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Inclusion and the relevance of culturally responsive teaching in U.K. Business schools

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ABSTRACT: *Inequality, lack of learning, and poor academic achievement are firmly linked (Nieto 1999). Our research explores the British Muslim experience in the context of inclusive pedagogy practice in Business Schools. It is the aim of this paper to explore the relevance of culturally responsive teaching (Gay 2000) in supporting individual student learning differences in increasingly international Business Schools. Law (2004) argues that Universities are expected to be the interrogators of complex ethical problems, as servant and preserver of deeper democratic practices. To fulfil this role effectively universities need to shift away from what (Allen 1998) describes a 'White Syllabus'. The need to demand from students the ability to adapt to the approach of the institution without the institution making an effort to adapt to the student is an outdated concept which puts many universities at a disadvantage when trying to attract International students to UK business Schools.*

This paper will look at the relevance of 'culturally responsive teaching' and how this pedagogical method utilises student's cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and cultural differences to make learning more appropriate and effective for them. Such an approach teaches through the strengths of the students (Gay 2000) and the responsiveness of the educators. Our research adopts a culturally responsive framework (Villegas and Lucas, 2002) that looks at 5 salient characteristics and how they can be used to bridge the gap between learner and tutor and organisation.

It will be analysed and argued that culturally responsive teaching can be used to develop inclusion and minimise prejudice within UK Business Schools for minority groups and for this study British Muslims.

What is a British Muslim

British Muslims are a group which is made up of many diverse ethnic minorities and in many cases converts who are born and bred in the UK. However many Muslims are still typically part of a non-European culture which may include areas from the Middle East or south East Asia. It is however difficult to fully appreciate the numbers of Muslims and where they come from as many European countries do not make religion a prime area of concern.

This is a very diverse group that has its own challenges and stereotypes. It is one of the fastest growing groups in the UK and makes up about 3% of the population. It is acknowledged that over the next few years this group whether it is via immigration, from International Students or the increasing birth rate will have a key role to play in the changing nature of Higher education.

Looking at the issue of identity, many British Muslims associate themselves with their religion and with their culture of origin. Many Muslims are proud of their Islamic roots but also have a deep connection with the adopted country of their birth.

Badawi (Muslim college in London) tries to give this "identity paradox" context, and tries to place a Muslim lifestyle within a western democracy. For example British Muslims accept Islamic dress codes and eating requirements, but want the dress to be in a western style and for the Pizzas and Burgers to be Halaal.

Other views contend that when looking at British Muslims it should be framed as an inquiry into religious pluralism. (Swann 1985; Grant 1997; Modood, Berthoud et al. 1997; Hurtado, Milem et al. 1999; Bucholtz 2003; Gittoes and Thompson 2007; Modood and Ahmad 2007; Duderija 2008; Basit 2009) contend that contemporary notions of multicultural equality and respect are a more appropriate discourse than the more traditional notions of religious pluralism and tolerance.

Jacobsen (1998) in her book *Islam in Transition* offers a different perspective. She looks at the concept of British Muslims but from an ethnic perspective. She looks at 'second generation' British Muslims, specifically young people whose parents immigrated to Britain from South East Asia and their experiences with British nationality, influences and attitudes to religion.

For my research I intend to have a perspective that is a mixture of (Modood and Ahmad 2007) and (Jacobsen 1998). The intention is to frame the perspective of the South East Asian British Muslims as a notion of multicultural equality and respect.

British Muslims in Higher education

It is common knowledge that ethnic minority degree attainment is lower than their white counterparts. According to Connor (2004) and Modood & Shiner (2002) H.E. Participation rates are higher for groups of ethnic minorities as compared to their white counterparts but degree performance is lower. Connor (2004) continues to say that Pakistani and Bangladeshi undergraduates are less likely than their White counterparts to get a first or upper-second classification for their degree. This is consistent even when background and other variables known to affect class of degree are taken account of (Connor 2004, Modood and Shiner 2002).

The widening participation strategy has increased opportunities for people from a wider range of backgrounds to access universities and higher level qualifications. These figures are verified by (Modood, Triandafyllidou et al. 2006) who place importance on these kinds of strategies in encouraging ethnic minorities to participate in H.E. His research shows that ethnic minorities make up almost one in six home undergraduates in England, almost double their share of the population (Modood, Triandafyllidou et al. 2006). This research is further corroborated by Connor (2004) as she documents the participation rates of Pakistanis and Indians within higher education as exceeding or coming extremely close to the government targets of 50%. Proportionately ethnic minorities are more likely to take H.E. Qualifications as compared to their White counterparts; the face of H.E. is changing from something that is predominately thought to be a white endeavour to something that is open to all.

What are the variables that contribute to the gap between participation rates and degree attainment, can the assumption be made that they are closely linked with H.E. Experience? These statistics have been given a voice by Mirza *'Why is it that those who are the most committed to education often struggle the most to succeed?'* (Mirza 2006)

This commitment has also been outlined by Modood and Shiner (2002) who consider the drive of ethnic minorities in obtaining qualifications. They comment that such is the strength of this drive that, while ethnic minority communities account for 8% of 18–24 year olds in Britain, they make up almost twice this proportion of university entrants. This level of representation confounds general social-class patterns in addition to this it is achieved from a situation of relative disadvantage.

This struggle for acceptance and trying to obtain a foothold in society has also been echoed by the Guardian (2008) who highlight the plight of British Muslims (33%) of working age who have no qualifications; this is the highest proportion of any religious group in this country. Additionally Muslims are the least likely to have degrees or equivalent qualifications (Guardian 2008).

Inequality in Higher Education admission

There is growing concern about the concentration of students from different ethnic minorities in different HEIs (Phillips, 2006). It can be argued that as well as poor degree performances many British Muslims are also disadvantaged by the inequality in student admission to H.E.

If we look at the statistics 85% of higher educational institutions in the UK have a sizeable number of Muslim students (FOSIS 2004). There are significantly higher proportions of Muslim, and other ethnic minority students at the "new" (post-1992) universities as opposed to the "old" (pre-1992) universities (Open Society 2005). Compared with the general population, ethnic minority groups are over-represented within new universities. They are, however, less well represented in old universities where evidence of black Caribbean, Bangladeshi and Pakistani under-representation led Modood (1993) to suggest that there was a definite ethnic hierarchy within this sector. Data from subsequent years confirmed this pattern (Modood, 1998).

A study of medical schools found that applicants from ethnic minority groups were 1.46 times less likely to be accepted even when qualifications and other factors were taken into account (McManus *et al.* 1995). This pattern is corroborated by Modood who from his data has concluded that a White student has a 75% chance of receiving an invitation to study in the pre 1992 universities as opposed to a Pakistani candidate who is identical in every way has only a 57% chance of an offer (Modood 2006).

Countless studies have taken place to show evidence of disparity and inequality between ethnic minority & British Muslim students as opposed to their White counterparts. Modood in his own analysis suggests that higher education has an ambivalent role in relation to ethnic equality.

Does this ambivalent attitude lead many academics and educationalists to continue to associate ethnic minorities in Britain with educational underachievement as opposed to success? (Modood 2006)

Is this a mild form of institutionalised racism, or plain ignorance on the part of the academics? As indicated by the Swann report academics are not overtly racist but have not been trained in cultural awareness, hence the need to develop a curriculum that facilitates a multicultural society (Swann Report 1985).

Culturally Responsive Teaching in UK Business Schools

At the heart of multicultural education is a long-standing concern with academic failure. In the latter decades of the 20th century, deficiency-oriented understandings of minority student "failure" gave way to the cultural mismatch theory (Nieto, 2000, p. 236).

Cultural mismatch theory regards academic failure not as a result of genetic or cultural inferiority, but rather as a result of the gap, the differences, between home and school cultures (Nermin Said and Katherine Richardson 2007). This paper will investigate if culturally responsive teaching is a viable solution to addressing this gap.

The current structures and curriculum's developed and implemented in many H.E. Organisations in this country cater for the Majority white student population with very little input from the histories of ethnic minority students (Nermin Said and Katherine

Richardson 2007) this is supported by Nieto (1999) who says a curriculum's content should include minority groups' contributions to a country's history.

Culturally responsive teaching is defined by Gay and Ladson-Billings as a method that allows the use of cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (Gay 2000). As a result the academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own culture and experiential filters (Au & Kawakami, 1994; Foster, 1995; Gay, 2000; Hollins, 1996;)

This embedding of culture can start to eradicate feelings of alienation and a perception of what many ethnic minorities consider a 'white' syllabus (Allen, 1998). Further criticisms from students have been identified in relation to the under-representation of ethnic minority academic staff (Carter et al., 1999) teachers low expectations, racial abuse, harassment, lack of role models, peer pressures, parental education, parental occupation levels, parental level of engagement in their students education, and parental aspirations (Nieto 1999).

To eradicate these experiences a framework has been developed which expands on and adapts the framework of Villegas and Lucas (2002). The aim of this framework is to identify a consistent model which can help to embed culturally responsive teaching in UK business Schools. This framework is built on 5 pillars:

- **Cultural consciousness**
- **Resources for learning**
- **Moral Responsibility**
- **Knowledge construction & Identity**
- **Educational Strategies**

These 5 pillars place the student at the heart of the Learning process. The conceptual framework can act as a bridge between:

- the student and the tutor
- the student and the organisation

Most research that uses cultural mismatch theory takes racial/ethnic minorities as their focal groups. Few studies, however, focus particularly on *religious* minorities, especially Muslims. For this reason, it is imperative that we understand how cultural mismatch can be used to understand the experiences of this non-dominant student population (Nermin Said and Katherine Richardson 2007) within a framework of Culturally responsive teaching.

It is my intention to investigate Cultural mismatch theory with respect to the five pillar framework identified above. This framework is a starting point in understanding the challenges Academics face in developing a culturally responsive pedagogy for the British Muslim experience.

The relevance of Culturally Responsive Teaching

To obtain an understanding of the current mechanisms and methods of pedagogy within H.E. it is intended to investigate the issues surrounding Academics and British Muslims within U.K. Business Schools.

To develop my research and underpin my literature review I intend to conduct semi-structured interviews of students and staff that asks them to reflect on their learning experiences and their teaching experiences. From these answers the author will pick out main themes and seek to identify if a culturally responsive teaching framework is relevant in U.K. business schools.

I will chose one student whose name was randomly picked from a list of British Muslims who were studying either Law & Accountancy and two academics who again where picked randomly from a list of Law & Accountancy staff, this was mainly done to eliminate elements of bias. I recognise that this sample is miniscule but it is felt that this is a good test for the five pillar framework. I will interview them with prepared questions against the culturally responsive teaching framework.

Cultural consciousness

The first part of the Culturally Responsive framework is Cultural consciousness. This part of the framework revolves around the importance that academics and organisations have empathy and understanding with the students they teach. Having intimate knowledge of inequality in society is a critical foundation block for the development of consciousness (Zamudio, Bridgeman et al. 2009). To better understand the student the academic must also understand his own consciousness.

Academics should understand that peoples ways of thinking, behaving, and being are deeply influenced by such factors as race/ ethnicity, social class, and language (Banks 1996). This empathy also entails an understanding of the complex relationships between establishments of education and society and the problems associated with cultural mismatch (Villegas 1998).

From the students perspective the main comments to come out at this section is the lack of *consciousness*. On this topic the student said that "*My tutors never made a conscious effort to get to know me*", the student felt disconnected from the academic experience and he said "*I never really connected with the academic on an individual level*". This lack of empathy from the academics towards the student is addressed by Gay (2000) who maintains that one of the most fundamental features of culturally responsive teaching is the power of caring. Caring for the student is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity. (Gay 2002)

Embedding caring into pedagogy may seem strange and have its detractors but this is not about having affection for the student but teachers understanding that their concern and caring has an implication on the lives of their students (Ladson-Billings 1995). Just to reaffirm this point when the student was asked if the academic had cared and made an effort know him if this may have made a difference the student remarked "*it would have made some modules bearable, and motivated me to work harder*".

Many academics do make an effort to get to know their students. If academics tried to develop a culture of caring and high expectations, which if rooted in pedagogy and academic success can help to form a basis of validation and strength (Gay 2002).

This validation is important in this case as the academic commented that "30-40% of my students are British Muslims, and they are a steady growing majority on the courses I teach" therefore one of the aims of the academic was "to make my teaching as accessible and open as possible" this can only be done effectively if the academic has a good understanding of his British Muslim students. This was attempted by the academic but purely from a pastoral and admin support perspective. There needs to be a commitment from the Higher education institution to create a climate of fair treatment and learning (Higbee 2007).

Resources for Learning

The second part of the framework looks at the relevance of resources for learning. Are the resources identified by the academics conducive to learning? The fundamental aim of culturally responsive pedagogy is to empower ethnically diverse students through academic success, cultural affiliation and personal efficacy (Gay 2000, pg 111). The central theme as part of any curriculum is the use of the textbooks (Gay 2000, pg 112), therefore the quality of the textbooks is an important factor in student achievement with (Gay 2002) mentioning that curriculum content that is meaningful to students improves their learning.

Within this context how meaningful is the curriculum content provided to British Muslim Students? When the student was asked on the cultural responsiveness of the text books he was provided with he responded "maybe the books could have been more culturally responsive, especially since I come from a retail background". He commented that the majority of the textbooks incorporated very little ethnic minority interaction. This is backed up by Sleeter and Grant (1991b) who after having completed an analysis of 47 textbooks that spanned subjects such as social studies, mathematics, reading, languages, arts and science found that the interaction within the textbooks analysed mainly revolved around white Europeans and Americans and a few segments of mainstream society (Gay 2002).

The academic respondent did try to incorporate content from textbooks that were accessible and easy to understand. When asked if the books were culturally responsive the academic responded "The text does refer to British Muslim cases, but it is from a very neutral perspective".

The academic did however introduce culturally responsive content that was developed by him. When the academic was questioned on these elements he replied:

"When I took over the modules I teach I introduced ethnic minorities familiarity in all the case studies and lecture questions that I provided, I wanted the British Muslims in my Class to see names and scenarios that are familiar to them, through this mechanism I wanted them to feel a part of the module. I wanted them to see Asian police officers, perpetrators, and victims of crime as a cross spectrum of society."

The academic is implementing a symbolic curriculum (Kirkland 2003) on specific aspects of his module. This is good practice but needs to be embedded from a module design

level and implemented throughout the module. The academic also commented that this type of familiarity *"helps to embed integration and improve attainment"*.

To encourage this integration (Gay 2002) recommends that academics should cultivate skills that allow them to develop deep cultural analyses of textbooks and other instructional materials. This is also advocated by (Nermin Said and Katherine Richardson 2007) who in addition recommend that professional development activity should provide teachers with the training to identify and teach against whatever remaining stereotypes may exist in textbooks and curricular materials. In this process, biases and misconceptions should be surfaced and addressed in order to help advance the learning process and promote critical teacher thinking (Nermin Said and Katherine Richardson 2007)

Moral Responsibility

The third pillar of the framework is focused on the academics moral responsibility for the students, to have the commitment to act as an agent of change (Villegas & Lucas 2002). There is a need for organisations and tutors to have a moral responsibility towards the students that they teach, this is a passion which again is embedded in empathy and understanding. Teachers have the moral obligation to do all they can to fulfil these expectations and to do so for all students, not just for some (Villegas & Lucas 2002).

When the student was asked about his experiences with his module tutor he replied that the administrative structures put in place by the university were very good and robust. When probed about his relationship with his tutor and what does his tutors expect of him the student replied that he was *"not expected to fail"* these are the bare minimum expectations from any academic. The student did not seem to think of this as out of the ordinary. When the student was questioned about his expectations of his tutors he replied *"I expect them to help me achieve a high mark"*.

High expectations are a two way process which should be engrained as part of the Moral responsibility of Academics, academics should have high expectations of their students and expect them to succeed and commit themselves to making success happen (Gay 2000 pg 33)

Additionally the student said:

"There is a lack of creativity in the teaching; the tutors don't really take much responsibility above the bare minimum in our learning. We do our lectures and tutorials and that's it, after that we are on our own".

When the student was asked why this is the case the student replied *"some of my tutors had a lack of passion for the subjects they teach"*. Academics should not just limit their interactions with students to merely teaching the subject matter (Gay 2000).

The academic that was interviewed for this study did have a passion for his subject and a passion for his students. His expectations were that students *"need to give the time and put in the effort to get the high marks"*. This is a very practical expectation that encourages students to take a practical approach to their work in their reading and in their research. Teacher expectations significantly influence the quality of learning opportunities provided to students (Nieto 1999). However while this may push students to work harder the academic also acknowledges:

I am starting to learn on a regular basis that students have a huge amount of outside pressures and commitments and maybe they just can't give the time this module needs. I have tried to change my style and give them more reading to do in their own time. I recognise that my teaching needs to be adapted to support my students.

The students are caught in a vicious circle of low paid work and University studies, and for the majority of them their way out of this trap is to finish their degrees and obtain a well paid professional job. It is this that will help them to become an integrated and valued member of society.

The expectations are high and the time constraints are high. Culturally responsive teaching can help to embed this within a learning culture and help students use their own previous knowledge to help their learning.

Knowledge construction and Identity

The fourth pillar is associated with teachers assisting students to build bridges between their pre-existing knowledge and the new material they are expected to learn. To do this the teachers must understand the student and the subject matter they teach (Ana María Villegas 2002). Culturally relevant teachers utilise students' culture as a vehicle for learning (Ladson-Billings 1995).

The student as a resource has never been fully investigated and the potential merits and pitfalls not fully documented. There is scope for growth and room to embed diversity and inclusivity within the curriculum. The student as a resource should be placed at the heart of any pedagogical action for the future. To deny students access to this resource is to deny students access to the knowledge construction process (Villegas & Lucas 2002).

For the academic to become the 'bridge builders' and to allow students access to the knowledge construction process they need to be able to understand and identify with the students they teach. In essence Teachers need to build on what students do have, rather than lament about what they do not have (Nieto 1999). Students are empowered as learners when they can identify with learning and with their tutors (Nieto 1999). The student interviewed for this study felt that his tutors did not identify with him and he pointed towards a huge cultural gap between him and his tutors:

I felt that there was a barrier between me and the tutors. On the whole my tutors had better overall relationships with the white students than with the British Muslims. The academics and the white students are always 'having a laugh', you don't really see this happening with the British Muslims.

When the student was asked why he did not try to build this rapport, the student replied: "dunno I just didn't feel comfortable talking with my tutor in that way". Academics identifying with students can create a positive learning climate (Lipka 1991).

Student understanding also needs to flow through to religious obligations and observances which may require flexibility in the timetabling of lectures, exams and coursework hand-ins. The student also reported that in year 1 this flexibility existed but in year 2 this was taken away:

I used to get Fridays off this allowed me to do my Friday prayers and work most of the weekend. This was taken away in year 2 forcing me to re-negotiate my work schedule and my lectures clashed with the Friday prayers.

The student felt that not enough effort was made by the university to resolve the clash or to give a suitable explanation for the necessity of the clash. The Muslim community believes students should not have to feel awkward, humiliated, or penalized for following their religious beliefs (Elnour & Bashir-Ali, 2003).

Within all of this the role of the academic is crucial. The academic also commented that his role in bridging the gap between home and University culture is vital. The academic interviewed did take an interest in his students and tried to bridge that gap within his teaching:

I try to get students to think out of their current environments and question the world around them, so for example in one of my lectures students were discussing the case of a priest abusing a boy within his parish. I asked the students to consider what would be the consequences if this happened in a mosque or a synagogue?

Another thing I noticed when undertaking these kinds of discussion was how different ethnicities can respond to challenges in different ways. For example when discussing the ban on smacking, British Muslim students would get very angry and emotional on the topic and with the people who disagreed with them. This was down to their own bad experiences from attending madrassah's from their childhood.

The academic also commented that many British Muslims: "In my experience are to accepting of what goes around them and think on a very moderate level they need to think from a more critical perspective". The academic designs his lectures around these thinking skills. This kind of approach is supported by Mirza (2007) who advocates the use of critical consciousness for British Muslims. British Muslims need to develop a critical consciousness to engage with the world and others critically. Rather than bemoan perceived injustice, ideas have been put forward by many leading thinkers to challenge the status quo and engage in critical discourse and dialogue for a better quality of life (Mirza, Senthilkumaran et al. 2007)

Educational Strategies

The fifth pillar is the understanding of the role of organisations and the academic in developing a culturally responsive curriculum. Nieto contends that all school policies and practices, not simply pedagogy and curriculum, need to change if student learning is to be fostered. Organisations need to do more than just rely on specific strategies; Organisations need to create the conditions for learning (Nieto 1999).

Some scholars (Suleiman, 2001; Taylor & Whittaker, 2003) identify curriculum as an important element in the negative schooling experiences of minority students because a traditional curriculum does not adequately represent their history (Said & Richardson 2007). Nieto supports this concern, "Students who do not belong to the dominant group have a hard time finding themselves and their communities in the curriculum," Nieto writes. "When they see themselves, it will be through the distorted lens of the dominant group" (Nieto 1999).

When the student was asked about how his culture and religion was dealt with by the support structures he felt that the majority of the time this was not really considered

important. The examples he gave include timetabling in Ramadan putting him at a disadvantage compared to other students.

This was also commented on by the academic who commented:

"How can British Muslims deal with all the external pressures from outside the University and still be expected to get a good degree? They face an immense amount of pressure from home such as:

- *Expected to look after their parents*
- *Expected to marry young*
- *Expected to have an forced marriage and therefore forced to flee for their safety*
- *Forced to work at young age to support their parents*

These issues are not just primarily in the domain of the females, but males more and more are starting to have these problems. British Muslims have it very hard as compared to their white counterparts."

How can the University develop its educational strategies to alleviate these problems and provide academics with the skills to teach effectively and efficiently?

New strategies and practices can give students a greater ownership and a deeper relationship with their organisational institution. It can help develop critical consciousness and involves students in the construction of knowledge, building on students' personal and cultural strengths, helping students examine the curriculum from multiple perspectives, using varied assessment practices that promote learning, and making the culture of the classroom inclusive of all students (Ana María Villegas 2002).

Conclusion

Coming from a Muslim Background and having been through the education system from nursery all the way through to the end of my Masters degree I have experienced the negative effects of Cultural Mismatch. The 5 pillars are intended to be a proactive approach to bridging the gap for Muslim Students in Higher Education. While this paper was only about the challenges of Muslim students, clearly the needs of other non-dominant racial/ethnic students merit the same attention.

Having done my research and interviewed many academics and students against my Framework there is a clear defined need for a culturally responsive teaching model at U.K. Business Schools in Higher education.

While within the University of Huddersfield there are pockets of good practice a consistent approach that encompasses and underpins the pedagogy.

In general structural elements in school reform have received an inordinate amount of attention, while concerns about improving the culture, climate, and interpersonal relationships in schools have received a lower priority (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996).

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