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International students VS Lecturers

It's not about teaching. All down to (international) students!

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Abstract

Since the early 2000s, UK universities have been criticised due to the performance gap between white students and their racialised counterparts. The challenges associated with an increasing intake of international students have impacted student retention and completion of programmes. Data suggests that international students underperform significantly in comparison to white students, and the assumption is that (international) students do not have the academic ability to succeed in UK HE. However, the real challenge here might not be about students' academic abilities, but about lecturers' teaching abilities; many UK universities recruit dual professional lecturers, who have not undergone appropriate pedagogical training, to embed industry experience in their curricula.

Keywords: international students, teaching, pedagogical training, dual professional lecturers

For the past few years, UK Higher Education (HE) has offered places in their programmes to a large number of international students, and UK HE Business schools have especially increased their international student intake significantly. According to HESA (2022), between Academic Year (AY) 16/17 and AY 20/21, the number of non-UK students increased by 34.2%. The number of students from China increased by 18.8% between AY18/19 and AY 20/21, while the number of students from India increased approximately by 207.5% between AY18/19 and AY20/21. As per the programme, nearly 37% of students who enrolled in Business and Administrative programmes in AY 20/21 were non-UK students. However, even though the intake number of non-UK students increased by 34.2% between AY16/17 and AY 20/21, the achievement rate of non-UK students only increased by approximately 26.1%. As per classification related to ethnicity, while 19.4% of black students and 31.2% of Asian students achieved first class, 37.6% of white students achieved first class. In the early 2000s, Connor et al. (2004) and Richardson (2008) argued that Pakistani and Bangladeshi undergraduate students achieved fewer higher classifications compared to 'white' students (Jabbar and Hardaker, 2013), and UK HE still has a propensity for 'white' students outperforming international students.

Zhang et al. (2016) discuss how Business schools in OECD countries are integrating diversified students into the curriculum for international students' success and how international

students play an important role in the profit of Business Schools (Pfeffer and Fong, 2004). The economic impact of international students is not only restricted to universities; they also contribute significantly to their host countries' economies (Sawir, 2011), and it has been propriety for those countries to attract and recruit more international students (Pandit, 2013). However, even though Western, and especially UK, universities have increased their intake of international students, it has not led to those universities and Business schools adopting appropriate changes in their curriculum and pedagogy (Zhang et al., 2016). Sadly, many faculties in Western Business schools have not taken these culturally linguistically diversified international students into account in their teaching practices, and so the pedagogy has not been adjusted accordingly (Sawir, 2011, Zhang et al., 2016).

In addition to the challenges of teaching culturally linguistically diversified students, there is another challenge faced by faculty in current HE. The combination of a mass-marketised higher education system and the concerns about student retention and withdrawal rates contributed to the idea of placing satisfying students' needs at the centre of attention in UK HE (QAA, 2004, Haggis, 2006), as per Stierer and Antoniou (2004)'s a "Customer shopping for learning services" concept (Haggis, 2006, p.521). However, as was discussed at the beginning of this article, a growing intake of international students and a diversified pool of students make it nearly impossible to meet all the different needs of students in the current HE. As Haggis (2006) notes, HE can no longer expect students to have the same level of learning and similar prior experience at the point of entry into university, so it should be considered that students may not understand how to interpret assessments, how to write essays, or even how to apply the suitable referencing style. However, from many faculties' perspectives, this is not due to different experiences or learning prior to university, but because universities are dumbing down academic standards. They blame the quality of the students as part of the problems, suggesting some of these students are not capable of managing critical challenges by HE standards (Hayes, 2003, Furedi, 2004). To survive a highly marketised industry, and to meet diversified students' needs, many HE institutions are trying to identify either what is wrong with students, or what the students want, while abandoning certain values relating to actual learning (Haggis, 2006). Furthermore, bringing focus to what is wrong with students, the narrative around international and/or diversified students by faculty may include elements of bias. As Haggis (2006) discusses, the question here might be how we can shift

from 'what is wrong with our (international) students', to 'what features of our curriculum are stopping our students from being engaged in the subject'?

According to Lomer (2017) and Lomer and Mittelmeier (2021), while non-EU and East Asian students are considered as essential for their economic contributions to HEs and described as 'cash cows', faculty simultaneously describe those students as bringing down the educational standards of institutions. International students' silence in class is often misunderstood as a lack of critical thinking and lack of engagement (Marlina, 2009), and faculty regularly describe them as "Lacking the language and academic skills required for British academic life" (Lomer and Mittelmeier, 2021. p1). Regrettably, many international students are stereotyped as students who have a lack of willingness to learn and who don't like collaborative learning (Turner, 2012), and they are often excluded as knowledge agents in the discussion of pedagogy (Madge et al., 2015) as they are seen as passive learners (Cowley et al., 2017) in the classroom. The words 'lack', 'challenges', 'problems', 'stresses', 'needs', and 'struggles' were predominately used to describe international students, while 'capable', 'able', 'coping', and 'managing' were less used (McKay et al., 2018, Lomer and Mittelmeier, 2021).

Lomer and Mittelmeier (2021, p12) also discuss how negative descriptions of international students as "Lacking skill, language, or other characteristics intrinsic to academic success" has positioned them as an inferior and marginalised group in the classroom. In addition, the faculty's opinion insisting that international students should digest a traditional British pedagogic approach (Ploner, 2017) shapes negative pedagogic practices against international students in HE (Lomer and Mittelmeier, 2021). As Heng (2018) and Wu (2015) discuss, it is important that we acknowledge the diversity and complexity of our international students' previous learning experiences and adjust our pedagogic approach to enable international students (Lomer and Mittelmeier, 2021).

Another challenge within the discussion surrounding pedagogy is the shift from teaching to delivering content in the class, as the pedagogic approach pushed since Michael Gove has promoted a knowledge-driven curriculum. To satisfy the government's movement of centralising teaching frameworks, teachers are being trained to deliver content in an uninformed way, rather than learning to be flexible teachers (Waters, 2021). This approach has been adopted not only in schools but also in universities. Additionally, in HE, many

lecturers have not undergone any form of pedagogical training before starting their careers as an educator, and this might disadvantage students by exposing them to ineffective or lower-quality teaching. (Yürekli Kaynardağ, 2019). Also, many Universities, especially HE Business schools, recruit practitioners to deliver lectures and are supporting dual professionalism, hence recruiting industry experts who want to start a new career as lecturers in universities. However, the challenge here is not about the experts' subject knowledge and/or industry experience. They can certainly deliver a knowledge-driven curriculum or pre-designed curriculum. But, the real question here is whether they know how to teach in the class without pedagogical training. Or like someone said, can anyone teach? Or the students' performance is not about teaching, but about students' ability to learn?

Postareff et al. (2007) argue that the pedagogical competencies of faculty play an imperative role in improving teaching and students' learning quality in HE. However, they point out that pedagogical training is not an essential requirement to become a lecturer in many countries. Yürekli Kaynardağ (2019) also discuss how, despite HE is using the term 'teaching quality' regularly, the relevance of teaching quality in HE to their actual teaching has become more deceptive due to the faculty's pedagogical (in)competencies. She points out that, as faculty with pedagogical training are more aware of issues regarding student learning and engagement in the classroom, their attitudes and language towards students are more crafted and sensitive, with more patience.

Another important aspect of the pedagogical competency of faculty is associated with diversified students in the classroom. Due to a lack of pedagogical training and knowledge on how to incorporate diversity and inclusion into teaching, many faculty have struggled to connect their teaching content to a diversified pool of students (Zhang et al., 2016). As faculties focus on the delivery of teaching content without contemplating whether culturally linguistically diversified international students have fully understood the content, they see the responsibility of improving academic ability and of appreciating the content as sitting with students (Benzie, 2010). However, as Jabbar and Hardaker (2013) state, student performance is faculties' moral responsibility; it is essential for faculty to understand that their role is not only delivering the content and knowledge in the classroom, but also ensuring students comprehend and understand the content. Therefore, as Allan et al. (2009) argue, the subject

knowledge of faculty is imperative to deliver content; however, understanding different pedagogical approaches to facilitate active learning in the classroom is also pivotal.

Then the real question here is not “What is wrong with international students?”. The correct question might be, “Do we truly understand how to teach international students without pedagogical training?”

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