

"Ethnic minority participation in British Higher Education: The story of the 1990s"

by

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to consider statistically both the participation of ethnic minority groups in the UK whilst they are still in higher education and their participation in the labour market when they graduate.

What appears to have happened during the 1990s was that the overall participation rate in higher education increased and as higher education expanded this participation rate was accelerated for all non-white ethnic groups. The expansion for ethnic minorities appears to have been influenced by familial pressure to participate and possibly a stimuli caused by seeing that participation was possible as participation increased.

The policy implications of this work are that some ethnic minorities are more over-educated for their roles than are whites (is comparability being achieved only by being better or is due to an over-estimation of the qualifications required for specific job functions) and that most ethnic groups after participating in higher education still earn less than whites on average (is this due to unobserved factors or to lingering labour market discrimination?)

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to consider statistically both the participation of ethnic minority groups in the UK whilst they are still in higher education and their participation in the labour market when they graduate. Several studies in the 1990's (for example, Modood et al (1997, 1998)) of ethnic minorities, education and the labour market showed that it was no longer appropriate to talk of a black-white divide in educational and employment opportunities as there was a diversity of experience both within and between ethnic minority groups.

The data

The data sets used for the analysis are the Great Britain Annual LFS for 1990 (hereafter 1990) and the 4th quarter 2000 LFS for Great Britain (hereafter 2000).

One issue that arises first of all in this consideration is whether the LFS¹ is an appropriate tool for this type of analysis. This author feels that it is because of the large sample size that is available for analysis as shown in the following tables where we detail sample sizes for the total LFS population (**Table 1**) and the 18 to 25 population (**Table 2**).

¹ Material from the Labour Force Surveys is Crown Copyright; has been made available from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) through the Data Archive and has been used by permission. Neither the ONS nor the Data Archive bear any responsibility for the analysis or interpretation of the data reported here.

Table 1
Sample sizes for the total adult population

	1990	2000
White	141523	92265
Black	1446	1519
Indian	2058	1439
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	1539	1118
Chinese	354	252
Other or mixed race	860	1281
Total	147780	97874

Table 2
Sample sizes for the 18 to 25 population

	1990	2000
White	15479	9397
Black	233	246
Indian	261	221
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	168	282
Chinese	55	59
Other or mixed race	115	237
Total	16311	10442

One caveat that needs to be borne in mind about the use of the LFS is that the definitions of ethnic origin variables have changed over time. **Table 3** shows how the LFS ethnic origin definitions of 1990 and 2000 map to those to be used in this study.

Table 3
Ethnic origin map

	1990 LFS	2000 LFS
White	White, White-Other	White
Black	West Indian/Guyanese, African, W.Indian/Guynese- Other, African-Other	Black - Caribbean, Black - African, Black - Other
Indian	Indian, Indian- Other	Indian
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Pakistani-Other, Bangladeshi- Other	Pakistani, Bangladeshi
Chinese	Chinese, Chinese- Other	Chinese

Other or mixed race	Arab, Arab- Other, White-Mixed, W.Indian,Guy/White- Mixed, Indian/White- Mixed, Pakistan/White- Mixed, Bangladeshi/White- Mixed, Other Asian/White- Mixed, African/White-Mixed, Arab/White- Mixed, Asian Mixture-M, African/W.Indn,Guy-M, African/Asian- Mixed, Miscellaneous Partly Coloured, Miscellaneous Coloured, Other Asian-Other, Mixed Origin	Other
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The ethnic composition of British higher education

It is perhaps instructive at this point to examine briefly the structure of the UK undergraduate population by ethnic group (**Table 4**). It is important to notice that the structure of both the United Kingdom undergraduate or graduate population does not mirror that of United Kingdom society as a whole (**Table 5**).

Table 4
Distribution of current participants in higher education by ethnic group.

	1990	2000
White	87.24%	83.28%
Black	3.09%	4.61%
Indian	3.75%	3.19%
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	2.48%	3.38%
Chinese	1.39%	1.32%
Other or mixed race	2.05%	4.22%

Table 5
Distribution of population of Great Britain by ethnic group.

	1990	2000
White	95.77%	89.99%
Black	0.98%	2.36%
Indian	1.39%	2.12%
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	1.04%	2.70%
Chinese	0.24%	0.57%
Other or mixed race	0.58%	2.27%

What we immediately notice from tables 4 & 5 is that all of the non-White ethnic groups seem to be statistically over represented in the undergraduate population compared to the general population.

An important side issue here is whether the LFS is giving us a representative sample of the participant in UK higher education. The definitive source of Higher Education statistics in the UK is the Higher Education Statistics Agency which produces annual reports on a range of higher education matters. If we take their 2000/2001 data and compile a table of the distribution of 1st Year UK Domiciled HE Students reclassified into the ethnicity definitions used above as shown in **Table 6**, we obtain a close match to the LFS data except for the Indian and other groups.

Table 6
Distribution of 1st Year UK Domiciled HE Students by Ethnicity in 2000/01

	2000/01
White	82.99%
Black	4.46%
Indian	4.76%
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	3.40%
Chinese	1.09%
Other or mixed race	3.31%

Source: HESA (2002)

Let us first consider the reasons why ethnic groups appear to be over represented in the undergraduate population.

Ethnic Minorities in Higher Education

Why do ethnic groups appear to be over represented in the undergraduate population? One of the major reasons for this is due to differences in demographic profiles between ethnic groups. The majority, some 53%, of all undergraduate students are aged between 18 and 25, so we need to look at how this group is distributed, using the LFS data amongst the five ethnic groups. If we do this, we obtain **Table 7**.

Table 7
The 18 to 25 population by ethnic group

	1990	2000
White	94.90%	90.73%
Black	1.43%	2.30%
Indian	1.60%	2.03%
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	1.03%	2.60%
Chinese	0.34%	0.54%
Other or mixed race	0.71%	1.80%

Thus it seems that this key group for higher education participation was more heterogenous in terms of ethnicity than the population as a whole in 1990 but not so much in 2000. However, if we turn to look at participation rates by ethnic group for the 18 - 25 age group (**Table 8**), we see that higher education was still more heterogenous.

Table 8
The percentage of the 18 to 25 population who are participating in higher education by ethnic group.

	1990	2000
White	7.67%	21.66%
Black	14.59%	41.06%
Indian	21.84%	40.27%
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	23.21%	30.50%
Chinese	47.27%	62.71%
Other or mixed race	24.35%	40.51%
Total	8.41%	23.41%

However, an analysis of demographics only goes a small way to explaining the over-representation of ethnic minorities in the undergraduate population.

Adia (1996) considered the influences upon white and ethnic minority students to enter Higher Education. It was found that ethnic minority families appear to value higher education more highly than white families with parents of ethnic minority students being much more likely to want all their children to attend University than white parents. Although both white and ethnic minority students felt that parents/guardians were important influences in their decision to enter higher education, ethnic minority students were more likely to say that this influence was important or very important than white students. Similar more recent findings for the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in Oldham are reported in Dale et al (2002).

Adia (1996) also found that white students were much more likely to have had an immediate family member educated at University than were ethnic minority students so it might be interesting to look at the stock of higher education currently present by ethnic group.

Table 9 below illustrates the proportions of adults² in each ethnic minority group that have received a higher education qualification³.

² The definition of adult being used here is anyone aged between 18 and 70 inclusively.

³ The definition of higher education qualification that is being used here is a qualification at NVQ levels 4 or 5 such as (but not exclusively) an higher degree, a first degree, a teaching qualification or a nursing qualification.

Table 9
The percentage of adults that have received a higher education qualification by ethnic group.

	1990	2000
White	10.94%	24.41%
Black	13.91%	26.39%
Indian	15.66%	30.47%
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	6.33%	12.59%
Chinese	18.65%	33.48%
Other or mixed race	11.97%	27.87%

Two additional points can be made here.

Firstly, although 26.39% of the Black ethnic group in 2000 had an higher education of some sort, Modood (1997) found that very few of the individuals of Caribbean ethnic origin had degrees and that many of their higher qualifications were vocational qualifications such as HNC's or in nursing. This is also the case here with 9.3% of such qualifications were in nursing and 11.5% were in HNC/HNDs. This is still true albeit to a lesser extent of current Higher Education participants as shown in **Table 10**.

Table 10
The qualifications being studied for by ethnic group for the 18 to 25 population participating in higher education in 2000.

	Higher degree or NVQ level 5	Other degree or NVQ level 4	HNC, HND	Nursing
White	8.82%	81.68%	8.19%	1.32%
Black	9.68%	74.19%	11.29%	4.84%
Indian	6.94%	86.11%	6.94%	0.00%
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	11.86%	83.05%	3.39%	1.69%
Chinese	25.81%	70.97%	3.23%	0.00%
Other or mixed race	13.16%	80.26%	6.58%	0.00%

The most striking thing to note is that nursing is almost three times more common amongst the Black ethnic group as the current type of higher education participation than it is for any other ethnic group.

Secondly there is a very high degree of polarisation with regard to educational qualifications within the Pakistani or Bangladeshi group. In 2000, 20.3% of those aged 18 to 25 in this ethnic group had no qualifications with another 9.4% having a sub-GCSE qualification as their highest qualification. While over 3¹/₂% have an higher education qualification and are studying for an higher degree

Some authors, e.g. Modood (1998), have argued that ethnic minorities in general acquire qualifications later on in their life than is the case for the white population. Therefore it might be informative to take a step back and look at when the different ethnic groups are undertaking their 'A'-level study.

Table 11
A comparison of those undertaking
'A'-level study by age and ethnic group in 2000.

	Age at which the 'A'-level study is taking place		
	16 - 19	20 - 24	25+
White	90.43%	2.23%	7.34%
Black	89.19%	5.41%	5.41%
Indian	96.30%	1.85%	1.85%
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	90.91%	6.06%	3.03%
Chinese	100.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Other or mixed race	88.37%	6.98%	4.65%

Table 11 shows that it is not clear cut as it appears that there is evidence of a number of different phenomena. Firstly, there is quite strong evidence of a return to education later on in life for a number of ethnic groups, most notably the white, black and other/mixed groups. Secondly, there is also evidence of certain groups of young people taking their 'A'-levels later than their peers, most notably the black, Pakistani/Bangladeshi and other/mixed groups.

Even after taking into account academic and social factors, which themselves may be a result of discrimination, some rates of ethnic minority admission to university and polytechnics remained unexplained as detailed in Modood & Shiner (1994).

The rewards from Higher Education

Battu & Sloane (2002) argue that non-whites have substantially higher levels of over-education⁴ than whites. Their table V suggests the following levels of over-education and under-education for UK and overseas qualifications broken down by ethnic group - **Table 12** is an adaption of this

Table 12
Levels of over-education and under-education for UK and overseas qualifications
broken down by ethnic group (adapted from table V of Battu & Sloane (2002))

	Over-education	Under-education
White	19.7%	9.9%
Caribbean	16.3%	6.1%
Indian	33.0%	5.4%
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	15.6%	18.2%
Chinese	30.8%	12.3%

This analysis suggests that Indians and Chinese (and also African-Asians, which we include as part of other) are more over-educated for their employment than whites. For these groups,

⁴ This is defined as that they "are employed in jobs for which their current qualifications are not a requirement", Battu & Sloane (2002) p. 192

this could be taken as evidence that the high levels of participation in higher education for these groups are part of a desire to obtain comparability by being better.

The problem with a serious analysis of the returns to higher education from a sample survey such as this is that the sample sizes for some of the ethnic minorities are too small for a realistic comparison to be valid. The following analysis (**Table 13**) demonstrates this point and is undertaken using the 2000 LFS sample of adults aged 25 years of age or over who are working.

Table 13
Average gross weekly wage for individuals having as their highest qualification by ethnic group

	The highest qualification is	
	NVQ5	NVQ4
White	£631.58 (£344.42) 640	£546.43 (£349.91) 2590
Black	£557.25 (£170.93) 8	£493.46 (£322.67) 39
Indian	£635.71 (£340.64) 17	£528.96 (£378.93) 46
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	£497.75 (£276.63) 4	£378.10 (£172.24) 10
Chinese	£577.00 1	£522.50 (£251.41) 8
Other or mixed race	£715.50 (£230.21) 18	£463.80 (£155.50) 30
		Mean (sd) <i>Sample size</i>

This type of analysis can be made significantly more useful by combining the data to form an index where the average gross weekly wage of a white person with at least an NVQ4 qualification is 100 as in **Table 14**

Table 14
Average wage index by ethnic group

Ethnic Group	Wage Index
White	100.00
Black	89.53
Indian	99.02
Pakistani or Bangladeshi	73.19
Chinese	93.83
Other or mixed race	78.51

The main finding from this is that the only ethnic group with an average gross weekly wage that is not significantly different from that of whites is the Indian ethnic group. All of the other ethnic groups are earning statistically significantly less than whites at the 95% level of statistical significance.

Conclusion

I will split this conclusion in to what happened, why I think it happened and what policy implications flow from both of these.

What appears to have happened during the 1990s was that the overall participation rate in higher education increased and as higher education expanded this participation rate was accelerated for all non-white ethnic groups.

The expansion for ethnic minorities appears to have been influenced by familial pressure to participate and possibly a stimuli caused by seeing that participation was possible as participation increased.

The major policy implications of this fall into 3 areas.

Firstly, why is it that some ethnic minorities are more over-educated for their roles than are whites, it is part of comparability being achieved only by being better or is due to an over-estimation of the qualifications required for specific job functions.

Secondly, why are Chinese students participating at such a rate in higher education. Little research seems to have been done in this area but the results are striking with over a third of the population having an higher education qualification in 2000 and over 60% of the 18 to 25 population currently studying for an higher education qualification.

Thirdly, most ethnic groups after participating in higher education still earn less than whites on average. Is this due to unobserved factors or to lingering labour market discrimination?

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(Table 10a - First Year UK Domiciled HE Students by Level of Study, Mode of Study, Gender and Ethnicity 2000/01 is online at <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/holisdocs/pubinfo/student/ethnic01.htm>)

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