

# Understanding the literature in the United Kingdom on racially minoritised young children, families, and practitioners in early childhood education and care

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**Abstract:** There is a plethora of research evidence that good ECEC is critical for young children to thrive and to have positive long-term outcomes. This is of particular importance for young children in the UK from racially minoritised communities who tend to have poorer educational outcomes with disadvantage magnified into adulthood. Against this backdrop, we wanted to develop a better understanding of the amount of UK academic literature that focussed on racially minoritised young children, their families, and practitioners. To do this we undertook a PRISMA scoping review to develop a systematic list of articles, books, and reports published up to 1.11.2024 on the following databases - JSTOR, Web of Science, and SCOPUS. Using key search terms we sourced 1,387 items. The first review reduced this to 55 items and further investigations resulted in exclusion of those items that did not meet our key search terms; this left 24 books, articles, and reports. These were categorised thematically as: anti racist practice, children's experience, culture, de/colonial play, Fundamental British Values, identity, inclusion, inequality, racism, and workforce. We took a storytelling approach to tell four stories: racism and inequality, policy and practice, children's experiences and children's rights. Our analysis and discussion employed Critical Race Theory to understand how racism impacted the research in the articles, and what the literature reveals about ECEC pedagogy and practice. We make suggestions for future researchers, providing encouragement to expand the canon of literature and develop research and outputs that addresses, dismantles, and challenges systemic racism in ECEC.

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## Introduction

This article reports the findings of a small funded project which undertook a review of the academic literature that was available on the JSTOR, Web of Science, and SCOPUS databases to develop a clearer understanding of extant research that had a focus on young children under 5 from Black and Global Majority heritages in United Kingdom (UK) Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). To set the wider context our rationale for this research was linked to the UK's colonial legacies which have shaped both the diversity found in the population, and has provided a difficult legacy for those from racially minoritised Black and Global Majority heritages who have either migrated to, or were born in, the UK (Houston, 2018; Race & Lander, 2014). In recent years global politics have firmly shifted to the right, with a rise in radical right wing political discourses. In Europe, these discourses have refocussed nationalist politics, racism, and the demonisation of migrants and refugees (Akkerman et al., 2016; Rooduijn, 2015; Swank & Betz, 2018). The UK has not been isolated from these debates and in 2024 there was an election where the Labour party won a large majority from the incumbent Conservative party, with Reform UK emerging as the radical right party with a primary focus on anti-immigration (Borger, 2025) and deportation Jones (2025). During 2025, in an attempt to stem the potential flow of voters to the nationalist Reform UK party, the Labour

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government has been surrounded by rumours the Prime Minister Keir Starmer might consider negotiating the UK's application of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (Elgot, 2025), which some have argued, has hindered the removal of migrants who are not granted 'a leave to remain' status in the UK.

It is within this contemporary socio-political contest that our article builds on Vini's research on race and racialisation in English Initial Teacher Education, where she focused on teachers who worked with children in compulsory schooling (between the ages of 5 and 18 years). Her briefing paper on racial inequity post Covid-19 highlighted a paucity of UK academic literature about families from Black and Global Majority heritages with young children under 5 years in Early Childhood Education and Care (Lander et al., 2021). Her research was the catalyst for our project and in this article we argue that the limited academic focus is due to two reasons. The first is linked to wider colonial and settler colonial legacies, and right-wing political discourses that invoke long held racist tropes. These discourses and tropes racially marginalise and other those who do not 'assimilate' into the prevailing culture (Bhopal, 2018; Mirza, 2018; Race & Lander, 2014; Warmington, 2024). Furthermore, colonial and settler colonial tropes also impact the ways in which ECEC practitioners from Black and Global Majority heritages are perceived, racially minoritised, and othered in ECEC settings (Sakr & Tembo, 2022; Tembo, 2021b). The second is linked to child development where understandings of young children have focussed on developmental psychology via a set of universalists, essentialised Eurocentric measures that all young children need to meet (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Taylor, 2015; Robinson & Díaz, 2005). These measures are based on logics that create an 'othering' of children outside of White Eurocentric norms (Fairchild & Lander, 2021). Given the rise in radical right discourses now is the time to understand what academic literature already exists as this could encourage more academics and students to pay attention to the ways in which young children and practitioners from Black and Global Majority heritages are marginalised in academic articles and wider discussions and teach their students about these disparities\*. Therefore the overarching research question for our study was: "What is the extent of the published academic literature in the UK focussing on ECEC research that includes Black and Global majority heritages?" Our sub questions were: "Who does this literature include (children, practitioners, parents and carers)?" and "How might this literature be used to understand ECEC practice?"

### **Background of Early Childhood Education and Care in the UK: Pedagogical Approaches**

The UK is composed of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. These devolved nations have similar perspectives on ECEC where provision is available for children from birth to five years but there are small nuances in the different national curricula. There are a diverse range of pedagogical approaches (e. g. Montessori, Froebel, Reggio Emilia) available, with ECEC pedagogy generally taking a child-centred and developmentally appropriate play-based approach (Wall et al., 2015). In England this is underpinned by a curriculum framework, the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Department for Education [DfE], 2024a). The EYFS (DfE, 2024a) is premised on inclusive practice and based on other legal frameworks, for example the Equality Act (HM Government, 2010) nationally, and the United National Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 1990) globally. These policies when combined with dominant conceptualisations of child development have contributed to wider understandings of children's agency, learning and development (Marsh et al., 2019). However, in the EYFS (DfE, 2024a) race is only mentioned once when linked to the Equality Act 2010 and there is a sentence in the introduction which encourages "Equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported." (p. 5). Interestingly there is no explicit information about supporting young children from Black or Global Majority heritages, or encouragement for addressing cultural differences in the EYFS (DfE, 2024a). However, there is another sector developed document, Birth to Five Matters (Early Years Coalition, 2021) which is explicit about race and racism, but as this is non-statutory it is impossible to know how many ECEC practitioners engage with it and use it in their daily practice. Murriss (2016) has

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\* Encouraging ECEC practitioners to be aware of the disparities in outcomes for children from Black and Global Majority heritages is an equity issue given that "where ethnicity was known, 18% of 3 and 4-year-olds registered for the 30-hour entitlement were from an ethnic minority (excluding White minorities) background, lower than the 29% registered for the 15-hour entitlement. In comparison, 31% of 2-year-olds registered for the 15-hour entitlement were from an ethnic minority background." (DfE, 2024b, n. p.).

argued that curriculum documents provide a narrower Eurocentric view of both the cultural and relational nature of learning, pedagogy, and development for young children. It is interesting to note that the outcome of developmentalist pedagogical perspectives produces a homogenisation of children, creating a hierarchy that focuses on cognitive outcomes favouring children from white more financially and culturally privileged families. These perspectives and conceptualisations also position young children as innocent and unaware of racial bias (Robinson & Díaz, 2005). However, what has become clear from the limited research there is, young children are very aware of racial difference, and this can be manifested in their interactions, behaviour, play, and culture (Houston, 2018; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001).

### **Contemporary Development of ECEC Provision to Reduce Inequality**

There have been a range of UK government funded programmes that aimed to tackle post-industrial social and economic disadvantage and ensure better outcomes for all children. Unfortunately, even with successful programmes, such as Sure Start that provided focussed multiprofessional universal services via Children's Centres (Fairchild & Mikuska, 2024; House of Commons Library, 2017), long-term positive impacts for children from Black and Global Majority heritages were not always fully realised (Houston, 2006). There have also been debates about how to raise the issue of racism in ECEC that allows for productive discussions about its impact on young children, families, and practitioners (Lane, 2008a, 2008b). These have included the ways in which the voices of those from Black and Global Minority heritages had not been part of the burgeoning ECEC policy debates in England in the early 2000's (Kwalhi, 2006). From a contemporary perspective there is a plethora of research evidence that good ECEC is critical for young children to thrive and to have positive long-term outcomes (Melhuish & Gardiner, 2021; Taguma et al., 2012). In addition, Mikuska & Raffai (2018) argue that it is important to ensure ECEC includes teaching on minoritised cultural heritages, including the importance of cherishing family's native language. Commissioned reports have indicated that access to high quality ECEC is of particular importance for Black and Global Majority heritage young children (La Valle et al., 2022), mostly as these racially minoritised children tend to have poorer educational outcomes with disadvantage magnified into adulthood especially at the intersections of social class, race, ethnicity, and poverty (Li, 2021).

### **Setting the Context: Contemporary Socio-Political Issues**

Global geopolitical shifts have resulted in more right-wing forms of government, and negative political and media portrayals of diversity, equality and inclusion. The impact of this has changed, and some would argue, fractured social consciousness and cohesion. These issues have been conflated with societal and social practices which Bhopal (2018) argued "reinforces the position of whites at the expense of disadvantaging those from black and minority ethnic backgrounds" (p. 5). In June 2016, the UK Brexit referendum resulted in the decision to leave the European Union. Since then, the ramifications of Brexit have polarised and divided perspectives and socio-political debates, producing both political and social turmoil. The consequences of this decision have included a rise in the reporting of hate crime (Bhopal, 2018), and a national debate on immigration which has taken an overtly racist overtone. Resultant post-Brexit challenges included the aftermath of the Windrush saga where long term Black citizens who had lived in the UK since they were children, had been denied UK citizenship (Bhopal, 2018; Houston, 2018) and negative media reports that have vilified people of racially minoritised Black and Global Minority heritages.

As University lecturers from the University of Portsmouth and Leeds Beckett University who teach ECEC practitioners, those who work with children and families, and primary school teachers, we wanted to develop a better understanding of the volume of UK academic literature that had a focus on racially minoritised Black and Global Majority heritage young children, their families, and practitioners. We hoped this would give an indication of the body of work that might be used in higher education learning and teaching strategies, as this could indicate how future ECEC practitioners conceptualise the experiences of Black and Global Majority young children and build an anti-racist lens into their ECEC teaching practices. We had doubts that there was limited literature and research on race and race inequality that focussed on UK contexts, pedagogy, curriculum, and teaching practices. Our rationale for the funded project was to

develop a better understanding of the extant literature and we were able to complete this review thanks to winning funding from the University of Portsmouth to undertake a systematic literature review. This article will be the first to scope the UK academic literature that focuses on UK ECEC research on and with children and their families from racially minoritised Black and Global Majority heritages. We argue a deeper understanding of what is available in the field is urgently required, particularly given some of the global and local prevailing socio-political challenges and discourses.

### **Critical Race Theory as a Theoretical Framework**

We use Critical Race Theory (CRT) as our theoretical framework for this article. CRT provides the structure to unpick the ways racism and racialisation circulate in societal and day to day interactions. Later in this article CRT is used to analyse the data found during the literature search. To define terms racialisation is the process by which the notions of race and racism become meaningful and are present in everyday occurrences, speech and thinking. Garner (2017) highlighted:

'Race' is about categorisation and classification. Racism is about differential outcomes of these classificatory and categorising practices. Racialisation, however, is the process by which the classification and categorisation takes place: therefore it is ongoing. The racialised group is the outcome of this process (p. 24-25).

Yusoff (2018) traced how racialised language can be related back to colonialism, settler colonialism, and enslavement where blackness was a marker of the ways that people from Black and Global Majority heritages were treated as less-than-human and seen as 'property'. To counter the stories and narratives of racism, CRT grew in prominence, initially in the USA with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950's and 1960's (Taylor, 2009). It recognised "the relationship between knowledge, naming and power" (Taylor, 2009, p. 4) and how this could be employed to interrogate systemic societal structures of racial inequality. Intersectionality was the term developed and introduced by Crenshaw in 1989. She highlighted how racial inequalities were magnified by other social structures of power such as gender, social class, disability, and sexuality (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989).

The first tenet of CRT is that racism is an inherent part of society and is difficult to overcome due to socialised perspectives and colour blindness (Taylor, 2009). Interest convergence is the second tenet where "racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class people (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it." (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 7). The third tenet is that race is socially constructed, and this links to the fourth tenet that recognises the plurality of experiences and the importance of intersectionality as a method to understand the multiple impacts of racism on daily life (Crenshaw, 1989). The final tenet is the importance of storytelling and focussing on the voices, research and literature from people and scholars of Black and Global Majority heritages (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). These tenets have become an important way to develop a critical social justice perspective to understand the ways in which those from Black and Global Majority heritages have been racially minoritised and marginalised. These tenets can also be used to respond to racist and racialising legacies in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and to develop alternative stories that build on the legacies of CRT usage in law and social studies. Recently, there has been a growing body of research applying CRT to pedagogy and practice in education as a tool to explore racial inequalities and academic achievement both in the USA and the UK (Houston, 2018; Lynn & Dixson, 2013; Race & Lander, 2014; Taylor et al., 2009). This body of research has indicated that education practice is rarely neutral, and Busey et al., (2022) have argued that CRT has been used "to ground the permanence of racism—the idea that racism is an enduring aspect of American society—as central to understanding how race functions in education" (pp. 417-8). Although Busey et al. (2022) write from the perspective of the USA, we agree with this argument and extend the geography to include the UK, particularly in the current context as the radical right gains more track in UK politics and those from Black and Global majority heritages are vilified.

### **Race and Racism in Contemporary Society**

Terms have been used as social and political constructs, which then become dominant framings that essentialise particular characteristics of groups of people producing ways to classify, delineate, and reify Eurocentric superiority (Walters, 2012). Lander (2011) had previously argued that terms such as 'race' were

problematic as “our genetic make-up is essentially the same, with only a small proportion that is different” (p. 52). Even with these arguments there has been a rise in the eugenics movement that proposes a genetic basis to all differences. Interestingly advances in genetics have confirmed that the eugenicist view of racial superiority cannot be substantiated (Pilkington, 2003, cited in Walters, 2012), and as Mersha and Beck (2020) note “contextual factors and experiences stretching across history, and not genetics, that divided people into the racial and ethnic categories of today” (p. 1). Rutherford (2021) highlighted that the “invention of race” (p. 448) in the 18th century has led to stereotypes and language taxonomies that influence modern perspectives of race and racism. These taxonomies are hard to shift particularly where eugenicist views were reified by historical allegiances to white male scientific ‘pioneers’ whose legacies are “celebrated today, but whose views are contemptible by our modern standards.”(Rutherford, 2021, p. 448) and not based on robust contemporary evidence.

Racial inequality in society operates via ‘whiteness’ and ‘white privilege’, both of which magnify power structures and reinforce specific political and cultural forms of expression and marginalisation (Bhopal, 2020; Diamond et al., 2023; Thompson, 1999). Bhopal (2018) argued “whiteness gave and guaranteed white people legal entitlement to freedom...protecting their own position in the system” (p. 19) and this is apparent in all age phases of education, including ECEC. A focus on whiteness can result in colour-blindness, here race and racism are disavowed under the misplaced notion that everyone is the same and colour is not noticed. Mueller (2017) highlighted how social structures and institutions reproduced white power and privilege, as a consequence a focus on business as usual amplified whiteness as expected and dominant. This leads to colour-blindness where “racial group membership and race-based differences should not be taken into account when decisions are made, impressions are formed, and behaviors are enacted” (Apfelbaum et al., 2012, p. 205). Colour-blindness in itself does not produce marginalisation, but is pernicious as it negates experiences of racism and racial minoritisation of Black and Global Majority heritage people (Mueller, 2017). Racism still manifests today both for individuals and in institutions (Caller & Gorodzeisky, 2021; Hill Collins & Solomos, 2010). With the rise in right wing politics these debates have been a party-political battle ground through which white supremacist views become more extreme and have resulted in race riots and race hate crimes (Dodd, 2024). In the same way that ‘race’ has been problematised and contested, ‘ethnicity’, derived from sociology and anthropology as a way to consider the diverse cultural markers which become apparent between groups of people, is equally as problematic but more accurate than race (Walters, 2012).

## Method

This section details the methodology, methods, and key search terms used in our scoping review. It indicates the number of items sourced during the search and the ways in which these were reviewed and a final list of items selected. As this was a literature review it did not require institutional ethical approach as it did not directly include human participants. However, we did take an ethics of care approach to decision making during the review and analysis, this included considering our identities and positionalities and questioning our perspectives during the analysis phase and during writing of this article (Suri, 2020).

### Literature Search

We adopted a PRISMA methodology to develop our scoping review of the available literature (Page et al., 2020; Tong et al., 2012). This methodology has been traditionally employed in health to explore literature on health interventions, however more researchers from education and social sciences are using these kinds of systematic methodologies to develop a better understanding of the available literature in a particular area or topic (see the work of Blackwell et al., 2022; Chapman, 2021; Davies & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, 2025). We were particularly interested in literature that concentrated on the UK context (including England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), and included research with young children, parents and carers, and ECEC practitioners who were from Black or Global Majority heritages. During early project meetings we developed a list of key terms for the inclusion criteria (table 1) to develop a systematic list of articles, chapters, books, and reports published between 1.1.1979 and 1.11.2024 on the following databases - JSTOR, Web of Science, and SCOPUS, as like Maynard and Bennett (2023) we had

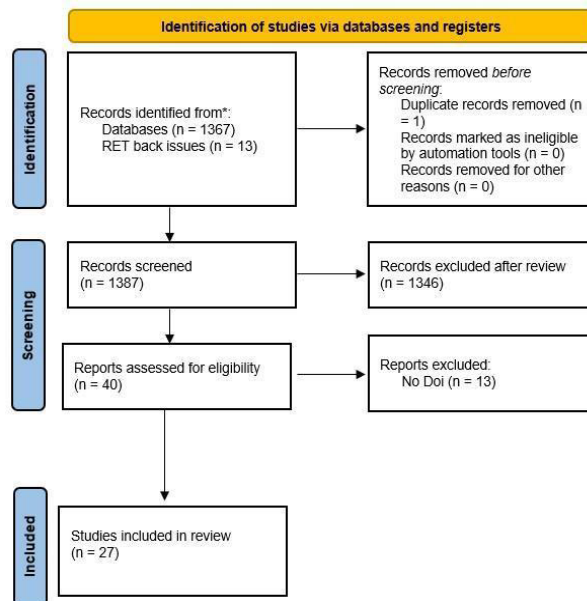
access to these via our Institutional EBSCO databases. The start date for the literature search was chosen as there was an increase in ECEC provision in the UK from the early 1980s (Melhuish, 2016) and we wanted to ensure any research from this time was included. Our guide for this literature search was our research questions: “What is the extent of the published academic literature in the UK focussing on ECEC research that includes Black and Global majority heritages?” Our sub questions were: “Who does this literature include (children, practitioners, parents and carers)?” and “How might this literature be used to understand ECEC practice?” We acknowledge that a CRT approach might argue for a wider range of evidence to be included in the literature search, however we take our lead from Patterson et al. (2023) who argue the “ability to effectively translate the key messages of academic educational research findings into communications that are easily understood by policy makers is of the utmost importance for researchers seeking to make an impactful difference.” (p. 5). We are mindful that this article is not specifically positioned for policy makers but we would add academics and students to the target audience for our article. We also acknowledge that by using JSTOR, Web of Science, and SCOPUS databases as the primary source for literature we do not include broader academic and non-academic work in the literature search and understand that a CRT approach would welcome a more expansive view of ‘evidence’. This decision was primarily driven by the scope and scale of our small funded project and research questions which focused on academic literature in the first instance. Initial searches were on terms in Tier 1, then subsequent searches were terms in Tier 1 plus terms in Tier 2, terms in Tier 1 plus terms in Tier 3.

**Table 1***Key terms for the literature search*

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Early Years	Provision or Setting	Race
Early Childhood Education and Care	Pedagogy or	Racism
Early Childhood Education	Teaching	BAME or Black, Asian and minority ethnic
Early Years Education	Curriculum	BME or Black and Minority ethnic
England	Children	Critical Race theory or CRT
Wales	Families	Discrimination
Scotland		Attainment
Northern Ireland		Identity
United Kingdom		Race Equality
		Race Equality Teaching
		Prevent duty or Prevent agenda
		Fundamental British Values (FBV)

The resultant reports were saved, and a master list was generated. Initially duplicates were removed and the remaining list contained 1,387 items. The first screening of these was initially by item title, this allowed us to remove items that did not meet the Tier 1, 2 and 3 key terms. In some cases, it was not clear from the title whether the item should be excluded, this required a read through of the abstract to ascertain if the item matched the key words or should be excluded. After review we initially identified 27 books, journal articles, and reports that aligned with our search criteria in table 1 and this process is detailed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
Identification of outputs from key terms



We were also aware of an archived journal Race Equality Teaching (RET<sup>\*\*</sup>) which published articles on race in all age phases of education. This journal was not one that was indexed online but was one we were aware of and wanted to draw on to contextualise this project. A review of this journal saw us source 13 articles which matched our key words but did not have a Doi allocated so did not appear on JSTOR, Web of Science, and SCOPUS. As it fell outside of the PRISMA database search we reviewed we agreed that we would not include them in the analysis but would use the articles to develop the background context to this article. After the 27 (see figure 1) items were identified, they were read and categorised thematically using Braun and Clarke’s (2019) reflexive thematic analysis. During this reading 3 of the articles were removed (Callender, 2018; Nazroo et al., 2020; Zilanawala et al., 2019) as these items contained research focussed on children of primary school ages and not ECEC. The reason these articles had been included in our initial search was the abstracts indicated they were early years focussed, however these researchers had used the term early years to reflect the first years of compulsory education.

After reading the remaining 24 articles we discussed our categorizations and the assumptions we had made before agreeing on a theme name (Braun & Clark, 2019). We wanted to use short theme names for each theme that indicated the key elements of the articles, and allocated a label that reflected on the predominant focus of the article. In this phase we used semantic inductive coding and CRT as our theoretical framework to categorise the articles. These resultant themes were: anti-racist practice, children’s experience, culture, de/colonial play, Fundamental British Values (FBV), identity, inclusion, inequality, racism, workforce (see table 2). We have added the constituent UK countries to table 2, these were presented as UK where there was no mention of the country in which the research was undertaken. Where it was clear England or Scotland were added to the table. There are many similarities between the English and Scottish ECEC system, both support learning and development from birth to five years, both have a curriculum framework that can be used to support early learning and a funded entitlement that can be used in settings and schools, and both have a range of qualification requirements and opportunities for graduate and postgraduate qualifications (for further details please see: DfE, n.d.; Education Scotland, n.d.).

<sup>\*\*</sup>This journal was originally published by UCL Press and articles were online between 2010 and 2018.

**Table 2**  
Themes derive from outputs

Author	Year	Title	Source	Theme	Geography
Anderson	2020	The securitisation of values: early years leaders experiences of the implementation of the prevent strategy	Journal	Fundamental British values***	England
Bamsey et al.	2024	Race and the space in between: practitioner reflections on anti-racist practice in one Froebelian early years setting.	Journal	Anti-racist practice	Scotland
Barron	2009	Illegitimate participation? A group of young minority ethnic children's experiences of early childhood education	Journal	Children's experience	England
Barron	2014	Finding a voice: A figured worlds approach to theorising young children's identities	Journal	Children's experience	England
Bradbury	2013	Understanding early years inequality: Policy, assessment and young children's identities	Book	Inequality	England
Clark & Watson	2014	Examining whiteness in a children's centre	Journal	Identity	England
Epstein	1993	Too small to notice? constructions of childhood and discourses of 'race' in predominantly white contexts	Journal	Identity	England
Fairchild & Lander	2021	Seeing beyond: Perspectives of Black children in English ECEC.	Chapter	Racism	UK
Houston	2018	Racialisation in Early Years Education	Book	Racism	UK
Klaus & Siraj	2020	Improving Roma participation in European early childhood education systems through cultural brokering	Journal	Identity	UK
Louis & Bettridge	2024	Let's Talk About Race in the Early Years	Book	Racism	UK
Nutbrown & Clough	2009	Citizenship and inclusion in the early years: understanding and responding to children's perspectives on 'belonging'	Journal	Inclusion	England
Robertson	2018	Let's Talk About 'Culture' in Multiculturalism: The Case of Early Childhood Policy and Practice	Chapter	Culture	England
Robson	2018	How do practitioners in early years provision promote Fundamental British Values?	Journal	Fundamental British values	England
Rosen	2015	Between play and the quotidian: inscriptions of monstrous characters on the racialised bodies of children	Journal	Racism	UK
Sakr et al.	2022	Ethnicity & the early years workforce: A census of staff in maintained nursery schools in England	Report	Workforce	England
Tembo	2021a	'Hang on, she just used that word like it's totally easy': Encountering ordinary racial affects in early childhood education and care	Journal	Racism	UK
Tembo	2021b	Black practitioners in (white) settings: Making racial identity visible in Early Childhood Education and Care in England, UK	Journal	Identity	England
Tembo	2023	End discriminatory practices and prioritise meaningful inclusion	Journal	Anti-racist practice	England
Tembo	2024	Attuning to processes of affective sociomaterialisation: exploring subjectivity and identity in outdoor early childhood provision in Scotland, UK	Journal	Identity	Scotland
Tembo & Bateson	2024a	Liminal relationalities: on collaborative writing with/in and against race in the study	Journal	Anti-racist practice	Scotland

\*\*\*Fundamental British values were mandated by the Conservative/Liberals Coalition Government who were in power between 2010 and 2015. These values are democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs (DfE, 2014). practitioners at all age phases have a duty to both promote these and report any young children/families who are suspected of radicalisation to the relevant Prevent channels, these reports are reviewed and action taken where needed (Home Office, 2024). Both these measures are still a requirement and have been critiqued for being discriminatory to those from Black and Global Majority heritages (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017).

		of early childhood			
Tembo & Bateson	2025	Before race: a literature review on de/colonial habits in play within early childhood	Journal	De/colonial play	England & Scotland
Tembo & Bateson	2024b	Skin deep: a review of early childhood policy affordances for anti-racist practice in England and Scotland	Journal	Anti-racist practice	England & Scotland
Tembo et al.	2024	'Maybe that makes a difference actually': attuning to praxis for anti-racist social justice leadership among nursery school head teachers in the UK	Journal	Anti-racist practice	UK

Once the themes had been identified all 24 items were reviewed and the full outputs were read to ensure they were specifically concerned with ECEC children, families, and/or practitioners. The analysis of the 24 items, detailed in table 2, have been reported in the Findings section of this article. In the discussion section we added an additional layer of analysis using CRT to further understand the findings. The conclusion will argue the need for more transformative research and publications that addresses, dismantles, and challenges systemic racism in ECEC.

### Findings

This section provides a synthesis of the key themes identified from the 24 items included in the scoping review. These themes are summarised in table 3 and are presented below.

**Table 3**

*Themes generated from the 24 sourced items following the scoping review*

Themes	Number of items
Anti racist practice	5
Children's experience	2
Culture	1
De/Colonial play	1
FBV	2
Identity	5
Inclusion	1
Inequality	1
Racism	5
Workforce	1

Rather than complete a traditional presentation of the findings, in keeping with our theoretical framework of CRT, we have adopted a storytelling approach to this section. We plan to tell four stories that are developed from the synthesised articles. These four stories allow us to surface: racism and inequality; policy and practice; the ECEC workforce; and children's experiences and children's rights.

#### Racism and Inequality

A focus on colonial habits pervades play practice and outcomes showing how racism is normalised as an everyday occurrence in UK society. Tembo and Bateson (2024a) explored the ways in which ECEC can be a site of decolonial resistance where they critiqued traditional anti-racist approaches that focussed only on explicit racism. In doing so they argued this approach manifests colonial ideologies that operate at deeper, habitual levels in children's everyday interactions, emotions, and play experiences. They argued these colonial legacies could be disrupted by applying Jones and Okun's (2001, cited in Tembo & Bateson, 2024a) framework of white supremacy culture to ECEC. Tembo and Bateson (2024a) revealed the ways dominant values such as individualism, competitiveness, and control manifested in play reified whiteness and reinforcing racially minoritised hierarchies. To offer a counter story/counter narrative Tembo and Bateson (2024a) proposed a decolonial approach to play that moved beyond representation (e.g., diverse books and dolls), to a position of critically examining how play practices themselves are structured by colonial worldviews. They argued that free play holds radical potential for disrupting colonial logics and fostering alternative ways of being and relating. Free play allowed adults and children to assume fluid

identities, share power, and engage with collective decision-making. This kind of play, they argue, could counter racial hegemonies breaking the hierarchical and competitive norms instilled by colonial white centric education systems. Rather than policing or structuring play, they argued practitioners should observe and create environments that allow alternative and collective forms of intersectional social organisation(s) to emerge. They suggested that by resisting the urge to 'correct' or structure children's play, practitioners can help children explore alternative relationships, knowledge systems, and ways of being that do not conform to colonial expectations of order and productivity.

Barron (2009) found that children's prior experiences at home significantly influenced their ability to engage in ECEC activities. In his research, many Pakistani-heritage children came from homes where Islamic texts, cultural objects, and multilingual conversations in Punjabi and Urdu were central. In contrast, the ECEC environment lacked visual and linguistic representation of these elements, making the transition into ECEC more challenging for these children. It contained a high volume of English print, which white children were more familiar with, while Pakistani-heritage children encountered less familiar linguistic symbols, leading to feelings of exclusion. He argued the lack of cultural representation marginalised those from non-white heritages. The outcome of this lack of representation reinforced language barriers and marking boundaries rather than facilitating inclusion. In a second article, Barron (2014) highlighted another example where a white British boy, Mitchell, when asked if he would celebrate Eid responded: "No, I will be having Christmas... because we're not dark, are we, silly?" (p. 259). Mitchell's response reflected how racially minoritised identities are internalised at an early age, for example associating Christmas with whiteness and Eid with non-white identities. A focus on traditional UK practices and customs and aligns with the CRT tenet that racism advances the interest of dominant racial groups (in this case white British). As a counter narrative, Barron's (2014) research challenged traditional developmental models that viewed identity formation as a passive process. Instead, he highlighted children's agentially negotiated their identities through social interactions. To exemplify this, he mentioned that during a cricket game, a British Pakistani boy, Hamad, insisted: "You be England, and I'll be Pakistan... I live in England, but my country is Pakistan. I am a Pakistani guy." (Barron, 2014, p. 259). This example illustrated how children navigated the intersectional nature of national and ethnic affiliations, and reinforced self-perceived ethnic boundaries while resisting imposed identities. Part of Barron (2014) analysis of this event highlighted how "hegemonic positional identities often limit children's ability to explore alternative figured worlds" (p. 261), in this case where Hamad's identity choices were shaped by pre-existing racially minoritised narratives.

Robertson (2018) critically examined the way culture is discussed and applied in ECEC, arguing that culture is often misused as a tool for exclusion, reinforcing stereotypes, deficit narratives, and structural inequalities in settings. Using a critical discourse analysis, she deconstructed how "culture talk" (Mamdani, 2002, cited in Robertson, 2018, p. 2) was embedded in educational policies and everyday practices to justify barriers to inclusion rather than promote meaningful racial and cultural engagement. Robertson critiqued how some practitioners framed minority cultures as obstacles to educational success rather than assets, this approach advances the privileges afforded to the white majority culture. This focus was reinforced when she observed practitioner discussions where comments such as "education is not important in their culture" or "their families do not care about school progress" were commonly expressed by ECEC practitioners (Robertson, 2018, p. 1), reifying the superiority of white cultural expectations. However, she argued that there was no evidence to support the claim made by the practitioners, her conclusion was these comments served to shift blame from structural inequalities onto families and communities. She highlighted the use of the term 'culture' has been constructed as an acceptable tool to drive a wedge between groups of people. In her research ECEC practitioners rarely drew attention to white, middle-class children's cultural capital. She argued this highlighted how essentialist views of culture reduce diverse communities to fixed stereotypes and that ECEC settings did little to push back against stereotypes. For example, cultural representations often focused on superficial aspects such as food, music, and festivals, reinforced tokenistic multiculturalism rather than fostering deep social and cultural understandings. Robertson (2018) analysed the curriculum document *Development Matters in Early Years Foundation Stage* (Early Education, 2012) and argued that it reinforced deficit perspectives of racially minoritised

cultures by framing cultures and cultural heritage as a problem rather than a strength.

## Policy and Practice

The ECEC sector in the UK is policy driven and, in many cases, these impacts and informs practice. Both England and Scotland's policies were shaped by neoliberal priorities—which foreground attainment, economic productivity, and individual responsibility over structural inequalities. These neoliberal visions produce a resistance to anti-racist discourses, as life becomes individualised and personal responsibility is favoured over collective responsibility and consciousness. Tembo and Bateson (2024b) argued a lack of focus on anti-racist practice erases racial disparities, treating children as individual learners rather than members of historically racially minoritised groups. They identified one of the most significant gaps in ECEC policy was its failure to acknowledge how race operated in children's play and peer interactions. The absence of a race-conscious pedagogy meant that ECEC practitioners lacked the guidance and support needed to engage with how children constructed racial identities in their everyday experiences and how they needed to find ways to counter narratives to any racialised framing of young children.

As part of wider securitisation following the UK's participation in the Gulf War in the 1990s a range of policies and directives were developed. One of these, the Prevent Duty which mandated practitioners needed to play a role in countering extremism, has had a major impact on the education sector and resulted in the promotion of Fundamental British Values (FBV) (DfE, 2014). Whiteness and white privilege are presented as the norm in the UK, it becomes a dominant centre of truth that is upheld by social and cultural expectations. Louis and Bettridge (2024) highlight white privilege as “being seen as an individual with your own thoughts, interests, and abilities rather than a homogenous blob. It is a series of structural advantages embedded into the fabric of our society” (p. 22). To exemplify this embeddedness, Fairchild and Lander (2021) have acknowledged the way policy plays its part in both countering racism and equally magnifying racism and racial inequalities. They also highlighted that a lack of focus on racism in the curriculum and training means that anti-racist practice is especially important in English ECEC to counter dominant racist stories and narratives. This lack of focus on racism became magnified in policy as Bamsey et al. (2023) found a central challenge identified in policy implementation was the tension between political correctness and authentic anti-racist practice which many practitioners found hard to navigate. For example Tembo (2023) critiqued the UK government's promotion of Fundamental British Values (FBV) (DfE, 2014) arguing that it reinforced white, Eurocentric cultural norms while marginalizing pluralistic perspectives. He warned that such policies created an atmosphere where diversity was controlled rather than genuinely embraced, leading to implicit cultural hierarchies within ECEC. In a separate study Tembo and Bateson (2024b) highlighted political resistance to anti-racist initiatives, particularly in England, where the then Conservative government had actively opposed CRT and anti-racist education (DfE, 2014). They indicated the introduction of FBV had further entrenched nationalist and assimilationist narratives, sidelining meaningful discussions on race, colonialism, and systemic inequality in ECEC.

Robson's (2018) research critically examined the ways ECEC practitioners mediated the statutory requirement to promote FBV in their settings. Her study highlighted that while practitioners complied with the policy, their engagement was often performative rather than meaningful. She argued this was largely due to the forced securitisation of ECEC under the Prevent Duty\*\*\*\*. Interestingly, even with this scepticism, ECEC practitioners still displayed FBV posters in their settings to meet Ofsted expectations, illustrating the tension between compliance and personal beliefs. Robson (2018) described this as an example of “performativity” (p. 102), where practitioners engaged in symbolic gestures to satisfy regulatory requirements rather than embedding FBV in a meaningful way. The impact of Prevent and FBV were explored by Anderson (2020) who critically examined their implementation. Her study found that FBV had the potential to create a climate of suspicion, particularly among families from Muslim and migrant backgrounds, reinforcing a sense of exclusion and ‘othering’. Another tension highlighted by Anderson (2020) was “these values are appropriated and promoted within the English context for education as

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\*\*\*\* The Prevent Duty was designed to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Prevent also extends to supporting the rehabilitation and disengagement of those already involved in terrorism. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance>

fundamentally 'British', yet with minimal debate as to what these values actually denote" (p. 432). This lack of clarity leaves practitioners unsure about how to meaningfully integrate FBV into their settings, leading to tokenistic and compliance-driven approaches rather than genuine engagement with democratic and inclusive principles. Another key finding was a concern that FBV were a form of enforced Britishness. Robson (2018) highlighted that practitioners in her research had expressed discomfort with the nationalistic framing of FBV. One participant noted, "I don't think some children and families would see themselves as British. If I go home and say to my Mum 'I am British.' She would say 'No you are not you are...'" (Robson, 2018, p. 101). This showed how the emphasis on "Britishness" had the potential to exclude children from diverse cultural backgrounds and failed to acknowledge the complexities of intersectional identities in ECEC settings. Practitioners also critiqued the resources available for teaching FBV, with one stating that "a lot of the resources we saw online were posters that had a British flag on it. Our children are not from a British background, and we did not want to display something that did not belong to them" (Robson, 2018, p. 101). This suggested that many practitioners rejected overtly patriotic symbols as they felt these may signal a focus on nationalism that might alienate non-British families. Despite this, practitioners did their best to reinterpret and adapt FBV to align with their existing values-based pedagogy, which ensured that children engaged with ethical learning in ways that were meaningful, rather than dictated by policy constraints.

There have also been policy issues in the devolved nations, even when policy sought to be more equitable this did not always manifest in implementation and practice. For example, challenges were highlighted by Tembo and Bateson (2024b) whose analysis of policy frameworks in England and Scotland found limited occurrences where policy openly referenced race equality. They noted, when they were present, the commitments were often "vague, inconsistent, and politically constrained" (p. 530). In the Scottish context Tembo and Bateson (2024b) argued the Scottish GIRFEC (Getting It Right for Every Child) framework promoted inclusivity, but lacked explicit engagement with racial and colonial legacies. What is interesting is that Scotland has made a national policy commitment to anti-racist practice in wider policy making (Scottish Government, 2023), however these commitments did not always play out in practice. In England, the EYFS (DfE, 2024a) had stronger equity requirements in previous iterations, but these had been "gradually diluted" (p. 533), particularly after Brexit and rising Conservative Party and Labour Party resistance to anti-racist discourses. These discourses have been promulgated by Reform UK and have impacted Conservative and Labour party manifestos and policy promises. In addition, both countries' policies were shaped by neoliberal priorities which highlighted attainment, economic productivity, and individual responsibility over breaking down structural inequalities. Tembo and Bateson (2024b) argued these neoliberal foci erased racial disparities, treating young children as individual learners rather than members of historically racially minoritised groups. They identified one of the most significant gaps in ECEC policy was its failure to acknowledge how race operated in children's play and peer interactions. The absence of a race-conscious pedagogy meant that ECEC practitioners lacked the guidance and support needed to engage with how children constructed and challenged racial identities in their everyday experiences.

### **ECEC Workforce**

Sakr et al. (2022) examined the ethnic composition of the ECEC workforce in maintained nursery schools (MNSs) in England, revealing significant disparities in representation, qualifications, and leadership roles. Their findings highlighted that the workforce was considerably less diverse than the children and families they served, with 72% of staff identifying as white, compared to just 48.9% of children in these settings. These underrepresentation's were even more pronounced in leadership positions, as staff with senior management responsibilities were less diverse than those in middle management and teaching-only roles. The study further demonstrated that ethnic diversity decreased as qualification levels increased, with white staff making up 81% of those with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), compared to 66% of those with Level 3 qualifications (equivalent to high school leaving certificates). These findings suggest structural barriers prevent racially minoritised staff from progressing into senior roles and higher qualifications, reinforcing racial inequalities within the sector.

One key issue highlighted was the lack of government monitoring for ethnicity in the ECEC workforce, as the Department for Education's annual survey misleadingly claims that staff ethnicity "aligns with the overall population" (Sakr, et al., 2022, p. 6). Sakr et al. (2022) challenged this claim, and argued that without targeted policies to address these imbalances, the sector risked further reinforcing systemic inequalities. The study also pointed to the absence of discussions on racial diversity in ECEC leadership training and called for greater attention to ethnic representation in qualifications such as the National Professional Qualification in Early Years Leadership (NPQEYL). Sakr et al. (2022) suggested that achieving a truly representative workforce required systemic change, including better data collection, targeted professional development, and structural interventions to remove barriers preventing racially minoritised practitioners from progressing into leadership roles. Their research highlighted the urgency of addressing racial inequalities within the ECEC workforce to create a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

### **Children's Experiences and Children's Rights**

A focus on children's rights is important as it can surface a range of children's experiences. Interestingly, there has been a narrative that young children are not aware of race and racial differences (Epstein, 1993), but as this section shows this narrative is not necessarily the case. In Barron's (2014) research the participant ECEC setting reflected dominant cultural and educational narratives that privileged certain experiences over others. For example, the curriculum and environment prioritised western child-centered education and failed to recognise the cultural knowledge and experiences of British Pakistani children who were on the setting roll. The research undertaken by Barron (2009) indicated that in some play-based shopping scenarios, children of Pakistani heritage struggled with expected behaviours, as their home shopping experiences did not include queuing or engaging in scripted transactions. As a result, they were often viewed as 'disruptive' rather than as children struggling with cultural misalignment. He noted that practitioners rarely challenged racialized assumptions in the curriculum, inadvertently reinforcing ethnic boundaries. For example, staff did not view ethnicity as a factor influencing participation which led to unconscious exclusion, for example religious celebrations were treated differently. This manifested in Christmas being extensively celebrated, but Eid received limited attention, signalling which cultural identities were validated and which were marginalised. Barron (2009) had already highlighted how taken-for-granted practices ECEC can unintentionally exclude certain children, making their participation feel "illegitimate" (p. 341) and the finding on religious celebrations exemplified this. In a similar way, the concept of Whiteness is also a feature in Clarke & Watson (2014), where their research based in a children's centre, revealed the "multiple guises within the Centre as performed, constructed and deconstructed by parents, staff and young children." (p. 77).

In his research, Barron (2009) noted the focus on Eurocentric models of child development and ECEC practice encouraged independence and free play, which aligned with developmentalist theories from Rousseau, Froebel, and Piaget. However, this did not account for cultural learning styles of racially minoritised children, who were more accustomed to adult-guided activities at home. Furthermore, the ECEC setting's role-play area often reflected white middle-class experiences, such as a travel agent's office featuring skiing brochures, which had little relevance for the Pakistani-heritage children. Using a figured worlds framework Barron (2014) focused on analysing how institutional practices, cultural norms, and social interactions shape their white and Pakistani children's experiences. He highlighted that while structural and cultural factors shape children's participation, children were not passive recipients—they were capable and engaged, resisted, and negotiated their identities. This indicated that children did not simply absorb cultural narratives but actively interpreted and responded to them (Barron, 2014). Klaus and Siraj (2020) explored identity formation among Roma children in ECEC and focused on how systemic marginalisation affects their children's educational participation. Roma children faced structural and cultural barriers that prevented them from accessing ECEC at the same rates as their peers. The study highlighted that "institutionalized discrimination and poverty underpin many structural factors, such as shortages of preschool places and unaffordable fees" (p. 51), help to create a cycle of exclusion. Furthermore, Robertson (2018) also noted the ways children and families were marginalised when she critiqued how some practitioners framed minority cultures as obstacles to educational success rather than

assets. She noted that phrases such as “education is not important in their culture” or “their families do not care about school progress” were commonly expressed by ECEC practitioners (p. 1). However, she argued that there was no evidence to support these claims and that they served to shift blame from structural inequalities onto families and communities. She highlighted the use of the term ‘culture’ has been constructed as an acceptable tool to drive a wedge between groups of people. In her research ECEC practitioners rarely drew attention to white, middle-class children’s cultural capital. She argued this highlighted how essentialist views of culture reduce diverse communities to fixed stereotypes and that ECEC settings did little to push back against stereotypes. Robertson (2018) analysed *Development Matters in Early Years Foundation Stage (Early Education, 2012)*<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> and argued that it reinforced a deficit perspective of racially minoritised cultures framing culture as a problem rather than a strength.

### Discussion

As we start this discussion it is important to circle back to the current UK socio-political environment which is being challenged by radical right politics and discourses. Our discussion will connect the discussions of the literature identified in the research to CRT. The four stories identified in the findings represent our analysis of the articles sourced under key headings: racism and inequality; policy and practice; the ECEC workforce; and children’s experiences and children’s rights. What all these stories show is that racism in the UK is not a monolith, it manifests and is experienced differently depending on local ECEC settings and local/national contexts. Some of the articles we sourced specifically focussed on either England or Scotland whereas for others there was no specific national context mentioned so we have assumed the research was undertaken in the UK (see table 2). Interestingly Tembo and Bateson (2024b) noted “Public discussion about the role of racism in Scotland has generally appeared progressive on the surface” (p. 528), however they acknowledge the current sociopolitical issues faced by the UK and other nations that “discussion[s] about race within most ELC settings remains scant – and indeed largely unsanctioned – let alone embedded in practices which foreground everyday entanglements with coloniality.” (p. 530). When discussions about race and racism become marginalised it becomes easier for more radical right wing voices to dominate conversations and the public realm.

We situate this section in the contradictions that manifest within the current UK this socio-political backdrop. The first tenet of CRT indicates that whiteness is the preferred position in society and impacts social and cultural perceptions and behaviours (Taylor, 2009). It is clear in the literature that whiteness is a totalising position in the UK and this leads to marginalisation of all non-white children and families. Whiteness as a majority position underpins the prevailing perspectives and attitude in ECEC education, this is demonstrated in the ways that ECEC practitioners conceptualise children and work with children; how policy is developed and delivered; the experiences that racially minoritised children have, especially those that are limited and manifest as tokenistic social and cultural representation in ECEC settings; young children’s outcomes at the end of the EYFS (DfE, 2024a); and transition to compulsory schooling. Some examples of this include the political and structural barriers and the ways that young children are viewed and conceptualised as colour blind by practitioners. In addition, racism and colour blindness links to the way representation manifests in ECEC settings particularly where it is confined to the white majority culture. From a policy perspective, Prevent and Fundamental British Values have been used to further racially marginalise young children, practitioners, and their families. These policies have caused practitioners to ‘police’ young children and their families’ speech, actions and play. Practitioners do not explicitly mention how policies drive their practice, but researchers were able to observe and interpret interview data from their studies and identified how the policies acted as a boundary making practice that reified whiteness and marginalised non-white identities. The research shows that these policies reinforce dominant notions of whiteness and white privilege and impact the ways that ECEC practitioners develop curriculum and work with young children and their families.

Whiteness and white privilege are a form of interest convergence, the second tenet of CRT, where

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<sup>\*\*\*\*</sup> *Development Matters (DfE, 2023)* was revised via the then Conservative Government. At the same time a sector led response, *Birth to Five Matters*, was developed by the Early Years Coalition (2021) and was written to ensure children and families from racially minoritised families were celebrated and included in curriculum guidance documents.

policy and practices advance the white majority (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This can be evidenced by the multiple instances of tokenism where settings provided multicultural resources that magnified stereotypes, for example books such as 'Handa's Surprise' (Browne, 2006) which infantilises Black African rural life, and national costumes in dress up areas to celebrate cultural festivals such as Diwali, Chinese New Year, and Eid. These examples of tokenism other the diversity and importance of recognising and celebrating difference and acceptance, producing and reinforcing marginalisation and lack of concern for non-white cultural experiences. Interest convergence manifests in binary framings of white and black practitioners. These perspectives do little to support and understand the wider experiences of all ECEC practitioners. In addition, Eurocentric child development impacts the perception of white and racial minoritised young children. Eurocentric theories posit the white child as favoured with white culture norms positioned as the exemplar for practice and ways to live. Eurocentric epistemologies and narratives highlight the superiority of economic, political systems, and technologies that frame perspectives of modern life. As a practice Eurocentric epistemologies and narratives are intimately connected to colonialism and colonial violence and become the dominant framing of life in capitalist and conservative UK. With this in mind it becomes clear why ECEC adopts these theories as they maintain the dominance of whiteness and align with social hierarchies that link to national identity and white privilege reflecting some of the wider discourses in society.

Eurocentric epistemologies that reinforce marginalisation also fail to acknowledge that race is a social construct rather than a genetically determined fact and this links to the third tenet of CRT that posits race and racism as social constructs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). As demonstrated in the literature the social construction of race is clearly identified in practice and pedagogy. To overcome this, the social structure of marginalisation and oppression would need to be dismantled, and equitable structures developed to ensure all can flourish. As the literature shows this is a challenge due to the inherent positioning of whiteness and white privilege. However, there were examples of ways ECEC settings and practitioners did try to counter marginalisation and oppression, these examples are part of the pattern of resistance that needs to be celebrated and explicitly signposted as examples for other ECEC practitioners and settings. Policy in Scotland has an aim of developing more ethical anti-racist modes of practice, however in some cases policy and practice do not always align and this becomes a missed opportunity for equality and equity practices. One way to do this is to foreground antiracism and make it more visible in policy and curriculum documents, this way it could form part of training programmes and ECEC setting policies. The visible nature of race has long been a tool of white supremacy and colonialism reinforces this in both history and modernity. Racism is a way to separate and favour white dominance and even with steps made locally in ECEC settings it is a challenge for ECEC nationally to dismantle these dominant structures. Particularly with policy, social, and developmental narratives that racially minoritise Black and Global Majority young children and their families. Good leadership and staff from diverse backgrounds can go some way to work against racism and to be the starting point for more resistance against racialising narratives, however research has shown that there are few leaders from racially minoritised Black and Global Majority heritages and limited non-white staff in ECEC settings. More work is needed to ensure great diversity in staff and leadership to start to counter racism and white supremacy.

The fourth tenet of CRT is the ways in which a range of intersections further entrench marginalisation (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality provides a lens to explore how identities such as race, social class, education, financial sustainability, and language can magnify racism and marginalisation. Intersectionality is important given the gendered and classed nature of ECEC practitioners, many of whom have limited qualifications, and are low paid. In addition, ECEC work has been seen as emotional labour where practitioners are 'babysitting' or 'looking after little ones' which minimises the externally facing view of ECEC practitioners and negates the complex work they need to do in their role (Fairchild & Mikuska, 2021). Intersectionality can be employed to understand the ways in which practitioners are framed as a deficit. It can also be applied to the ways racially minoritised young children from Black and Global Majority heritages are positioned. These intersections were highlighted in the literature, for example in Bradbury's (2013) research the confluence of race, poverty, social class, and gender reinforced

stereotyping and othering of racially minoritised young children and families who were seen as deficient in comparison with their white counterparts. Another example of intersectional marginalisation was demonstrated where ECEC practitioners confounded racially minoritised young children and family's disadvantage when they take a colour-blind approach, or when they position young children as deficient when they come from racially minoritised Black and Global Majority heritages, live in areas of poverty and high deprivation, and are not proficient in English.

There are ways to celebrate racially minoritised young children from Black and Global Majority heritages, and the fifth tenet of CRT advocates for counter-storytelling as a method to develop new narratives that highlights the achievements and excellence of young children and their families (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This is an important tenet and suggests that scholars and researchers need to develop new narratives about ECEC in the UK. For example, highlighting inequality, and white privilege is key as race is a social construct and reinforces whiteness and works to deny "the reality of a racialized society and its impact on people in their everyday lives" (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). We argued that the articles and books that we sourced all work from a position of story-telling and counter story-telling. There were instances of stories that reinforce racism, but also there were counter-stories which recounted opportunities to understand how racism can be countered and how new and more inclusive ways to practice can be developed. All these outputs came from the position of exploring mechanisms to develop a deeper understanding that unpacks the ways in which racism is constructed in policy and literature, and how these resultant discourses circulate in ECEC practice. These outputs provide sites of contestation, surface marginalisation, highlight residences, and pose suggestions to move beyond dominant and normative constructions of race and whiteness.

### Conclusion

This article reports the findings of a research project funded by the University of Portsmouth. The project provided the opportunity to complete a systematic literature review to explore the number of outputs that had a focus on the experiences of young children, families and ECEC practitioners from racially minoritised young children from Black and Global Majority heritages. We devised the project as we felt there was limited literature but wanted to quantify what this looked like. From the 1,367 outputs originally sourced and screened, 27 outputs were identified, this was reduced to 24 on final screening. The outputs were themed based on content and, where appropriate, sub-themes were developed. The identification of the outputs were in response to our research question "What is the extent of the published academic literature in the UK focussing on ECEC research that includes Black and Global majority heritages?" We argue that the 24 articles indicate more work is needed to focus on ECEC research to understand people from Black and Global Majority heritages, this could focus on the lived experiences of young children, parents and carers, and practitioners and add to the existing field to identify marginalisation and contradictions, but also patterns of resistance and good practice. Our sub research question "Who does this literature include (children, practitioners, parents and carers)?" and "How might this literature be used to understand ECEC practice?" were answered in the findings and discussions where children and practitioners, and in some cases parents and carers, were part of the research and articles. In answer to the second sub research question the four stories we present are our interpretations of the research articles we sourced during the literature review. We acknowledge these are the stories that we have developed and realise that other stories and counter stories are possible as readers will take their own position as they read and conceptualise the articles.

From the stories we developed we used the five tenets of CRT to develop a high-level discussion on the 24 outputs. What we found is that the outputs clearly highlighted that this is an under-researched area of ECEC policy and practice. We suspect this may be due to the concerns researchers might have about developing projects that explore racism and whiteness in ECEC settings due to the misplaced idea that young children do not recognise race, the concerns researchers might have about researching a topic which is seen as contentious in England's white dominant society. This is reflected in the power of the radical right discourses that are based on whiteness and white supremacy infusing all aspects of socio-political

discussions in the UK as a totalising force that can limit a social justice approach. Taking this position leads to the vilification of CRT by those who are driving political and social narratives that recentre whiteness and white supremacy. Even with these socio-political challenges the outputs sourced did provide a backdrop to how race is contested in ECEC, it showed the ways whiteness and white privilege operate and how this reinforces racism and racist tropes that suggest racism is an implicit part of English society. We argue this position reflects the dominant colonial legacies of the UK which positioned, and still position, whiteness and white privilege as a dominant narrative. Policy directives and curriculum further reinforce racism where interest convergence can be exemplified in ECEC practices, tokenism, and a focus on intersectional marginalisation and a lack of focus on equitable inclusion. These represent and reinforcement of race as a social construct where marginalisation can follow a young child through to school and future employment. There were counter stories in the literature sourced and there seems to be an increase recently in outputs that critique and critically analyse the lived experiences of racially minoritised young children, families, and ECEC practitioners from Black and Global Majority heritages.

Before we started this project, we had a feeling that there was limited literature that focused on racially minoritised young children, families, and ECEC practitioners from Black and Global Majority heritages. However, we were surprised about the paucity of outputs that we sourced. We acknowledge the work in the *Race, Equality and Teaching* journal which did important work to deconstruct some of the dominant framings of race and racism in ECEC. However, these articles are not easily accessible as the lack of Doi means that online searches via accepted academic search engines become problematic. We also acknowledge the recent scholarship and outputs that we have been able to source and the Special Issue this journal is part of. As we finish this article, we would like to encourage UK academics to focus, or continue to focus, on ways to raise the profile of research that helps to understand racially minoritised young children, families, and ECEC practitioners from Black and Global Majority heritages. It is important to develop and enhance research in this area as this is a way to push back against the dominance of white focussed outputs in UK ECEC. Ladson-Billings (1989) wrote “If we are serious about solving these problems in schools and classrooms, we have to be serious about intense study and careful rethinking of race and education” (p. 22). We agree with this comment, and we hope our article contributes to this important call for evidence.

## Declarations

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