The Invisible Influence: Systemic Racism and Experiences of Migrant Workers in Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Abstract

Aotearoa/New Zealand, like many other countries, is experiencing a rise in the number of migrants working in care professions such as aged care, disability care, and early childhood education and care (New Zealand Government, 2024). Despite this growing presence, research on the experiences of migrant workers in early childhood education (ECE) remains limited, despite their significant contributions to the sector. Notably, according to the latest data, the proportion of immigrant workers in ECE increased from 7% in 2001 to 16% in 2017 (Hyslop & Le, 2019); it is likely that this figure has continued to increase since then. Given the increasing reliance on migrant workers in ECE, it becomes essential to understand not only their contributions but also the challenges they face within the sector. While existing literature has demonstrated that racism remains a persistent challenge for migrants of colour—particularly in industries such as aged care and healthcare (Ahlberg et al., 2022; King-Dejardin, 2019; Stevens et al., 2012)—there is limited research that specifically addresses the systemic nature of this racism, especially within the ECE sector.

As a result, this thesis explores the experiences of migrants of colour working in ECE in Aotearoa/New Zealand, with a particular focus on how systemic racism shapes their experiences. Systemic racism, a key concept in this study, refers to the collective and often invisible forms of racial discrimination that occur across individual, institutional, and societal or structural levels (Banaji et al., 2021; Gynter, 2003; Mooten, 2021; Schindler & Zeller, 2011; Schmidt, 2010). Understanding systemic racism requires recognising how these levels interact and reinforce one another, ultimately forming a broader system that disadvantages minority groups. As Schindler and Zeller (2011) note, such discrimination can be difficult to identify because it is embedded in the everyday functioning of these systems. Understanding these dynamics is essential for addressing the structural barriers that impact the professional lives of migrant educators in ECE settings.

Guided by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and employing counter-storytelling as a methodology, this study draws on semi-structured interviews with eleven migrants of colour, including both qualified and non-qualified ECE teachers. This approach allowed the research to highlight participants' lived experiences and their interpretations, alongside the researcher’s analysis. Indeed, the findings demonstrate how systemic racism, both overt and subtle, continues to shape the professional and personal experiences of migrant teachers of colour in ECE, often manifesting in nuanced and easily overlooked ways. The findings also align

with existing literature on care work, which shows that the experiences of migrants of colour are often dismissed, ignored, and marginalised (Ahlberg et al., 2022; King-Dejardin, 2019; Stevens et al., 2012). Additionally, the research contributes to understanding how systemic racism influences the ways people of colour cope and navigate their social and professional lives. Overall, this thesis expands current knowledge about the experiences of migrant teachers of colour in Aotearoa/New Zealand's ECE sector. It contributes to greater recognition of the systemic nature of racism in ECE and how it is embedded in, and unfolds through, participants' experiences—often in ways that are not immediately obvious or easily recognisable.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) on 30 October 2024, with validity extending for three years until 27 October 2027. The approval reference is 24/260. For further details, refer to Appendix A-E, which includes the AUTEC Ethics Application Approval Letter and all related documents.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will first introduce the aim, research question, and contribution, including the researcher's identity in relation to the research. Next, the chapter examines the background of this study, including the research problem and its rationale. The background of the research problem highlights current issues within the early childhood education (ECE) sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand, particularly the undervaluation of ECE labour and the ongoing tension between the roles of care and education in ECE practice. The subsequent emphasis is on Aotearoa/New Zealand's migration patterns, including the contemporary and historical background of immigration policy. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the thesis structure.

1.2 Aim, Research Question and Contribution

This study explores the experiences of migrants of colour in the ECE industry in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The primary research is conducted among people of colour who entered Aotearoa/New Zealand with a migrant status, whether as a work, resident, permanent resident, or student visa holder, and who currently work, or have worked, in the ECE industry in Aotearoa/New Zealand as qualified or unqualified staff members. It aims to highlight their experiences and perspectives, including the potential influence of systemic racism. This study will address this by answering the following research question:

What are the experiences of migrant workers of colour in early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and in what ways does systemic racism shape these experiences?

Before proceeding, let us consider my stance as a researcher. I am aware that my background, experiences, and personal beliefs shape this study, including the culture and environment in which I was raised. This topic resonates with me personally as a person of colour who migrated to Aotearoa/New Zealand to pursue education. Having grown up in a country where freedom of speech was often restricted or even prohibited and where fundamental human rights could be disregarded if they conflicted with the interests of those in power, these persistent social injustices have long influenced me. These experiences have shaped my perspective and led me to approach this research through a Critical Race Theory (CRT) lens, with a commitment to amplifying the voices of those often marginalised in mainstream discourse. Indeed, I am

deeply inspired by the pursuit that Donnor and Ladson-Billings (2018) articulate, offering a powerful explanation of the stance taken by critical race theorists—one that strongly aligns with my position as a researcher. As they emphasise:

> "Critical race theory is not about special pleadings or race-baiting as some may argue. It is also not…[a] paradigm that makes a scholar seem more cutting-edge or avant-garde. It is about the serious business of permanent and systemic racism that ultimately diminishes the democratic project. It is about dispelling notions of colorblindness and postracial imaginings so that we can better understand and remedy the disparities that are prevalent in our society. It is one of the tools we can use to assert that race still matters" (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018, p. 209).

Although I believe that Aotearoa/New Zealand has made significant progress in embracing diverse perspectives, partly due to its bicultural foundation, this research does not aim to fabricate an issue by implying that all Aotearoa/New Zealanders are racist or that all migrant workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand certainly face discrimination. Instead, it seeks to bring forward the perspectives of those directly engaged in the sector, shedding light on how they perceive and navigate issues related to race, equity, and inclusion. By doing so, this study highlights how systemic barriers and biases operate, often in ways that are not immediately visible or acknowledged.

Importantly, this research also aims to contribute to the academic gaps regarding the experiences of migrants of colour working in ECE in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Unlike other labour-receiving countries, Aotearoa/New Zealand has limited studies on the experiences of migrant workers in this sector. This research contributes to the existing ECE literature by offering a perspective on the intersections of gender, ECE work, race, and other factors that may create or exacerbate existing tensions within the industry. While the experiences of this group of participants may align with or differ from findings in other national contexts, this study provides valuable insights into these similarities and differences, ultimately helping to identify the most suitable ways to support and integrate migrant ECE workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

1.3 Key Terms and Definitions of This Thesis

1.3.1 People of Colour

Having discussed the aim, research questions, and contributions of this thesis, it is now necessary to explain the key terms and definitions used in this thesis. It is challenging and impossible to agree on the most suitable or acceptable terminology to describe non-White individuals or people of colour (the term that will be used in this study) since no absolute, universally agreed-upon or unprohibited term exists. Biscontini (2024) reported that the term "people of colour" was traced back to a French phrase in 1797, which referred to individuals with White and Black ancestry. It was subsequently employed in formal legislation in 1807 in the United States of America (USA), concerning laws that prohibited the importation of enslaved individuals into the USA (Biscontini, 2024). After that, it became a legal term, although various states have defined it differently, primarily centring on the relation to Black individuals. Over time, the definition of people of colour has evolved and been used differently across various groups, with the phrase being seen as either offensive or acceptable depending on different communities (Biscontini, 2024). Nevertheless, various terms are employed to refer to individuals of colour in numerous literary works and studies, the most prevalent being people of colour, racialised individuals, minorities, racial minorities, ethnic minorities, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of colour) (Biscontini, 2024; Government UK, 2024; Lane, 2019; National Institutes of Health, n.d.). Many individuals may raise concerns with such terminology and argue that those terms are used to segregate or categorise certain groups of individuals, and some may argue that some terms lack political correctness. As a result, in this paper, the term "people of colour" will be used as a primary term to refer to individuals who are neither White nor beneficiaries of White privilege (Biscontini, 2024). This term in this research is not intended to reinforce divisions among groups of people but rather to draw attention to those who are underrepresented in the dominant discourse.

1.3.2 Aotearoa / New Zealand

Moreover, in this research, it utilises the terms "Aotearoa / New Zealand" together, acknowledging their distinct meanings and recognising Aotearoa / New Zealand as a bicultural and colonial nation. This also highlights the influence of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which emphasises and empowers the voices of those who have historically been disregarded. This case recognises the culture and language of the Māori,

acknowledging them as the Indigenous people of Aotearoa/New Zealand, where Aotearoa translates to “long bright world” or “long White cloud” and is currently the Māori designation for New Zealand (Breen et al., 2021).

1.3.3 Other Terms

Finally, the term “Pākehā” is a Māori designation used to refer to non-Māori New Zealanders of European descent. In contrast, “White people” denotes White individuals in a broader context.

1.4 Research Problem and Rationale

Aotearoa/New Zealand is commonly perceived as a small nation with a culturally and ethnically diverse population. Although European ethnicities still comprise the largest portion of the population, the 2023 Census revealed an increase in other ethnicities, including Māori, Asian, Pacific peoples, and Middle Eastern/Latin American/African groups (New Zealand Government, 2024). One reason for the increase in diversity is the rise in immigration resulting from migration policies implemented since 1970, which aim to address the skills shortage in Aotearoa/New Zealand (Simon-Kumar, 2015). This conveys the market position of Aotearoa/New Zealand as one of the significant labour-receiving countries from the past to the present (Farashah & Blomquist, 2020). Indeed, Aotearoa/New Zealand and numerous other nations are experiencing a rise in the number of migrants working in care professions such as aged care, disability care, and early childhood education and care (New Zealand Government, 2024). Specifically, based on the most recent statistics, the proportion of immigrant workers in ECE rose from 7% in 2001 to 16% in 2017 (Hyslop & Le, 2019). It is expected that the number will exceed these statistics in the current year. Despite the significant contribution of migrant workers to the economy (which will be discussed in more detail further in this chapter) and increasing diversity in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the persistent discrimination encountered by migrant workers in many sectors, particularly discrimination based on race, remains prevalent (Daldy et al., 2013). Maydell and Diego-Mendoza (2014) found that despite the illegality of visible discriminatory actions, prejudice remains significant and is now manifesting in covert, less explicit forms that are frequently unconscious and rooted within structures or systems. Therefore, several studies in Aotearoa/New Zealand have sought to address this issue by examining racism in employment, particularly within the care industry, like healthcare. However, in the context of ECE, existing literature has primarily focused on the challenges of

fostering inclusivity, with scholars exploring how policies and practices can support ECE centres in embracing diversity and creating an inclusive environment for children and teachers. (Foster-Cohen & van Bysterveldt, 2016; Griffiths et al, 2022; Shuker & Cherrington, 2016). Consequently, there has been limited research explicitly examining the experiences of migrant staff in ECE, who are the direct stakeholders in this topic. Hence, this thesis aims to explore the experiences of migrants of colour in ECE and how systemic racism may contribute to their experiences. Given that systemic racism has been identified as a barrier to workforce diversity (Griffiths et al., 2022), this study examines whether and how it manifests in the experiences of migrant workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand — a country often regarded as ethnically diverse. Additionally, this research could potentially uncover other forms of discrimination within the ECE, providing a foundation for future studies to investigate further and address these challenges.

1.5 Background to the Research Problem

This section provides background information on the research problem, including an overview of ECE and migration in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It covers the definition, principles, and current tensions within ECE, along with the current trends about migrant workers and the evolution of past and present immigration policies.

1.5.1 Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand

The Ministry of Education (2017) defines early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand as a formal arrangement for teaching and caring for young children, including babies, toddlers, and children up to the age of 6 years (the age before they begin compulsory education in primary school). There are several types of licensed and certified services of ECE recognised by the Ministry of Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand: teacher-led services, parent and Whānau-led (families) services, Te Kōhanga Reo (Māori language and culture-oriented ECE centre), playcentre, playgroups, home-based education and care services and Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura) (New Zealand's state distance education provider) (Ministry of Education, 2023). As of 2024, there were 4,409 licensed early childhood services in Aotearoa/New Zealand, with 194,597 children enrolled (Ministry of Education, 2025). Additionally, the majority (71%) received education and care services. In comparison, 14% were enrolled in kindergartens, 5% in home-based services, 5% in play centres,

and 4% in Te Kōhanga Reo (Māori language and culture-oriented ECE centre) (Ministry of Education, 2025). These services can be provided by private, community-owned, non-profit organisations, and others.

1.5.2 Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Aotearoa/New Zealand

This previous section has demonstrated the general statistics of the ECE industry in Aotearoa/New Zealand. There are curricula and learning philosophies for ECE that all early childhood services in Aotearoa/New Zealand are required to adopt, known as "Te Whāriki" (Aotearoa/New Zealand's early childhood curriculum) (Ministry of Education, 2017). Unlike the school curriculum, Te Whāriki does not impose formal subject teaching; instead, it describes principles, goals, strands, and learning outcomes (Ministry of Education, 2017). In particular, the Ministry of Education (2025) emphasised that the principle in Aotearoa/New Zealand's ECE posits that a child can learn best through play, along with facilitation from the supervision and assistance of proficient adults. The optimal initiation of formal education for a young kid involves fostering independence while cultivating critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. In support of this, 33,309 teaching staff were employed in licensed early childhood services in 2024 and Te Kura (the Correspondence School); 23,699 were qualified teachers (Ministry of Education, 2025). Notably, the workforce was predominantly European/Pākehā (62%), followed by Asian (24%), Māori (8%), Pacific peoples (6%) and the remaining staff identified as MELAA (Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African), other ethnicities, or did not state their ethnicity (Ministry of Education, 2025).

1.5.3 Early Childhood Education Workforce in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the Association with Gendered Work

Another significant aspect of the ECE workforce is its gender imbalance, with women comprising most of the workforce, accounting for almost 97% of the teaching staff in 2024 (Ministry of Education, 2025). This mirrors broader trends in care-based professions, where gender norms influence people's perceptions and associations with this profession as a woman's job. Especially with the gendered dynamic where the traditional role of what women "naturally" do—a primary caregiver, aligns closely with ECE's dominant daily routine involving domestic spheres and the idea of mothering, caring and nurturing children, including assisting with cleaning, meals, toileting, sleeping and playing (Gould, 2022; McDonald et al., 2024; Nentwich et al., 2018;

Ravenswood & Smith, 2017). Those tasks are traditionally deemed routine, unpaid, and of low value, whereas the economic work outside the home, which is performed primarily by men, is considered to have higher status (McDonald et al., 2024; Ravenswood & Smith, 2017). This is also evidenced in the research where researchers have discussed how teaching and mothering are constantly associated with early childhood education and care (ECEC) teaching, which is also reflected in foundational ECEC theories, preserving the idealised image of the loving mother as the ideal representation of an ECEC teacher (Ailwood, 2017; Aslanian, 2015; Gould, 2022; Van Laere et al., 2014). While this maternal discourse of care work has benefited women in career opportunities in care professions like teaching and nursing, scholars have emphasised that it reinforces essentialist views of care, which suggest that it is a woman's job, thereby undermining the complexity of care work, which is skilled, intellectual, and affective (Gould, 2022). In this case, the essentialist notion reinforces the historical gender role, which is not only problematic in creating limitations in individuals' potential and predefined categories of people based on their gender or race but also feeds into the system that discriminates and denies the existence of individual uniqueness. Consequently, this significantly echoes the ongoing tension between care and professionalism in ECEC as a gendered issue deeply embedded in the sector's history and politics. Indeed, as women dominate this field and are strongly associated with caregiving and nurturance traits, ECEC is perceived as lacking professionalism due to its association with hyper-femininity (Gould, 2022).

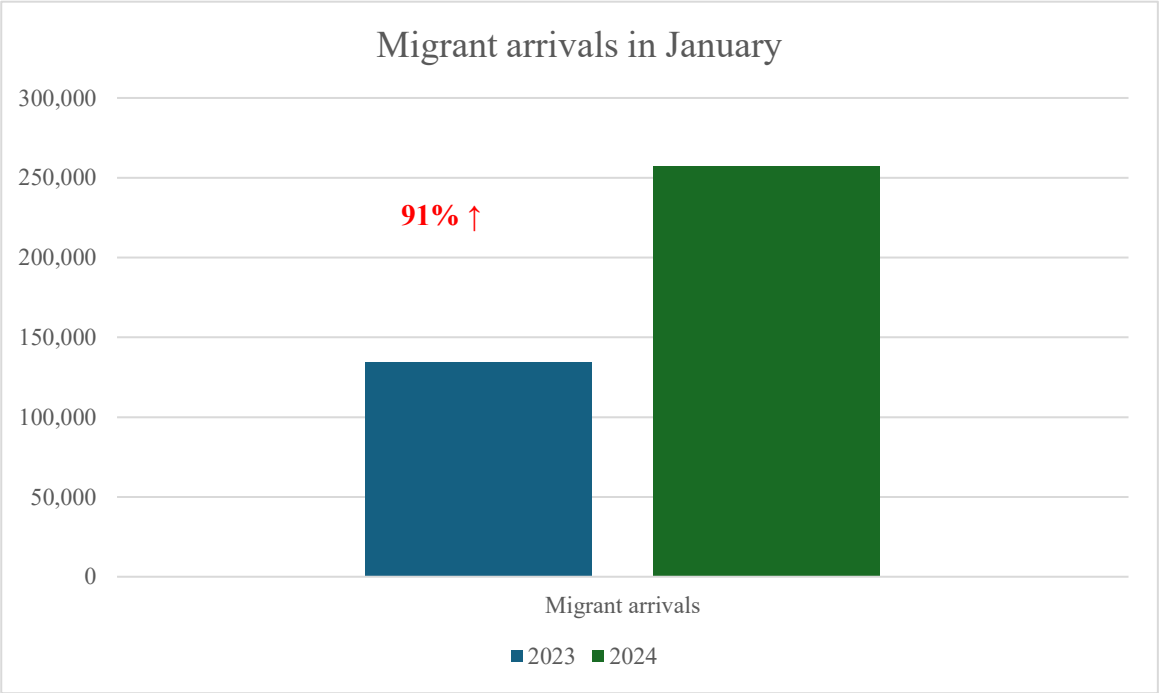
On a related note, at the time this thesis was conducted, NZEI Te Riu Roa (the biggest education sector union in NZ) stated its concern over the regulation changes regarding ECE, where the government aims to reduce qualification requirements for the teachers, including removing the requirement of Te Whāriki—the curriculum and the requirement to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) and acknowledging Māori as tangata whenua (Indigenous people) (NZEI, n.d.). With the government's ongoing reform efforts, the reduction in qualification requirements reinforces the prevailing perception of ECE as primarily a care role rather than an educational profession. This shift suggests that the government views ECE work as less professional than other roles within the education sector. Gould (2022) found that her participants expressed this as an undervaluation of care labour and its association with exploitation, where taking care of children, such as feeding, comforting, changing diapers, or attending to children's basic needs, was perceived as simple, mothering jobs, and low-skilled. This tension was evident in the pay equity claims, where more than 90,000

educators—including teachers and principals in schools, kindergartens, and ECE services—advocated for fair pay (NZEI, n.d.). The union's support for this claim highlighted the broader issue of undervaluation in the education sector, making it the most significant pay equity claim in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It presented a vital opportunity to address wage disparities and improve working conditions, thereby ensuring that educators received fair recognition for their contributions. Nevertheless, the government's recent urgent changes to the Equal Pay Act 1972 have abolished all existing pay equity claims, including this one (Ravenswood, 2025). This move reflects a broader pattern of undervaluing work performed by women, especially in sectors like education, care, and support work—industries known for being underpaid and overworked (Ravenswood, 2025). These changes make it even harder for women to raise concerns about unfair pay. By increasing the barriers to making a claim, the state not only widens the gender pay gap but also benefits businesses at the expense of women's rights. This reflects the current state of the industry, where educators have long been fighting for fair treatment and the recognition they deserve for their significant contributions and expertise, only to see their efforts further sabotaged by the very state that claims to work for and represent the people of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Another significant aspect of the government transforming ECE is the demolition of Te Whāriki (Aotearoa/New Zealand's early childhood curriculum), along with the obligation to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi) and recognise Māori as tangata whenua (Indigenous people). This will result in a lower perception of value in ECE work, as Te Whāriki plays a crucial role in redefining care as an essential component of teaching, rather than a distinct or inferior function (NZEI, n.d.). Te Whāriki advocates for ideas such as interdependence, reciprocity, and connections, supporting educators in confronting the traditional separation between care and education, while emphasising the significance of care in nurturing children's growth and learning (Gould, 2022). Without Te Whāriki, the emphasis on understanding the significance of the "care" aspect in ECE would be further diminished, reinforcing existing stereotypes and deepening the undervaluation of ECE work. Not only that, but the government's attempts also to diminish the obligations to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) and the rights of Māori individuals exemplify systemic racism, wherein the states undermine the identity of Indigenous peoples through trivialising the cultural significance in the education system, all while preserving a power structure that favours the dominant group.

1.5.4 Migrant Trends and Immigration Trends in Aotearoa/New Zealand

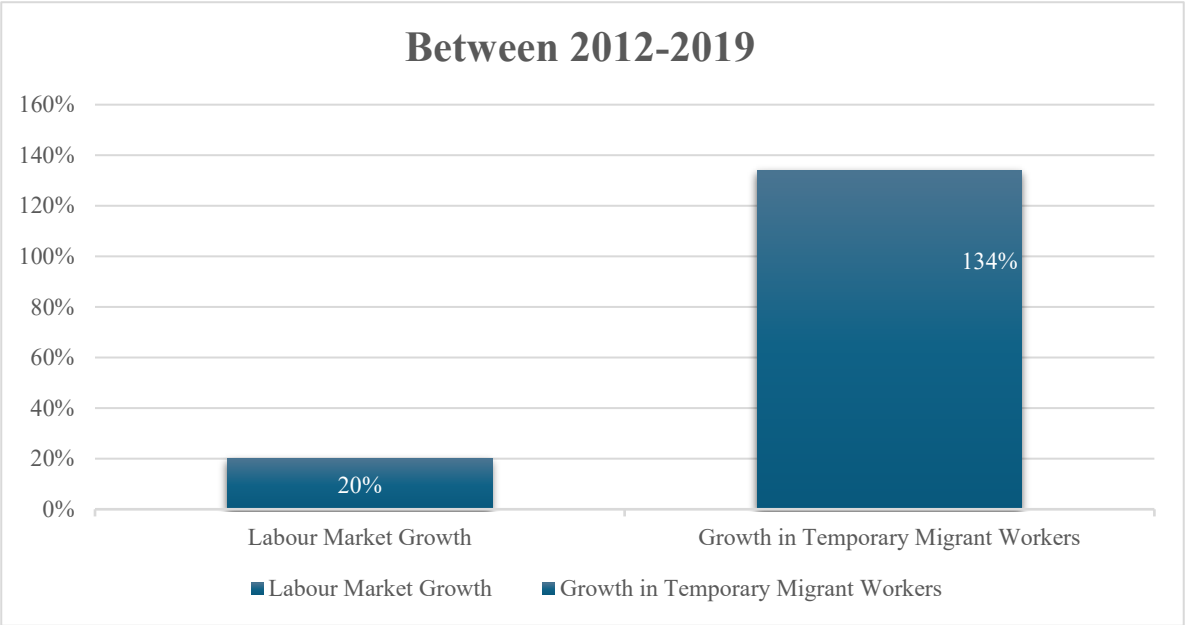
Figure 1: Comparison of Migrant Arrivals: January 2023 vs January 2024



Note. Figure created by the author using data from Stats NZ (2024).

Migrant workers are individuals who temporarily relocate from their country of origin to seek employment, typically on temporary or seasonal visas, or without documentation (Reid et al., 2021). In Aotearoa/New Zealand, net migrant arrivals in January 2024 increased to 91% (257,200) compared to January 2023 (Stats NZ, 2024). India was the largest group, followed by the Philippines, China, New Zealand, Fiji, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Sri Lanka and Vietnam (Stats NZ, 2024).

Figure 2: Labour Market Growth vs Growth in Temporary Migrant Workers (2012–2019)



Note. Figure created by the author using data from the New Zealand Productivity Commission (2021).

The increase in net migrant trends reflects Aotearoa/New Zealand's stage of the labour market; according to the latest data, employment in Aotearoa/New Zealand's labour market grew by 20% between 2012 and 2019, driven by a significant 143% rise in the number of temporary migrant workers (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2021). This illustrates the result of the shift in migration policy by the Aotearoa/New Zealand government over the last two decades, which has transitioned its focus from permanent settlement to managing substantial numbers of temporary migrants (Collins, 2020; Islam et al., 2024). The New Zealand Productivity Commission (2021) agreed that the demand from employers has primarily driven Aotearoa/New Zealand's temporary migration systems, leading to a sustained rise in the number of temporary migrants with work rights, which more than doubled between 2012 and 2022, especially with a growing proportion of migrants employed in low-skilled jobs. Due to these legislative changes, several sectors, including agriculture, tourism, healthcare, hospitality, transportation and logistics, retail and construction, have grown more dependent on temporary workers to address labour shortages (Islam et al., 2024; Stringer et al., 2022). To be specific, the New Zealand Productivity Commission (2021) identified that the contribution to a substantial rise in employment among working holiday and essential skills visa holders in Aotearoa/New Zealand, particularly in the accommodation, food services, agriculture, forestry, and fishing sectors, is owing to the rapid expansion of tourism, dairy farming, and horticulture. This includes a notable increase in the employment of essential skills and work for

residence visa holders, driven by the growth of the construction industry (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2021).

1.5.5 Historical Immigration Systems: Racial Bias in Migrant Selection

Building on the trends, Islam et al (2024) emphasise that these policy modifications extend from a prior change in migration regulations during the late 1980s and early 1990s, which evolved from favouring migrants from "traditional source" countries, such as Britain and Ireland, to a system that prioritised human capital, emphasising skills and financial assets. Indeed, until the early 1970s, Aotearoa/New Zealand's immigration policy was a prime example of a discriminatory system against certain races and nationalities, where historical ties and race-based preferences for migrants from traditional source countries largely influenced selection criteria. Strict restrictions were imposed on non-British and European individuals, especially Asians; these restrictions included a poll tax, English-only application forms, English-language reading tests, and permits for entry, as well as the requirement of thumbnails on certificates issued to a specific group of people—the Chinese (Beaglehole, 2015). At the time, the principle underlying the policy was driven by fear over the growing Chinese population, with the aim of "keeping the country White" or maintaining Aotearoa/New Zealand as a "country of European development" (Beaglehole, 2015; Mitchell, 2003). Beaglehole (2015) stated that these policies also reflect the belief in the superiority of the White race and the desire to turn Aotearoa/New Zealand into the "Britain of the South". Indeed, Mitchell (2003) highlighted that Aotearoa/New Zealand's economy relied significantly on exporting produce to Britain. With this cultural attachment, the Aotearoa/New Zealand government preserved the immigration policy that the British favoured, including those who "assimilated" easily into Aotearoa/New Zealand's British-based culture (Mitchell, 2003). At that time, although the skill shortage was on the rise, the government's preferences were clear, with the priorities being the stock of people in Britain, and then Scandinavia or Northern Europe would be considered (Beaglehole, 2015). It was not until 1986 that migrant selection in Aotearoa/New Zealand was considered merit-based, allowing individuals who met specific criteria—such as education, business experience, professional skills, age, or financial assets—to immigrate regardless of race or nationality (Beaglehole, 2015). Yet, privileging financial assets challenges the notion of a truly merit-based system. After that, the Immigration Amendment Act of 1991 replaced the occupational priority list with a points-based system, which was further refined after 2002 (Beaglehole, 2015). Under this system, points were allocated based on age, qualifications, employment

status, work experience, skills shortages, and the location of a job offer. However, the point system is no different in reinforcing the same system that disproportionately disadvantages people of colour and those margins of society, creating a more significant inequity and bias, but in a different form (Mooten, 2021).

1.5.6 The Current Immigration Point System

The point system in Aotearoa/New Zealand is used as a tool for applying for a “Skilled Migrant Category Resident Visa” and on the immigrant website, it states that this visa is "for people who have skills that will contribute to New Zealand's economic growth." (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, n.d., para. 10). A minimum of 6 points is required to apply for this type of visa which include: 3 to 6 points are awarded based on Aotearoa/New Zealand occupational registration or qualifications or income, with an additional point granted for each year of work experience in a skilled position in Aotearoa/New Zealand, capped at a maximum of 3 points (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, n.d). It is evident that only certain migrants with specific qualifications meet the requirements of the points system. Obviously, this system is designed to select the “ideal migrant”—someone highly educated, who holds a well-paid, specialised job, and who is seen as not a burden to the host society (Mooten, 2021). However, this ideal sharply contrasts with the reality in many host countries, including Aotearoa/New Zealand, where temporary work programs are still highly utilised to address labour shortages. Although current policies may offer pathways for migrant workers to obtain residency, these pathways are neither guaranteed nor straightforward (Stringer et al., 2022). During the waiting period—whether for visa outcomes or to meet eligibility criteria—migrants are often left in a state of uncertainty and vulnerability (Stringer et al., 2022). This has resulted in widespread cases of exploitation, as demonstrated in the research by Stringer et al. (2022), which shows that immigration and labour policies in New Zealand often fail to adequately protect temporary migrant workers. At a structural level, these policy gaps have enabled exploitation to become systemic. This reflects how migrant workers are frequently treated as economic tools—valued primarily for their labour—rather than as individuals with rights, dignity, and aspirations. Moonten (2021) presented a points system that was historically established to address perceived social issues associated with certain immigrant groups, particularly those from non-preferred nations (i.e., non-European, non-Western Hemisphere) that were seen as a threat to societal cohesion. Consequently, low-skilled migrants, including racialised migrants, were perceived as a threat to social cohesion, accompanied by

assertions that during economic recessions, low-skilled immigrants would be unable to retrain due to their educational backgrounds, countries of origin, and limited potential for assimilation (Mooten, 2021).

Overall, it is evident that migrant workers make significant contributions to the labour market in Aotearoa/New Zealand, bringing valuable skills, knowledge, and experiences — including within the ECE sector. Although the most recent available data is from 2017, it is evident that reliance on migrant labour in the ECE workforce has increased substantially over the past decade, and it is likely that current figures have surpassed those earlier levels (Hyslop & Le, 2019). Nevertheless, the skills and contributions of migrant workers continue to be undervalued and further diminished by systemic barriers, such as systemic racism. As a result, exploring their experiences in ECE provides a deeper understanding of how such systemic barriers may play a critical role in continuously undermining their personal and professional lives.

1.6 Thesis Structure

The next chapter (Chapter 2) will review the literature by first defining systemic discrimination and racism, including their overlap and differences, as the terms have been used interchangeably. Then, the chapter will go into further detail about each level of racism—individual, institutional, and societal or structural —that accumulates into systemic racism, including how each level unfolds for migrants of colour. Finally, it will focus on the characteristics of ECE and its association with migrant workers. Next, in Chapter Three, the methodology chapter discusses the philosophy underlying this study: relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology informed by Critical Race Theory. This includes discussing the methodology of counter-storytelling that employs semi-structured interviews to acquire data and thematic analysis to analyse the data. Chapter four presents the study's findings and demonstrates the outcomes from the thematic analysis of interview data acquired from migrants of colour in ECE, presenting four Themes. Chapter five, the discussion chapter, examines the study's findings concerning the reviewed literature, identifying similarities and differences between the participants' experiences and existing research on the topic. This analysis provides a deeper understanding of the issue within the Aotearoa/New Zealand context. Finally, Chapter Six will present the study's conclusions, addressing how the research questions are answered. It also outlines the significance of the findings, acknowledges the study's limitations, offers recommendations for future research, and provides closing remarks.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This introductory chapter outlined the purpose of the study: to investigate the work experiences of migrants of colour in ECE and to explore how systemic racism may have shaped these experiences. It highlighted the potential contributions of this research in addressing gaps in the existing literature, particularly within the context of ECE in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The chapter also presented the research problem and rationale, raising important questions about diversity in Aotearoa/New Zealand by considering the significant contributions of migrant workers to the ECE workforce, while acknowledging the persistent racial discrimination they faced. Additionally, this chapter provided background information on the research problem, including an overview of the ECE sector, migration trends, and immigration policies in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It discussed current tensions within the ECE sector, where gendered dynamics and the undervaluation of ECE work contributed to disparities compared to other levels of education. Furthermore, the chapter examined the substantial proportion of migrant workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand, a trend largely driven by immigration policies designed to meet employer demands. It also explored historical immigration policies that restricted entry for people of colour and how these evolved into the current points-based system. While this system addressed labour shortages, it continued to disadvantage migrants of colour in various ways.

The following chapter, the literature review, will examine existing scholarship on racism, systemic racism, and the ECE sector, with a particular focus on their association with migrants of colour and the resulting implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter, the introduction, identified the aim of this study, the research question, the contribution, and the research problem, along with its rationale. It also provided background information on the early childhood education (ECE) industry, including current trends and the historical and contemporary context of immigration policy.

This chapter offers an overview of the existing literature on systemic racism and the experiences of migrant workers in the ECE industry in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It begins by defining systemic discrimination, followed by an exploration of the concepts of racism and systemic racism, which are central to this study as specific forms of discrimination. The chapter then explores the relationship between migrant workers and racism, with a particular focus on how racism manifests at the individual, institutional, and societal levels. It examines how these levels interact to construct systemic racism, shaping the lived experiences of migrant workers. The chapter also discusses the implications of these intersecting forms of racism on migrant workers, including how they influence coping strategies and resilience. Finally, the chapter addresses critical issues related to racism against migrant workers in the ECE sector. Overall, it illustrates the current state of research on racism, systemic racism, and ECE. As a result, it identifies research gaps stemming from the limitations of existing studies and the lack of material specifically addressing migrants of colour in ECE—particularly in Aotearoa/New Zealand, where the predominant focus has been on other care sectors such as aged care and healthcare.

2.2 Systemic Discrimination

2.2.1 Discrimination

Discrimination can be defined as an intentional or unintentional act of unfair or unequal treatment, including exclusion or preference made toward an individual based on their characteristics or identities, such as gender, race, colour, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion, ethical belief, political opinion, national extraction or social origin, marital, employment and family status (Human Rights Commission, n.d.; International Labour Organization, 1960; Schmidt, 2010). Individuals may experience discrimination through day-to-day practices,

such as unequal treatment by employees and disparities in systems that undermine or hinder equal opportunities or treatment across various aspects of life (International Labour Organization, 1960; Mooten, 2021). Especially in social and economic areas, such as employment, justice, immigration, child welfare, education, healthcare and police systems (Mooten, 2021). For example, Schmidt (2010) found that immigrant teachers encountered significant challenges in securing employment, as employers often presume, they possess less value in the education profession than other candidates despite their remarkable qualifications, experience, and backgrounds. This reflects how employers' biased attitudes toward immigrant teachers stem from individual prejudice and manifest in everyday practices—such as assumptions about migrant workers—ultimately resulting in unequal treatment that disadvantages these groups of people. Indeed, this is just one example of research highlighting bias and unequal treatment within a single organisation and area of life. Undoubtedly, many similar incidents may have occurred in other organisations or areas of systems worldwide, where such practices have gradually become embedded in the system, shaping values and practices that disadvantage certain groups. As a result, discriminatory practices that individuals adopt are now accumulating and becoming pervasive at a systemic level that operates within society.

2.2.2 Systemic Discrimination

To clarify, Cambridge University defined "systemic" as "relating to or affecting the whole of a system, organisation, etc., rather than just some parts of it" (Cambridge University Press, n.d., *Systemic*). In this case, what may start as isolated acts and beliefs of discrimination by individuals, seemingly insignificant on their own, can accumulate over time when shared by groups and eventually by the majority. This collective behaviour and attitude become the foundation of normalised systems that "systematically" disempower and disadvantage countless people. Gynter (2003) explained "systemic discrimination" as an indirect form of discrimination; this unequal and prejudiced treatment now lies and is embedded within the system rather than the individual who presents it. For example, in employment, systemic discrimination may manifest as hiring bias, a lack of recognition of overseas qualifications, wage disparity, and limited career advancement due to an individual's characteristics or identities (Mooten, 2021).

Indeed, the institutions, organisations, norms, rules and procedures that operate in society are designed and intended to hold "neutral value" and not reinforce or perpetuate the existing inequalities created and organised to benefit and elevate the dominant group while marginalising minorities (Schindler & Zeller,

2011). Therefore, the claims of "neutrality" fail to recognise the lasting effects of a long history of oppression, which continue to profoundly impact minority groups in a society. This historical legacy, rooted in systems of slavery, gender discrimination, colonialism, and more, is a fundamental driver of ongoing social inequality (Mooten, 2021). A well-known example that is believed to be the formal recognition of the existence of systemic discrimination could be in court in the USA in 1970, where the Supreme Court formally acknowledged the impact of systemic discrimination, where the company policy of requesting high school diplomas disadvantaged and discriminated against Black employees due to their limited access to education in that timeframe (Bohren et al., 2023; Schindler & Zeller, 2011). Schindler and Zeller (2011) highlighted that failing to acknowledge past structural oppression means that practices, policies, or procedures labelled as "neutral", "race-blind", or "colour-blind" overlook the deep-rooted impact of historical discrimination and systemic violence that persist in marginalising and disadvantaging across a generation of minority groups. This is problematic and dangerous, as it reinforces the false assumption that everyone shares the same experiences and values, and that society operates on principles of equality and justice for everyone. Such an approach diminishes the significance of minority values, ultimately compromising or denying their human rights and fundamental freedoms (Schindler & Zeller, 2011).

Although discrimination can occur based on a wide range of personal characteristics—such as age, gender, political beliefs, and employment status—the term systemic discrimination has often been used by scholars to specifically examine racial discrimination and segregation (Gynter, 2003; Mooten, 2021; Schindler & Zeller, 2011; Schmidt, 2010). Thus, systemic discrimination and systemic racism are frequently used interchangeably and do share some overlap. However, systemic discrimination can more broadly refer to systems and practices that disadvantage individuals based on a range of characteristics, not limited to race alone, including ethnicity, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, and immigration status (Human Rights Commission, n.d.; International Labour Organization, 1960; Schmidt, 2010). As a result, this study aims to focus on the experiences of migrants of colour; it will explicitly use and focus on the term "systemic racism", which is racial discrimination as patterns of behaviour, policies or practices that are part of the structures of an organisation, and which create or perpetuate disadvantage, specifically for people of colour (Mooten, 2021). The following section will provide more details and discuss racism and systemic racism.

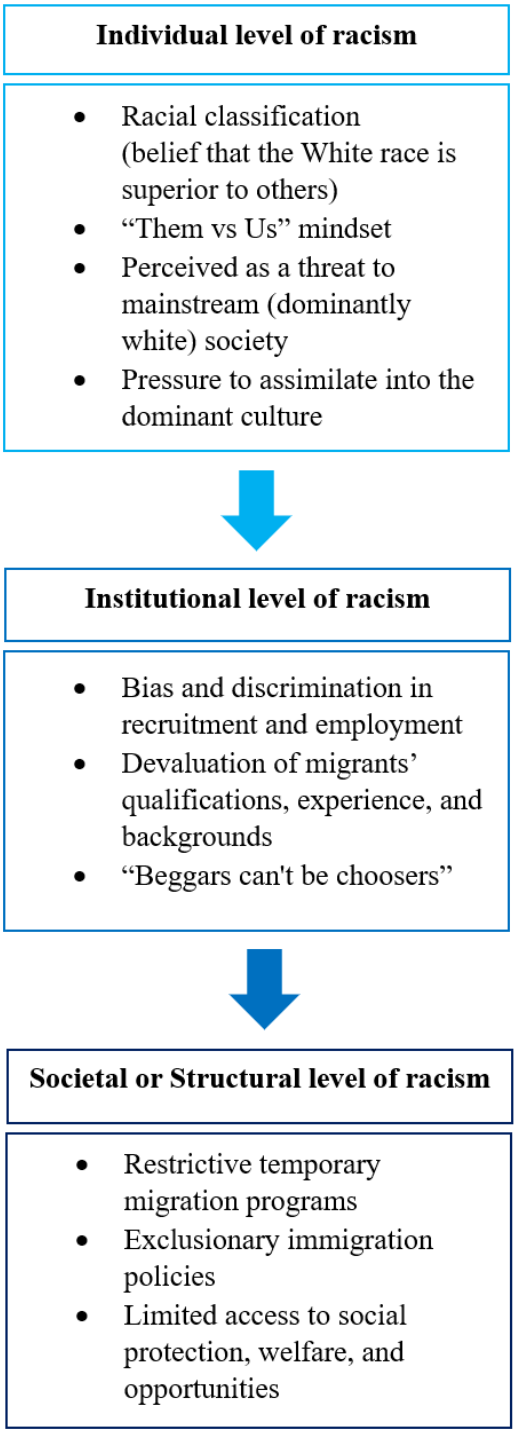
2.3 Systemic Racism

2.3.1 Racism

To begin with, it requires an understanding of racism by examining one of the most significant historical events that has profoundly shaped the view on racial discrimination, serving as an example of how racism and systemic racism were established and continue to persist today. Ultimately, this section offers a conceptual overview of racism, laying the groundwork for understanding how systemic racism is constructed and sustained over time. Feagin (2006) explained the beginning of one's mindset of racism using a remarkable historical event, tracing back to the seventeenth century when the colonisation of North America and the enslavement of African American people began. At that time, the coloniser's group (White settlers) perceived their actions as justified and aligned with their sense of moral and civilisational duty by killing, exploiting and using other non-Europeans, persuading their belief that those who were different were not human; they were "savage, uncivilised and non-Christian" (Feagin, 2006). In that time frame, the dominant idea of race positioned White people as preserving the value and ideology of being "White, or Christian" to distinguish themselves and assert superiority over people of colour and other cultures. Feagin (2006) emphasised that they also symbolise White for the "ownership of the earth and civilisation", using this as a justification to invade the land of Indigenous people and legitimise slavery. Thus, races become classifications of social hierarchy. The idea that racial groups are biologically different is fundamental, pervasive and inherent in the belief that some races are naturally superior or inferior to others while downplaying other races, causing the phenomenon of racial segregation from generation to generation (Mooten, 2021). Consequently, with racial classification, certain races become associated with negative stereotypes, images, and metaphors, creating racial bias where individuals have generically negative defaults and stigma around other races, especially people of colour (Banaji et al., 2021; Feagin, 2006; Mooten, 2021). For example, the association of people of colour with "low-skill, free and cheap labour" and Banaji et al. (2021) found that "White Americans associate White with human and Black, Asian, and Latinx with an animal with greater ease than the opposite pairing (White with an animal), regardless of the category of animal (generic or specific)" (p. 11). Indeed, scholars pointed out that those beliefs of racial classifications served as the ideological foundation for justifying slavery, the appropriation of First Nation

lands, the mistreatment of Asian immigrants in 19th-century Canada, the Holocaust and many more (Mooten, 2021).

Figure 3: Layers of Systemic Racism Faced by Migrants of Colour



Note. Figure created by the author using data from multiple sources: Banaji et al. (2021), Daldy et al. (2013), Farashah & Blomquist (2020), Huang (2021), Jammermann (2021), Kind-Dejardin (2019), Lyons

et al. (2011), Mooten (2021), Negreiros et al. (2024), Salahshour and Boamah (2020), Simon-Kumar (2015) and Tan et al. (2024).

Understanding how systemic racism forms requires the examination of how racial bias at each level: individual, institutional and structural or societal interplays and collectively builds into other levels, creating a system that flows around racial discrimination (Banaji et al., 2021; Mooten, 22021). As a result, as illustrated in Figure 3, this example demonstrates how various levels of racism can interact and unfold in the experiences of migrants of colour which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. The aim of the figure is to explain how systemic racism cannot be understood as a single process or by examining each level of racism in isolation. Instead, it requires recognising how different levels of racism interact and reinforce one another, ultimately building into a more extensive system that disadvantages minorities while benefiting the majority. However, the scope presented in this thesis and the figure are limited, due to the nature of the topic being extensive and complex, along with the limitations of the thesis study.

2.3.2 Individual Level of Racism

Banaji et al. (2021) and Mooten (2021) proposed the importance of understanding racism at the individual level, as the individual is regarded as a vital actor within all systems of life and living. Individuals, including their interactions, attitudes, and behaviour, are structured and influenced by a set of beliefs, values and ideas that are the foundation of their mental structure (Banaji et al., 2021). Hence, individuals who upheld the ideology that the value of humans can be determined based on race and one race is superior to another could frame their negative "attitudes (preferences, prejudices), beliefs (stereotypes), and behaviours (discrimination) toward other, feeding into the racism system and is reflected in the willful, conscious/unconscious, direct/indirect, or intentional/unintentional words or actions of individuals" (Banaji et al., 2021; p. 2). To demonstrate, managers who hold negative and biased attitudes, such as a belief in the superiority of certain races—may make hiring decisions that favour one racial group while discriminating against others. These biases often result in less friendly and less helpful behaviour, reduced time spent with applicants, and more negative verbal interactions, particularly toward migrants of colour (Maydell & Diego-Mendoza, 2014). Similarly, in their research, Maydell and Diego-Mendoza (2014), along with Sahraoui (2020), have found that participants experience racist treatment from managers and colleagues, which manifests as bullying, stigmatisation, demeaning behaviour, favouritism, and various forms of harassment. This includes verbal

harassment—such as gossip, taunts, and ridicule and non-verbal harassment, including hostile stares, social exclusion, and damage to personal belongings (Maydell & Diego-Mendoza, 2014; Sahraoui, 2020). As a result, racism can be defined as the act of treating people in a discriminatory or hostile manner due to perceived disparities in race and culture (Banaji et al., 2021; Mooten, 2021). It reflects the stance that biological differences are indicators of value in humans, where, most of the time, being "White" is considered superior to other races (Mooten, 2021). This includes "racial differences, such as skin colour, stature, eye shape or head shape, were arbitrarily chosen to justify racial classification resulting in a hierarchy of human value based on race." (Backhouse, 1999; Bolaria & Li, 1988; Fleras, 2017; Nestel, 2012; Satzewich, 2011, as cited in Mooten, 2021, p. 15).

2.3.2.1 Individual Level Racism: Migrants of Colour's Experiences

Racism against migrants of colour in Aotearoa/New Zealand is evident at the individual level, particularly through the interactions and perceptions of the dominant population. Researchers have observed that migrant groups who are culturally and visibly distinct from the dominant European populations in Aotearoa/New Zealand often face racial discrimination, similar to the experiences of minority groups in other countries (Daldy, 2013). Moreover, research found that people of colour often face prejudice based on their skin colour, language, religion, beliefs, and customs (Tan et al., 2024). Stevens et al. (2012) argued that these visible and cultural differences become markers used by the dominant population to wrongly classify and associate negative stereotypes with other ethnic groups, resulting in discrimination and racism. This process of racial classification, rooted in notions of superiority, reinforces a "them vs us" mindset that legitimises exclusionary attitudes and behaviours, particularly among White populations toward migrants of colour. Tajfel (1981) explained the concept of "them" (outgroup) and "us" (ingroup) through the lens of Social Identity Theory (TSI), which suggests that individuals categorise the social world into two essential groups (as cited in Negreiros et al., 2024). This categorisation helps people develop a stronger sense of belonging within their group, and such a process occurs not only at the individual level but also within broader societal and institutional contexts (Negreiros et al., 2024). In seeking to maintain a positive image of their group, individuals often compare their ingroup to others, which can lead to favouring their own group while devaluing the outgroup (Negreiros et al., 2024). As a result, this dynamic contributes to the development of prejudice and discrimination, reinforcing a perspective of division between "them" and

"us" (Negreiros et al., 2024). In other words, the desire to feel good about one's group can unintentionally lead to unfair treatment of those outside it.

At the same time, scholars have highlighted that countries like Aotearoa/New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and others benefit economically from migrant labour, which contributes to market flexibility, alleviates labour shortages, and supports national growth (Farashah & Blomquist, 2020; Mooten, 2021; Simon-Kumar, 2015). Despite this economic reliance, migrants—especially those of colour—are still perceived by some as threats to "mainstream society, national values, and Kiwi identity" (Lyons et al., 2011, p. 25; Simon-Kumar, 2015, p. 1179). This contradiction reflects the enduring "them vs us" mentality, which has evolved over time but remains embedded in public discourse. In contemporary contexts, discriminatory attitudes are often expressed subtly rather than overtly, conveyed through coded language and hidden biases that continue to shape public perceptions and behaviours (Simon-Kumar, 2015). Lyons et al. (2011) found that Pākehā participants often used rhetorical strategies to justify racist views, reinforcing the dominance of a White-centric society that privileges European-looking and English-speaking individuals. For instance, concerns about Aotearoa/New Zealand losing its national identity due to immigration tend to focus disproportionately on Asian migrants, even though the country also receives a significant number of White immigrants (New Zealand Productivity Commission, 2021). This is evident in the research, which highlights Pākehā attitudes toward certain migrants of colour, particularly Asian immigrants, who are often perceived as desirable due to their reputed work ethic, economic contributions, and role as a buffer against recession—especially following the global financial crisis, as noted in a 2007 Ministry of Foreign Affairs White paper (Lyons et al., 2011; Simon-Kumar, 2015). However, despite these positive perceptions, Asians were still considered unsuitable because they stood out too much and lacked proficiency in English (Simon-Kumar, 2015). Similarly, Pacific Island immigrants were viewed as more culturally aligned with Aotearoa/New Zealand. However, they were often deemed undesirable for the economy due to stereotypes portraying them as lazy, lacking English proficiency, or not understanding Aotearoa/New Zealand's work standards and expectations (Lyons et al., 2011; Tan et al., 2024). These perceptions reinforced negative stereotypes, associating this group with unemployment and dependence on social welfare (Lyons et al., 2011; Tan et al., 2024). Ultimately, this selective concern reveals a deeper contradiction: while migrants of colour are seen as a threat to national identity, the historical and ongoing marginalisation of Māori—whose

identity and values have long been undermined and excluded from mainstream society—remains largely unaddressed (Lyons et al., 2011).

Subsequently, the expectation for migrants to assimilate and adapt—often driven by a desire to preserve mainstream cultural values—can lead to perceptions that those who retain their original identity are less suitable or desirable. John Berry's acculturation model provides a useful framework for understanding how migrants navigate these pressures, varying in the extent to which they adopt the cultural norms of their host society while maintaining aspects of their original culture (Berry, 1997, as cited in Tutu et al., 2018). The four primary acculturation strategies were identified when individuals may adopt when navigating cultural adaptation: assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalisation. (Choy et al., 2021; Tutu et al., 2018). Androni & Constantin (2024) stated that "Berry (1997) created the most cited model of acculturation and defined four standard acculturation strategies: integration (bicultural), separation (only retaining elements of the native culture), marginalisation (dissociation from both cultural identities) and assimilation (following only the mainstream culture)." (p. 129). Indeed, the integration strategy, where migrants actively engage with both their heritage culture and the host society's culture, is not only the most preferred form of acculturation among migrants, but also the most beneficial (Choy et al., 2021). This strategy has been consistently associated with enhanced psychological and socio-cultural well-being, including higher levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, and overall adjustment compared to the other three strategies (Androni & Constantin, 2024). Interestingly, although integration yields more positive outcomes, assimilation—where migrants adopt the host culture while relinquishing their own is the strategy most favoured by host communities (Choy et al., 2021; Tutu et al., 2018). Indeed, this point, also emphasised by Daldy et al. (2013), states that the fewer migrants of colour identify with their ethnicity or cultural background, the more people perceive them as a better fit and less of a threat to the host country's values; thus, they face less discrimination. However, scholars argued that although migrants may make concerted efforts to "assimilate" into their host country by acquiring and adapting the dominant language, accent, and cultural practices, their efforts are often undervalued (Lyons et al., 2011). This is because these traits are acquired rather than inherited, and therefore lack the perceived authenticity or legitimacy attributed to those born into the dominant national identity (Lyons et al., 2011). This reflects how migrants of colour have always been perceived. Although he/she might have been in the country for a significant period or well assimilated

into it, the fact that they had to acquire it rather than be born with it made them categorised as "other" in the country. To illustrate, migrants of colour who have lived in the country for over 20 years may still be considered outsiders. Regardless of how well migrants assimilate, those who are visibly and culturally different from the dominant group continue to be perceived as "other" in society. In contrast, White migrants—particularly those from countries like the UK and South Africa—are often not part of the discourse when discussing the "migrant topic", as researchers have shown that New Zealanders often perceive them as belonging and fitting well into Aotearoa/New Zealand's culture (Lyons et al., 2011). This perception is shaped by their alignment with the dominant group—sharing the same race (White), speaking the same language (English), holding similar cultural values, and, in some cases, being associated with the settler population—which contributes to their quicker acceptance and inclusion (Lyons et al., 2011). This distinction reflects a deeper sense of entitlement and inherited superiority, in which White people downplay the significance of other races and cultures. This notion not only exists in Aotearoa/New Zealand but is also amplified among White-dominant countries such as the UK, Australia and Southern Europe, where researchers found that in these countries' political discourses, they often reinforce and legitimate racism and discrimination using the rhetoric and notion of "protecting national interest and identity" by positioning those who embody the dominant culture of the country as "us" and those who embody different culture as "them, outsider and foreigner" (Lyons et al., 2011).

2.3.3 Institutional Level of Racism

Consequently, individual attitudes and behaviours rooted in entitlement and segregation—once seemingly minor—have gradually accumulated. As more individuals with these shared values come together, they form a collective that influences societal norms and, ultimately, shapes our systems. At the institutional level, racism extends beyond personal biases toward migrants of colour (Gynter, 2003). These prejudices have become embedded within institutional structures, policies, and values (Gynter, 2003; Mooten, 2021). Importantly, this level of racism is not a recent development; it is deeply rooted in historical processes such as colonisation and slavery, where racial classifications were used to legitimise exploitation, dispossession, and violence (Mooten, 2021). As discussed earlier, racial ideologies that positioned people of colour as inferior laid the groundwork for policies and systems that continue to marginalise racialised communities (Banaji et al., 2021; Feagin, 2006; Mooten, 2021). These foundational beliefs persist in shaping

institutional norms and practices, perpetuating racial inequities in contemporary society. As a result, systems are often designed to benefit the dominant majority while marginalising and overlooking the needs and experiences of minority groups. Mooten (2021) explains that this level of racism operates within organisations and institutions, where norms, values, and principles influence the development of rules, policies, and regulations. These mechanisms systematically result in unequal treatment and discrimination against racialised groups, reinforcing social structures that favour prevailing populations. For instance, migrants of colour in Aotearoa/New Zealand—despite holding qualifications and experience comparable to those from countries like the UK or Australia—frequently face challenges in having their credentials recognised (Tan et al., 2024). These barriers contribute to broader employment issues, including ethnic pay gaps, underemployment, and limited career progression (Ministry for Ethnic Communities, 2025). In contrast, UK and Australian migrants benefit from smoother pathways due to the alignment of their accreditation systems. This disparity reinforces institutional preferences that favour dominant groups, while others are systematically excluded.

2.3.3.1 Institutional Level of Racism: Migrants of Colour's Experiences

Indeed, migrants of colour are often associated with unemployment, underutilisation of skills, and working in unstandardised and unacceptable terms and conditions (Farashah & Blomquist, 2020; Tan et al., 2024). They are overrepresented in traditionally low-paid occupations, as many migrants of colour often face economic and job insecurity. As a result, they tend to accept any available job to secure their place in the labour market. In their job search, they are frequently subjected to the saying, “beggars can't be choosers” (Tan et al., 2024). Indeed, scholars have conducted studies in Aotearoa/New Zealand examining racism in employment and have found that people of colour face numerous obstacles in securing work (Tan et al., 2024). "These barriers include overt racism in hiring decisions, claims of lack of experience, under- or overqualification, discrimination, and being offered jobs or pay that do not align with qualifications or experiences" (Tan et al., 2024, p. 5). Moreover, Farashah and Blomquist (2020) researched managers across Europe about their attitudes toward migrant workers; they found that managers' attitudes and perceptions may exhibit cognitive biases in decision-making, which can significantly affect how they evaluate migrant candidates and personnel. First notable bias identified was that managers tend to favour individuals who share similar characteristics—such as mindset, personality traits, nationality, and other identities—a

phenomenon known as the “similar-to-me” effect. A second pattern identified by Farashah and Blomquist (2020) was the presence of stereotyping in managerial decision-making, where candidates were evaluated based on managers’ positive or negative associations with characteristics such as gender, race, physical appearance, and accent. Especially when it comes to evaluating migrant job applicants who may share differences in terms of educational background, culture and language, which could lead to even more prone to decision error in managers, Tan et al. (2024) demonstrated the case of African communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand where qualified doctors and accountants were working low-paying, contract-based jobs despite their qualifications. Likewise, the Indian community struggled for many years to secure employment that matched their qualifications and experience (Tan et al., 2024). This is linked to evidence showing that immigrant teachers in Australia often have their prior background, knowledge, experiences, and skills not fully recognised and appreciated, or even devalued, when they enter the dominant education system (Huang, 2021). On an institutional level, these teachers' unique experiences and diversity are often overlooked and treated as “empty vessels” (Huang, 2021). This case aligns with research findings that highlight wage disparities between migrant workers and local employees, where immigrants and people of colour are often underrepresented or underpaid in many professions (Dalydy et al., 2013). This disparity may be linked to the fact that migrants are frequently overqualified for the jobs they hold, and employers often fail to recognise overseas qualifications. Some researchers identify this failure as a form of discrimination in recruitment decisions (Dalydy et al., 2013). Salahshour and Boamah (2020) and Daldy et al. (2013) emphasise the issue of discrimination in recruitment, noting that job applicants who display indicators of ethnic association—such as ethnic names, ethnic cues, or immigration status—are less likely to be selected for employment compared to White applicants, despite having equivalent qualifications and experience. In other words, immigrants with foreign names, qualifications, and experience face additional disadvantages in job shortlisting. Trenerry et al (2012) asserted that systemic racism not only limits employment prospects among workers of different backgrounds—migrants of colour but also affects other parts of their career life and progressions like job allocation, performance evaluation, training, remuneration, dismissal, resignations and retirement. Undoubtedly, the impacts extend beyond an individual's career, affecting various aspects of life, with the consequences manifesting in the long-term quality of life and perpetuating disadvantages across generations.

2.3.4 Societal or Structural Level of Racism

This level of racism refers to the principles or beliefs on which a society is organised. These ideas are embedded in regulations, protocols, and legislation, illustrating how deeply ingrained societal inequalities produce racialised distinctions, categorisation, and stratification (Mooten, 2021). This institutional framework not only reflects but also reinforces social hierarchies, where race becomes a key determinant of access to resources and opportunities. Participation in other key institutions—such as the economy, politics, culture, the judiciary, and education—further contributes to the construction and maintenance of these hierarchies (Mooten, 2021). This level of racism is reflected in the broader practices of how society operates. One clear example, closely related to migrants and central to this study, is migration policy.

2.3.4.1 Societal or Structural Level of Racism: Migrants of Colour's Experiences

Migration policies, such as visa programs, often benefit the host country by utilising temporary migrant labour to fill labour shortages, yet deny migrants the opportunities for settlement and long-term benefits like citizenship, keeping them excluded from full participation in society (Kind-Dejardin, 2019; Mooten, 2021; Tan et al., 2024). Collins (2020) investigated the trend of working programmes in Aotearoa/New Zealand and found a transformation from long-term settlement-focused programs to various temporary visa categories. Consequently, some industries were found to employ large numbers of migrants on temporary visas due to a labour shortage of local workers. Scholars state that this reflected the principle of migrant policies that many countries, including Aotearoa/New Zealand, used, aiming to target low-skilled migrants for a short-term stay (temporary visa programs) to avoid dealing with problems associated with settlement "namely long-term employability, integration, impact on the host country's labour market and public finances, and the educational and labour market outcomes of their children." (OECD, 2008, as cited in King-Dejardin, 2019, p. 24). Importantly, immigrant policies play a significant role in migrants' livelihood in many aspects, from employment situation and migrant status to the determination or refusal of economic, social, and civil rights (King-Dejardin, 2019). Furthermore, these policies also influence power dynamics and the relationships between migrants and employers, often placing migrants in a highly disproportionate and disadvantageous position (King-Dejardin, 2019). One prime example commonly found among migrant visas and policies is the condition attached to their legal status that restricts them to specific occupations, industries and employers. For example, temporary migrants are often bound and dependent on specific

employers, such as students or seasonal workers, who have fixed work hours and benefits. As a result, "entry into and exit…are therefore not purely matters of 'choice' for migrant workers" (King-Dejardin, 2019, p. 52). Subsequently, Lewis et al. (2015) declared how the restrictive immigration policies enforced by the global North have undermined the rights to work and access to welfare for migrants, thereby creating "a source of surplus labour-power from beyond the nation-state that can be hired, fired and deported to meet demand without regard to social protection." (as cited in Jammermann, 2021, p. 3). Accordingly, the world economy that is heavily structured and influenced by global commerce and capitalism has intensified circumstances for exploitation, while countless migrants have already faced specific vulnerabilities that place them susceptible to exploitative labour relations (Jammermann, 2021). The restrictions and immobility in the labour market and society often found among temporary foreign worker programs force migrant workers to accept low wages with standardised working conditions, remaining in precarious positions and excluded from legal and social protections. Researchers demonstrated the case of temporary migrants in Australia who encounter unfair rights and working conditions compared to permanent residents. In particular, dependent on specific employers, migrant health and social care workers often endure inadequate compensation, extended hours, substandard working conditions, restrictions on promotional opportunities and professional advancement, and job instability due to apprehensions about the repercussions of voicing complaints (King-Dejardin, 2019). These experiences reflect how societal and institutional structures intersect to reinforce systemic disadvantage. As illustrated in the diagram of systemic racism, each level—individual, institutional, and societal or structural—interacts to sustain these inequities. However, this study does not attempt to address every dimension of systemic racism, as its vast and complex nature cannot be fully captured within a single research effort.

2.4 Impact of Racism

Indeed, after considering each level of racism and how it unfolds in the experiences of migrants of colour, it is important to examine the implications of racism—both socially and psychologically—on their lives and identities, as well as how it influences the ways they cope with and respond to these experiences. Firstly, multiple studies have found that the cumulative effects of daily and lifelong experiences of racism can lead to racial trauma, significantly increasing the risk of poor physical and mental health, as well as symptoms associated with trauma (Medel-Herrero et al., 2021; Williams et al., 2022). Emotional responses to these

experiences—such as shock, fear, and anger—are common, and these reactions can be intensified when individuals' experiences are dismissed or invalidated (Williams et al., 2022). Research conducted in Canada among people of colour revealed a wide range of mental health impacts resulting from racism. These include depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), intrusive thoughts, hypervigilance, cognitive distortions, stress, exhaustion, isolation, loneliness, sleep disturbances, diminished self-esteem, and a reduced sense of belonging and life satisfaction (Williams et al., 2022). Conspicuously, scholars emphasise that these conditions often persist or worsen over time, as racial discrimination is also embedded in the very systems meant to provide support (Williams et al., 2022). Especially with institutional racism and structural barriers frequently preventing people of colour from accessing equitable and appropriate care and treatment (Williams et al., 2022).

Furthermore, complaints about racism by people of colour in the workplace are often trivialised and dismissed, largely due to a lack of support from managers (Ngocha-Chaderopa & Boon, 2016). Research has shown that ethnic majority nurses in the United States and Aotearoa/New Zealand were even punished for supporting nurses of colour who reported experiencing racism in the workplace (Ahlberg et al, 2022). Remarkably, Bain (2018) described this trivialisation of racism as a "practice of ignorance," which ultimately silences the voices of those affected (as cited in Ahlberg et al, 2022). This is also evident in the research of Ahlberg et al (2022), which found that healthcare workers of colour often struggle to speak about their experiences of racial discrimination, which affects how they respond to racism. Other scholars have identified several reasons for this, including the absence of safe and supportive spaces to discuss racism, emotional stress and anxiety, and fear of being reported to management or watched by colleagues (Ahlberg et al, 2022; Kristoffersson et al., 2021). This fear is rooted in the potential negative consequences of speaking out, such as losing job opportunities, being demoted, or facing salary reductions (Ahlberg et al, 2022). As a result, many workers of colour avoid discussing racism and instead adopt coping strategies such as working harder to prove their professionalism, suppressing their emotions, and trying to appear as "normal workers" (Ahlberg et al., 2022). In doing so, they often strive to appear "strong" and unaffected by racism, even when they experience or witness it—as a means of protecting themselves (Ahlberg et al., 2022). Similarly, Malatest International (2021) found in their research of migrant New Zealanders often coped by minimising the impact of racism through emotional suppression. This included attempts to "brush off" or "forget about" racist

experiences, along with the emotional distress associated with them. These behaviours can be understood as forms of resistance to racial degradation and as emotional self-protection, yet those self-protection mechanisms could result in such significant emotional labour, leading to a high level of stress and exhaustion (Ahlberg et al, 2022). Ahlberg et al (2022) emphasised in their research on workers of colour in healthcare that racism is often silenced and not acknowledged as a form of discrimination, and workers of colour are left to carry the emotional burden of these experiences alone, no matter how painful or heavy.

2.5 Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Overview and Migrants of Colour Experiences

2.5.1 Overall Trends in Early Childhood Education

The Early Childhood Education (ECE) workforce plays one of the most important roles in fostering the development of critical and fundamental skills for children, such as social, emotional, language, motor, cognitive, and behavioural growth through the interactions and construction of a healthy environment that promotes those learning processes (Methlagl et al., 2022). Without a doubt, the health of ECE staff, both physical and mental, is influenced by personal and external factors, which significantly impact the quality of care and the overall development of children (Farewell et al., 2022). Despite the demand and substantial implications and responsibilities ECE staffs have, the ECE workforce characterised as low wages and pay inequities, lack of professional status, limited career development opportunities, poor working conditions, including long hours, inflexible policy, high and stressful job demands and workload, low job control and unsupportive and under-resourced workplace environments (Griffiths et al., 2022; Farewell et al., 2022). As a result, job dissatisfaction and high turnover rates are anticipated, along with an increased risk of injuries and other occupational hazards, which can have adverse effects on the health of ECE staff, including chronic mental and physical health conditions (Cumming et al., 2015; Farewell et al., 2022).

2.5.2 Trends in Early Childhood Education in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Similarly, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the combination of historical legacy and dominant discourse has continued to position the ECE workforce as a gender-specific and low-status profession, with a primary female and Pākehā workforce, compared to other education professions (Griffiths et al., 2022; Ministry of

Education, 2025). This affected the diversity in the workforce, especially with the dominant discourses that shape the practice of ECE and favour certain groups, while marginalising others or their perspectives. This marginalises the significance of other cultural perspectives, excluding diverse worldviews from shaping practices and policies, which are instead aligned with what is deemed the "standard" or "dominant values" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). This notion can be seen in the trends as mentioned in the introduction chapter of the demolition of Te Whāriki (Aotearoa/New Zealand's early childhood curriculum), along with the obligation to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) and recognise Māori as tangata whenua (Indigenous people) (NZEI, n.d.). This trend can also be observed in Aotearoa/New Zealand's research, where respondents indicate that systemic racism is the barrier to diversity in the ECE workforce, with diversity being perceived as a weakness or inability rather than a strength (Griffiths et al., 2022). For example, teaching teams are often unwilling to learn about Māori culture, and individuals are not offered the same opportunities due to their cultural differences (Griffiths et al., 2022). Those negative attitudes lead to feelings of exclusion and "being other", and teachers not feeling that their cultures and diversities are valued, heard, or acknowledged. This is evident in the research, where participants expressed fear of judgment from other teachers and families when sharing their diversity, and how doing so could threaten their job security (Griffiths et al., 2022).

2.5.3 A Gendered and Coloured Workforce

Building on the discussion of the ECE workforce dynamics in Aotearoa/New Zealand, it is important to consider broader trends in global care work. Scholars highlighted that the shift in Western societies, where women who were traditionally positioned as informal caregivers are now increasingly employed in the labour market, has resulted in an increasing number of migrant women employed in domestic and low-paid occupations across multiple European countries (Doyle & Timonen, 2010). Consequently, it created an influx of migrant workers employed in the aged care and childcare sectors, which resulted in the development of racial and gendered hierarchies within the care sectors, placing certain groups of women at a disadvantage where particular nationalities of migrants face lower wages, fewer opportunities for career advancement and social protection with greater job insecurity compared to other workers from other or Western countries (Doyle & Timonen, 2010). Likewise, this phenomenon may also reflect the challenges encountered by migrant workers in Aotearoa/New Zealand's ECE sector

Nevertheless, it is also believed that numerous migration barriers and constraints have significantly limited migrant career options, leading migrants to pursue careers in the high-demand care industry, which is primarily labour-intensive, low-paid, and often precarious (King-Dejardin, 2019). These factors include inadequate acknowledgement of skills and qualifications, language proficiency, discrimination, insufficient social network connections, gender norms and familial obligations (Doyle & Timonen, 2010; Hamilton et al., 2021). Notably, Hamilton et al. (2021) researched career transitions in migrant employment within Australia's care sectors and revealed that prevailing gender and racial norms, including broader societal discourses about migrant women, that they particularly fit for care roles, influenced participants' pathways into care work as well as the included of personal narratives of meaningful enjoyable, familiar, and accessible work within the care sector. In this context, it portrays the use of "embodied capital" of female migrants where "performing care is a kind of 'capital' that women with few resources have access to in the context of constrained labour market opportunities, offering an employment choice that is 'more meaningful than the alternatives available." (Hebson et al., 2015, as cited in Hamilton et al., 2021, p. 3063). This reflects the societal perception that the construction of gender and ethnicity contributes to the disproportionate prevalence of migrants in caregiving occupations (Doyle & Timonen, 2010; Hamilton et al., 2021). This notion aligns with research among Aotearoa/New Zealand ECE staff, revealing their perception that ECE is not recognised as a profession but as "glorified babysitting" (Griffiths et al., 2022). Participants expressed that their careers are not respected career pathways in terms of pay parity and do not offer equitable pay compared to other educational professions within the same sector (Griffiths et al., 2022).

2.5.4 Experiences of Migrants of Colour in the Other Types of Care Sectors

However, there is a lack of literature examining the experiences of migrants of colour in the ECE industry, particularly regarding how they are treated in the workforce. Yet, their experiences are anticipated to parallel or be similar to those identified in other care sectors. King-Dejardin (2019) emphasises in their research that, compared to non-migrant workers, migrant care workers more frequently depended on overtime and extended hours and accepted fewer desirable shifts. This led employers to prefer migrant labour, citing their "willingness" to undertake all shifts and their "strong work ethic" despite significant workloads (King-Dejardin, 2019). This explains how employers justify and legitimise their actions, simply

blaming the migrant despite them having no choice but to accept poorer terms and conditions due to varying circumstances and factors, as mentioned previously. Furthermore, several empirical studies internationally have highlighted racial and ethnic stereotypes and prejudice faced by migrant care workers by their care receiver, employers, and the carers themselves (King-Dejardin, 2019). To illustrate, Stevens et al. (2012) agree that racial discrimination and unequal treatment in the workplace manifest through differential treatment by managers and colleagues, as evident in in-service conditions, work allocation, task responsibilities, patient assignments (which involve a high level of difficulty), pay rates, overtime compensation, and career advancement. Similarly, King-Dejardin (2019) also reported that a significant percentage of participants indicated that they faced insufficient professional and career opportunities, inadequate acknowledgement and appreciation of their professional identity by their managers, and a deficiency of collaboration and solidarity among team members. Moreover, the stereotype and discriminatory mindset, incredibly xenophobic, is also evident among care recipients, where research demonstrates their attitudes and behaviour toward migrants of colour, from making racist remarks to making preferences for carers from certain countries based on perceived characteristics (King-Dejardin, 2019; Stevens et al., 2012). The research has shown that "visual social markers", including skin colour, dress code and English accent/ability, are used to categorise workers, with skin colour emerging as the most significant determinant of discrimination and racism, significantly affecting Black African migrant workers (Stevens et al., 2012).

2.6 Chapter Summary

The literature review chapter examined existing research on systemic racism in relation to the experiences of migrant workers. It identified several gaps, particularly the lack of studies focusing on migrants of colour in the ECE sector in New Zealand. The chapter highlighted systemic racism by analysing it at three levels: individual, institutional, and societal or structural. It explored how racial superiority mindsets became embedded within institutional structures and policies, resulting in biases that disadvantaged migrants of colour. These systemic barriers manifested in various forms, ranging from workplace discrimination to broader institutional practices that disempowered migrant workers. The chapter also discussed current tensions within the ECE sector, which is highly gendered and characterised by poor working conditions and low wages. Although the sector employed a significant number of women of colour, those from certain regions faced

greater disadvantages due to systemic inequities. While the existing literature has extensively examined the experiences of migrant workers in other care industries, such as aged care and healthcare, it has lacked a specific focus on migrants of colour in ECE. These gaps in the literature led to the central research question of this study: What are the experiences of migrant workers of colour in early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and how does systemic racism shape these experiences?

The following methodology chapter outlines the philosophical foundations of this research, including the research paradigm, methodology, methods, and analytical approach.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter, which reviewed the literature, examined the current research on systemic racism, migrants of colour, and early childhood education (ECE). The literature review demonstrated several gaps, especially in the context of Aotearoa/New Zealand literature. Of most importance, it identified a lack of examination of the systemic level of racism in the experiences of migrants of colour, specifically in the context of the ECE industry. Despite the scarcity of research, the current evidence supports that discrimination continues to be an invisible power that is embedded in the systems that disadvantage migrant workers. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap and contribute to the knowledge of systemic racism among migrants of colour in ECE in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

This chapter will begin by discussing the philosophical background and foundation of the research. It will then outline the chosen research paradigm, methodology, methods, and data analysis process used in this thesis. The chapter will introduce the Critical Race Theory (CRT) paradigm, which is informed by a relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology. It will also explore how CRT informs the selection of methodological tools—specifically counter-storytelling—and how this, in turn, influences the methods employed in this study, including participant selection criteria, sampling strategies, data collection techniques, and data analysis methods such as thematic analysis.

3.2 Philosophical Background

This thesis aims to address a gap in the literature by exploring how systemic racism shapes the experiences of migrant teachers of colour in ECE settings. While much of the existing research tends to generalise racism or focus on individual-level discrimination, there is limited attention given to how systemic forms of racism operate within the ECE sector (Mooten, 2021). This research also seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between migrant labour, racism, and ECE. As stated earlier, this study focuses on the subjective perspectives and experiences of migrants of colour in ECE, rather than their objective and majoritarian realities. As Solórzano and Yosso (2002) stated, majoritarian stories are dominant narratives told by the majority group (those in power within society), while silencing and

ignoring the stories of marginalised groups—in this case, migrants of colour. Therefore, with qualitative methods, the researcher is able to understand insightful information from each participant while considering how their unique beliefs, behaviours, attitudes and values underlie and influence their perception of experiences (Moore, 2006). Qualitative research focuses on understanding the underlying reasons and meanings behind human behaviour, rather than simply identifying what is happening (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). It is richly informative, relying on words rather than numbers as data, aiming to explore how individuals construct meaning and make sense of their realities and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Moore, 2006). Its aim is to understand how people interpret what they have experienced by understanding the phenomenon from the participant's point of view rather than the researcher's (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Undoubtedly, a qualitative research approach is well-suited to this study, as it enables the collection of rich, in-depth information from participants. This method allows the researcher to explore whether, and in what ways, systemic racism influences the experiences of migrants of colour employed in ECE in Aotearoa/New Zealand. A qualitative study also enables researchers to illuminate participants' lived experiences by delving deeply into their worldviews through their own lenses. In line with the core principles of qualitative research, which emphasise the "the importance of seeing the world from the perspective of those who were seldom listened to—the criminal, the vagrant, the immigrant—was emphasized. While not using the phrase, they knew they were 'giving voice' to points of view of people marginalized in the society." (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011, as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, pp. 6-7).

3.3 Philosophical Foundation of Research

Recognising that qualitative research is best suited for this study, this section discusses the core values underpinning the research—what we believe, what informs our understanding of knowledge and reality, and how these beliefs shape our approach to conducting research. Hays and Singh (2012) emphasised that designing a qualitative study requires the integration of key assumptions, research paradigms, and methodological traditions. These elements reflect underlying philosophical foundations that guide the construction of scientific inquiry in qualitative research. As a result, this chapter focuses on ontology, epistemology, research paradigm, and methodology, and how these core philosophical foundations form the fundamental knowledge and approaches used in conducting research.

3.3.1 Ontology

Ontology concerns beliefs about the nature of reality and what exists; at its core lies the question: "What is out there to know?" (Grix, 2002, p. 180; Ponterotto, 2005). There are two major ontological positions: realism and relativism. Realism holds that there is one objective reality and unchanging universal truth that applies to all humans, as opposed to relativism, which stands for multiple realities that are contextual and changeable depending on diverse factors and the background of individuals (Hays & Singh, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005; Spencer et al., 2020). Quantitative research often employs a realist ontology as it focuses on demonstrating cause and effect, predicting or defining the distribution of certain qualities across populations or phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This suggests that participants' realities can be objectively measured, and the study's outcome is often presented numerically. In contrast, qualitative research often adopts a relativist ontology, focusing on how participants interpret their experiences, construct their understanding of the world, and assign meaning to those experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This implies that reality is socially constructed; therefore, this study employs a relativist ontological perspective as it aims to understand the experiences of migrants of colour in ECE who have worked in the field of ECE for at least two years. The researcher also analyses the data by listening to the experiences shared by participants, who are influenced by their own perceptions, interpretations, and how they make sense of their lived experiences.

3.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology implies "what it means to know and what can we know about it?" (Gray, 2022, p. 23). This includes how knowledge is gathered, how we come to know what we know, and the relationship between the researcher and participants—where participants are regarded as the knowers and the researcher as the would-be knower (Ponterotto, 2005; Spencer et al., 2020). For example, rather than positioning the researcher as an expert on the phenomenon being studied, qualitative research paradigms such as interpretivism emphasise a constructivist epistemology. This perspective values the dynamic between participant and researcher as fundamental to portraying and illustrating the lived experiences of participants (Ponterotto, 2005). In contrast, research paradigms like positivism, often used in quantitative research,

emphasise an objectivist epistemology, where the researcher, participant, and the research topic are assumed to be independent (Ponterotto, 2005).

3.3.3 Research Paradigms

Together, ontology and epistemology underpin and inform research paradigms, which in turn guide and shape the methodologies that researchers employ. Filstead (1979) proposed that the research paradigm is a "set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of that world." (as cited in Penterotto, 2005, pp. 127-128). The philosophical assumptions guiding the research and the decision on instruments, tools, participants, and methodologies are informed by the research paradigm chosen by the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Penterotto, 2005). Examples of research paradigms will be explored further in the next section, where the researcher provides a detailed discussion of the paradigm adopted in this thesis and contrasts it with paradigms commonly used in quantitative research.

3.4 Philosophical Foundation of This Thesis

3.4.1 Critical Race Theory Paradigms

Indeed, the core aim of this research is to amplify the voices of marginalised groups in society, with a particular focus on migrants of colour. This aligns closely with the principles of qualitative research, as outlined in the previous section, especially its emphasis on exploring systemic racism through the lived experiences and perspectives of participants. Consequently, this research was underpinned by Critical Race Theory (CRT), which also reflects the researcher's fundamental beliefs and values. Although this paradigm has not been extensively employed within the business discipline, the objective of this study closely aligns with the core value of this paradigm, which is inspired by social injustice (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018). Indeed, CRT aims to give a voice to and empower marginalised groups, particularly those racialised and ethnically minoritised—by challenging existing oppressive power structures, in contrast to other research processes that may minimise participants' voices and objectify them (Lincoln et al., 2018; Hays & Singh, 2012). As Delgado and Stefancic (2012) emphasised, CRT concentrates theoretical enquiry on examining and altering the interplay between race, racism, and power. Undoubtedly, this study is highly

suitable, as it aims to examine how systemic racism interferes with and interplays with the experiences of migrants of colour in ECE in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Similarly, scholars believed that critical theorists, including CRT theorists, hold the fundamental principle of advocating against diverse oppressive experiences by transforming a qualitative enquiry into a political endeavour that fosters social action to benefit powerless groups in society (Hays & Singh, 2012). However, Donnor and Ladson-Billings (2018) highlighted that the implementation of the CRT lens is not intended to distort reality, but rather to provide different viewpoints on racial issues, ensuring that the voices of marginalised groups are heard and amplified.

Creswell and Poth (2018), along with Solórzano and Yosso (2002), stated that CRT has three primary purposes; first, it aims to highlight the narrative about discrimination from the perspective of people of colour (minority) while challenging the dominant discourse and majoritarian narrative that accompanies White privilege and suppresses minorities. Secondly, CRT supports the notion that race is not biologically real but instead constructed by society while constantly arguing for the "eradication of racial subjugation" (Parker & Lynn, 2002; Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this perspective, race is a subjective and dynamic term influenced by political pressures and shaped by individual experiences. Lastly, CRT strives to examine other disparities, including gender, class, race, sexuality and other inequalities individuals face (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Importantly, these three goals reflect the core objective of this research: to give voice to participants and illuminate their perceptions and lived experiences of racism. In doing so, the study not only challenges dominant narratives but also encourages participants to reflect on and recognise patterns of discrimination in their lives. While CRT acknowledges the role of other inequalities individuals face, recognising that race often intersects with other area of identities (such as gender, class, and sexuality) the primary focus of this research is on the role of systemic racism on migrants of colour, in line with CRT's central concern with the interplay between race, racism, and power (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Moreover, the researcher also acknowledges that participants will experience and perceive things differently, influenced by various factors in their lives, and that participants are indeed the main actors in their own stories. This contradicts approaches like positivism, which posits the existence of factual, universal truth and objective reality that can be measured, identified, and apprehended (Penterotto, 2005). Particularly with its focus on the commonalities and generalisability of participants' experiences rather than

acknowledging each participant's unique and subjective realities (Hays & Singh, 2012; Penterotto, 2005). Consequently, through the utilisation of CRT, the researcher aims to address existing gaps in the literature and contribute to a deeper understanding of how systemic racism may influence the experiences of migrants of colour in ways that are either similar to or different from those documented in previous research. This study also seeks to inform meaningful change that could benefit both the participants involved and other marginalised groups within society.

3.4.2 Relativist Ontology

As explained earlier, CRT focuses on realities that are socially and historically constituted by power dynamics. Hence, this research employed a relativist ontology, where the researcher acknowledges that there are multiple realities and that each participant constructed their own subjective and contextual realities (Ponterotto, 2005). Relativist scholars assert that realities are not permanent but vary across individuals and time; they emphasise the significance of unique experiences and sociocultural contexts rather than generalisations (Hays & Singh, 2012). This informed the assumptions for research when acquiring knowledge, where the researcher acknowledged the diverse insights, each participant contributed and utilised these to report multiple viewpoints and perspectives believed to be influenced by oppressive experiences, as central to the CRT paradigm (Donnor & Ladson-Billings, 2018). The core aim was to understand that there are multiple meanings associated with a phenomenon in the minds of those who encounter it, while diverse interpretations of the data were also influenced by both the participants' perspectives and the researcher's lens (Ponterotto, 2005). In this case, the researcher sought to understand the experiences of racism through the lens of migrants of colour, interpreting and analysing the data with the researcher's understanding, background and lived experiences, also as a person of colour. Indeed, CRT emphasises the belief that human nature operates within a framework defined by power struggles and the quest for dominance. This also informed the research to examine interactions of privilege and oppression that may be predicated on race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, class, gender, mental or physical ability, or sexual orientation (Lincoln et al., 2018).

3.4.3 Constructivist Epistemology

Consequently, alongside relativist ontology, CRT is also informed by a constructivist epistemology. Gray (2004) stated that constructivism proposes that truth and meaning are co-constructed by the interplay between the subject (individual) and the outside world. The truth is not external to be discovered; individuals construct their distinct meanings, even within the same phenomenon (Gray, 2004). Aligned with CRT's goals, it sees race as a social construct and considers that each participant perceives racism differently, even in the same incidents; one individual may interpret an act as racist, while another may dismiss it as irrelevant. This highlights the notion that individuals' construction of meaning in phenomena or reality is influenced by their experiences, perceptions, and social environments, including their interactions with researchers (Ponterotto, 2005). Ponterotto (2005**)** highlights that as part of the Critical Theory paradigm, the interaction between researcher and participant is both transactional and subjective; it is also dialectical, aiming to provoke change in participants that fosters collective empowerment and liberation from oppression. This implies that in this case, the researcher is not just a neutral observer or isolated and independent from the participants, but that knowledge is co-created—exchanged and influenced by both parties—leading to deeper understanding and critical reflection. Certainly, CRT and a constructivist epistemology acknowledge that knowledge is significantly influenced by values, reflecting its commitment to addressing social injustices (Ponterotto, 2005). This highlights that CRT aligns closely with the objectives of this research, as it acknowledges the influence of both the researcher and the participant. With this in mind, the interaction between participants and researcher aimed to empower those at the margins of society under oppressive structures and to advocate for meaningful change and social justice.

3.5 Methodology

Grix (2002) noted that methodology is about the process and procedures used to acquire knowledge and pertains to the rationale of scientific inquiry, particularly examining the possible capabilities and constraints of specific approaches or procedures. This refers to the study of methodologies and the underlying assumptions about how knowledge is created and understood, which subsequently inform the method that should be used to acquire the data (Grix, 2002). The choice of method and approach in this study is

underpinned by ontological and epistemological assumptions, which, in this case, are a relativist ontology and a constructivist epistemology. Consequently, the CRT research paradigm, which encompasses a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology, informs the selection of counter-storytelling as a research methodology. Counter-storytelling is "a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told", those considered at the margins of society, including people of colour, women, LGBTQIA+, and people experiencing poverty. (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, as cited in Hunn et al., 2006, p. 244). While Solórzano and Yosso (2002) originally conceptualise counter-storytelling as a method within critical race methodology, which is informed by CRT, this thesis adopts a broader interpretation, positioning counter-storytelling as a methodology in its own right. This shift reflects a growing body of research that treats counter-storytelling not only as a tool for data collection and analysis but also as a guiding framework that shapes the understanding of lived experiences and serves as a foundational element of the research design (González, 2020; Hauber-Özer et al., 2023; Miller et al, 2020). Hence, within this methodological framework, semi-structured interviews served as the primary method for data collection, as they provided the narrative material from which counter-stories could be constructed and analysed (this is discussed in more detail in the following section).

Moreover, it is believed that counter-storytelling challenges the “master or majoritarian narrative, monovocal stories” that have often been told by people of privilege, including those with racial, gender, class, and other forms of privilege (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 27). These stories reinforce the idea that racial privilege is “natural and acceptable” and emphasise the notion that humans are biologically different (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Undoubtedly, it is a reflexive collection of assumptions, accepted beliefs, and shared cultural insights that individuals from the dominant race contribute to the discourse on race (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This methodology serves as a mechanism for revealing, examining, and questioning the majoritarian narratives of privilege and for giving voice to those unheard stories that have been distorted and silenced (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). These majoritarian narratives are believed to be multilayer stories that serve to benefit White people, males, the middle/upper class and heterosexuals by designating these social positions as natural or normative benchmarks (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Not only that, but the majoritarian narrative also distorts and silences the historical and lived experiences of people of colour by employing “standard formulae” that claim neutrality and objectivity yet implicitly reinforce

negative stereotypes about people of colour (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Indeed, scholars have found that counter-storytelling contrasts with other methodologies that facilitate the majoritarian narrative found in some social science literature; those are "methodologies that dismiss or decentre racism and its intersections with other forms of subordination omit and distort the experiences of those whose lives are daily affected by racism—those "at the bottom of society's well." (Bell, 1992, as cited in Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, pp. 31-32). Consequently, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) highlighted that minimising the "intercentricity" of race recognises that complex relationships exist among race, class, and gender and that racism plays out across multiple levels (individual, interpersonal, institutional). In this case, Solórzano & Yosso (2002) stated that the term "intercentricity" is often used in the CRT context, where CRT scholars propose that race, racism, and other forms of subordination are central elements that help to understand and explain an individual's experience, rather than being a marginal factor. Indeed, the intercentricity of race and racism in discourse facilitates the dominant discourse that trivialises race significance and perpetuates the belief that racism is a relic of the past (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Subsequently, this methodology aligns closely with the research objectives that aim to capture the narratives of migrants of colour, who are frequently disadvantaged within society. Listening to their stories and experiences enhances our comprehension of racism and systemic racism from their viewpoint, ultimately enabling us to recognise the broader implications of racism beyond existing literature and potentially uncover insights that scholars have overlooked. Significantly, it advances the ultimate goal of this research, which is to validate the voices and experiences of those who are often marginalised—people of colour (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

3.6 Method

As discussed in the previous paragraph, this study employed counter-storytelling as a methodological framework for acquiring knowledge. It utilised semi-structured interviews as a specific method for data collection. Grix (2002) explained the method as a specific procedure used to acquire knowledge and data, which should be guided by the research question. Moreover, King et al. (2019) argued that methods are used for data collection and analysis, which are also guided by the methodology. In qualitative research, interviewing is one of the most common methods for data collection. An interview can be defined as a face-to-face verbal interaction whereby one individual, the interviewer, seeks to obtain information or opinions from another individual or individuals (Brinkmann, 2018). Indeed, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) emphasised

that the interview is a co-constructed account, an intersection where power, race, class and gender interact. This means that an interview is not simply an exchange of information; it is also shaped by those underlying factors. Considering this, the semi-structured interview aligned well with the CRT paradigm and counter-storytelling, where the researcher acknowledges each participant's unique perception and experience. At the same time, the interaction between the researcher and participants, along with the researcher's own perceptions, also influenced how both parties interpreted and communicated during the interview process. In other words, the stories about racism told by participants reflected their perceptions, while the analysis of those stories was also influenced by the researcher's perceptions and understanding.

3.6.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are the most commonly used form of interview in the human and social sciences, and "it is defined as an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena." (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, as cited in Brinkmann, 2020, p. 437). It integrates a predetermined set of open-ended questions, facilitating the flow of conversation, while providing the flexibility and autonomy for the interviewer to explore other ideas and discussions that may arise during the interview, thus enriching the emergence of other potential themes or responses (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This approach offers the freedom and ability to focus on or follow up on significant topics or conversations related to the research, unlike other forms of interviews, such as unstructured interviews that rely on improvisation and non-directive interviewing (Brinkmann, 2020; Grey, 2004). In this study, the researcher developed a list of open-ended questions, including prompts designed to guide the interviewee's responses and help the interviewer ensure that the conversation covered the key information required for the research. Indeed, as stated earlier, the purpose of the semi-structured interview was to allow the researcher to understand how participants construct meaning around the phenomenon of racism by carefully listening to the stories they shared. This approach was intended to help interpret the information they provided, making sense of the phenomenon through their perceptions, viewpoints, and lived experiences. Afterwards, the researcher aimed to uncover emergent themes from the evidence gathered from participants by analysing these data using thematic analysis, which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

3.6.2 Selection Criteria

In this research, participants were eligible individuals of colour who had migrated to Aotearoa/New Zealand. They had worked or were working in ECE and had at least two years of working experience in ECE in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This criterion was designed to ensure that participants had sufficient exposure to and understanding of the local ECE context, including core ECE curriculum and practices. Moreover, it was hoped that this criterion would ensure participants' awareness of the dynamic trends and challenges within both their organisations and the broader ECE sector. They could hold any position, whether qualified, unqualified, or in training and could work part-time, full-time or on contracts. Nevertheless, they were required to be fluent in spoken English to ensure they fully understand the research information, including the role, benefits and potential risks, in order to minimise potential harm and negative impact on participants.

3.6.3 Sample Selection, Recruitment and Participants

Multiple sampling tools were employed to recruit participants in this research: convenience, purposive, network and snowball sampling. The first primary method used was convenience sampling, which involved selecting participants based on their accessibility and proximity to the researcher (Bhardwaj, 2019; Vehovar et al., 2016). This method included publicly available information from organisations, as well as accessible locations and communication channels through which potential participants could be reached. For this method, recruitment began with the researcher searching Google for ECE centre locations and websites, then sending email invitations to ECE centres around Auckland, including other ECE-related organisations, unions, and associations. Moreover, the researcher personally distributed invitation flyers at local ECE centres in the North Shore area and placed flyers in public places, such as AUT campuses, libraries, and cafes.

Another method used was purposive or judgmental sampling, which is a type of sampling that selects the members of the sample based on the purpose of this study and the researcher's judgment, that this group would provide information relevant to the study's objectives—in this case, migrants of colour and ECE workers (Bhardwaj, 2019; Kumar, 2011). The researcher utilised this approach by emailing migrant-related organisations, unions, and associations, including embassies. Furthermore, the researcher posted the

advertisement to an ECE-related Facebook group, which resulted in this method being one of the more successful recruitment techniques. The following method used in this study is network sampling. The researcher utilised her personal and professional networks, asking them to forward the research advertisements to anyone interested, including posting the advertisements on her personal social media platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Lastly, this research also employed snowball sampling, where one participant helps to reach other participants (Bhardwaj, 2019). This type of sampling was another successful recruitment technique that helped to identify most of the participants in this research.

When potential participants contacted the researcher expressing interest, they were sent a Participant Information Sheet, which included details about the purpose of the research, why they were invited, how to agree to participate, what would happen during the research, potential risks and benefits, how their privacy would be protected, and the expected outcomes of the study. The consent form was also included, allowing participants to choose whether to sign and return it to confirm their participation or provide verbal consent before the interview began.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants, all of whom were women, as anticipated, given the nature of the ECE industry in Aotearoa/New Zealand (see Table 1 below for more information). Participants were employed across a range of ECE organisations, including private centres, non-profit providers, and community-based services. They held diverse roles, including leadership, teaching, and relief positions. This group of participants also came from diverse backgrounds, representing different countries, although the majority were from Asia.

Table 1 – Participant Information

All participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms to uphold confidentiality.

Pseudonym	Country of Origin	Current Role
1. Thida	Thailand	Qualified teacher
2. Helena	Brazil	Reliever
3. Yasna	Iran	Qualified teacher
4. Maria	Philippines	Qualified teacher
5. Fang	Hong Kong	Qualified teacher

6. Harin	Korea	Qualified teacher
7. Malee	Thailand	Qualified teacher
8. Samira	Indian	Reliever
9. Anika	Indian	Reliever
10. Tala	Fiji	Qualified teacher
11. Mei	China	Reliever

3.7 Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

As the previous section provided detailed information about the data collection method, including semi-structured interviews, selection criteria, sample selection, recruitment, and participant details, this section now focuses on the method of data analysis—thematic analysis. Alem (2020) states that data analysis involves examining, cleaning, altering and modelling data to uncover valuable insights, draw conclusions, and facilitate decision-making. Data analysis is a crucial step in both quantitative and qualitative research, and there are numerous approaches to it, employing various techniques and terms that are used differently across different research domains, such as science, social science, and business (Alem, 2020). In qualitative studies, data frequently consist of words, text, or images, while quantitative research focuses on the analysis of numerical data (Gray, 2004). Thus, in this research, the researcher used non-numerical data, utilising transcripts obtained from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis as the method of data examination. This approach facilitated the identification, analysis, and reporting of themes, thereby enabling the researcher to articulate the experiences of migrants of colour in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Emphasising the goals of CRT and counter-storytelling aimed to capture the experiences of marginalised groups in society by giving voice to and shedding light on stories told by those individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002)

After the semi-structured interviews were conducted and transcribed, the researcher used “thematic analysis” (TA) to examine the conversations between participants and the researcher about their experiences in ECE in Aotearoa/New Zealand, including attention to nonverbal communication. TA is a tool or approach used in qualitative data analysis to identify, analyse, and interpret the patterns of meaning, so-called “themes”, across participants' experiences, perceptions, behaviours, and perspectives, ultimately helping to comprehend their perceptions, feelings, and actions (Clarke & Braun, 2017). TA differs from

other approaches as it is a technique not tied to or informed by any pre-existing theoretical frameworks, nor does it require technical knowledge, such as grounded theory, conversation analysis, discourse analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Indeed, it is a flexible method that can be applied across a range of theoretical frameworks and research paradigms. In this study, guided by a CRT paradigm, TA was employed to provide a rich and detailed account of the data collected from migrants of colour, despite the researcher having limited practical and technical experience with this analytical approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a result, the heart of TA lies in identifying themes that help the researcher understand common patterns in a phenomenon or participants' shared experiences. However, themes do not simply reside or emerge from the data itself; rather, they are shaped by the researcher's thought, interpretation, analysis, and attempt to create links between the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, the researcher's judgment is crucial in identifying themes, which do not solely depend on quantifiable measures but instead on the researcher's ability to capture meaningful connections to the overall research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This aligns with the constructivist epistemology and CRT paradigm as mentioned earlier, where the understanding and meaning of the phenomenon are created and co-constructed through interactions between the researcher and participants (Grey, 2004; Hays & Singh, 2012; Penterotto, 2005).

Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined six steps of thematic analysis (TA): (1) familiarising oneself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Following these six steps, the researcher began by rewatching the recorded interviews and making notes on initial ideas. These included observations of participants' body language, key messages, and possible meanings conveyed during the conversations. The researcher then transcribed the interviews and read the transcripts repeatedly to become deeply familiar with the data. In the second phase, the researcher created initial codes by highlighting key messages and assigning short labels that captured the essence of the data. During the third phase, qualitative analysis software (Delve) was used to import and review all transcripts. The researcher generated codes, compared them to the initial ones, and grouped related codes into potential themes and sub-themes. This process involved revising, merging, splitting, or discarding some themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the fourth phase, the researcher evaluated the potential themes by examining their relationship to the coded extracts and the

overall data set. This involved going back and forth to refine the themes, removing overlaps, and editing them until a consistent pattern emerged across the data. In the fifth phase, the researcher defined and named the final themes and sub-themes, ensuring each had a clear and concise label. These were then organised into a thematic chart to support understanding and presentation. Finally, in the sixth phase, the researcher wrote the findings chapter, presenting a comprehensive analysis of the data and themes that reflected the experiences of migrants of colour in ECE in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The aim was to demonstrate the credibility and value of the analysis by providing sufficient evidence to address the research question: What are the experiences of migrant workers of colour in early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and in what ways does systemic racism shape these experiences?

3.8 Chapter Summary

To sum up, this chapter first presented the research aims to address the current gap in the ECE and systemic racism literature in Aotearoa/New Zealand, including the ultimate aim of answering the research question: What are the experiences of migrant workers of colour in early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and in what ways does systemic racism shape these experiences? It then outlined the philosophical background that informs the study, specifically identifying it as qualitative research, and included the research's philosophical positioning—namely, the Critical Race Theory paradigm, characterised by a relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology. Together, these inform the counter-storytelling methodology, which uses semi-structured interviews to collect data. This chapter also described the sample selection and recruitment process, which employed techniques such as convenience, purposive, network, and snowball sampling. Furthermore, it explained the data analysis process, detailing the six phases of thematic analysis used to examine data collected from participants—migrants of colour.

The following chapter will present the findings derived from this analysis, including four themes and eight sub-themes.

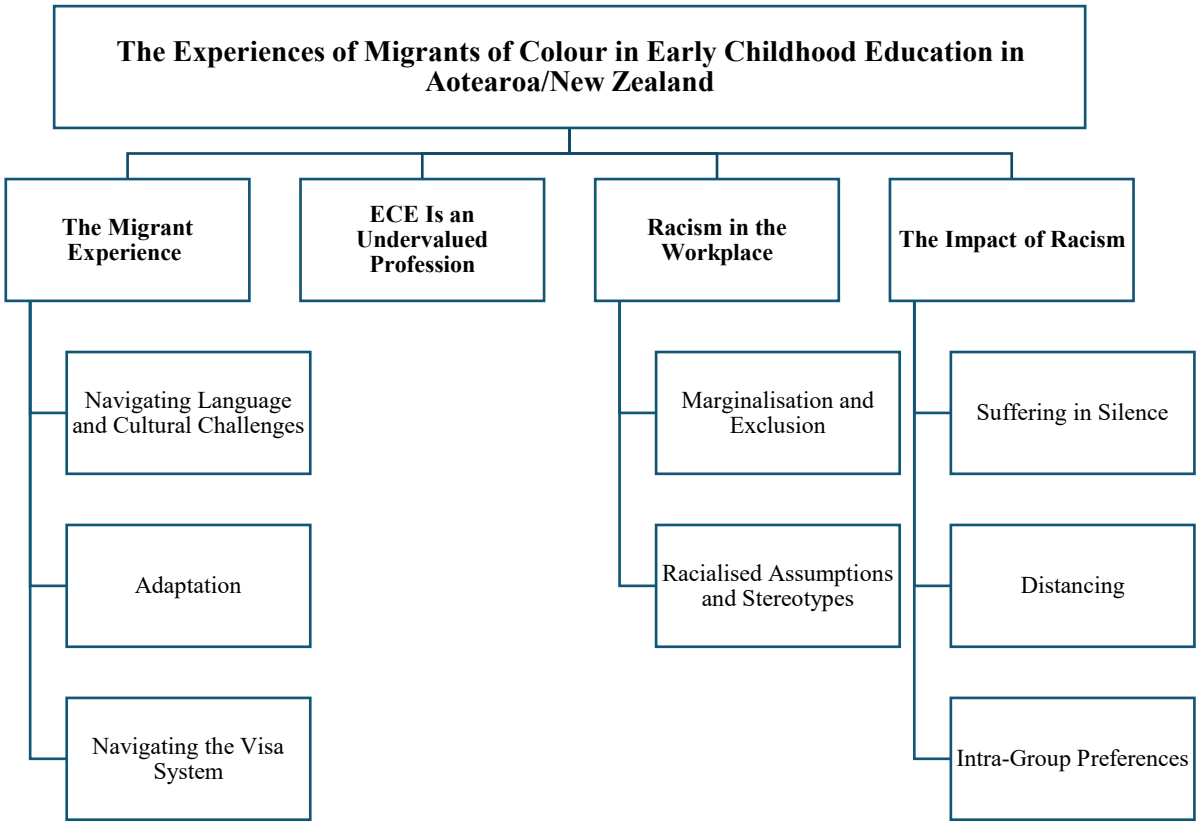
Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the methodology chapter, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with eleven female participants from various countries. This participant group holds different roles, including qualified and unqualified teachers and relievers. This chapter presents the findings of the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. Four main themes and eight sub-themes were identified from the data, as shown in Figure 4 below. The following section will briefly summarise all the themes and sub-themes. The next section will then discuss each theme and its corresponding sub-themes in detail, supported by quotes from participants.

4.2 Brief Summary of the Themes

Figure 4: Organisational Chart Representing the Four Key Themes of the Study



The first theme, The Migrant Experience, explores participants' shared experiences working as ECE professionals in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It includes three sub-themes: 1) navigating language and cultural challenges, 2) adaptation and 3) navigating the visa system. The first sub-theme reveals that language barriers were among the most frequently reported and significant challenges. It also addresses cultural differences, which emerged as a recurring issue, with some participants struggling to adjust to unfamiliar norms and expectations. The second sub-theme focuses on participants' views of adaptation as necessary for living and working in a new country. Finally, the third sub-theme captures participants' difficulties navigating the visa and immigration system.

The second theme, ECE Is an Undervalued Profession, uncovers systemic issues within the ECE sector, highlighting how ECE continues to be perceived as an undervalued profession. Participants discussed how ECE work is often underestimated, with the profession being perceived by others as non-complex, easy or requiring low effort. Building on this notion, the theme also demonstrates participants' experiences of age discrimination and being perceived as nannies rather than professional educators, reflecting a widespread misunderstanding and underestimation of the ECE role. This undervaluation is further exhibited in the pattern of parents' disrespectful behaviour and their tendency to shift more responsibility toward ECE teachers.

The third theme, Racism in the Workplace, highlights participants' experiences of racism in the workplace, consisting of two sub-themes: 1) marginalisation and exclusion, and 2) racialised assumptions and stereotypes. The first sub-theme explores how participants' expressions of opinion or concern often led to mistreatment or racist behaviours, including accusations, gossip, excessive monitoring, and exclusion. The second sub-theme addresses racialised assumptions and stereotypes, particularly how formal qualifications influence the perceived value and capability of migrant teachers. This, in turn, affects the extent to which participants are professionally accepted and recognised as ECE educators within their workplaces.

The final theme, The Impact of Racism, highlights the consequences of racist experiences and how they impact their well-being and influence their coping strategy or the way they navigate through the systems. There are three sub-themes within this theme: 1) suffering in silence, 2). distancing and 3). intra-group preferences. The first sub-theme reflects the emotional toll on participants and how racism continues to be a taboo topic in the workplace, reflecting power dynamics and distrust in systems to bring justice. The second sub-theme explores how participants coped with discriminatory experiences. Many used expressions such as

"I am lucky", "I do not care" and “I cannot help it” to emotionally distance themselves from the situation. The final sub-theme focuses on the preservation of cultural groups, which was evident in hiring practices and parental preferences for teachers from similar cultural backgrounds.

4.3 Theme One: The Migrant Experience

This theme represents the day-to-day challenges faced by participants working in Aotearoa/New Zealand's ECE sector. Participants described navigating the complexities of living and working in a new country, including differences in culture, language, norms, systems, and ways of life. Several key sub-themes characterise this broader theme, each focusing on a distinct aspect of the difficulties participants encountered: navigating language and cultural challenges, adaptation, and navigating the visa system.

4.3.1 Navigating Language and Cultural Challenges

Language Challenges

Language difficulty was one of the most common and significant challenges for participants as migrant workers. This is because all participants originated from countries where English is not their native language. However, English is considered one of the most used and predominant languages in Aotearoa/New Zealand, alongside Māori and New Zealand Sign Language. Consequently, participants expressed difficulty learning and comprehending English as their new language, including dialogue, speed, accent and vocabulary. These challenges contributed to concerns about the accuracy of communication when interacting with parents, colleagues, and children.

> *“You know. Language, language, language. Sometimes you know, especially because they have different dialects, different accents, and sometimes you, because, because of the responsibility that you have in the childcare, you have to get in touch with parents. And it's sometimes it's difficult, you know, to communicate with them” (Yasna).*

Indeed, for many participants, communicating with parents of children at the centre appeared to be their primary concern. This could be due to several factors, including the fact that they may feel professional pressure from their job responsibilities, which require direct interaction and communication with parents. Especially as an ECE teacher, delivering messages clearly and verbally is essential, particularly when it

comes to children's safety. Consequently, many felt pressure over their effectiveness in English skills, which spiked the fear and anxiety of imprecise communication, where, in this type of work environment, miscommunication could lead to misunderstandings or mistrust that affect their professional credibility and the safety of the children. Moreover, participants' level of English proficiency was closely linked to their confidence and comfort in self-expression. A lower proficiency often resulted in difficulty expressing themselves fully or voicing their opinions. In some cases, this led to communication avoidance, as participants feared being judged or perceived as rude due to cultural differences.

> *"Sometime when parents say something that you don't understand and you feel like, you want to have communication with them, but you don't know what it means. So, you're kind of like, yes, yes, yes, and smile. And yeah, and that, that's the wrong thing to do. You should say, you know, sorry, I, I didn't get that, but I, I felt. Most of the time I didn't say that, you know, because you, you kind of like, uh, I don't know what you're saying, and, and you don't want to be rude, you know" (Thida)*

Not only that, but with the bicultural background of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the incorporation of Māori in the ECE curriculum. Some participants expressed difficulty in using and learning about Māori languages and culture, even though they are not the primary language used for communication. They struggled to learn about the Māori language on top of English, including the incorporation of Māori norms and traditions and practices within the daily routines of ECE, such as singing Karakia (Māori incantations and prayer), singing Waiata (Māori songs), Māori greetings, Tikanga Māori (customs and protocols), and Pūrākau (storytelling).

> *"And the Māori, the Māori, as well on the top. So, this, Oh my gosh. Now, now I need to learn English and Reo Māori and so, so, it's quite a lot. Yeah. But, but I do like, yeah, you know, I like to learn. So yeah, it, it did. It didn't make me feel like, you know, like bad about it. I feel excited, but yeah, I just think, oh, it's a lot" (Helena)*

Malee also highlighted critical language-related challenges, noting that despite living in Aotearoa/New Zealand for over two decades, she continued to experience difficulties not only in understanding English and Māori but also in grasping pragmatic, cultural, and contextual aspects of communication. These included interpreting humour, idioms, social cues, myths, legends, and culturally specific references. Such challenges

may influence how connected participants feel to local knowledge and highlight the ongoing nature of cultural learning in their experiences.

> *"Probably I don't come across a lot of books or stories or myths or that sort of thing like, locals. So, I do have to do my research before I teach. And when I didn't sometime when people talk about something and I didn't get it. That's still, that's still the case this day, even though I'm here for 24 years. Yeah, you still have some other places in New Zealand they talk about. I didn't know about the, the myth or whatever the Māori legends stuff that I didn't know about. So still the knowledge, you know, it's. There's a lot of things to learn to be the teacher, yeah" (Malee)*

Cultural Challenges

Turning now to the difficulty participants face in navigating cultural differences. Not only did the participants have to adapt and learn about Aotearoa/New Zealand culture, but they also needed to learn to navigate through other cultures due to the multicultural nature of Aotearoa/New Zealand and the working environment in the ECE. Working with people from diverse cultures, including colleagues, children and parents, has posed specific challenges for participants to manage. Participants expressed how that had to learn, research, and better understand the different cultures that are present in the centre. This included celebrations or cultural practices that might be practised in ECE centres to honour the diversity of different staff origins.

> *"Cause, I'm not familiar. I'm not that familiar with the Māori culture, so that's why like I need to like work harder to learn about it. And also like the other culture as well, like, like Thailand's culture and also the Indian culture cause for our centre we do celebrate like different like countries like festival and stuff. So, it was a bit hard for me like oh, a little bit lost at the beginning. Like I need to do some research to like understand like why they're doing this and like what's the meaning behind it and stuff like that." (Fang)*

This could suggest that workplace support may be insufficient, requiring teachers to address these challenges independently through self-directed research and problem-solving. Such self-reliance may contribute to stress and overwhelm, as participants must individually develop strategies to understand and adapt to the diverse work environment. Importantly, with the different working styles of staff from various cultures, participants

also recognised the need to navigate these challenges by understanding and finding ways to approach and work effectively with diverse staff. Finally, participants also noted that parents from different cultures have varying requirements and expectations for their children.

> *"It's like I have to be. Multiple, multiple. Yeah. And then also. To understand parents' aspiration. To know different cultures backgrounds. Yeah, cause, the parenting all different. And then they all come from different culture. Oh yeah, that can be another thing there. Yeah" (Harin)*

In contrast, most participants perceived workplace cultural diversity as exceptionally positive and beneficial. They had seen diversity as an opportunity to learn about other cultures while sharing their own culture with others. They also got to celebrate their own traditions in the centre, and one participant expressed happiness that she had received such positive feedback and a high level of engagement from the children and parents. Participants also emphasised the benefits of children being in this diverse environment.

> *"Korean, Chinese, Indian, Kiwi, Norway. Um, Māori, um. We hardly have Thai, but we used to have one, Sri Lanka. Vietnam, um. Um, South America. Um, Iranian, yeah. Yeah, and we do, yeah, we do a lot of um culture thing as well like Chinese New Year, Diwali, and this year I am hosting um like 'Loy Krathong' for the first time. That they really enjoy." (Thida)*

Nevertheless, being in Auckland might have contributed to such an environment, where most participants expressed how Auckland is a multicultural city with many immigrants. As a result, one participant expressed how she believes such diversity and the number of immigrants in Auckland prevent her from experiencing discrimination. Nevertheless, this implies that situations might be different for migrants in other cities with lower migration numbers.

Accordingly, such diversity and multicultural background in Aotearoa/New Zealand is believed to contribute to more positive experiences for participants, where many participants disclose that the reasons they did not experience racism may be owing to the nature of New Zealanders. Many often describe New Zealanders as friendly, open-minded, accepting and kind.

"You know, people in New Zealand are used to accepting people in different countries. They know that they, they were born in like or they were raised in the multicultural country, so they know they used to it." (Yasna)

This positive perception is also evident in their attitude toward the country, where participants explained that Aotearoa/New Zealand is a country that is characterised by freedom, gender equality, natural beauty, a peaceful environment, a high standard of living, and social stability.

4.3.2 Adaptation

Participants generally viewed adaptation to Aotearoa/New Zealand society as a normal and necessary part of the migrant experience. Most believed adjusting to the Aotearoa/New Zealand way of life was expected and sensible, given their position as migrants. Although individual perceptions of adaptation varied, a shared understanding emerged among the participants: Aotearoa/New Zealand culture significantly shapes their way of living and thinking. Participants tended to focus on the positive aspects of adaptation, often seeing it as common sense—for example, engaging in cultural celebrations, adopting social courtesies, and learning the language. Indeed, one participant, Tala, highlighted how fluency in English can even serve as a "free pass" to avoid experiences of racism, underscoring the protective role of language competence in navigating social acceptance. This may include understanding one's rights and speaking up for oneself, which may have been more possible due to the high language proficiency of many participants.

"My children hasn't had any issues with racism at the moment, and I and I think it's because they are quite vocal and because English is their language apart from my language. They are able to relate and to approach, so I think racism for my children is out of the way." (Tala)

4.3.3 Navigating the Visa System

Participants commonly reported feeling overwhelmed and frustrated while navigating the visa process. These emotions often stemmed from the perception that they were expected to manage their visa applications independently, without sufficient support from employers or relevant authorities. The central issue identified by participants was the presence of delays or errors in the visa process, which directly impacted their ability to maintain employment. For migrant workers, holding a valid work visa is essential, as it grants them the

legal right to work in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The need to constantly maintain and update their visa status placed significant pressure and anxiety on most participants. A single mistake could render them ineligible for a work visa, resulting in the loss of their right to work and earn an income.

> *"Oh. I feel like kind of the same like before. I haven't get my, my residency. I will feel like a bit like anxious about my future or like getting anxious. Like when my visa like expired. They're getting like getting soon and I was getting up to panic like oh, will I still be able to get the? Visa next time? Or is it will be all right? Everything will be OK and can't like that." (Fang)*

Additionally, many participants expressed frustration with the slow pace of immigration-related processes, which led to delays in renewing their work visas and, in some cases, resulted in a temporary loss of the right to work. One participant even highlighted how this dependency on visa status could place migrant workers in a vulnerable position, potentially exposing them to exploitation.

4.4 Theme Two: ECE Is an Undervalued Profession

Another significant pattern observed in participants' experiences as ECE workers was the undervaluation of both care work and the ECE profession. Two participants clearly stated that they experienced the devaluation of ECE work. Participants agreed that people and parents of the children have a biased perception toward ECE-related occupations, where they believed the ECE job is simply an easy job, "just taking care of or playing with the children".

> *"It's not, to be honest, it's not, it's not well respected. Again, there is a bit of a bias towards this profession saying, oh, it's basically they don't do anything. You just look after children, but people don't realise that it's actually a lot of hard work and it's not that easy. Easy field...they, they believe that it's kind of very straightforward, easy job, but it's actually not. It's actually not good. Yeah." (Anika)*

This portrays the perception that people believe the ECE occupations do not require much effort; instead, they view caregiving as a natural human (mostly a mother's) instinct rather than a professional skill. This might also suggest that some parents perceive ECE occupations as mothering roles suited for women with children rather than professional occupations requiring expertise. This notion implies that only people with children or who are mothers will better understand taking care of children, which overlooks the educational

aspects of ECE while undermining the essential aspects of care, which are embedded in the core of the ECE curriculum. This, in turn, reflects participants' experiences, particularly those without children, who reported being treated with disrespect or seen as less capable. Many participants reported that, due to their lack of experience and youth (often as new graduates), parents doubt their ability and knowledge to care for children, despite holding recognised qualifications and training to work in ECE. Not only that, but if participants did not have children of their own, parents also doubted the participants' capability to understand their concerns and the overprotective nature of their children. However, most participants clearly stated that they believed that the treatment they got was simply because they were young rather than because of their race.

> *"She told me that like there was a parent, she's more preferred the older teacher to, like look after her daughter…cause she think that like she's too young. That's why she feels that like you, you won't have that knowledge or like cause, you never have your own children. And then like, you won't understand like. How I feel or like why I request like that like kind of like just change, check for a professional knowledge but, but she's a really like good, experienced teacher. But just because she's young and she doesn't have kids. So that's why like the parents was a little bit like judging about it… cause some of the parent might feel like, oh, you have no experience, maybe like you're just fresh graduate. Maybe like you don't know how to deal with, like, children and stuff like that. Yeah." (Fang)*

Similarly, the devaluation of care work was reflected in participants' shared experiences, particularly through being treated and perceived as nannies. This is especially common among those working with younger children, such as infants. Participants who work with babies believed that it is because their job revolves more heavily around nurturing and caring than participants who care for older children.

> *"Sometimes I do feel like, like parents like my see us as a babysitter. Like kind of like that rather to be a teacher cause. I think they feel like maybe because we got more like caring part than the teaching part cause they still young so they will need more love so like sometimes, like even the parent maybe doesn't mean it, but like just give me. Feeling like oh, they just seeing us like, is like, like, babysitter or like, yeah, something like that. Yeah. Or nanny" (Fang)*

Consequently, being treated as a nanny or babysitter rather than a teacher may be, as discussed above, because ECE work is perceived as low-skilled work, with their qualifications undervalued and more closely associated with maternal or caregiving traits than professional expertise. As a result, professionals in this field are often viewed as caregivers rather than educators. Despite the widespread underestimation of ECE work, participants expressed that the role has become increasingly stressful, particularly when dealing with children and their parents. This stress may be compounded by the lack of recognition of the complexity and responsibility involved in ECE roles. Particularly, the undervaluation of the profession may also help explain the disrespectful behaviour some teachers experienced from parents, who may perceive ECE educators as mere babysitters rather than qualified professionals. Notably, this perception appears to persist across participants regardless of their race, qualifications, or position within the ECE sector, suggesting that the industry is subject to systemic undervaluation. This trend reflects a broader societal tendency to regard ECE as less respectable or important than other educational or professional fields. Mei also suggested that such a lack of parental respect may stem from perceiving the relationship as one between a business and a customer, rather than a partnership between educators and families. She also mentioned that parents with this mindset expect teachers to do everything for their children, as they already pay for the service.

> *"And one of the issues that early childhood teacher has to and as you get all the abuse and all the. Bad stuff from the parents. They, they don't treat you as a teacher anymore. I mean not. I'm not saying everyone, but it's, it's quite common now. They just think, oh, we, we pay the childcare fee. We are the customer, and you are just running a business. You're just serving me. You just like a babysitter or, you know, they. And when they are not happy or when they have a bad day or something, they will just direct their fire at the teachers and think it's really not fair. Yeah, it's not a highly respected job anymore. Unfortunately, in New Zealand." (Mei)*

This also aligns with another participant's observation that, compared to the past, parents are increasingly shifting the responsibility of raising their children onto teachers. They expect educators to manage everything for their children, despite the reality that effective child development also requires active involvement and effort from parents at home.

> *"Maybe probably about 15 years ago when I started working is different. The parents more hands on and read with children, you know, take care of their toilet training and everything.*

Now it becomes like they expect the teacher to do everything and just take home, come pick up their kids and then go home and put to bed. That's what they want. So yeah, I agree with that statement that they do perceive the teacher as a babysitter." (Malee)

Indeed, the overall confirmation from participants within this theme implies that, although ECE is not widely perceived as a skilled profession, ECE teachers still expect to possess substantial knowledge and expertise. This contradiction highlights the gap between societal perceptions and the actual demands of the role.

4.5 Theme Three: Racism in the Workplace

This theme captures the discriminatory treatment that participants encountered in their workplaces. It encompasses both verbal and non-verbal, as well as direct and indirect, expressions of prejudice manifested through attitudes and behaviours underpinned by systemic and interpersonal racial discrimination. The sub-themes identified under this theme are marginalisation and exclusion, and racialised assumptions and stereotypes.

4.5.1 Marginalisation and Exclusion

Among participants, experiences of racist treatment from colleagues or parents often began when they attempted to express their opinions, raise concerns, or question certain practices. For Yasna, everything was going exceptionally well until she shared her opinion and questioned certain practices within the organisation, which led to her receiving unacceptable and prejudiced treatment.

"I got bullied because that girl was really insulted me the way that she ruined all my confidence the way that. And when I remember those days when I first started there, she was so kind. I really loved her. We were so good. But the way that I started to complain about things…or express my ideas, she I think she got a guard. Yeah, she, she felt that. OK, this person is. Now start talking. She didn't like it." (Yasna)

In another case, where the participant only shared the concern with the parent, whose child had treated her poorly, the parent was offensive instead of apologising or acknowledging the teacher. This could indicate mistrust or misunderstanding, and it may also suggest that the outcome might have been different had the concern been raised by a different teacher.

"My head teacher told me that the mother is very upset with me. Yeah, totally. Because the totally opposite of what I expected. I thought she would might just talk to her child and tell her not to say things like that to teachers because what the child said wasn't something nice, but instead that was put on me that I have offended the parent" (Anika)

Interestingly, Tala stated that as a person of colour who is expressive, aware of her rights and holds a leadership role, she became the target of bullying. Overall, expressing opinions appears to be a primary trigger for conflict or tension among many individuals. Such discriminatory behaviour from colleagues or parents may be rooted in the thought of entitlement, where people do not expect migrants of colour to talk back and just do what they have been told. The expression of opinion may also be perceived as a form of control or power, reflecting societal attitudes that suggest migrants should remain unheard and that their perspectives are unworthy of consideration. This could also suggest that standing up for oneself and voicing opinions may be perceived as crossing the boundaries of stereotypes associated with people of colour. This might be because when individuals do not conform to the expected norms, their actions may be viewed as unexpected or inappropriate, leading to discriminatory treatment simply because they do not fit into the preconceived frame others hold of them. Ultimately, it resulted in treatment that participants explained as bullying, such as accusation, gossiping, lack of support, monitoring and exclusion.

"Well, I think it's always come down to the colour and not only colour, but like I said, if you've been vocal like I am very vocal and I know my right. So, knowing those things, it becomes inferior. To other cultures, but. Particularly the White people. Yeah. So, if I'm not talking, meaning I don't know anything, but if I'm talking tells them that I've got a mentality there. I can hear my voice, and I know my rights and that is an inferior, and that is something that the White people that they will not expect. Because I'm, I'm getting like I'm older now and I could see things that the younger ones could not see. So, these things, and to me, these things needs to be addressed. So, whoever leadership you know at the end of the day, he or she needs to look after her staff. So, there is no discrimination or no racism. So, everybody can continue with their work and live happily. But, but, not everyone has that mindset." (Tala)

Notedly, as can be seen in the participant's quote above, where she stated, "Because I'm getting like I'm older now and I could see things that the younger ones could not see", this might imply that racism in the workplace

could be tremendously subtle and challenging to recognise, particularly for those who are new to the industry. Participants with longer experience may appear more capable of identifying these nuanced forms of discrimination—forms that younger or less experienced educators may not yet recognise or that their younger selves may have previously overlooked. This highlights the presence of racism within the ECE sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand, not as overt or explicit, but rather as indirect and often embedded in everyday interactions and institutional practices.

This subtlety is further reflected in the experience of exclusion and marginalisation within participants' professional environment, a form of racism that, while not always overt, significantly impacts their sense of belonging and professional recognition. Participants reported being intentionally excluded from social groups, even when they tried to build relationships with others on their teams. Some observed that others appeared to bond easily while intentionally excluding them. Two participants' accounts included being ignored in conversations or being subjected to controlling behaviours that prevent social interaction. Such experiences undermine a sense of belonging and devalue the presence and contributions of participants. This, in turn, could lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, with some participants questioning their value and self-worth. Not only is it problematic in destroying one's self-confidence, but it could also result in longer-term, unbearable consequences or impacts that compromise one's mental health and ability to participate in the workforce fully.

> *"I think I had subtle sort of discrimination. Not openly. They say something, but you can feel it like it's subtle, like they will not include you into team sort of conversations I have worked in a lot of centres where the where the staff are having a good sort of kind of kind of, you know? Chitchat. They will talk to each other, and they will have a sort of a good time, you know? But then I'm not included in their in their in their chit chats. I'm not included. They will not probably build that relationship with me but even though how much hard I tried to build that relationship with them they will not give me any. How do you say? Any sort of you know, kind of hint or they will not. Give me response is the right word like even though I'm trying hard to maintain that relationship with my colleagues like having a laugh. You know, sometimes you just have a laugh or or just kind of they will probably not do it with the but they will do it with*

their own other colleagues, but they will not do it. So, they will exclude you. Exclusion is something I have witnessed time and time again." (Anika)

4.5.2 Racialised Assumptions and Stereotypes

Positioning oneself as a qualified staff member in ECE appears to provide legitimacy that extends beyond fulfilling regulatory requirements, but it is also a tool to evaluate one's trustworthiness and credibility. Being a qualified teacher means the Aotearoa/New Zealand authority has formally approved the participant. This means meeting formal requirements, such as acquiring an ECE-related qualification, gaining practical experience, and demonstrating English proficiency (in the case of migrants). However, being asked about their qualifications and where they are from as migrant workers may seem innocent and neutral. Nevertheless, it could also conceal the subtle assumption about migrants of colour, where people may not automatically assume migrants of colour to be competent or qualified.

"They said are you from India? I said yes, I am. And they said oh, are you qualified? So, I feel that kind of a racism I said no I'm not. Oh, you speak good English, I said, well, you're more qualified than me, then, like, because you are qualified and I'm not qualified. I only get the experience by teaching around you know, yeah, so yeah, definitely there is some racism involved." (Samira)

This could also highlight the unspoken stereotype that the experiences or qualifications of migrants of colour in other countries outside Aotearoa/New Zealand are inferior. Subsequently, having an Aotearoa/New Zealand qualification or recognition could at least help them "prove themselves" to be credible to the standard people deem acceptable in the country. This notion is present, particularly among participants who are not currently qualified teachers, those who were previously qualified, or those in the process of obtaining a qualification. These participants often experienced underappreciation and undervaluation of their unqualified position, as well as disrespectful treatment, mostly from people within the organisation.

"I told her that my registration had expired. I was a trained teacher, and she immediately commented to me without even giving me a chance to say anything else. She said well, oh, so you let it expire that that easily. So, she didn't give me a chance to say, well, why it did expire? ...That the comment of her sat with me for, for a very long time, just like a judgement started by

she just judged me first thing in the morning at the door, and she, she receives me at the door and she's commenced like that. And just that just stayed with me for a very long time. You know that I felt it was so harsh to say that, you know, to someone" (Anika)

This could suggest that formal qualifications are necessary to gain trust, respect, and legitimacy in the ECE setting. In other words, qualification may be perceived as a marker of serious professional intent and prior experience. At the same time, those without may be viewed as simply filling staffing gaps or seeking alternative benefits. This perception may reflect the underlying stereotypes frequently held against many migrant workers. Overall, this highlighted how formal qualifications are crucial in determining migrants ' teachers' degrees of being professionally accepted and recognised as ECE employees in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This could also indicate that a person's value and credibility are tied to their qualifications; otherwise, they will be deemed dispensable or useless to the organisation.

"But just like one time, like I just felt like not very valued as a relief teacher because I was unqualified. Yeah, so not. Not very like, oh, I, you know, I, I tried to work hard and do everything. And I, I really want to know like to do more as a relief, but I felt like they didn't let me be very part of the team like I was just like You know, just relief teacher to look after the children and I want to do more that time." (Helena)

4.6 Theme Four: The Impact of Racism

Ultimately, this theme reveals the underlying consequences of racist treatment and illustrates how it impacts participants on both personal and professional levels. Further analysis revealed distinct sub-themes within this category: suffering in silence, distancing and intra-group preferences. These sub-themes demonstrate how racialised treatment affects participants emotionally, shapes their coping strategies, and influences how they navigate social and professional spaces.

4.6.1 Suffering in Silence

The impact of racist treatment can extend far beyond what is immediately visible or expected. Although many participants expressed the need to move on for their own good, the emotional consequences appear to be long-lasting and unimaginable. Participants seemed emotional when discussing these subjects and

expressed how they were still stuck with them. Confusion, anger, and sadness were the common emotions that could be identified during the discussion. One participant, Anika, even expressed how discrimination in the workplace is often viewed as a taboo topic, as an issue that cannot be discussed openly with others in the workplace, primarily due to the fear of losing a job.

> *"I was facing this same racial discrimination, and I was very unhappy. There was another colleague, there was another. Two or three teachers from other cultures and they were working in the other different room, and we would meet in the staff room sometimes, but they would never discuss anything about it if I wanted to talk about it, they will not even give me a response because they were so scared of losing their jobs. I think they're so scared of losing their jobs that even though they are witnessing this discrimination, even though they are, they will not talk about it. They were so scared. Yeah, it is because yeah, a lot of people just quietly suffer discrimination because they don't want to lose the jobs." (Anika)*

This could make participants feel invalidated and unheard, compounding their experiences of discrimination. The lack of a supportive and safe work environment further silences their voices, making it difficult to raise concerns or seek support for these issues. Ultimately, this points out that participants acknowledge racial discrimination did occur in their workplace; however, when it was raised or reported, the system often sided with the person responsible, with consequences more likely to fall on the victim instead. Similarly, Mei confirmed the ineffectiveness of systems, describing how, despite making a report, no meaningful action was taken. This reinforces the perception that institutional responses to such issues are inadequate. It could also reflect how such incidents are often treated as commonplace, which trivialises the seriousness of the issue, leaving countless people feeling unsupported, hopeless and powerless.

> *"I had a horrible experience that I was abused by the parents down to very, very personal level. And that just unacceptable. But there's nothing you can do. I talked to the management. I even emailed the Ministry of Education. I said when the teacher does some did something wrong, I mean the parents can report to you, but when the parents did something horrible to the teacher, where should we go? And there's no answer to this. Basically, if they abuse you, you just have to ignore it and let it go and there's nothing we can do, unfortunately." (Mei)*

Indeed, the stigmatisation of this topic in the workplace could also reflect on the power dynamic, where migrants of colour distrust the systems to bring justice and thus feel safer to be silent. Some participants may feel they should not speak up, which may be due to their dependency on the centre for employment or because they believe there are no better alternatives available. This can also be seen in the pattern of participants' responses, where several expressed that there is “nothing they can do” or “cannot help it”, and eventually, they simply need to “let it go”.

4.6.2 Distancing

Distancing refers to instances where participants employed metaphors and rhetoric to distance themselves from situations when asked questions about their experiences with racism or discrimination. Participants often conveyed that they feel “lucky” that they have never experienced such racism or discrimination in their workplace, which also aligns with their expression that they are fortunate to have good team members in their workplace.

> *“With racism, I, I've been so lucky to have a really support team, you know, and we can, we can even joke like, come on, Asian tourists coming. I'm going to cut your queue, and we joke things like that at work, um, when people do microwave food and I said, hey, Asian, come in, come on, hurry up. I'm gonna cut your queue.” (Thida)*

Participants found that having supportive team members was rewarding and essential in helping them navigate challenges in their personal and professional lives. A cohesive team, including a supportive leader, can make participants feel valued and included. This supportive environment enabled participants to thrive in their roles, express themselves fully, and contribute their unique strengths from diverse backgrounds.

> *“I came to this centre that I work now, the first thing that I felt like oh, I felt like even though I was relief teacher there I, I really feel like felt like very valued, you know they. They had some, some professional development, and they invite me and I was also excited because I felt like, oh, even though I, I am relieved cause I was, I was still unqualified at that time, but I felt more valuate so I think but not really like as immigrant.” (Helena)*

While this may seem positive when participants expressed their fortune to have a supportive team and never have to experience racism, this could indicate that participants feel they have never experienced racism

simply because of “luck” rather than it being a common experience for people not to encounter such things. This indicates that participants might perceive racism to be one of the common occurrences among people of colour, where some are unlucky to experience it. Not only that, but participants also communicated that even if they experienced racism, they chose to “not take it personally” or claimed they “did not care.” This response may reflect a broader normalisation of such experiences, indicating that racism is not seen as a unique or personal attack but rather a shared and persistent reality. It may also serve as a coping strategy, enabling participants to focus on the positive aspects of their careers and professional aspirations. Many participants expressed strong passion and commitment to the ECE field, which could imply that they were determined not to let racism damage their careers. Alternatively, these responses may highlight participants’ emotional resilience and ability to manage adversity. This mindset appeared to support them in navigating other life challenges as well.

> *“I don't care. I mean, every culture has a bad point. I mean, I came out. I came to New Zealand when I was 16. I see so many bad things about New Zealand culture. I mean, who cares? I mean, just get a life….I'm not really a snowflake or what. I mean, if you want to say something, comment on about my culture or my country. As long as it's your opinion and the same, it's reasonable outside. Nothing wrong with it. I don't mind, to be honest.” (Mei)*

Moreover, when asked about racism, some participants acknowledged that it had occurred. However, they often shifted the responsibility onto themselves, focusing on how they managed the situation rather than on addressing the source of the problem. Some also emphasised that it was ultimately the individual's responsibility to deal with and respond to racism.

> *“Oh, I'll be honest, racism is still out there. And we know that New Zealand is one of the top racism. And it is happening, and it just depends on how you approach racism... If you don't take it seriously, it'll affect your work. But because I'm a very strong person personality wise, I'm strong and that is just nothing to me. Like I said, it just depends on the person. However he or she takes it, you know.” (Tala)*

4.6.3 Intra-Group Preference

Interestingly, participants articulated how the normalisation of cultural preservation often led people to remain within their own cultural or ethnic groups, including in the workplace. They observed that it is common for some ECE centres to predominantly employ staff from the same nationality. While some participants saw this as a matter of cultural comfort or familiarity, others identified it as a form of racism, highlighting how hiring practices can reflect intra-ethnic discrimination, even among those broadly categorised as Asian. This tendency to favour one's own cultural group—often due to shared language, similar backgrounds, and perceived ease of communication—may inadvertently exclude others from different national or ethnic origins, resulting in exclusionary practices within minority communities themselves.

> *"Like if I talk about Indian owned centre like owner operator is Indian definitely, he wants some Indian staff in the childhood centre. That's what I figured out. If it is owner is Chinese own centre definitely, they want the Chinese staff to be employed. Yeah, that's kind of a, yeah. If you apply for that job, you won't get it. That's what I personally also feel that way. I applied and my friend applied was Chinese. She got it and then I figure out what was wrong with me and then she said, oh, they prefer on these Mandarin because Chinese people like that. So yeah, definitely there are racism like that." (Samira)*

This tendency is also reflected in parental preferences, where families may favour teachers who share their cultural background or speak the same language. Such preferences are often rooted in a desire for their children to feel comfortable, secure, and surrounded by a familiar cultural environment, like what they experience at home. Most participants viewed this behaviour as understandable rather than discriminatory, with several acknowledging that they might make similar choices themselves in the same situation.

> *"It will be much more like Asian parents wanted to do wanted their they have preference. So some parents, yeah, some. So this is also so to me it's not being discriminated. It's because they as a parent maybe like they're very protective of their child and sometimes. Parents can, can take the decision for their child of what they think is best for them." (Maria)*

4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presents a total of four main themes and eight sub-themes identified from the interview transcription of eleven participants working in ECE.

The first theme, “The Migrant Experience”, revealed the challenges participants faced as migrant workers. Participants navigated the language and cultural challenges of being migrants in a different country, including working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Participants also navigated the visa systems, as having a valid working visa is essential to work lawfully within the country. Overall, these experiences may have led to adaptive normalisation, where participants came to view it as a necessary survival strategy.

The second theme illustrated how ECE is an undervalued profession. Participants expressed how ECE professionals are often viewed as requiring low effort rather than expertise, leading to participants being perceived as nannies rather than educators. Having no children or being young was also perceived as unsuitable due to parents' perception of a suitable role for ECE professionals being a mother. Despite the devaluation, parents still expected high standards and responsibility from teachers to care for their children.

The third theme, “Racism in the Workplace”, presented the racist treatment that participants received from attempting to express their opinions, raise concerns, or question certain practices. Such treatment includes bullying, accusations, gossiping, lack of support, monitoring and exclusion. Moreover, it highlighted how the values and professional credibility of migrants of colour are often closely linked to their qualifications, exposing an implicit societal assumption that they are unworthy or incompetent unless they possess an Aotearoa/New Zealand qualification.

The final theme explored the impact of racism on participants, which shows how racism is viewed as a taboo topic in the workplace, associated with the lack of support within organisations and broader institutional systems. Participants often coped by using metaphors and rhetoric to distance themselves from those situations. This was also evident in the normalisation of cultural preservation, where people remain within their cultural group.

Overall, while this group of participants did not explicitly identify many instances of direct racism in their experiences, they exhibited manifestations of racism in more subtle and hidden ways that were often difficult to recognise. This was evident in the pattern of participants’ responses to specific situations and topics, which

confirmed the underlying presence of racism within the ECE sector. Nevertheless, driven by their deep passion and long-standing commitment to their careers, some participants appeared to unintentionally overlook or downplay experiences of racism, prioritising their professional growth and dedication to the field over directly confronting these challenges.

The next chapter, the discussion chapter, will compare and contrast these findings with the existing academic literature. It will focus on the novelty of some findings, especially those that have not been widely discussed in the current literature, which will serve as the primary focus of the discussion chapter.

Chapter 5 Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter, the findings chapter, presented four key themes and eight sub-themes identified through thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with eleven participants. The four main themes were 1) the migrant experience; 2) ECE is an undervalued profession; 3) racism in the workplace, and 4) the impact of racism.

This chapter discusses these findings in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. It aims to identify the consistencies and differences between existing research and the data gathered from this specific group of participants. Particular attention is given to the novel insights that emerged from this study—insights that have not been widely addressed in the current literature. By doing so, this chapter seeks to deepen the understanding of how systemic racism shapes the lived experiences of migrants of colour within the early childhood education (ECE) sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

5.2 The Migrant Experience

The first key finding represents the migrant experience and highlights the various difficulties participants face as migrant workers. This theme reflects evidence that supports current thought in the literature. Existing research often emphasises factors such as language and cultural differences, or racial distinctions, as contributors to discriminatory treatment. For instance, Tan et al. (2024) identified language as a key factor contributing to discrimination against people of colour, while Steven et al. (2011) noted that language differences are often used as markers to categorise and associate negative stereotypes with other ethnic groups, leading to racism and discrimination. However, participants in this study demonstrated the direct challenges caused by these factors themselves. Rather than explicitly describing the consequences of a discriminatory system or how it manifests in their experiences, they illustrated how struggles within these systems impact their professional and personal lives. This suggests that the effects of such barriers may be experienced as marginalisation, even if not always consciously identified as discrimination.

Following this, Choy et al. (2021) explained that a lack of proficiency in the host country's language (in this case, English) can intensify the stress of acculturation among migrants. Choy et al. (2021) identified limited

proficiency in the host country's language as a key factor that exacerbates acculturative stress among migrants. Without the ability to communicate fluently, migrants face significant challenges in performing everyday tasks, accessing employment opportunities, and integrating effectively into the host society (Choy et al., 2021). This aligns with the findings of this study, in which participants frequently expressed language challenges as one of the most significant issues. They often voiced concerns about communication accuracy, being judged, and being misperceived, factors closely tied to their confidence and comfort in expressing themselves. This reflects the stress caused by limited English proficiency at the time and signals their efforts to integrate into the host society (Choy et al., 2021). Consequently, some participants even believed that language adaptation—particularly achieving high fluency and proficiency in English—could serve as a "free pass" to avoid racism. This suggests that while language acquisition may not eliminate the perception of migrants of colour as outsiders, it can significantly reduce the likelihood of overt racism. This notion aligns with the assimilation strategy in John Berry's acculturation model, which outlines four strategies reflecting the degree to which immigrants engage with the host culture while maintaining their own (Berry, 1997, cited in Tutu et al., 2018). Particularly, the assimilation strategy, where migrants adopt the mainstream values of the host country while abandoning their own, is often the most favoured by host communities (Tutu et al., 2018). Hence, fluency in English may be seen as a sign of aligning with mainstream culture, which explains why certain migrant groups—such as those from the UK and South Africa (who speak English and share racial and cultural similarities)—experience quicker acceptance and inclusion due to their association with the dominant group (Lyons et al., 2011). This preference is also evident in historical immigration policies, where a certain group of migrants were favoured—particularly those who could easily assimilate into Aotearoa/New Zealand's British-based culture (Beaglehole, 2015; Mitchell, 2003). These policies aimed to "keep the country White" or maintain Aotearoa/New Zealand as a "country of European development" (Beaglehole, 2015; Mitchell, 2003). These historical values remain deeply ingrained in the institutional structures and societal attitudes of Aotearoa/New Zealand. With this in mind, competence in the dominant language may help migrants of colour be perceived as fully assimilated and aligned with the host country's values and norms. This supports the findings of Daldy et al. (2013), who explained that the fewer migrants of colour identify with their background, the more they are perceived as fitting in and posing less of a threat to national values, resulting in less discrimination. These findings confirm that language competence is closely

linked to assimilation, as English is the dominant and most widely spoken language; communicating effectively in it is often seen as aligning with the country's culture, values, and way of life.

Furthermore, this study found that participants normalised adaptation as a necessary and reasonable process for migrants relocating to a new country. Some even felt that the country shaped their way of living and thinking. Participants described engaging in cultural celebrations, adopting social courtesies, and learning the language. Not only that, but they were also able to celebrate and share their traditions while adjusting to life in Aotearoa/New Zealand. While the previous section illustrated how language proficiency can reflect an assimilation strategy, this finding shows that participants actively engaged with both their heritage culture and the host society's culture. This demonstrates the use of another strategy in Berry's acculturation model—the integration strategy (Berry, 1997, cited in Androni & Constantin, 2024). Rather than abandoning their own culture to fit in, participants employed an integration strategy, blending their own cultural practices with those of Aotearoa/New Zealand to adapt. Scholars have found this to be the most preferred and beneficial strategy among migrants (Choy et al., 2021). Indeed, research highlights its benefits for psychological and socio-cultural well-being, including higher levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, and overall adjustment (Androni & Constantin, 2024). These benefits were clearly reflected in participants' perceptions, as many spoke positively about the integration process and the value of cultural diversity. They expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn about other cultures while sharing their own and highlighted how such an environment is especially beneficial for children. This aligns strongly with the literature, indicating that participants viewed the integration strategy as a key factor in supporting their adjustment and overall well-being.

5.3 ECE Is an Undervalued Profession

The findings within this theme reveal a persistent pattern of undervaluation in the ECE sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Participants consistently reported that the ECE profession—particularly the caregiving aspects of the role—is underestimated and perceived as low-effort, simplistic, and lacking complexity. This perception aligns with Gould (2022), who identified a strong link between the undervaluation of care work and its historical association with women. Similarly, McDonald et al. (2024), Hamilton et al. (2021), and Ravenswood & Smith (2017) explained how gendered assumptions position

women as natural caregivers, performing tasks traditionally viewed as routine, unpaid, and of low value. Participants also described how parents often perceive ECE teachers as nannies rather than educators, due to the profession's emphasis on caregiving and the predominance of women in the field (Ministry of Education, 2025). This perception reinforces the idea that ECE lacks professionalism—a notion often associated with hyper-femininity (Gould, 2022). Griffiths et al. (2022) further support this view, noting that ECE teachers in Aotearoa/New Zealand are frequently seen as "glorified babysitters". These findings underscore the ongoing tension within the sector, where feelings of being undervalued are widespread and reflect the lived experiences of ECE professionals.

Another example of this undervaluation is evident in parental attitudes toward younger educators or those without children. Participants reported experiencing discrimination based on age and lack of parental experience, which mirrors broader societal beliefs that equate motherhood with caregiving competence. This belief is deeply embedded in foundational ECEC theories, which often idealise the image of the loving mother as the archetype of an ECE teacher (Ailwood, 2017; Aslanian, 2015; Gould, 2022; Van Laere et al., 2014). Such mental associations diminish the complexity of care work, which is skilled, intellectual, and emotionally demanding, and reinforce essentialist views that caregiving is inherently a woman's role (Gould, 2022). Participants' experiences reflect how these perceptions not only devalue the profession but also undermine the expertise and qualifications of educators, regardless of gender or parental status, who have undergone formal training and are committed to their professional roles. These assumptions diminish the professional status of ECE teachers and contribute to the perception that formal qualifications are unnecessary—an idea further reinforced by recent government decisions to reduce qualification requirements.

As reported by NZEI Te Riu Roa, the Aotearoa/New Zealand Government is proposing to reduce qualification requirements for ECE teachers, dismantle key elements of Te Whāriki—the national ECE curriculum—and remove obligations to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and acknowledge Māori as tangata whenua (Indigenous people) (NZEI, n.d.). This demonstrates how the state itself contributes to the perception of ECE professionals as care workers rather than educators. This is also evident in the diminishing emphasis on Te Whāriki, which has played a crucial role in reshaping positive perceptions of the care dimension within ECE (NZEI, n.d.). As a result, individuals and institutions may further devalue the ECE profession, reinforcing outdated views of it as low-skilled, low-paid, and low-status work (McDonald et al., 2024; Ravenswood & Smith, 2017). The

erosion of the importance of care not only undermines the ECE sector but also disproportionately affects those who predominantly perform this work—women (Gould, 2022). This exacerbates existing gender inequalities, as care work—often seen as an extension of women's "natural" roles—continues to be underpaid, under-recognised, and overlooked. Substantially, this issue is further impaired by the Government's recent urgent amendments to the Equal Pay Act 1972, which abolished all existing pay equity claims (Ravenswood, 2025). Such legislative changes reflect how the state continues to perpetuate the undervaluation of work traditionally performed by women, making it even more difficult for women to challenge unfair treatment within institutional structures—especially in industries historically known for being underpaid and overworked, including ECE (Ravenswood, 2025).

Lastly, the findings also reveal the undervaluation of ECE through parents' perception of the sector as a business transaction rather than an educational partnership. Many parents view themselves as customers and the ECE centre as a business, and since they pay fees, they feel entitled to receive all services without contributing to the learning process. This consumer mindset shifts the responsibility for a child's development entirely onto ECE professionals, reducing the role of parents in the educational journey. This expectation not only places unrealistic demands on teachers but also reinforces the misconception that ECE is merely a form of babysitting (Griffiths et al., 2022).

5.4 Racism in the Workplace

While the findings in this study were largely connected to existing literature, they also revealed an interesting pattern that offers further insight into the role of systemic racism in shaping the experiences of migrant workers. One key finding was that the expression of questions, concerns, and opinions often became a trigger point for participants to experience discrimination. Although this is not directly addressed in the literature, Tan et al. (2024) reported that migrants of colour are overrepresented in traditionally low-paid occupations due to economic and job insecurity and are often subject to the notion of "beggars can't be choosers". This mindset stereotypes migrants of colour as individuals who should accept any available job under any condition, without questioning or demanding better treatment—even when their concerns relate to fundamental human rights (Tan et al., 2024). Rather than acknowledging that some migrants of colour are forced to accept disadvantageous conditions due to systemic inequality and racism, this notion shifts the

blame onto the migrants themselves (International Labour Organization, 1960; Mooten, 2021). As a result, individuals who discriminate against participants may be influenced by the belief that migrants should be grateful for any opportunity and refrain from making demands. Thus, when participants voice their concerns, it is often perceived as crossing the boundaries of these stereotypes, reinforcing the findings of Tan et al. (2024).

Furthermore, the findings revealed participants' experiences of direct racist treatment, including bullying, accusations, gossiping, lack of support, monitoring, and exclusion. These experiences align with the work of Maydell and Diego-Mendoza (2014) and Sahraoui (2020), who have documented similar manifestations of racism in the workplace, including instances of managers and colleagues treating migrant workers in a discriminatory manner. It also provides an explanation for such treatment in relation to individual-level racism. As Banaji et al. (2021) explain, individual-level racism stems from a superiority mindset, where individuals believe one race is superior to others. This mindset manifests in negative attitudes (preferences, prejudices), beliefs (stereotypes), and behaviours (discrimination) toward others. These underlying biases also help explain discriminatory behaviours toward migrants of colour, alongside a tendency to favour those who align with the dominant group or who can easily assimilate into Aotearoa/New Zealand's British-based culture, as discussed previously in the first theme (Beaglehole, 2015; Daldy et al., 2013; Mitchell, 2003; Tutu et al., 2018).

In particular, the theme of exclusion highlights a "them vs. us" mentality, where "us" refers to the ingroup and "them" to the outgroup. Tajfel (1981) explained that individuals seeking to maintain a positive image of their own group often compare it to others, which can lead to favouring their ingroup while devaluing the outgroup (as cited in Negreiros et al., 2024). This dynamic reflects how perceptions of superiority and racial classification subtly convey hidden attitudes toward migrants—especially migrants of colour—based on differences in skin colour, language, religion, beliefs, and customs. (Lyons et al., 2011; Simon-Kumar, 2015; Tan et al., 2024). One interpretation of this finding is that social exclusion may be used intentionally to prevent migrants of colour from becoming part of the social circle within an organisation, based on the belief that they are different and therefore do not belong. This is also consistent with the work of Lyons et al. (2011) and Simon-Kumar (2015), who emphasise that migrants of colour are often perceived as a threat to mainstream values—such as "Kiwi traditional values" and "Kiwi nationalism." Indeed, even when migrants

of colour successfully assimilate by acquiring the language, accent, and cultural practices, they may still not be accepted or perceived as local, simply because they were not born with those attributes (Lyons et al., 2011).

Another significant finding was that being a qualified teacher in Aotearoa/New Zealand is essential for establishing credibility and trustworthiness in the ECE sector. Participants expressed that their roles as unqualified teachers were often undervalued, with limited responsibilities and recognition. This implies that their prior experiences and professional knowledge were dismissed or undermined. The value placed on holding an Aotearoa/New Zealand teaching qualification reflects a broader issue identified by Huang (2021), who found that immigrant teachers' diversity and experiences are frequently overlooked, and they are treated as "empty vessels"—lacking appreciation and recognition for their backgrounds, skills, knowledge, and contributions. Additionally, the findings reveal that during initial interactions, participants were often asked about their registration status and judged negatively if they were unqualified or if their teacher registration had expired. These experiences align with the work of Farashah and Blomquist (2020), who found that candidate evaluations are heavily influenced by managers' implicit biases regarding gender, race, appearance, and accent. In this context, participants—being migrants of colour—were subjected to preconceived notions and stereotypes that overshadowed their actual qualifications and experiences. This reflects a deeper, often unspoken assumption that migrants of colour are inherently less competent or less qualified, regardless of their professional history in ECE.

5.5 The Impact of Racism

The findings in this theme reveal significant insights into the impact of racism on participants—how it affects their emotions, influences their coping strategies, and shapes how some people of colour navigate society. Participants described the emotional toll of their experiences, with racist remarks continuing to affect them long after the incidents occurred. This lingering impact was evident in how participants recalled these moments during interviews, often accompanied by visible emotional responses such as anger, confusion, and sadness. These reflections are consistent with a wide body of literature documenting the emotional and psychological effects of racism, which include shock, fear, anger, and serious mental health consequences such as stress, isolation, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), among others

(Williams et al., 2022). These reflections underscore how deeply embedded and enduring the effects of racism can be, particularly when experienced in professional and supposedly inclusive environments such as ECE.

The findings further reveal that racism in the workplace is often perceived as a taboo topic—one that cannot be openly discussed due to fear of professional repercussions, such as job loss. This supports the literature by Ahlberg et al. (2022), which highlights how people of colour often fear speaking out about racism in the workplace due to potential negative consequences, including loss of job opportunities, demotion, or salary reductions. Ahlberg et al. (2022) and Kristoffersson et al. (2021) further emphasise the lack of safe spaces to discuss racism and the fear of being reported to management or monitored by colleagues. Similarly, participants in this study expressed that when incidents of racism were reported, they were frequently ignored or dismissed, leaving victims feeling unsafe, disempowered, and unsupported. This contradiction—where racism is publicly condemned yet privately tolerated—demonstrates the real implications of systemic racism. These findings echo those of Ngocha-Chaderopa and Boon (2016), who observed that complaints about racism raised by people of colour are often trivialised and dismissed, particularly due to a lack of support from managers. While this study found that some complaints were escalated to the Ministry of Education, the lack of meaningful response reflects broader literature on how systemic racism within institutions acts as a barrier to equitable and appropriate support and treatment (Mooten, 2021; Williams et al., 2022). This highlights how institutional structures fail to provide justice or safe spaces for people of colour, reinforcing a system that disproportionately disadvantages them. The subtle and often invisible nature of systemic racism creates an environment of fear and silence, where victims are left to navigate their experiences alone. Indeed, this finding substantially validates Ahlberg et al. (2022), that experiences of migrants of colour in ECE in this study, much like those in healthcare, experience similar patterns of racism—where the topic is often silenced, and individuals are left to carry the emotional burden of these experiences alone, regardless of how painful or heavy they may be. Notably, Bain (2018) emphasised that the trivialisation and dismissal of racism can be understood as "the practice of ignorance", which, in this context, serves to silence the voices of those affected (as cited in Ahlberg et al., 2022). This eventually feeds into the majoritarian discourse, aligning with the concept described by Solórzano and Yosso (2002), which refers to dominant narratives constructed by those

in positions of power that aim to benefit the privileged while distorting, marginalising, and silencing the historical and lived experiences of people of colour.

Furthermore, the findings also reveal how silence around racism contributes to its normalisation. Participants often minimised their experiences using phrases such as “there is nothing I can do,” “I cannot help it,” or “you just have to let it go.” These expressions reflect coping mechanisms rooted in emotional withdrawal and a sense of powerlessness, where individuals feel unable to challenge or change their circumstances. This is strongly supported by the findings of Malatest International (2021), which reported that participants frequently coped with racism by emotionally suppressing its impact. Similarly, the tendency to “brush off” or “forget about” racist experiences—despite the emotional distress they cause—was a recurring theme in both studies. Moreover, some participants described their experiences of racism as a matter of “luck,” reinforcing the perception that racism is both commonplace and unavoidable. This framing minimises the significance of racism and distances individuals from the unfair and unpredictable nature of their experiences, suggesting that outcomes are beyond their control—again echoing the findings of Malatest International (2021). Additionally, despite the emotional toll, many participants claimed they “did not take it personally” or “did not care,” indicating a shared understanding among people of colour that racism is a collective, rather than isolated, experience. This aligns with literature suggesting that workers of colour often suppress their emotions and present themselves as strong and unaffected, using this as a form of resistance to racial degradation and emotional self-protection (Ahlberg et al., 2022). These findings highlight the complex emotional labour involved in navigating racism, particularly in professional environments where such experiences are often silenced or dismissed.

Remarkably, the findings uncovered that racism could occur within communities of colour themselves. Some participants noted that individuals may favour those from their own cultural or linguistic backgrounds during hiring decisions. This tendency, similar to what was mentioned in the previous section, where individuals favour their own ingroup, supports the theoretical framework proposed by Tajfel (1981), which reflects a dynamic commonly observed in the “them vs. us” mindset, particularly among White populations toward migrants of colour (as cited in Negreiros et al., 2024). In contrast, this study demonstrates that similar patterns can emerge within communities of colour, where individuals may unintentionally perpetuate unfair treatment toward other ethnic groups, as evidenced in participants’ experiences of hiring bias. However, there

is a lack of literature examining whether this behaviour also functions as a coping mechanism in response to racism. Indeed, in some cases, such behaviour was perceived as normal or natural, particularly when participants described parents expressing preferences for teachers who shared their cultural background. While this reflects a human tendency to seek comfort in familiarity, it also blurs the line between cultural affinity and discriminatory bias. These dynamics underscore the importance of distinguishing between cultural preference and systemic exclusion—especially when such preferences result in unequal treatment of individuals from other ethnic or cultural groups.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the findings of this study in relation to the existing literature. Firstly, it examined how a lack of language proficiency can increase the stress of acculturation among migrants, as reflected in participants' concerns about language difficulties (Choy et al., 2021). Notably, participants viewed English proficiency as a free pass to avoid racism, which aligns with the literature by Tutu et al. (2018), suggesting that host countries tend to prefer migrants who assimilate easily into the dominant culture of Aotearoa/New Zealand. This was also evident in the favouritism shown by dominant groups toward certain migrant communities—such as those from the UK and South Africa—and in historical immigration policies that preferred migrants from British and European cultural backgrounds (Beaglehole, 2015; Berry, 1997, cited in Tutu et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2011; Mitchell, 2003). While assimilation—adopting only the mainstream values—is often preferred by host societies, participants in this study employed an integration strategy, engaging with both their heritage and host cultures (Choy et al., 2021; Tutu et al., 2018). This approach had a positive impact on their well-being and adjustment in Aotearoa/New Zealand, as reflected in their experiences and supported by the literature (Choy et al., 2021).

The second theme aligned strongly with existing literature on the undervaluation of ECE, particularly its connection to the historical devaluation of women's roles in care work (McDonald et al., 2024; Gould, 2022; Hamilton et al., 2021; Ravenswood & Smith, 2017). This societal perception contributes to parents viewing ECE not as a professional educational service but as a form of babysitting or customer service (Griffiths et al., 2022). Moreover, the discrimination participants experienced based on age and lack of parental experience reflects the perception that the loving mother is the standard or ideal model of an ECE teacher (Ailwood,

2017; Aslanian, 2015; Gould, 2022; Van Laere et al., 2014). Following this, government policies that reduced qualification requirements and dismantled key elements of Te Whāriki have further undermined the care dimension and expertise of ECE professionals, reinforcing the perception of the sector as low-skilled, low-paid, and low-status work (McDonald et al., 2024; Ravenswood & Smith, 2017; NZEI, n.d.). This includes the Government's recent amendments to the Equal Pay Act 1972, which have further worsened conditions for women in many industries (Ravenswood, 2025).

The third theme highlighted how racism is embedded in individual attitudes, perceptions, and behaviours, which in turn influence how migrants of colour are treated (Banaji et al., 2021). Participants reported experiencing bullying, accusations, gossiping, lack of support, monitoring, and exclusion. Exclusion, in particular, reinforced a "them vs. us" mindset, where individuals favour their ingroup while diminishing others (Tajfel, 1981, as cited in Negreiros et al., 2024). Thus, migrants were often perceived as threats to mainstream society, such as "Kiwi traditional values" and "Kiwi nationalism" (Lyons et al., 2011; Simon-Kumar, 2015). Another point discussed was that participants who were not qualified teachers in Aotearoa/New Zealand found that their prior professional experience and knowledge were dismissed, aligning with Huang's (2021) concept of migrant teachers being treated as "empty vessels." These experiences were also shaped by managers' implicit biases, where migrants of colour were subjected to stereotypes that overshadowed their actual qualifications (Farashah & Blomquist, 2020).

The fourth theme deliberated the emotional consequences of racism, including its long-lasting psychological effects. These findings align with literature that emphasises serious mental health impacts such as stress, depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Williams et al., 2022). Participants described feeling unable to discuss racism in the workplace due to fear and hopelessness, consistent with Ahlberg et al. (2021) and Kristoffersson et al. (2021), who highlight the lack of safe spaces and fear of professional consequences. Not only that, but complaints about racism were also often trivialised or dismissed, reflecting how systemic racism acts as a barrier to equitable support (Mooten, 2021; Williams et al., 2022). Subsequently, participants often coped by suppressing their emotions, distancing themselves from their experiences, or presenting themselves as unaffected as a form of emotional self-protection and resistance to racial degradation (Ahlberg et al., 2022; Malatest International, 2021). Interestingly, the findings also revealed that migrants of colour themselves tended to favour individuals from similar cultural backgrounds, seeking familiarity and comfort, which

mirrors the “them vs. us” mindset. While this behaviour may reflect a coping mechanism, there is limited literature exploring whether it functions as such (Tajfel, 1981, as cited in Negreiros et al., 2024). However, this tendency can blur the line between cultural affinity and discriminatory bias, especially when it leads to exclusionary practices.

The next chapter, the concision chapter, will summarise the key findings and outcomes, providing clear answers to the research questions of What are the experiences of migrant workers of colour in early childhood education in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and in what ways does systemic racism shape these experiences? This study will also outline its contributions to the existing body of knowledge, discuss the significance and limitations of the research, and provide recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter will provide a summary of the key findings of the research and outline the answer in relation to the research questions. This includes the contribution, significance and potential implications of this research to the field. Moreover, this chapter will outline the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research. Ultimately, this research will end with the closing comments.

6.2 Research Outcomes and Responses to Research Questions

The central research question guiding this thesis is: What are the experiences of migrant workers of colour in early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and in what ways does systemic racism shape these experiences? To address this question, the study is framed within a Critical Race Theory (CRT) paradigm, which seeks to amplify the voices of those who have been historically marginalised, particularly people of colour (Hays & Singh, 2012; Lincoln et al., 2018). CRT provided a lens through which the research could critically examine the structures and practices that perpetuate racial inequities in ECE. In alignment with CRT, the study employed a counter-storytelling methodology, which centres the narratives of individuals whose experiences are often overlooked or silenced. This approach enabled the research to illuminate the lived realities of migrant workers of colour in the ECE sector (Hunn et al., 2006; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for rich, in-depth insights into participants' experiences, while thematic analysis facilitated the identification of recurring patterns across the narratives of eleven participants—both qualified and non-qualified ECE teachers.

In response to the research question, the study identified four key thematic categories that emerged from participants' experiences, summarised here:

1) *The migrant experience*.

   Participants described challenges related to language barriers, cultural adaptation, and navigating complex visa systems. These experiences shaped their entry into and ongoing engagement with the ECE sector.

2) *ECE is an undervalued profession*.

Many participants felt that ECE was perceived as low-skilled work. This was reflected in disrespectful behaviour from parents—such as treating teachers as nannies—alongside experiences of age discrimination and unrealistic expectations placed on educators.

3) *Racism in the workplace*.

Participants reported various forms of marginalisation and exclusion, including bullying, gossip, lack of support, excessive monitoring, and social isolation. Racialised assumptions and stereotypes were also prevalent, particularly around perceived competence, where those without Aotearoa/New Zealand qualifications were often assumed to be less capable.

4) *The impact of racism*.

The emotional toll of racism was significant. Participants described how racist incidents were often trivialised, ignored, or dismissed by colleagues and institutions. As a result, many developed coping strategies, such as distancing themselves, suppressing their emotion and retreating into their own cultural or social groups for safety and support.

Three key conclusions can be drawn from these findings. First, the study revealed a distinct pattern in the attitudes of the dominant group, characterised by intragroup favouritism and outgroup bias (Tajfel, 1981, as cited in Negreiros et al., 2024). This pattern showed that individuals who assimilated easily into the dominant culture—specifically Pākehā culture, which refers to the norms, values, and practices associated with New Zealanders of European descent—were often treated more favourably, while those who maintained distinct cultural identities faced both subtle and overt forms of exclusion (Beaglehole, 2015; Lyons et al., 2011; Mitchell, 2003; Tutu et al., 2018). As reflected in the participants' accounts, they experienced direct forms of racist treatment, including bullying, accusations, gossiping, lack of support, excessive monitoring, and social exclusion. These behaviours were not only socially isolating but also revealed a deeper pattern of dismissing their professional qualifications, backgrounds, and lived experiences. Indeed, driven by intragroup favouritism, this dynamic reinforces dominant national values at the expense of cultural diversity, contributing to systemic racism (Lyons et al., 2011; Simon-Kumar, 2015).

Secondly, the thesis also found that racism has a long-lasting and deeply emotional impact. The emotional toll persists over time, regardless of how long ago the incidents occurred. This finding aligns with existing literature that links racism to serious mental health consequences (Williams et al., 2022). However, racism remains a topic that is difficult to discuss openly, and the lack of accountability for those responsible creates an environment where victims feel unsafe, ignored, and dismissed (Ahlberg et al., 2022; Kristoffersson et al., 2021; Ngocha-Chaderopa & Boon, 2016). As a result, participants often coped by emotionally suppressing or minimising their experiences—an adaptive strategy that reflects the absence of safe spaces for disclosure (Ahlberg et al., 2022; Malatest International, 2021). This reflects that institutional structures frequently fail to provide justice or support for people of colour, reinforcing a system that silences the voices of those affected and disproportionately disadvantages them (Ahlberg et al., 2022; Mooten, 2021; Williams et al., 2022). Systemic racism thus fosters an environment of fear and silence, leaving victims to navigate their experiences in isolation.

Finally, the persistent undervaluation of ECE is deeply rooted in historical gender biases that have long devalued women and the tasks traditionally performed by them, such as caregiving (Gould, 2022; McDonald et al., 2024; Hamilton et al., 2021; Ravenswood & Smith, 2017). As a result, ECE that revolves heavily around care is often perceived not as professional expertise but as an extension of maternal duties (Ailwood, 2017; Aslanian, 2015; Gould, 2022; Van Laere et al., 2014). This perception has contributed to the social construction of ECE as hyper-feminine, simplistic, and lacking in complexity (Griffiths et al., 2022; Gould, 2022). Such views continue to marginalise ECE as a legitimate and skilled profession, rather than recognising it as a specialised field requiring professional knowledge and training.

6.3 Contribution and Significance of the Research

This study makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the experiences of migrants of colour working in ECE in Aotearoa New Zealand. Despite the growing diversity within the ECE workforce, there remains a notable gap in research that specifically addresses the intersection of race, migration, and systemic racism within this sector. Existing literature tends to focus on migrant workers in broader care industries, often overlooking the unique challenges faced by migrants of colour in ECE settings. This thesis addresses

that gap by offering rich, empirical insights into the lived experiences of qualified and non-qualified ECE staff from over nine different countries, each bringing distinct languages, cultures, and worldviews.

A key contribution of this research lies in its exploration of the intersecting challenges faced by participants, not only as migrants and people of colour, but also as professionals navigating the complexities of the ECE sector. The findings reveal how underlying individual biases contribute to discriminatory behaviours, which in turn reinforce and contribute to systemic racism that disproportionately disadvantages people of colour (systemic racism) (Banaji et al., 2021; Lyons et al., 2011; Mooten, 2021; Simon-Kumar, 2015; Tan et al., 2024). Importantly, the findings in this thesis resonate with existing research on racism in care and healthcare work (e.g., Ahlberg et al., 2022; King-Dejardin, 2019; Stevens et al., 2012), which consistently highlights patterns of systemic silencing, emotional marginalisation, and inadequate institutional support for workers of colour. However, much of this research has focused on broader care industries such as healthcare and aged care, leaving a significant gap in understanding the experiences of migrants of colour within the ECE sector. This thesis addresses that gap by extending the conversation into the under-researched context of ECE in New Zealand.

Notably, the study highlights the absence of safe spaces within ECE organisations to discuss racism (Ahlberg et al., 2022; Kristoffersson et al., 2021). Participants reported that incidents of racism were frequently ignored or dismissed, leaving them feeling unsafe, disempowered, and unsupported, even by institutions such as the Ministry of Education, which are expected to uphold equity and wellbeing for both educators and children. This lack of meaningful response reflects systemic barriers to equitable treatment and support, as discussed in works by Mooten (2021) and Williams et al. (2022). Furthermore, the thesis sheds light on the emotional toll of racism and the coping mechanisms employed by migrants of colour. Participants often felt compelled to forgive or dismiss racist incidents due to the absence of viable alternatives or support, a pattern reflected in their metaphors and expressions (Malatest International, 2021). This internalisation of racism not only affects their emotional well-being but also shapes their responses to future incidents, reinforcing cycles of silence and resilience under pressure (Ahlberg et al., 2022; Ngocha-Chaderopa & Boon, 2016).

In sum, this thesis provides a critical and timely contribution to the discourse on race, migration, and ECE in New Zealand. It calls for greater recognition of the systemic nature of racism in ECE and urges institutions to

create safer, more inclusive environments where the voices of migrants of colour are heard, validated, and supported.

6.4 Research Limitation

The first potential limitation of this thesis is the small sample size. Although Guest et al. (2006) suggested that data saturation in thematic analysis typically occurs around 12 interviews, and Eynon et al. (2018) reported that it could occur with as few as nine, this study included a total of eleven participants. While this number is suitable for a master's thesis, it still provides a limited amount of data, particularly in qualitative research, which relies more on the depth and richness of data than on quantity; a small sample can risk insufficient data saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Thus, a larger sample might have found greater consistency.

This is linked to another limitation: the use of snowball sampling for participant recruitment. As a result, more than half of the participants came from the same organisation. While this provided insight into shared workplace experiences, it also meant that the findings may lack diversity, particularly when participants had not experienced significant racism in their current workplace. Future research would benefit from including participants from a wider range of workplaces to capture more diverse and nuanced experiences.

Furthermore, this study focused solely on participants currently living in Auckland. While Auckland is New Zealand's most ethnically diverse city—with 39% of its population born overseas and over 130 ethnic groups represented (Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2015)—this regional focus may not reflect the experiences of migrants of colour living in less diverse areas. In regions with fewer immigrants, migrants may face different, and potentially more overt, forms of racism. Therefore, the findings may not be generalisable to all migrants of colour across New Zealand.

Another limitation is the requirement for participants to be fluent in spoken English. This criterion was intended to ensure participants fully understood their rights, including the risks, benefits, and their role in the research. However, it unintentionally excluded migrants of colour with limited English proficiency—individuals who may be particularly vulnerable to racism. As noted in the literature, language ability is often perceived as a marker of social desirability in dominant cultures, favouring those who speak English fluently

and align with White, Western norms (Lyons et al., 2011; Tan et al., 2024). This aligns with the findings of this study, where participants described English fluency as a means to avoid racial discrimination.

Finally, due to the complexity of the topic, it is nearly impossible for this thesis to capture all levels of racism that contribute to systemic racism. The findings do not fully represent the diverse ways in which migrants of colour may encounter racism—whether at the individual, institutional, or societal level. This limitation is further compounded by the study's narrow scope, which is based on data from only eleven participants, each interviewed once for no longer than an hour. Systemic racism often operates subtly through everyday interactions and is deeply embedded in social structures, making it difficult to identify and articulate. As such, its profound impact on the lives of migrants of colour warrants further, more detailed investigation in future research.

6.5 Recommendations for Future Research

One potential recommendation is to conduct future research that focuses on other regions of New Zealand, or ideally, on the country as a whole. It would be valuable to examine whether similar patterns emerge among participants located outside of Auckland, which is known for its cultural diversity. Expanding the geographic scope, along with increasing the sample size, could help establish more robust patterns and provide a wider range of experiences and stronger thematic insights.

Additionally, broadening the scope to include perspectives from other stakeholders—such as parents, colleagues, and managers—could offer deeper insight into the attitudes and behaviours that shape the experiences of migrants of colour. In particular, the perspectives of parents, who were identified in this study as playing a significant role in shaping participants' experiences, warrant further exploration.

Future research should also consider examining broader factors that influence participation, particularly those related to intersectionality. This approach can provide a more nuanced understanding of how overlapping identities—such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, and age—collectively shape experiences of discrimination. As Weldon (2008) argues, individuals are not marginalised based on a single identity, but through the interplay of multiple aspects of their identity. This was reflected in the current findings, where age emerged as a contributing factor to discrimination. Some participants noted that recognising racism was more difficult when they were younger or newly entering the industry. Including a more diverse sample in

terms of age and sexual orientation could help uncover how intersecting identities produce varied outcomes across different groups.

Moreover, removing the requirement for participants to possess a high level of English proficiency could offer valuable insights into how language barriers exacerbate experiences of racism. While this criterion was originally intended to ensure participants understood the risks and benefits of participation, alternative approaches—such as the use of interpreters—could allow for the inclusion of individuals with limited English skills without compromising ethical standards. This would help capture the experiences of a particularly vulnerable group whose voices are often excluded from research.

Finally, future studies could benefit from a more focused examination of the different levels of racism—individual, institutional, and societal or structural—that collectively contribute to systemic racism. This is especially relevant in the context of ECE, where the specific experiences of migrants of colour remain underrepresented. Much of the existing literature tends to generalise these experiences across various industries, potentially overlooking the unique challenges within ECE settings. More targeted research is needed to capture the nuanced realities of migrants of colour working in ECE.

6.6 Closing Comments

In conclusion, this thesis makes a meaningful contribution to deepening the understanding of the experiences of migrants of colour within early childhood education (ECE) in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Through the voices of participants, it has illuminated how systemic racism—both overt and subtle—continues to shape professional and personal experiences in ways that are deeply emotional, enduring, and embedded within institutional structures. These findings underscore the importance of recognising that racism is not always explicit; it can be woven into everyday practices, fostering environments that silence, ignore, and dismiss individuals.

Moreover, the research offers valuable insights into how historical and structural inequalities continue to influence perceptions of migrants and shape their experiences within ECE settings. It contributes to a growing body of work that challenges dominant narratives—calling out colour-blind and so-called neutral practices that distort and silence the historical and lived experiences of people of colour. At the same time, it reinforces and advocates for meaningful change by fostering collective empowerment through interactions and co-

created knowledge—exchanged and influenced by all participants and the researcher. While this study has shed light on critical issues, the vast and complex nature of systemic racism calls for further exploration of diverse voices and perspectives.

Indeed, this research represents a small but crucial step toward acknowledging and addressing the lived realities of migrants of colour in ECE. It is hoped that future research will build on these findings, deepening our collective understanding and informing actions that promote justice, equity, and inclusion across all areas of society. Ultimately, recognising and addressing systemic racism is essential for creating a more inclusive and equitable environment—one that embraces diversity and affirms the identities of all individuals.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

21 January 2025

Katherine Ravenswood
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Katherine

Re: Ethics Application: **24/260 The Invisible Influence: Systemic Discrimination and Experiences of Migrant Workers in Care Occupations in New Zealand**

Thank you for your responses to the conditions for the amendment to your ethics application.

The amendment to expand the recruitment (to include migrant "care and support workers) has been approved.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

The application number and title need to be referenced on all correspondence related to this project.

All forms are available online http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

For any enquiries, please contact the Secretariat at ethics@aut.ac.nz

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Czm3978@autuni.ac.nz

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

30 October 2024

Katherine Ravenswood
Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Katherine

Re Ethics Application: **24/260 The Invisible Influence: Systemic Discrimination and Experiences of Migrant Workers in Early Childhood Education in New Zealand**

Thank you for your responses to AUTEC's conditions.

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 30 October 2027.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. In participant facing documents please make it clear that participants need not have directly experienced racism to take part.

Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC unless requested but must be completed before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC.
2. All public facing documents must have the AUTEC approval number and be of a high standard of spelling and grammar. Dates on the Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) must be consistent.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented.
4. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date.
5. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project.
6. Any serious or adverse events must be reported to AUTEC, this includes unforeseen issues that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
7. AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management permission for access from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

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All forms are available online http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

For any enquiries, please contact the Secretariat at ethics@aut.ac.nz
(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Czm3978@autuni.ac.nz

Appendix B: Tools

a. Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Background Question

1. Please tell me a little about yourself and your background.
2. Tell me why you decided to come to New Zealand.
    - What is your current visa status, and what is your first visa status when entering New Zealand? (come here by yourself, your partner, family etc.)

Workplace and ECE or care and support work-related Questions

1. Tell me what interests you about early childhood education; how did you come to work in ECE or care and support work?
2. How long have you worked in this field, and what roles have you held?
3. What has it been like working in ECE or care and support work?

Experiences of racism-related Questions

1. What do you think were the biggest challenges for you as migrant workers who work in ECE or care and support work?
2. Have you come across what you think might be racial discrimination toward you and your colleagues? (from the manager, colleagues, parents and children etc.).
    - Feeling treated differently or unfairly at work because of your background or migrant status?
    - How are you treated compared to your non-migrant colleagues?
    - Can you describe any instances where you felt excluded or ignored?
3. Have you encountered any specific challenges in your job that you believe are related to being a migrant worker or your race?
4. Please tell me what happened when there was a change of your visa status (when the participant moves from a work visa to a residence visa and other)
    - Did people treat you differently?
    - What are the changes that you realised the most?
    - Biggest advantages?

b. Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

11 December 2024

Project Title

The Invisible Influence: Systemic Discrimination and Experiences of Migrant Workers in Care Occupations in New Zealand

An Invitation

Dear participant,

I am a Master of Business Management student at Auckland University of Technology, and as part of my qualification, I must complete a final research project. The object of my research is to find out what the migrant workers experience in early childhood education and care and support work in New Zealand and how systemic racism plays a role in their work experiences.

For this, I aim to collect data on the work experiences of migrants of colour who are currently working or previously worked in either early childhood education or care and support work in New Zealand for at least two years. I am conducting an interview as part of my research project and the interview will take approximately 1 hour, and the interview may occur online or in-person. You will be asked to share your background, career journey and the experiences of racism. Your participation in this study is voluntary (your choice), and you may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

Your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and could lead to a greater understanding of the impact of systemic racism on migrant workers' experiences in New Zealand. If you know other people who can participate in this research, please forward this invite to them.

I invite you to take part in this study and share your experience!

Thanks & regards,

Nanthaphat Suwanthanasin

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to have a better understanding of how systemic racism plays a role in and impacts the work experiences of migrants of colour in the early childhood industry and care and support work in New Zealand. The study hopes to shed light on the real-life experiences of participants to gain a better understanding of systemic racism and to contribute to a piece of knowledge about the current gap in New Zealand literature. Discrimination means unfair and biased treatment based on a person's characteristics, like race, age, gender, employment status, or religion. Over time, this unfair treatment has become part of society's systems, policies, and

everyday practices. In this study, we focus on racial discrimination, known as systemic racism. This kind of unequal system unfairly impacts people of colour more than others.

Moreover, this research is for my thesis which contributes to my Master of Business Management degree at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT).

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a migrant of colour who is currently working or has previously worked in the early childhood education industry or care and support work (those who provide healthcare assistance in aged care, healthcare, and disability care) with at least two years of work experience. However, those who work in home-based education and care services will be excluded from the study as they may not encounter the same factors as other types of education and services due to limited encounters with people. You have been identified as a potential participant through my advertisement and personal and professional contacts. As a possible participant, you have received an invite with this Participant Information Sheet and the contact details to ask any further questions

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Once you have reviewed the information in this document, if you agree to participate in this research, you can express your interest by emailing me at Czm3978@autuni.ac.nz. Once you confirm your participation in this project, I will send you the Consent Form for you to read. After that, you will have at least two weeks to review this information and request further clarification. You can consent to participate by signing an electronic copy of the Consent Form and emailing it to me OR signing the hard copy on the day of our meeting before our interview.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?

As a participant, you will be asked to share stories about your experiences with racism while you work in early childhood education or care and support work in New Zealand. You will be asked around 10 questions related to this research topic, and you can choose between an online or in-person interview. If you choose, an in-person interview will occur at the appropriate place, which both of us agreed to, such as a meeting room at any of the AUT campuses. It will not take place in private homes or spaces for both of us, and it will only take place in public spaces, preferably at the AUT campus. This will require approximately one hour of your time. I will be recording the interview and taking field notes. All the information you share will be strictly used in this study only. After the interview, you will be given the opportunity to review and comment on the interview transcript before it is used in this study. You will be given one week to review the interview transcript. Participants will also receive a $30 voucher to thank them for their time and contribution.

What are the discomforts and risks?

You may experience some slight emotional discomfort when talking about your experience of racism and discrimination. However, you do not have to answer any questions you don't wish to,

and you may stop the interview or take a break at any point. You also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Once the interview transcript is ready, it will be shared with you so you can review and comment on it before it is used for this research.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

AUT Student Counselling and Mental Health is able to offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly as a result of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- drop into our centre at WB203 City Campus, email counselling@aut.ac.nz or call 921 9292.
- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant, and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet.

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling on https://www.aut.ac.nz/student-life/student-support/counselling-and-mental-health

What are the benefits?

As a participant in this study, this research could be an opportunity for you to share your stories and experiences that you may not be able to share with others. It also gives you a reflection on your own experiences. It could help you recognise and gain a greater understanding of racism and patterns of discrimination that you might not have realised before.

Not only that, but the research also helps to contribute to the knowledge of systemic racism that is part of systemic discrimination and hopes to provide more understanding of the issue via your voice. Indeed, the outcome of the research can potentially raise awareness and call out the current discriminatory practices and policies in many organisations and institutions that continue to disadvantage people of colour. The hope is to help organisations be better aware of the invisible influences embedded within normalised and day-to-day practices and to encourage organisations to change for more inclusive and equitable practices for all kinds of people.

As a researcher, this will benefit me by providing a better understanding of systemic racism, how it might manifest even in the industry that educates people, and how it has been a lived experience of countless people in society from the past until now. Importantly, this research allows me to progress in pursuing my master's qualification.

How will my privacy be protected?

Any information that can be used to identify your identity will be removed, and any private information will not be disclosed. Pseudonyms will be used when reporting about you and your stories. All gathered data will be confidential and only accessible to the researcher, supervisor and professional transcriber, who agree to confidentiality only. You also had a chance to review and raise any concerns about the interview transcripts once they were finished before any further use. The interviews' transcripts, recorded video and digital audio files will be in digital format in a secure folder on the supervisor's AUT OneDrive account.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

It will need approximately 60 minutes of your time. There will not be any additional cost

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have one week after you receive the Consent Form to consider the invitation to this study. During that week, you can ask questions or raise concerns about this research and your participation in this project. Additionally, there will be a maximum of two follow-ups if you do not contact us after one week.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

You will have one week to review and comment on the interview transcript. Also, you can receive a summary of the findings of this study if you wish, and once the thesis is examined and approved, it will be posted on TUWHERA for open access for all interested parties.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Prof. Katherine Ravenswood, katherine.ravenswood@aut.ac.nz, or on 09 921 9999 x 5064.*

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , (+649) 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Nanthaphat Suwanthanasin – Czm3978@autuni.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Prof. Katherine Ravenswood, katherine.ravenswood@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 x 5064

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *30 October 2024*, AUTEC Reference number *24/260*.

c. Consent Form

Consent Form

Project title: ***The Invisible Influence: Systemic Discrimination and Experiences of Migrant Workers in Care Occupations in New Zealand***

Project Supervisor: ***Prof. Katherine Ravenswood***

Researcher: ***Nanthaphat Suwanthanasin***

- ○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 11 December 2024
- ○ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ○ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ○ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ○ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ○ I agree to take part in this research.
- ○ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes○ No○

Participant's signature: .....

Participant's name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30 October 2024 AUTEC Reference number 24/260

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

Project title: *The Invisible Influence: Systemic Discrimination and Experiences of Migrant Workers in Care Occupations in New Zealand*

Project Supervisor: ***Prof. Katherine Ravenswood***

Researcher: ***Nanthaphat Suwanthanasin***

- ○ I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.
- ○ I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.
- ○ I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature: .....

Transcriber's name: .....

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Date:

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30 October 2024 AUTEC Reference number 24/260

Note: The Transcriber should retain a copy of this form.