

“A place for learning that feels like home”: Meeting diverse students learning needs to promote business sustainability in HE”

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Abstract

An ability to enable students to feel at home in their learning environment, is intrinsic to educational sustainability. This topic is recognised as being one of the most critical change schemes that challenges learning institutions such as those in the realms of Higher Education (HE), not least universities.

Consequently, it is hardly surprising to learn that there is growing interest in the need to explore issues relating to Sustainability Development in education from the students' perspective. Furthermore, as Jickling (2000), warned, sustainable development is a concept that “critics have argued is an inappropriate focal point for developing curriculum”. This is because it is regarded as being “too normative, ambiguous, and ineffective at solving the complex problems” (Jickling, 2000) that future generations of students are likely to face (Jickling, 2000), particularly from an emotional perspective.

Notwithstanding, this is an area of research recognised as being one that is under-developed. Furthermore, research evidence suggests that within the paradigm of HE, there is a tendency to focus less on affective outcomes such as students' values, and more on cognitive skills namely, knowledge and understanding. These are research gaps that this paper aims to address, courtesy of the study that reflects its focus.

Nonetheless, an ongoing increase in diversity among cohorts of students in recent times, highlights the need to gain a better understanding of what would encourage students of difference, to want to stay in their chosen learning environment.

The findings of a questionnaire survey initially conducted from 2017 to 2018, which captures the responses of 4,238 national and international undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral Higher Education students, provides some answers to what might be regarded as a pertinent question.

The aim of this study was to identify diverse university students preferred learning and teaching approaches and methods, what they regarded as learning effectively, what they believed motivates them to want to learn and, what they perceived as the barriers to their learning.

The findings of this qualitative and quantitative study, revealed that respect recognised as a culturally situated, core commonly shared value for all, was ranked in the top three most significant factors in enabling diverse university students to feel at home in their learning environment, which also nurtured a sense of belonging.

The students who participated in this study confirmed that being taught by someone who respects them was their preferred teaching and learning approach. They also said learning effectively was subject to their teachers treating them with respect, which they said would also motivate them to want to learn.

Respect or lack thereof primarily from the participants teachers, was ranked by the students in this study, as being one of the key barriers to their ability to learn effectively in the classroom.

The researcher was able to draw on these findings to promote greater awareness and understanding of cultural meanings of respect among diverse university students. They also helped to identify how these meanings manifest in behaviours in the classroom to inform teaching practices.

These findings were also used to develop the range of inclusive interventions created by the researcher. These were piloted among lecturers to enable universities to know how to make students feel that they belong, and in so doing, promote sustainability in education.

This is an ongoing study consequently additional data will be utilised to add to future sustainability development discourses and diversity debates.

Key words: Education, Sustainability, Respect, Belonging

1: INTRODUCTION

An ability to enable students to feel at home in their learning environment, is intrinsic to Educational Sustainability (ES). This topic has instigated intense debate over the last few decades (Dale & Newman, 2005; Hopkins, 1998; Rassool, 1999), and is

recognised as being one of the most critical change schemes that can influence students' decision as to whether they should continue their course of study in their institution (Strayhorn, 2018). This scenario challenges learning institutions not least, those in the realms of Higher Education (HE), who now need to know how best to nurture a sense of belonging among their diverse cohorts of students if they are to retain them (Richardson and Stevenson, 2018). Furthermore, as recognised in Director Nick Hillman's 'Short Guide to non-continuation in UK universities' Policy Note 28; written for the Higher Education Policy Institution, an independent 'think tank' (HEPI Policy Note 28, 2021); Students decision to discontinue their studies in HE is why this topic is rising to the top of the political agenda. Hence the 'Office for Students' intention to assess the quality of programmes provided by English HE institutions, based on their continuation rates (HEPI Policy Note 28, 2021)

With this thought in mind, it should come as no surprise to learn that there is growing interest in exploring Sustainability Development in Education (SDE), from the student's perspective. Furthermore, as Jickling (2000), warned, sustainable development is a concept that "critics have argued is an inappropriate focal point for developing curriculum". This is because it is regarded as being "too normative, ambiguous, and ineffective at solving the complex problems" (Jickling, 2000) that future generations of students are likely to face (Jickling, 2000), particularly from an emotional perspective. Nevertheless, to examine students perspective of SDE, can yield insights for "benchmarking the current quality of a curriculum" to identify appropriate strategies for reforming it (Watson, Noyes, and Rodgers, 2013).

This is an area of research recognised as being one that is under-developed (Kagawa, 2007). Furthermore, research evidence suggests that within the paradigm of HE, there is a tendency to focus less on affective outcomes namely students' values such as 'their' respect; and more on skills, knowledge, and competencies (Cebrián and Junyent, 2015).

These are research gaps that this paper aims to address, courtesy of a study that reflects this focus. Nonetheless, there has been an ongoing increase in diversity among cohorts of students in recent times, as depicted in the UK government's 'Entry rates into higher education' facts and figures, that was published on the 9th of March 2022.

These figures showed that black students had the largest increase in entry rates compared to other ethnic groups from the year 2006 (21.6%), to 2021 (48.6%). However, in 2021 Chinese students had the highest percentage of entry rates in HE of all ethnic students in the same period (2006-2021), which was 72.1% (Gov UK, 2022).

Such occurrences pose a pertinent question namely, what would encourage students of ethnic and cultural differences to continue their course of study in their chosen learning environment?

The findings of a questionnaire regarding a longitudinal study that was initially conducted from 2017 to 2018 to present day, that captures the responses of 4,238 national and international undergraduate and postgraduate Higher Education students; provides answers to this question, that can be regarded as significant today.

This study was undertaken by the author as a means for informing the 'Diversity Best Practice Teaching and Learning' Toolkit that they were in the throes of creating for use in classrooms across Middlesex University London. The aim of this toolkit is to provide educators with the 'know-how' for teaching diverse learners.

A previous study conducted from 2005, that explored cultural meanings of respect (Wilson, 2010), coupled with feedback from culturally diverse students who participated in this more recent exploration (from 2017-2018), suggested knowing how to teach diverse student cohorts, was an area that needed to be addressed.

Moreover, this toolkit was designed to help decolonise the curriculum in HE that tends to be dominated by western ideals, to promote a more balanced learning environment that is best 'fit' for today's heterogeneous learners.

Chapter two reviews literature regarding the concepts; SDE, Belonging, and Respect and their implications for retaining diverse students in HE today and for the future. The methodology adopted for the study is described in chapter three, followed by the presentation and analysis of the research findings, then the conclusion of the meaning of these findings. This is followed by the recommendations for teaching culturally diverse HE students to nurture belonging and promote student retention.

2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A review of literature regarding sustainable development as a concept, revealed two interesting points albeit not the only ones. Namely, that Sustainable Development (SD) and its role in education, has been the subject of heated debate over several decades (Dale and Newman, 2006; Hopkins, 1998; Rassool, 1999). This is hardly surprising as evidence exists that suggests the growth in the role that SD plays in the HE curriculum, is increasing (Cotton, Warren, Maiboroda and Bailey, 2006). The second point is despite this revelation, the availability of research data to ascertain students and lecturers' view of this topic regarding the learning environment, let alone academics' understanding of what SD is in context, is limited (Cotton et al, 2006).

The research that does exist on this topic, tends to centre primarily on Sustainable Development in Education's (SDE) "physical characteristics" (Acton, 2018; Cleveland and Fisher, 2014), instead of "student opinion, " (Acton, Cleveland et al), and when the students perspective is considered, it is evident that their view tends to be environmentally focused (Zeegers and Clark, 2014).

Nevertheless, the two points mentioned earlier, raises some concerns particularly when aware that the world of Higher Education is operating in the thrust of a VUCA environment (Bennis and Nanus, 1985), namely, one which is Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous due to various recent events. This includes the war in Ukraine that has led to the UK sanctioning Russian sources who fund students' places (www.gov.uk, 2022; www.withersworldwide.com, 2022). Brexit resulted in a significant drop in enrolment of individuals from EU countries, restrictions that threaten the accessibility to EU research funds, and arguably what could be an impending schism in the UK's relationship with Europe's academia (Mayhew, 2022).

Nonetheless, lest not forget the pandemic due to COVID-19, hence increased unexpected pressure on students and employees in HE. These occurrences argue why student non-continuation and retention are matters of some urgency today, inextricably linked to SD in education.

Moreover, prior to COVID-19's `sharp-sudden-insidious` presence in our lives, there was alleged to be, “more focus on” students leaving their studies “than at any point in living memory” (HEPI Policy Note 28, 2021)

This was due to various reasons such as those listed below:

- 1) **Regulatory changes** resulting in the appointment of a Director for Access and Participation in the newly formed Office for Students, that will now result in closer scrutiny from governing bodies pertaining to access, progression, and retention (Ref. HEPI Policy Note 28, 2021).
- 2) **Metricisation:** As a consensus response that makes evident a shift in focus from making judgements regarding programmes based on their graduate earnings. Instead, the new metrics to be utilised, is the continuation data used in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF). This information is made available to potential students via the Discover Uni website, and is likely to be incorporated as part of the Office for Students' new quality regime, raising its importance (HEPI Policy Note 28, 2021)
- 3) **Resources.** This relates to the reduction in teaching income with just one increase in the tuition fee cap for English home students but this was back in 2012 (HEPI Policy Note 28, 2021).

These reasons further argue why it is important for universities to understand what would encourage their students to stay, as they can no longer afford to lose even a handful of student income. Furthermore, the recent socio-economic, financial, and health crisis, has stoked the debate regarding the relevance of business schools (Thomas and Cornuel, 2012), their sustainability, and that of universities.

This review of literature suggests that the need for students to feel that they belong, defined “as a feeling of acceptance and purpose, and feeling as though where you are is where you are meant to be” Samuel, 2021), can influence their decision to stay or leave their study programme institution.

This observation is corroborated by `Universities UK` in their report on “BAME Student Attainment at UK Universities”, published in May 2019. This report acknowledged the significance of `inclusion` and `belonging` in the literature, where

BAME students “repeatedly cited feelings of discomfort, isolation and a sense of” not feeling that they belong, as the reasons why they were least likely to feel satisfied with their learning experience, and as such were likely to leave.

As Strayhorn (2018) asserts, “belonging with peers, in the classroom, or on campus is a critical dimension of success” in Higher Education (HE). Furthermore, having the capacity and know-how to build a culture of belongingness within the realms of HE, are other critical factors that determine student retention (O’Keeffe, 2013).

Notwithstanding, HE institutions are likely to encounter some challenges when trying to develop a sense of belonging which is “fundamental to student retention and success” and is central to their experience (Richardson, and Stevenson, 2018; Baixinho, Ferreira, Medeiros, and Oliveira, 2022).

Arguably, creating a culture of belongingness is subject to a welcoming environment where students can feel they are being cared for and supported, which is crucial (O’Keeffe, 2013).

Other key risk factors that resulted in students feeling isolated and excluded, hence non-completion, is their experience of discrimination, an inability to relate to for example, those of difference, a lack in, or limited discussions regarding the issue of race, disability, and socioeconomic status (Schusler, Espedido, Rivera, Hernández, Howerton, Sepp, K., Engel, Marcos, and Chaudhary, 2021; O’Keefe, 2013).

Moreover, it is worth noting that ‘belonging’ as a concept, can differ subject to students identities such as those that reflect any of the Nine Protected Characteristics of the UK Equality Act 2010, namely, gender, beliefs, sexual orientation, or race (Strayhorn, 2018). Besides, students feeling that they belong or for that matter not; is “used to gauge” their “adjustment to and persistence within Higher Education” (Bettencourt, 2021).

Further explorations of the literature regarding this topic made evident more definitively, that students’ sense of belonging relates to what they perceive should be their social support on campus, and what Stayhorn (2018) refers to as their “experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, and respected”.

As acknowledged by Mertz, Johannsen, and Van Quaquebeke (2015), in their work, respect a subject of debate pertaining to moral, problematic issues such as racism

(Darwell, 1977); is “one of the most powerful and complicated concepts involved in governing human’s relations to others and themselves” and in part, is a cultural phenomenon (Haydon, 2006), with many meanings.

This is hardly surprising as there are numerous global cultures and sub-cultures across different societies and communities, and as such, one definitive meaning of respect, something we are all entitled to, is unlikely.

Palmer-Jones and Hoerl (2008), defines respect as being the way we behave and feel, while Cohen (2007), said it relates to one person’s sentiment towards another, whereas Browne, (1995), believes respect reflects “ethical values related to equality, inherent worth, and the uniqueness and dignity of the individual”.

What is apparent from the literature, is that respect and its opposite (disrespect) is ever present in our daily lives whether in the workplace, at home, among our social networks and, also in the classroom (Mertz, Johannsen, and Van Quaquebeke, 2015).

Respect also affects “our feelings of justness and belonging” (Mertz et al, 2015), and despite evidence of a “growing body of research on respect, a general agreeable conceptual accounting” of what this concept really means, remains elusive (Mertz et al, 2015).

However, further insights were gained from a study conducted over a five- year period (2005-2010), with diverse final-year undergraduate multidisciplinary business students enrolled at Middlesex University London (Wilson, 2019; Wilson, 2010).

The aim of this study was to explore cultural meanings of respect, and how these meanings manifest in behaviours in the classroom that revealed “that respect is a key commonly shared value for all that is culturally situated” (Wilson, 2019; Wilson, 2010). This study also made evident that we take our respect for granted and are therefore unlikely to realise that we give others our respect and expect our respect back, while they do the same (Wilson, 2019; Wilson, 2010). This lack of awareness poses challenges, particularly where respect in one culture could mean disrespect in another (Wilson, 2010). This can lead to suspicion, hostility, complaints of discrimination and even conflict, which was the case for many of the students who

participated in this study (Wilson, 2010: Wilson, 2019), that can result in students leaving.

As Haydon (2006), asserts, “respect for persons has to take a person’s cultural context into account” as both (respect and culture) are inextricably linked, so to understand one, is subject to understanding the other (Wilson, 2010). Research evidence also suggests “disparate perceptions of respect does have an impact on learning in the classroom” (Begum, & Dossetor, 2005). Therefore, a lack of awareness of students cultural meanings of respect can leave them questioning whether they belong in their learning environment. These discussions make evident the relevance of respect to sustainability in education.

3: METHODOLOGY

A mixed method research approach drawing on both qualitative and quantitative methods (Bager-Charleson, McBeath, and Vostanis, 2021), was adopted for this study, on which this paper is based.

The research relates to a longitudinal study devoid of external influences (Caruana, Hernández-Sánchez, and Solli, 2015) that employed “repeated measures to follow” (Caruana, Hernández-Sánchez, and Solli, 2015), diverse business school university students. It was first conducted from October 2017- 2018 , building on the author’s earlier study (2006-2012 & 2012-2017), that explored cultural meanings of respect. This study combined a qualitative approach to help tackle the research questions posed, and to acquire “an understanding of the meaning and experience” of diverse HE students (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, and Davidson, 2002). This is in addition to a quantitative approach based on statistical data analysis (Tan, 2022), as it was recognised that this combined approach would afford the researcher the best of both research worlds. This is because not one, but two parts of the phenomenon was explored that provided holistic, robust, insightful knowledge and a greater understanding of the research findings (Bager-Charleson, McBeath, and Vostanis, 2021).

The aim of the study was to gain answers to the following four research questions, to identify the teaching and learning methods that would better enable diverse students of mixed learning abilities to learn more effectively.

Q1: What is your preferred learning and teaching approach and methods?

Q2: What do you regard as learning effectively?

Q3: What motivates you to want to learn?

Q4: What do you regard as the barriers to your learning?.

These questions are summarised in figure 1 below:

Place Figure 1 here

This ongoing study was undertaken to incorporate the recommendations born of the findings, included in the 'Diversity Best Practice Teaching & Learning Toolkit', written by the researcher that was disseminated to educators across Middlesex University London for use in their diverse classrooms, yielding positive results.

The aim of this toolkit is to provide University lecturers with the 'know-how' for teaching diverse cohorts of students, while helping to decolonise the curriculum that is usually dominated by western ideals. As suggested by Harvey and Russell-Munine, (2018), decolonisation of HE institutions, "involves removing the barriers that have silenced non-Western voices in our 'multi-cultural' Higher Education system and combatting the epistemic injustices of a system dominated by Western thought". Nevertheless, decolonising the curriculum is a necessary means for including the knowledge and ideals (Harvey et al , 2018) that reflect what is now a more diverse student community. It is also essential for addressing the imbalance in the learning environment to promote equity and learning outcomes.

Higher Education Institutions are now challenged with the task of producing guidelines for decolonising the curriculum (Meda, 2020), which this toolkit affords.

As shown in Figure 2, the research objectives included working collaboratively with teams of four to six students, who were enrolled on the final-year undergraduate 'Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion' (EDI) module at Middlesex University Business School London. This module was created by the author of this paper from their diversity research work.

Place Figure 2 here

Figure 3, makes evident that the diverse students who participated in this study, were enrolled on undergraduate and postgraduate HE programmes in four different countries, namely the UK, Sweden, Nigeria, and Dubai.

Place Figure 3 here

Figure 4 below shows the data collection methods that were utilised for this study. This includes a `Diversity Teaching and Learning Questionnaire` that was either disseminated online or completed in the twelve focus-group interview sessions that were held throughout the duration of the study, (ref. Table 1 below).

Place Figure 4 here

The following research questionnaire was created post a pilot student survey that was utilised to decide what should be included in it. Consequently, this questionnaire lists 24 different teaching and learning methods, 34 things that would help students to learn more effectively, and 40 things that students believed could be perceived as barriers to their learning for them to pick from. The respondents were asked to use a Likert scale to rate and place their selected responses in priority order, subject to what they believed was their significance.

Place Table 1 here

The focus group sessions proved useful for, as Vaughn, Schumm and Sinagub, (1996) put it, “to better ascertain the why” behind a participant’s response. These sessions also provided the opportunity to observe the participants non-verbal behaviour such as their facial expressions, hand movements and eye-contact, as another method. The researcher was also able to note the participants audio sounds such as their `Uums` and `Aagh` expressed prior to, in conjunction with, or at the end of their verbal responses to the research questions posed.

Content analysis was used to analyse, encode, and categorise the large volume of student responses provided in the 4,238 completed questionnaires. This helped to identify any patterns and relationships between these responses regarding the characteristics such as who has a particular teaching preference, and who regards what as a barrier to their learning (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013; Powers and Knapp, 2006; Bloor & Wood, 2006).

4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter provides a breakdown of the research findings that were analysed to inform this study. It begins with the age data presented in Table 2 below, that shows the largest number of respondents in the study, was 1,718 students aged 18-24 years, which represents approximately 40.5% of the 4,238 respondents.

The second largest age group was 980 students (23.12%), aged 25-30, followed by the third, 675 students aged 31-35 (15.9%). The total number of these three largest age groups, was 3,373, which represents 79.58% of respondents. These figures also cross-referenced with the status of these students regarding the year of their programme of study that showed the majority were first-year undergraduate students (2,001 = 69.3%), while 864 (25.61%), were in their second year, with 508 (15.06%) being third year finalists. A total of 411 (9.6%) aged 36-46 were studying for masters' degrees, and 67 (1.5%) were enrolled on doctoral programmes.

Place Table 2 here

Table 3 provides the gender breakdown of the students who participated in this study, with 2,212 (52.19%) identifying as women, and 2,020 (47.66%) classifying themselves as men, while six (1.4%) of the respondents opted for other.

Place Table 3 here

Table 4 provides insight to the respondents ethnic backgrounds, with 36% confirming that they were either Black African, Black Caribbean, Black British, or Black African-Caribbean. A total of 22% of the students were Asian of either Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or of British Asian origin. The third largest ethnic group was the white respondents who described themselves as either English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British, East European, or other. This data made evident that the greatest number of respondents were those who belonged to the non-white BAME minority ethnic community, which was a total of 3,331 students (78.59%).

Place Table 4 here

Table 5 below makes evident that the respondents were students enrolled on programmes at twenty universities, of which eighteen were in the UK with some of the students enrolled at Middlesex University's Dubai campus. A total of 189 of the

students, were enrolled in two international universities located abroad in Sweden (79 students), and Nigeria (110).

Place Table 5 here

Responses to research questions

The top five most significant responses from the total number of responses to each question, are presented in each of the Tables below. These were selected based on volume.

As depicted in Table 6 below, the students top five preferred teaching and learning methods from a total of twenty-five responses, are listed in priority order per ethnic group.

Place Table 6 here

As shown in the above table, for the black students and East Asian students (primarily from China), “Being taught by someone who respects me” was number one on their list of preferred teaching approaches and methods.

Asian, White, Mixed, and Other, students opted for workshops, while feedback ranked second for the White, East-Asian, Mixed and Other students, compared to workshops for the Black students, and “Being taught by someone who respects me” for the Asian students.

In third place was “Being taught by someone who respects me” for the White, Mixed and Other students, while the Black and Asian chose feedback, and East-Asian students opted for Individual study. All but the East-Asian students who chose workshops, had individual study listed in fourth place, while for all the students visual recordings was listed fifth. These responses show that besides feedback, respect ranks in the top three most mentioned student responses.

Place Table 7 here

For this second question, the students were asked to confirm their meaning of learning effectively, and as shown in Table 7 above., “When teacher treats me with respect” was the top response for Black and East-Asian students. For the Asian, White, Mixed and Other students, it was being taught by an expert. Ranked second for the Black students was, “When the teacher understands my culture/background”,

but for the Asian, Mixed and Other students, it was “When teacher treats me with respect.” The White students opted for “Enthusiastic teachers”, while for the East-Asian students it was “Being taught by an expert.” “When the teacher understands my culture/background” ranked third for the Asian, East-Asian, and Other, students. But for the Black students it was “Being taught by an expert”, while for the White students it was “when the teacher treats me with respect, and for the Mixed it was “Enthusiastic teachers”.

Ranked fourth for Black, Asian, and Other, students, was “Enthusiastic teachers”, while for the White and East-Asian students it was “Learning with experienced people”. For the Mixed students it was “When the teacher understands my culture/background”. Listed at five, was “Learning with experienced people”, for the Black, Asian, Mixed, and Other, students. For the White students it was “When the teacher understands my culture/background”, and the East-Asian students said it was “Enthusiastic teachers.” These results made evident that respect, culture, being taught by an expert followed by, learning with experienced people, are significant for diverse students to learn effectively.

Place Table 8 here

For question three the students were asked what would motivate them to want to learn and as shown in Table 8 above, “Being taught by someone who respects me” ranked number one for all six ethnic groups. In second place was “learning with different people” for the Asian, White, East-Asian, Mixed, and Other, students, but for the black students it was it teachers who understands people from their cultural background. Third was “When learning is fun” for the East-Asian, Mixed, and Other, students, while the Black students said it was “Learning with different people.” Ranked fourth for the East-Asian, Mixed, and Other, students, was “if teachers understand people from their culture and background.” The Black and the White students said it was “When learning is fun”, while for the Asian students said it was “Constructive criticism.” Ranked fifth was “Constructive criticism” for the Black, East-Asian, Mixed, and Other, students, while Asian said it was “When learning is fun”, and for White students it was “When teachers understand people from my culture and background”. These results show that the most significant responses were “Being taught by

someone who respects me”, “If teacher understands people from my background, and when learning with different people.

Place Table 9 here

Table 9 documents the students responses to the final question regarding the barriers to their learning. For all the students, “Fear of failure” was what they regarded as the most significant barrier, followed by “Lack of respect from teachers”, then “Personal problems”, and “If what is being taught does not relate to their culture or identity”, which was the case for all but the White students whose fourth barrier was “Late class finish”. The fifth barrier was “Late class finish” for all students except the White students where “If what is being taught does not relate to their culture or identity” ranked fifth.

The findings from this last question, made evident that “Fear of failure”, “Lack of respect from teachers”, and “Personal problems”, were the top three most significant barriers to these ethnically diverse students learning. This was followed by “If what is being taught does not relate to” their “culture and identity”, which was the response for all but the White students who cited “Late class finish”, while for all the other students, this was ranked fifth. Number five for the White students was “If what is being taught does not relate to” their “culture and identity”.

5: CONCLUSIONS

What was evident from the review of literature regarding Sustainable Development (SD), was that this topic and its role in education, has been the subject of heated debate over several decades (Dale and Newman, 2006; Hopkins, 1998; Rassool, 1999). Additionally, the availability of research data to ascertain students and lecturers` view of SD in relation to the learning environment, is limited (Cotton et al, 2006), thus suggesting little understanding of the implications of this topic within higher education.

Furthermore, world events, recent socio-economic, financial, and health crisis, has stoked the debate regarding the relevance of business schools (Thomas and Cornuel, 2012), universities, and in turn their sustainability. Hence growing interest in students leaving their studies “than at any point in living memory” (HEPI Policy Note 28, 2021).

The literature also revealed that experiences of discrimination, an inability to relate to those of difference, limited discussions about socio-economic status and, race,

(O’Keefe, 2013; Schusler, Espedido, Rivera, Hernández, Howerton, Sepp, K., Engel, Marcos, and Chaudhary, 2021), were some of the reasons why students left their place of study. As identified by Arday, Belluigi, and Thomas, (2021) “the centrality of Whiteness as an instrument of power and privilege ensures that particular types of knowledge continue to remain omitted from our curriculums”, that are conducive to BAME students. Furthermore, “the monopoly and proliferation of dominant White European canons does comprise much of our existing curriculum; consequently, this does impact on aspects of engagement, inclusivity and belonging particularly for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) learners” (Arday, Belluigi, and Thomas, 2021).

These reasons argue the benefits that can be gained from implementing “Anti-racism education” (Arday, Belluigi and Thomas, 2021). This would afford lecturers with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of students who “reflect the cultural hybridity of multicultural society (Arday, Belluigi, Thomas, 2021) to know how best to embrace and teach them. The caveat is failure in this regard, might exacerbate feelings of a lack of belongingness, particularly among those students from disadvantaged or marginalised groups, such as BAME students.

This was recognised in the report on “BAME Student Attainment at UK Universities”, published by ‘Universities UK’ (2019), where these students “feelings of discomfort and isolation” was recorded thus suggesting that they were unlikely to remain in their university programme.

As O’Keefe (2013), acknowledged the need to feel that one belongs in the classroom, among peers, and while on campus, “is a critical dimension of success” in Higher Education (HE). This argues why having the know-how for building a sense of belongingness and an ability to encourage persistence in HE, are essential factors that determine student retention (O’Keefe, 2013; Bettencourt, 2021). Furthermore, universities need to be reminded that tackling “a student’s persistence in a Higher Education Institution” is a must (Truta, Pary, and Topala, 2018).

The research on respect revealed several significant findings relevant to the topic of this book chapter. Namely, that respect is a core commonly shared value for all, is culturally situated so to understand another’s meaning of respect is subject to

understanding their culture (Wilson, 2019). Furthermore, respect in one culture could mean disrespect in another, but a lack of awareness of cultural meanings of respect can result in the assumption that when disrespect occurs, this is what was intended, when this might not have been the case (Wilson, 2010).

The findings from the second study on teaching and learning, showed that being treated respectfully, and being taught by teachers who are respectful, was ranked as the number one preferred teaching approach, and for learning effectively, by BAME students. These cited “fear of failure” as the biggest barrier to their learning, with a “lack of respect from teachers” as a close second.

These findings suggests that akin to the students who participated in the first study, respect was also a fundamental value for the students in the latter study. The inference is that where respect is present in the learning environment, students and primarily those from BAME backgrounds, are more likely to feel that they belong.

Therefore, as Gavin (2015), argued, there is much to be gained from giving “students the respect they deserve”. But this is subject to understanding what this means from their cultural standpoint. Moreover, students who feel they are being treated and taught respectfully in the learning environment, will not only “improve their performance”, but “our mutual interactions, and our satisfaction as teachers” (Gavin, 2015). Yet, “there are times when we all forget” or do not realise the interplay between respect and students need to feel that they belong. Perhaps because our judgement is often “clouded by institutional culture” plus our intentions “are subverted by the vexations of our roles as instructors (Gavin, 2015) and the growth in our ever-increasing workload.

Finally, students who feel respected and that they belong in their learning environment, will feel accepted, and as though “where they are, is where they are meant to be” (Samuel, 2021), which is a place of learning that feels like home!”

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