

# Black applicants' reaction to affirmative action plans in Brazil. The influence of psychological empowerment

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## Reacción de los solicitantes negros a los planes de acción afirmativa en Brasil. La influencia del empoderamiento psicológico

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## Reação dos candidatos negros aos planos de ação afirmativa no Brasil. A influência do empoderamento psicológico

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – Despite the presence of affirmative action policies aimed at promoting equality and diversity among the native Brazilian Blacks, it was observed that many Black applicants still continue to encounter challenges in securing employment and career advancement, leading to a sense of exclusion and disengagement. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the Black applicants perceive and respond to affirmative action plans designed to create fair opportunities.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study used a quantitative research method in line with positivism research philosophy. Survey research design was used due to the nature of the study. The population of the study is 25,467, which is the total number of Nigerian graduates staying in Brazil and holding valid Brazil visas at the time of the study, and the information was obtained from the Brazil embassy in Nigeria. The study used stratified random sampling to improve representativeness and reduce bias because of the widespread



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presence of the respondents across the 26 states in Brazil, while a sample size of 379 was determined through Krejcie and Morgan's sample size formula. A questionnaire was designed and administered via Google Forms to elicit information from the respondents, and the items of the questionnaire for each variable were adapted from past studies. The study used descriptive statistics to analyse the demographic information of the respondents and items of the questionnaire, while inferential statistics via partial least squares were used to analyse the formulated hypotheses.

**Findings** – This study found that Black applicants react positively to affirmative action plans and that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between Black applicants' reaction and affirmative action plans.

**Originality/value** – This study examined the perception and experience of Nigerians towards affirmative action plans in Brazil. Additionally, since almost all the previous studies in this area focused on the Western countries, this study not only introduces psychological empowerment as a mediating variable but also stretches the scope of the study from Western countries to Africa and Nigeria in particular.

**Keywords** Affirmative action plans, Applicants reaction, Psychological empowerment, Recruitment, Structure

**Paper type** Research paper

## Resumen

**Objetivo** – A pesar de la existencia de políticas de acción afirmativa destinadas a promover la igualdad y la diversidad entre la población negra brasileña, se observó que muchos solicitantes negros aún enfrentan dificultades para conseguir empleo y progresar profesionalmente, lo que genera una sensación de exclusión y desconexión. Esta situación plantea interrogantes cruciales sobre cómo los solicitantes negros perciben y responden a los planes de acción afirmativa diseñados para crear oportunidades justas.

**Diseño/metodología/enfoque** – El estudio empleó un método de investigación cuantitativo acorde con la filosofía de investigación positivista. Debido a la naturaleza del estudio, se utilizó un diseño de investigación de encuesta. La población del estudio, 25.467, representa el número total de graduados nigerianos residentes en Brasil con visas válidas para Brasil en el momento del estudio. La información se obtuvo de la Embajada de Brasil en Nigeria. El estudio empleó un muestreo aleatorio estratificado para mejorar la representatividad y reducir el sesgo debido a la distribución de los encuestados en los 26 estados de Brasil. El tamaño de la muestra, de 379, se determinó mediante la fórmula de tamaño de muestra de Krejcie y Morgan. Se diseñó y administró un cuestionario mediante Formularios de Google para obtener información de los encuestados. Los ítems del cuestionario para cada variable se adaptaron de estudios previos. El estudio utilizó estadística descriptiva para analizar la información demográfica de los encuestados y los ítems del cuestionario, mientras que se empleó estadística inferencial mediante mínimos cuadrados parciales (PLS) para analizar las hipótesis formuladas.

**Resultados** – El estudio encontró que los solicitantes negros reaccionan positivamente a los planes de acción afirmativa y que el empoderamiento psicológico media la relación entre la reacción de los solicitantes negros y los planes de acción afirmativa.

**Originalidad/valor** – Este estudio examinó la percepción y la experiencia de los nigerianos respecto a los planes de acción afirmativa en Brasil. Además, dado que casi todos los estudios previos en este ámbito se centraron en países occidentales, el presente estudio no solo introduce el empoderamiento psicológico como variable mediadora, sino que también amplía el alcance del estudio de los países occidentales a África, y en particular a Nigeria.

**Palabras clave** Planes de acción afirmativa, Solicitantes, Empoderamiento psicológico, Reclutamiento, Estructura

**Tipo de artículo** Trabajo de investigación

## Resumo

**Objetivo** – Apesar da existência de políticas de ação afirmativa que visam a promoção da igualdade e da diversidade entre os negros nativos brasileiros, observou-se que muitos candidatos negros ainda enfrentam desafios para conseguir emprego e ascensão profissional, o que gera um sentimento de exclusão e desmotivação. Esta situação levanta questões críticas sobre a forma como os candidatos negros percebem e respondem aos planos de ação afirmativa elaborados para criar oportunidades justas.

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**Metodologia/abordagem** – O estudo empregou uma metodologia de investigação quantitativa, alinhada com a filosofia positivista. O desenho da investigação foi o de inquérito, devido à natureza do estudo. A população do estudo, de 25.467, corresponde ao número total de licenciados nigerianos residentes no Brasil e com visto válido no momento do inquérito. As informações foram obtidas junto da embaixada do Brasil na Nigéria. O estudo utilizou uma amostragem aleatória estratificada para melhorar a representatividade e reduzir o viés, devido à distribuição dos respondentes pelos 26 estados do Brasil. O tamanho da amostra, de 379 participantes, foi determinado pela fórmula de Krejcie e Morgan. Foi elaborado e aplicado um questionário através do Google Forms para recolher informações dos respondentes, e os itens do questionário para cada variável foram adaptados de estudos anteriores. O estudo utilizou a estatística descritiva para analisar a informação demográfica dos inquiridos e os itens do questionário, enquanto a estatística inferencial através dos mínimos quadrados parciais (PLS) foi utilizada para analisar as hipóteses formuladas.

**Resultados** – O estudo constatou que os candidatos negros reagem positivamente aos planos de ação afirmativa e que o empoderamento psicológico medeia a relação entre a reação dos candidatos negros e os planos de ação afirmativa.

**Originalidade** – Este estudo examinou a percepção e a experiência dos nigerianos em relação aos planos de ação afirmativa no Brasil. Além disso, como quase todos os estudos anteriores nesta área se concentraram nos países ocidentais, o presente estudo não só introduz o empoderamento psicológico como variável mediadora, como também alarga o âmbito do estudo dos países ocidentais para África e, em particular, para a Nigéria.

**Palavras-chave** Planos de acção afirmativa, Candidatos, Empoderamento psicológico, Recrutamento, Estrutura

**Tipo de papel** Trabalho de pesquisa

## Introduction

Affirmative action plans (AAP) are widely implemented to address persistent inequalities in hiring, promotion and career advancement within organizations (Dunmade *et al.*, 2023). In Brazil, these policies have been institutionalized primarily to expand access and representation of historically marginalized groups, particularly Black Brazilians, within their organizations (Telles, 2014; Heringer, 2020; Lee, 2020a). Despite the formal adoption of AAP, Müller *et al.* (2022) and Paixão and Rosseto (2019) found that racial disparities in recruitment and promotion remain pronounced, often sustained by subtle biases, uneven policy enforcement and informal gatekeeping practices. While Dhanani *et al.* (2024), Iyer *et al.* (2021) and Park *et al.* (2025) have examined the effectiveness, legitimacy and institutional constraints of AAP, considerably less attention has been paid to how individuals who are exposed to these policy environments interpret and engage with them during recruitment and career advancement processes. This gap is particularly evident at the individual level.

Existing studies have largely emphasized institutional design and compliance (April *et al.*, 2023a, 2023b; Golom and Cruz, 2021) or perceptions of procedural fairness (Slaughter *et al.*, 2009), with limited focus on the psychological factors that shape whether marginalized applicants actively pursue opportunities associated with AAP. Research rarely examines how feelings of empowerment and self-efficacy influence engagement with these policies, especially in competitive academic labour markets. Besides, little is known about how such psychological dynamics unfold in cross-national environments involving Black foreign residents, whose experiences may diverge significantly from those of native beneficiaries of AAP. This study fills these gaps by concentrating on Nigerian graduates legally residing in Brazil who are either employed, actively seeking employment or have previously applied for job positions.

Importantly, although these individuals are subject to the same institutional environments in which AAP operate, they are not formal beneficiaries of Brazilian AAP, which are primarily designed for historically marginalized Brazilian citizens. Their engagement with AAP is therefore indirect, shaped by perceptions of inclusivity, opportunity structures and organizational signals rather than formal eligibility. Consequently, their perceptions of the

potential benefits and limitations of AAP differ markedly from those of Black Brazilian applicants competing for similar positions. Against this backdrop, the study examines how psychological empowerment influences the extent to which Black Nigerian residents engage with AAP in Brazil. By foregrounding psychological empowerment, the analysis shifts attention from policy design alone to the interaction between individual agency and institutional arrangements.

This perspective responds to calls within Brazilian and international studies to move beyond structural explanations and incorporate subjective experiences in evaluating diversity policies (Telles, 2014; Heringer, 2020). This study further contributes by extending AAP research to a cross-cultural setting, capturing the voices of Black foreign residents going through academic labour markets shaped by policies from which they are not direct beneficiaries. In doing so, it offers new insight into how empowerment can either enable or constrain engagement with AAP, enriching ongoing debates on diversity, inclusion and global job mobility, and highlighting the need for policy frameworks that recognize both structural access and psychological readiness.

#### *Objectives of the study*

- To determine the effect of Black applicants' reaction on AAP.
- To examine the mediating effect of psychological empowerment on the relationship between Black applicants' reaction on AAP.

#### **Literature review**

##### *Affirmative action plans*

Crosby *et al.* (2003) opined that AAP refers to policies designed to promote equal opportunities for individuals from groups that have historically been marginalized in employment, education and leadership positions. AAP aim to reverse the effect of past discrimination by giving members of the groups that have historically been disadvantaged, including racial minorities, women and people with disabilities, greater access to jobs, promotion and educational opportunities. AAP include selective hiring, quotas, training programmes and sponsorship to assist the groups in their quest for fair representation (Ogunyemi and Adebayo, 2019). Organizational institutions often use these programmes for diversity and inclusion enhancement. However, enforcing AAP is usually succeeded by contradictory reactions. While other people see them as necessary interventions of addressing structural disadvantage, other people believe those lead to accusations of biased advantage discrimination (Lee, 2021). Effective AAP is not only a matter of formulating policies but also the perception by the benefiteres and others in the organization. Therefore, there is a need to appreciate how individuals react to these programmes to assess their success and to optimize their use.

##### *Black applicants' reaction*

Black applicants' reaction to AAP is how Black or oppressed racial minorities perceive and respond to measures aimed at improving their representation in the organizational institutions, and leadership positions (Lee, 2020b). In most cases, Black candidates view these measures as an opportunity to open up avenues and spaces that have been difficult to access due to systematic prejudice. Lee (2021) argued that AAP encourage candidates to apply for positions, promotions and educational slots they might otherwise feel they are not qualified for. But all Black candidates do not respond positively to AAP. Some fear that their achievements will be

attributed to preferential treatment rather than merit (Heilman *et al.*, 1992). This fear of stigma led to reluctance to be part of affirmative action programmes even when they are qualified.

### *Psychological empowerment*

Psychological empowerment is the felt sense of mastery, confidence and capacity to influence decisions and results in an individual's personal life (Alotaibi *et al.*, 2020). It transcends the mere attainment of formal powers or authority, but confidence and capability. Psychological empowerment is traditionally described in four primary dimensions: meaning (assuming that one's work or efforts are valuable), competence (faith in one's abilities), self-determination (believing in the ability to make decisions) and impact (assuming that what one does matters) (Spreitzer, 1995). When individuals are psychologically empowered, they make things happen, take on challenges and are actively seeking opportunity for growth (Jimoh, 2022; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990). In the era of AAP and employment opportunities, psychological empowerment has its share in deciding how individuals respond to policies in their favour.

### *Effect of Black applicants' reaction on affirmative action plans*

AAP have been widely implemented across regions including Africa, Asia, North America and Europe as policy instruments aimed at reducing structural inequalities in recruitment, promotion and representation of historically marginalized groups (Lee, 2020a, 2020b). Empirical evidence suggests that such plans can enhance access to employment opportunities, career advancement and leadership positions when effectively designed and enforced (Lee, 2021). In Brazil, AAP are embedded within broader racial equity reforms, especially in higher education and public institutions, where they are primarily intended to benefit historically marginalized Brazilian citizens (Telles, 2014; Heringer, 2020; Paixão and Rossetto, 2019). Despite these policy commitments, persistent disparities in academic employment situations indicate that access alone does not guarantee equitable participation or advancement.

Research further shows that Black applicants' responses to AAP are not uniform. While some perceive these plans as mechanisms of empowerment and inclusion, others express concerns regarding stigmatization, merit dilution or procedural fairness (Moore *et al.*, 2023). From a social identity perspective, individuals' reactions to group-based policies are shaped by perceived legitimacy, group belonging and anticipated treatment within organizational contexts (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). However, existing studies have largely examined these reactions among formal beneficiaries of AAP, leaving limited understanding of how Black applicants who are exposed to such policy environments but are not eligible beneficiaries engage with AAP in practice.

This gap is particularly evident in the Brazilian context. Munanga (2001), De São Paulo (2010), Telles (2014) and Ferreira (2021) have provided rich analyses of the historical development, legal foundations and societal debates surrounding AAP, as well as empirical assessments of policy outcomes within universities and public organizations (Paixão and Rossetto, 2019; Heringer, 2020). Yet, these studies focus almost exclusively on Brazilian nationals, paying little attention to how Black foreign residents perceive and respond to AAP operating within the same institutional settings. As a result, little is known about how non-citizen Black applicants interpret these policies or whether psychological factors influence their willingness to engage with opportunities shaped by AAP.

This study addresses this limitation by examining the reactions of Nigerian graduates legally residing in Brazil who are employed, actively seeking employment or have previously applied for academic positions. Although these individuals are not formal beneficiaries of Brazilian AAP, they encounter recruitment and promotion processes influenced by such policies. Their

engagement with AAP is therefore indirect and perceptual, shaped by organizational signals, perceived inclusivity and expectations regarding fairness and opportunity. Importantly, their perceptions of the potential benefits or constraints of AAP differ significantly from those of Black Brazilian applicants competing for the same positions, making this distinction central to the study's analytical framework. Accordingly, the study formulates the following hypothesis to examine the relationship between Black applicants' reactions and AAP within the Brazilian context:

- H1.* Black applicants' reaction has a positive and significant effect on affirmative action plans.

*Mediating effect of psychological empowerment on the relationship between Black applicants' reaction on affirmative action plans*

The relationship between Black applicants' reactions to AAP and the extent to which these plans translate into meaningful engagement is complex and contingent on psychological empowerment (Ghosh *et al.*, 2019; Hameli *et al.*, 2023). Within AAP contexts, psychologically empowered individuals are more likely to perceive such plans as legitimate mechanisms that support career development and opportunity access, even when they are not direct beneficiaries of the policies (Girard, 2018; Xue *et al.*, 2024). Empowerment enhances self-efficacy, autonomy and perceived impact, thereby increasing applicants' willingness to engage with recruitment and promotion processes shaped by AAP.

Psychological empowerment functions as a critical intervening mechanism through which applicants' reactions to AAP are translated into behavioural engagement (Yahaya *et al.*, 2022). When Black applicants experience low empowerment or interpret AAP as stigmatizing or procedurally unfair, they are more likely to disengage from opportunities associated with such policies (Lee, 2021). On the contrary, higher levels of empowerment mitigate scepticism and strengthen trust in institutional processes, allowing applicants to navigate policy-regulated environments with greater confidence. Without this psychological foundation, the intended effects of AAP are weakened, as applicants may refrain from pursuing opportunities despite the presence of formal policy support (Perlman, 2023; Salman *et al.*, 2024). Psychological empowerment therefore bridges the gap between policy intent and applicant response by shaping how AAP are interpreted and acted upon.

Prior studies have examined psychological empowerment as a mediating variable in organizational and diversity-related outcomes. Research indicates that AAP evoke varied reactions, including perceptions of fairness, motivation and trust, which influence behavioural outcomes depending on individuals' psychological states (April *et al.*, 2023, 2023b; Girard, 2018; Lee, 2021). However, this body of work has largely focused on domestic populations within beneficiary groups, with limited attention to Black foreign applicants operating in policy environments where they are exposed to AAP without formal eligibility. In particular, little is known about how intersecting identities, such as being Black, African and non-citizen shape psychological responses to AAP in foreign academic labour markets.

This study addresses this gap by examining the perception and experience of Nigerian graduates legally residing in Brazil who are employed, seeking employment or have previously applied for a job positions. Although they are not formal beneficiaries of Brazilian AAP, their career decisions unfold within institutional contexts influenced by these policies. By analysing psychological empowerment as a mediating variable, the study explains how applicants' reactions to AAP are transformed into engagement or withdrawal. Understanding this mechanism is vital, as it suggests that strengthening psychological empowerment may

be as important as policy design itself in enhancing the broader effectiveness of AAP in increasingly globalized and diverse employment settings:

- H2. Psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between Black applicants' reaction and affirmative action plans.

### *Theoretical foundation*

Social identity theory (SIT), developed by [Tajfel and Turner \(1979\)](#), explains how individuals derive part of their identity and self-esteem from the social groups to which they belong. It reveals how group membership shapes perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. In a situation of Black applicants' reactions to AAP in Brazil, SIT helps explain why individuals' identification with their racial group influences how they interpret such policies. Applicants who perceive AAP as advancing their group's social standing would respond with stronger support, while others may view it as reinforcing existing inequalities. [April et al. \(2023a, 2023b\)](#) reaffirmed that these divergent reactions depend on perceived group status and the extent of racial identification. SIT therefore contributes to understanding how social belonging and identity-based perceptions shape psychological responses to AAP rather than directly predicting behaviour. It emphasizes the symbolic and emotional meaning attached to group-based interventions and offers perception into how identity dynamics influence empowerment and participation.

Additionally, psychological empowerment theory by [Spreitzer \(1995\)](#) complements this perspective by focusing on the internal processes that shape individuals' engagement and motivation. It emphasizes four interrelated dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination and impact that describe how people experience a sense of control and purpose in their actions. In relation to AAP, the theory explains how applicants' sense of empowerment mediates their responses to such programmes. Empowered individuals, who find alignment between the policy's objectives and their personal values, perceive AAP as an enabling mechanism that enhances their agency and self-efficacy ([Murrell, 2021](#); [Xue et al., 2024](#)). On the contrary, when policies are seen as unfair, the sense of self-determination and meaning diminishes, leading to disengagement. Psychological empowerment theory therefore contributes by explaining the cognitive and emotional mechanisms through which individuals interpret and respond to AAP. Together, SIT explains the role of social identity and perceived group standing, while empowerment theory clarifies how internal psychological states translate these perceptions into supportive offering a balanced understanding of applicant reactions.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a positivist philosophical orientation, which is appropriate for quantitative research that relies on objective measurement and statistical analysis to test hypothesized relationships among variables ([Sekaran and Bougie, 2016](#)). This stance is particularly suitable for examining the direct and indirect relationships between psychological empowerment, AAP and perceptions of Black applicants, as it emphasizes observable phenomena and empirical verification. Positivism further enhances the credibility and replicability of findings by grounding conclusions in measurable evidence, a position reinforced in contemporary methodological scholarship ([Saunders et al., 2019](#); [Park et al., 2020](#)). Consistent with this philosophical foundation, a survey research design was used due to its effectiveness in collecting standardized data from large and geographically dispersed populations, facilitating comparability of responses and robust hypothesis testing ([Bryman, 2016](#); [Taherdoost, 2016](#)).

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The population comprised 25,467 Nigerian graduates residing in Brazil with valid Brazilian visas at the time of the study, as documented by the Brazilian Embassy in Nigeria. To ensure conceptual alignment with the study objectives, eligibility was restricted to Nigerian graduates who were either currently employed, actively seeking employment or had previously applied for jobs in Brazil. This criterion was necessary to ensure that respondents possessed relevant exposure to recruitment, selection or workplace processes in which AAP and perceptions of Black applicants are likely to be salient. Individuals without any engagement in the Brazilian labour market were excluded from the sampling frame. This approach strengthened the relevance of the data to human resource decision-making and diversity management within the Brazilian context.

Stratified random sampling was adopted to enhance representativeness and reduce sampling bias. The population was stratified by Brazil's 26 states, and respondents were proportionately drawn from each stratum to reflect their geographical distribution. This strategy ensured adequate representation of Nigerian graduates across regions, minimized within-group variance and supported more meaningful geographical comparisons (Acharya *et al.*, 2013; Etikan and Bala, 2017; Sharma, 2017). While access to respondents within each stratum relied on existing Nigerian graduate networks and online platforms, participant selection within strata followed random procedures. Accordingly, the study used a stratified sampling technique with practical elements of accessibility, rather than pure convenience sampling. This clarification resolves the earlier inconsistency and confirms that representativeness was systematically pursued despite logistical constraints common in cross-national survey research (Lavrakas, 2018; Creswell and Creswell, 2018).

The required sample size of 379 participants was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula, ensuring adequate statistical power while remaining feasible given the population size. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms to accommodate the wide geographical dispersion of respondents across Brazil. Online administration facilitated efficient data collection, reduced costs and preserved data quality without the logistical challenges associated with physical distribution (Evans and Mathur, 2018). The data collection period extended over eight weeks, from February to March 2025, allowing sufficient time for follow-up reminders and improved response rates.

Measurement items were adapted from established and validated scales to ensure reliability and content validity. Psychological empowerment was measured using items derived from Spreitzer's (1995) four-dimensional framework, which has demonstrated strong psychometric properties across diverse contexts (Seibert *et al.*, 2011; Li *et al.*, 2023). AAP measures were adapted from Konrad and Linnehan (1995) and Harrison *et al.* (2006), capturing both structural and procedural aspects of diversity management. Perceptions of Black applicants were measured using items adapted from Heilman *et al.* (1992), which are widely used in studies examining racial attitudes in employment settings. All items were slightly modified to reflect the Brazilian context while preserving their conceptual meaning, and a pilot test confirmed clarity and cultural appropriateness. The use of validated instruments enhanced measurement accuracy and facilitated comparability with prior research (Boateng *et al.*, 2018).

Data analysis followed a two-stage procedure. Descriptive statistics were conducted using SPSS to summarize demographic characteristics and response patterns. Inferential analysis used partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM), which is well-suited for examining complex models involving multiple relationships and mediation effects, particularly when data deviate from normality (Hair *et al.*, 2021). PLS-SEM allows simultaneous assessment of direct and indirect effects and is increasingly applied in social

science research focused on prediction and theory development (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2022). Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent prior to participation, were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty, in line with institutional and international ethical standards for research involving human participants.

### Results and interpretations

The demographic profile of the respondents in Table 1 shows that a slightly higher proportion of the participants were male (55.4%) compared to female (44.6%). The majority of respondents fell within the 35–44 years age range (34.3%), followed by those aged 45–54 years (26.4%) and 25–34 years (18.5%), indicating that most respondents were in mid-career stages. In terms of marital status, a large percentage were married (63.3%), while 26.4% were single. Regarding employment position, 58% were academic staff, showing a dominant representation from the academic category, while 42% were non-academic staff. Educational qualification data reveals that almost half of the respondents held a PhD (47.5%), followed by master’s degree holders (29.0%); fewer respondents had a bachelor’s degree (13.2%) and other qualifications (10.3%). These demographics indicate that the sample consisted mainly of well-educated, mid-career academic staff, providing a knowledgeable and experienced group for the study’s investigation.

Table 2 below shows that most Black applicants responded positively to AAP, with high levels of agreement across all items. For instance, 87.3% agreed or strongly agreed that the

**Table 1.** Demographic information of the respondents

Personal data	Frequency	%
<i>Sex</i>		
Male	210	55.4
Female	169	44.6
<i>Age</i>		
Below 25 years	20	5.3
25–34 years	70	18.5
35–44 years	130	34.3
45–54 years	100	26.4
55 years and above	59	15.5
<i>Marital status</i>		
Single	100	26.4
Married	240	63.3
Divorced	20	5.3
Other	19	5.0
<i>Position</i>		
Academic staff	220	58.0
Non-academic staff	159	42.0
<i>Educational qualification</i>		
Bachelor’s degree	50	13.2
Master’s degree	110	29.0
PhD	180	47.5
Others	39	10.3

**Source(s):** Author’s own creation

**Table 2.** Perceptions and experiences of Nigerian residents in Brazil regarding affirmative action plans and psychological empowerment

S/N	Item	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
AA1	I feel encouraged to pursue opportunities in Brazilian organizations, even though I am not a formal beneficiary of local affirmative action policies	2.6	4.0	7.9	39.6	45.9
AA2	I am motivated to contribute my best to the development of the Brazilian organizations where I work or apply	2.1	3.2	7.4	42.2	45.1
AA3	I feel a sense of belonging and consider Brazil as an important country for my career and personal growth	5.3	6.6	10.6	36.9	40.6
AA4	I am willing to share information about affirmative action opportunities in Brazil with others	3.2	4.7	9.2	38.3	44.6
AA5	I feel more confident applying for positions in Brazil knowing that organizations implement affirmative action policies	2.4	3.7	7.9	40.9	45.1
BA1	I perceive that Brazilian affirmative action policies create fair opportunities for disadvantaged groups, even though I am not a formal beneficiary	3.2	4.5	8.4	38.5	45.4
BA2	I believe affirmative action contributes to greater equality within Brazilian organizations	2.6	3.9	7.9	40.1	45.5
BA3	I believe affirmative action increases the likelihood of Black individuals being considered for employment	2.9	4.2	8.1	39.3	45.5
BA4	I perceive that Brazilian organizations effectively implement affirmative action policies	4.0	5.3	9.5	36.7	44.5
BA5	Affirmative action in Brazilian organizations increases workforce diversity	2.4	3.7	7.4	40.7	45.8
PE1	The work I do in Brazilian organizations is meaningful to me	2.1	3.4	6.8	42.5	45.2
PE2	I am confident in my ability to perform well in Brazilian organizations	1.8	2.9	6.5	43.3	45.5
PE3	I have control over what happens in my work within Brazilian organizations	3.0	4.1	7.3	40.8	44.8
PE4	I have significant influence over decisions related to my role in Brazilian organizations	3.6	5.0	8.1	39.7	43.6
PE5	I can make an impact in the Brazilian organizations where I apply	2.5	3.8	7.0	41.9	44.8

**Note(s):** AA = affirmative action plans; BB = Black applicants' reaction; PE = psychological empowerment

**Source(s):** Author's own creation

policies encourage them to pursue opportunities (AA1), and 87.3% also felt motivated to contribute their best (AA2). Confidence in applying under AAP was similarly strong, with 86% agreeing or strongly agreeing (AA5). Although feelings of belonging were slightly lower (77.5% agreeing or strongly agreeing, AA3), the results indicate that AAP have

positively influenced applicants' confidence, motivation and engagement. Furthermore, the table also reveals that respondents generally view AAP positively. A large majority (over 83% agreed or strongly agreed) that these policies provide fair opportunities (BA1), promote workplace equality (BA2) and increase diversity (BA5). Agreement was slightly lower regarding effective implementation (BA4), with 81.2% agreeing or strongly agreeing, suggesting room for improvement in practice. The findings indicate strong support for the fairness, equality and diversity goals of AAP among Black applicants. Finally, Table 2 below shows that respondents reported high levels of psychological empowerment, with the majority (over 85% agreeing or strongly agreeing) across all items. Most felt their work was meaningful (PE1), they were confident in their abilities (PE2), and believed they could make an impact (PE5). Although slightly lower agreement was observed for influence over decisions (PE4), the data indicates a strong sense of empowerment among respondents in their roles.

Table 3 below presents the measurement model results, showing acceptable indicator loadings, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) for all constructs. AAP achieved a CR of 0.838 and AVE of 0.733, while Black applicants' reaction showed a strong CR of 0.893 and AVE of 0.849. Psychological empowerment also demonstrated good reliability (CR = 0.873) and AVE (0.830). These values indicate good internal consistency and convergent validity across the constructs, supporting the measurement model's adequacy for further analysis.

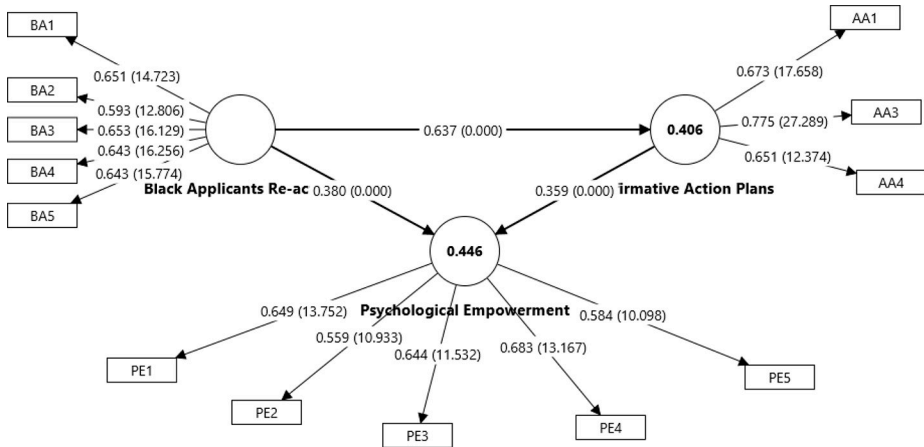
Figure 1 below illustrates the structural model showing that Black applicants' reaction significantly predicts AAP and that psychological empowerment mediates the relationship between black applicants' reaction and AAP. The results suggest that AAP enhance empowerment among Black applicants, while reaction strongly shapes perceptions of fairness, inclusion and confidence in the system.

Table 4 below presents the results of the hypothesis testing on the effect of Black applicants' reactions (BA) on affirmative action plans (AA). The relationship between BA and AA was found to have a positive and significant effect, with a beta value of 0.229 and a *t*-values of 4.661 ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating statistical significance. The  $R^2$  value of 0.406 suggests that Black applicants' reactions explain 40.6% of the variance in AAP. Based on these results, *H1* is supported, suggesting that Black applicants' reactions significantly influence their perceptions and engagement with AAP.

**Table 3.** Measurement model

Construct	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Affirmative action plans	AA1	0.673	0.838	0.733
	AA3	0.775		
	AA4	0.651		
Black applicants' reaction	BA1	0.651	0.893	0.849
	BA2	0.593		
	BA3	0.653		
	BA4	0.643		
	BA5	0.643		
Psychological empowerment	PE1	0.649	0.873	0.830
	PE2	0.559		
	PE3	0.644		
	PE4	0.683		
	PE5	0.584		

**Source(s):** Authors' own creation



**Figure 1.** Structural model with *t*-values  
**Note(s):** AA1 and 2 were deleted due to low loading  
**Source:** Author’s own creation

**Table 4.** Direct and mediating effects of Black applicants’ reaction and psychological empowerment on affirmative action plans

Hypothesis	Relationship	$\beta$	SE	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	95% CI (LL, UL)	Decision
H1	Black applicants’ reaction → affirmative action plans	0.229	0.049	4.661	0.001**	0.406	–	Supported
H2	Psychological empowerment × Black applicants’ reaction → affirmative action plans	0.637	0.035	18.111	0.001**	–	[0.047, 0.059]	Supported

**Note(s):**  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit. *p* < 0.05\*, *p* < 0.01\*\*  
**Source(s):** Author’s own creation

Additionally, the table further shows the results of the analysis on the mediating effect of psychological empowerment (PE) on the relationship between Black applicants’ reactions (BA) and affirmative action plans (AA). The beta value for the mediating effect of psychological empowerment is 0.637, with a *t*-values of 18.111 (*p* < 0.001), indicating a strong and significant mediation. The lower limit (LL) and upper limit (UL) of the 95% confidence interval (0.047 and 0.059, respectively) do not include zero, further supporting the significance of the mediation effect. Thus, H2 is supported, suggesting that psychological empowerment significantly mediates the relationship between Black applicants’ reactions and AAP.

*Discussions of findings*

The findings of this study indicate that Black applicants respond positively to AAP when these policies are perceived as transparent, consistently implemented and procedurally fair.

Within this specific group, AAP appear to function not only as mechanisms that structure access to employment opportunities but also as institutional signals of inclusivity and fairness. Respondents reported higher motivation to apply for academic positions, greater engagement with recruitment processes and increased confidence in their prospects when organizations were perceived to uphold AAP. These results are consistent with prior research showing that perceived procedural justice and inclusion shape minority applicants' attitudes and job-search behaviours (Heath *et al.*, 2023; Hunter, 2023; Iyer *et al.*, 2021). Importantly, however, these findings reflect perceptions of Black foreign residents who are not formal beneficiaries of Brazilian AAP and should be interpreted within this context.

The results further suggest that, for Black applicants, AAP help alleviate perceived structural barriers and anticipated discrimination in Brazilian employment settings. Previous studies have documented that Black applicants often encounter racial stereotyping and institutional exclusion in labour markets (Lee, 2021). In this study, AAP appear to mitigate such concerns by signalling organizational commitment to diversity and equity, thereby fostering a sense of institutional credibility. This perceived commitment provides psychological reassurance that encourages engagement with recruitment systems. Nonetheless, this reassurance is perceptual rather than policy-based, as Nigerian residing in Brazil do not qualify for AAP benefits in the same way as Brazilian nationals. Consequently, the positive effects observed should be understood as reflective of applicants' interpretations of organizational environments rather than direct policy results.

A central contribution of the study lies in identifying psychological empowerment as a mediating variable linking AAP to applicants' responses. Among Black applicants, empowerment shaped whether AAP were interpreted as enabling or merely symbolic. When applicants felt empowered, they were more likely to view these plans as signals of opportunity and fairness rather than as compensatory or stigmatizing measures. This finding aligns with existing studies emphasizing empowerment as a driver of proactive behaviour, confidence and persistence among marginalized populations (Alotaibi *et al.*, 2020; Hameli *et al.*, 2023; Hanafy *et al.*, 2025). However, the present evidence does not suggest that empowerment universally transforms AAP into a lived experience of inclusion across the Brazilian context. Rather, it demonstrates how empowerment operates within a specific group navigating a policy environment in which they are indirectly affected by AAP. The findings also indicate that AAP exert both direct and indirect influences on applicants' attitudes, with psychological empowerment amplifying these effects. The study acknowledges that perceptions of AAP among Black Brazilian citizens, who are formal beneficiaries of these policies, differ substantially from those of Black foreign residents competing in the same labour markets.

### *Theoretical implications*

This study offers several important theoretical contributions by extending the use of SIT and psychological empowerment theory to the context of AAP in Brazil. By focusing on Black applicants, particularly Nigerians seeking academic jobs, the research reveals how individuals' sense of group identity and psychological states shape their responses to policies in a non-Western setting. The findings support the idea that people's reactions to AAP are not just influenced by the presence of the policy itself but also by how they perceive themselves in relation to their social group and the institution. This reinforces social identity theory's argument that belonging to a marginalized group affects how individuals judge fairness, inclusion and opportunity.

In addition, the study shows that psychological empowerment plays a key role as the link between AAP and applicant behaviour. By providing empirical support for empowerment as a mediator, the study adds to our theoretical understanding of how feelings of competence,

self-determination and purpose turn institutional policies into personal action. This extends psychological empowerment theory by placing it within the affirmative action context, showing that empowerment matters not only for people already working inside organizations but also for those outside who are considering whether to apply. In doing so, the study broadens empowerment research beyond current employees and highlights its relevance for potential employees facing institutional entry points.

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#### *Practical implications*

The findings of this study offer several practical insights for Brazilian policymakers and university administrators aiming to strengthen diversity and inclusion in recruitment and admissions. Firstly, the positive link between Black applicants' responses and AAP suggests that when these policies are clearly framed and communicated, they can effectively encourage more participation from underrepresented groups. To achieve this, institutions must ensure that their AAP are transparent, fair and well-publicized. Providing clear information about eligibility, selection processes and expected outcomes can help build trust and confidence among Black applicants. Open and consistent communication helps applicants feel that the system is fair, which increases their willingness to engage with the opportunities provided.

Secondly, the research highlights that psychological empowerment plays a key role in turning policy into applicant action. This means that institutions need to do more than simply put policies in place they must also create conditions that empower marginalized applicants. Practical steps could include offering mentorship programmes, skills-building workshops and orientation sessions that strengthen applicants' sense of confidence, competence and belonging. Universities and employers should also provide spaces where applicants can voice concerns, access support and feel involved in the process, reinforcing their sense of control and participation. By combining empowerment initiatives with AAP efforts, institutions can create more inclusive recruitment pathways that not only attract diverse candidates but also keep them motivated and engaged throughout the selection process. This integrated approach ultimately strengthens both diversity and applicant experiences.

#### *Limitations and suggestions for future research*

The present study contributes to understanding how Nigerian Black candidates respond to AAP in Brazil, several limitations should be explicitly recognized. The reliance on self-reported data is one of the key limitations, as participants may have overstated positive attitudes towards AAP or underreported negative experiences due to social desirability bias. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits causal inference; the relationships identified between psychological empowerment, social identity and reactions to AAP cannot be confidently interpreted as directional or stable over time. Future research should seek to mitigate these limitations by adopting longitudinal or panel designs that can capture changes in attitudes and empowerment levels over time, particularly as AAP evolve.

Expanding the sample to include other minority communities in Brazil would provide a more comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural differences in reactions to such policies. Future research should also adopt comparative designs that examine how citizenship status, beneficiary eligibility and racial identity intersect to shape responses to AAP. Such work would deepen understanding of the differential psychological and behavioural effects of affirmative action across diverse Black populations and further clarify the boundaries of the present study's claims. Finally, the use of more representative sampling strategies would strengthen the external validity of findings and enhance their applicability to wider populations. These improvements would offer a clearer and more robust picture of

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how social identity and psychological empowerment interact to shape Black applicants' engagement with AAP in diverse sociocultural settings.

## Conclusion

This study focused primarily on the effect of Black applicants taking action on AAP in Brazil. The influence of psychological empowerment. Therefore, to answer the principal objective of the study, two basic objectives were formed, which are direct and indirect objectives. The direct objective determined the effect of Black applicants' reaction on AAP, and the indirect effect examined the mediating effect of psychological empowerment on the relationship between Black applicants' reaction and AAP. To explain the variables and the relationship between them based on the objectives of the study, both SIT and psychological empowerment theory were used. An online questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents, and the data collected was analysed through both descriptive and inferential statistics.

Through the discovery, the research has indicated that Black applicants' reactions to AAP are highly influenced by their psychological empowerment level. The findings underline that AAP alone may not be sufficient to induce active participation by the marginalized unless supported by efforts towards enhancing applicants' sense of competence, autonomy and influence. By emphasizing the mediating function of psychological empowerment, the research contributes significantly to our understanding of how employment-related behaviours are influenced by the interaction between institutional policies and individual psychological states.

Besides, the study widens the theoretical implications of AAP and empowerment by using these terms against the case of Black applicants. It emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive approaches towards diversity policies and stresses the imperative of surmounting not just structural obstacles but also psychological obstacles to inclusiveness. The study challenges future research to explore equivalent dynamics in other underrepresented groups and national contexts and calls upon institutions to synthesize empowerment-strategic interventions with AAP to develop more meaningful and sustainable diversity results.

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