



Executive Summary

This UX-focused research project investigates the systemic barriers that contribute to the achievement gap between racialised minority students and white students in higher education, specifically examining Frontline's social work program. Based on a comprehensive study involving 57 participants—including staff and participants (students)—the research highlights language as a crucial factor perpetuating educational inequities.

Data from the 2023 cohort revealed a significant 4-point performance gap at the master's level, with written assessments particularly illustrating these disparities. The study postulates that academic language disadvantages students from racialised minority backgrounds, connecting this issue to broader concepts of cultural capital and cognitive processing.

Grounded in cognitive load theory and principles of inclusive design, the research proposes a multi-faceted approach to tackling these challenges.

Key recommendations include:

- Simplifying the language and content within e-learning
- Designing for a variety of learning styles
- Creating more accessible assessment processes
- Developing collaborative content creation strategies

Ultimately, the project argues that inclusive design does not reduce academic rigour. Instead, it involves creating learning environments that acknowledge and support all participants' diverse experiences and cognitive processes.



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The Context

The existence of an attainment or awarding gap between racialised minority (BAME) students and White peers continues to be problematic within HE both in the UK and other countries such as the United States. According to UAL's Ethnic Representation Index (ERI) 2023, the difference between a White student being awarded a first-class or 2:1 degree in England compared to a BAME student was, on average 12.3%. This figure increased to 19.3% when focusing on Black students alone. These statistical trends are also supported by the [Office for Students \(OFS\)](#).

The Problem

The attainment gap also exists within Frontline's social work programme. The 2023 cohort showed a 4-point gap between White and racialised minority participants (Masters level students). Data presented at the March 2024 Gathering also highlighted an unusual yet interesting trend, the attainment gap is higher during anonymised assessments but decreases when participants' names are used. This is the opposite of participants who identify as having a disability, these assessment scores are higher when anonymised and lower when not.

This evaluation project aims to explore if and how language especially the language used within e-learning can impact and contribute to the attainment gap.