacher low expectations that we felt were emerging from the literature and from our professional interactions with the Black community and working with multicultural schools in London. There is a need for more research into the impact of unconscious bias and teachers' expectations on educational outcomes of Black Caribbean and BAME pupils in English schools. There is a need also for more good practice research in tackling racism including institutional and systematic racism. We also do not have good practice research evidence that teachers and schools can use to address race equality in education and multicultural education, inclusive curriculum, and diversity in the UK.

There are also other limitations to this study. It was not possible to explore the link between low expectations and race, gender, and social background/class factor as part of the research due to lack of funding. Further research is therefore recommended.

Acknowledgements

This paper's research evidence is derived from the recent research project into '*Black Caribbean Underachievement in British Schools.*' The Author would like to acknowledge that all the extracts and the quotations used in this article from this internal report is with kind permission of the Authors listed below.

References

- Banks, J. A. (1997). Multicultural Education: Characteristics and Goals. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks, (Eds.). *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (pp. 3-31). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Coard, B. (1971). *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System*. London: New Beacon Books.
- Crozier, G. (2005). There's a war against our children': black educational underachievement revisited. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26 (5),585-598.
- Cresswell, JW and Plano VL. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed method research*. 2nd Sage. Thousand Oaks, California.
- Demie (2019). Raising achievement of black Caribbean pupils: good practice for developing leadership capacity and workforce diversity in schools. *Journal School Leadership & Management*, 39 (1), 5-25.
- Demie, F. (2015). *The Underachievement of Black Caribbean Heritage Pupils in Schools: Research Brief*. Retrieved on from, https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/rsu/sites/www.lambeth.gov.uk/rsu/files/The_Underachievement_of_Black_Caribbean_Heritage_Pupils_in_Schools-Research_Brief.pdf
- Demie, F. and Mclean, C. (2017a). Black Caribbean Underachievement in Schools in England. London: Schools Research and Statistics Unit, Lambeth LA.
- Demie, F. and Mclean, C. (2017b). The Achievement of Black Caribbean Pupils: Good practice London: Schools Research and Statistics Unit, Lambeth LA.
- Demie, F and Mclean, C. (2007). Raising the achievement of African heritage pupils: a case study of good practice in British schools *Educational Studies*, 33 (4): 415-434
- De Boer, H., Timmermans, A., Werf, M (2018). The effects of teacher expectation interventions on teachers' expectations and student achievement: narrative review and meta-analysis. *Educational Research and Evaluation : An International Journal on Theory and Practice*, 24(3-5),180-200.
- Donlevy, V., Meierkord, A., & Rajania, A. (2016). Study on the Diversity within the Teaching Profession with Particular Focus on Migrant and/or Minority Background. European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture Education and Training. Luxembourg.
- Farine-Wu, A.; Alvarez, A and Allen-Handy, A. (2020). The 'I' in Identity: A White Future Teacher Confronts Race in an Urban School, *Whiteness and Education* 5(1), 112-129, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23793406.2019.1711149>

- Gershenson, S., Hart, C. M. D., Lindsay, C. A., & Papageorge, N. W. (2017). The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers. *Institute of Labor Economics*, (10630), 1–65. Retrieved from <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10630.pdf>
- Gillborn, D. (2008). *Racism and Education: Coincidence or conspiracy?* London: Taylor and Frances press.
- Gillborn, D. & Youdell, D. (2000). *Rationing Education: Policy, Practice, Reform and Equity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gillborn, D. and Mirza, H.S. (2000). *Educational Inequality: Mapping Race and Class*. London: OFSTED.
- Macpherson, W. (1999). *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*. London: the Stationery Office.
- Maylor, U., Smart, S., Kuyok, K.A. & Ross, A. (2009). *Black Childrens' Achievement Programme Evaluation*. London: Department for Children and Schools.
- McKown, C., & Weinstein, R. S. (2008). Teacher expectations, classroom context, and the achievement gap. *Journal of School Psychology*, 46, 235–261.
- Milliard, W.; Brown-Viner, K.; Baars, S.; Tretheway, A and Menzi, L. (2018). *Boys on Track Improving support for Black Caribbean and Free School Meal Eligible White Boys in London A research report*. London: Greater London Authority (GLA), Retrieved on from https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/lkmco_boys_on_track_report.pdf
- Rampton, A. (1981). *West Indian Children in Our Schools*. London: HMSO.
- Rhamie, J. and Hallam, S. (2010). An Investigation into African-Caribbean Academic Success in the UK, 5(2), 151-170)
- Richardson, B. (2005). *Tell It Like It Is: How our Schools Fail Black Children*. Bath: Bath Press.
- Riley, T., Monk, S. and Vanlssum, H. (2019). Barriers and breakthroughs: engaging in socially just ways towards issues of indigeneity, identity, and whiteness in teacher education *Whiteness and Education*, 4(1) 88-107
- Rubie-Davies, C.M., Peterson, E., Flint, A., Garrett, L., McDonald, L., Watson, P., O'Neill, H. (2013). Investigating teacher expectations by ethnicity in New Zealand. *The European Journal of Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 69,256–261.
- Patton MQ. (2002), *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 3rd Sage Publications; Thousand Oaks, California [Google Scholar]

Tenenbaum, H. R., & Ruck, M. D. (2007). Are teachers' expectations different for racial minority than for European American students? A meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*, 253–273.

The Voice (2013). Why Are British Africans Better In School Than Caribbeans?

<https://archive.voice-online.co.uk/article/why-are-british-africans-better-school-caribbeans>

Stake, R.E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Strand, S. (2012). The White British-Black Caribbean Achievement Gap: tests, tiers, and teacher expectations. *British Educational Research Journal, 38* (1), 75-101.

Swann, Lord (1985). *Education for All: Final Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups*. London, HMSO.

Villegas, A. M., & Irvine, J. J. (2010). *Diversifying the Teaching Force: An Examination of Major Arguments*. *Urban Review, 42*(3), 175–192.