**THROUGH THE EYES AND MIND OF REASON (AN AUDIO DOCUMENTARY)**

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**INTRODUCTION**

International students attending higher education institutions sometimes struggle to adapt to their new academic environment. Moreover, students often struggle with academic language as they master the material and conceptual frameworks of numerous graduate-level fields. This research addressed the issues of inclusion in curriculum and assessment design faced by foreign postgraduate students at Edinburgh Napier University, and suggestions are provided for making informed choices about the transformational learning of these students.

**BACKGROUND/LITERATURE REVIEW**

Students from countries other than the United Kingdom who move here often struggle to adapt to their new cultural milieu. They have diverse worldviews, cultural and language backgrounds, and learning- styles preferences when they enter the classroom (Arkoudis, 2006). In addition, their academic ability, motivation, past educational experience, and English language skills differ greatly (Kim, 2012). According to (Fry et. al., 2016), the higher education sector does not always possess an adequate academic culture that promotes teaching and learning, since overseas students struggle to adjust to the current British culture.

Consequently, varied demographic and cultural disparities, as well as variances in views, lack of understanding of the academic background of learners, age, race, learning expectations, and communication traditions, might influence the process of designing an inclusive curriculum and assessment (Helmi et. al., 2018b)

To promote successful teaching and learning for all students considering the rising worldwide variety of student demographics, it is crucial for instructors to comprehend students' obstacles.

**AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

**AIMS**

To show how group of international post graduate students differ in their learning experiences and challenges about inclusion and assessment design

**Objectives**

The research objective is to develop an understanding of how to improve the curriculum and assessment design based on the concepts of complete student learning experience

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

* Tell us about yourself.
* Tell us about your background.
* Would you tell us why you came to study here?
* What do you think of when you hear the word "learning"?
* Would you say that your programme of study is focussed on you?
* With the way your course is designed, do you think international students were put into consideration?
* Do you have a good time at school?  How? (Do you have quality engagement with your lecturer and the course?
* In what ways is your assessment design up to standard/suitable?
* What are the things you will like your lecturer to know about your previous learning experiences that will help you in your present study?
* What would you need your lecturer to know about you before your first class?

**Method**

Students were interviewed utilising the qualitative research method (Saunders et. al., 2019) to acquire the data.

To accomplish the project's objectives, semi-structured interviews were used. Semi-structured interviews are talks in which the interviewer asks the interviewee questions to elicit information (Saunders et. al., 2019). This technique was selected because understanding the issues associated with learning experiences about inclusiveness and assessment design requires the expression of profound insights that can only be gained via interviews.

 Ethical considerations were considered throughout the study process to protect anonymity, secrecy, power, and authority.

Therefore, the study has maintained very open communication based on informed permission from all participants and guaranteed that individuals were involved as volunteers with the right to withdraw at any time.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In terms of what the students would like their tutors to know about their previous learning experiences that can help them develop in their present study, the respondents state that our current tutors would be aware of previous teaching style, Previous teaching style is sage on stage approach, they expect that their tutors should/would be aware of the educational systems in their previous country of study (undergraduate). For example, majority of students interviewed have background in education systems that promote a passive form learning where engagement is not encouraged given that the style of delivery is a one-way teaching approach (sage on stage).

Regarding engagement with the tutors and the modules, the respondents generally agreed that they engaged with the sessions but sometimes struggled because the tutors expected a higher level of understanding in the subject areas. Students engaged but with limited understanding of subject areas for example while students did engage, their limited understanding of subject areas often meant that they felt their engagement was superficial and or they felt that they had to work much harder than home students to ensure engagement.

About assessment quality, the respondents felt that the assessments (course work) did not provide the best opportunities to showcase their potentials and possibly encourage the employment of ghost writers.

The students felt the curriculum was not inclusive given that examples did not reflect their background. More so, students acknowledged that their tutors did not find case studies from the students relevant to the western examples.

The students feel that the University is more concerned about students experience and performance within the programmes and classroom not necessarily their wellbeing outside the teaching environment.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Curriculum design should include international context in terms of general students’ population. For example, in the global hospitality management course, strategic leadership and project management courses, the post graduate students are majorly from Africa and Asia

 Assessments should be more flexible with an opportunity for choice. This will allow different methods of assessment to cater for individual student differences whilst discouraging cheating. Assessments like Portfolios, oral presentation, and or/essays

Pre-entry meetings between incoming students and the teaching team should be organised so that lecturers and module leaders will get the chance to know their students and help them in their learning experiences.

English comprehension with writing skills module should be introduced as a compulsory credit bearing or an optional credit bearing foundational course to programmes. This will give the students an opportunity to have an idea of what the course entails. It will also save them money if they don’t do very well, and they still get a certificate from it. It will replace the need for IELTs or generic English exam since some students pass this exam and still struggle with the comprehension of the course.

The university of the programme should establish or support the establishment of multicultural study groups to promote and develop the educational background of the international students. Students from different cultures studying different but similar courses can be grouped together to study as it encourages open discussion and learning from each other for example business management and project management courses.

Module leaders should know more about cultural and social background of their students to help them in their learning. This can be achieved by asking the students to talk about how their cultural and socio-cultural background impact on their course and vice versa.

Some students expressed a wish that their teachers cared about the student’s own preferences regarding modes of content delivery. This could be in the form of already having a variety of modes (following Universal Design for Learning principles) and/or as part of teachers and students getting to know each other.

**LIMITATIONS**

The findings and recommendations of this study should be considered alongside its limitations:

 Personal challenges**,** on reflection, I presumed that my questions were very clear to understand and that they would easily encourage participants to speak freely. However, it was interesting that prompts like “tell us about your background” were met with some confusion and resistance. After I explained what it was, I was looking for from the participants, eventually they were forthcoming. However, this shows that the interview process - especially when participants are aware that they are being recorded - is not necessarily an easy one.

Some students were not able to have a dialogue because they do not want to be recorded and do not want to sign a consent from with their details but in some cases are willing to have a dialogue without those. However, in this latter case, it was only on condition of payment which was not part of this project which presents an opportunity for a (funded compensating) continuation for this project.

Some respondents requested that parts from their dialogue be off record, one example of how this could be achieved would be for the researcher to interpret an unrecorded dialogue and then represent that in a paraphrased version from the perspective of a fictionalised case study voice, However to get accurate off the record information, this process should be continued in student acceptance terms for example, conversations without record but ethically request they confirm if the writing is the correct representation of their story.

**CONCLUSION**

This project was quite enlightening and challenging because it made me realise how a lot of students would like to have someone ask them about their experience here and how much they had to say about their story of the good and the not so good. Overall, we obtained valuable insights from students which informed the recommendations and limitations and what is quite surprising  is discovering that students feel the institution is not concerned about their well-being outside academics and majority of students are not too comfortable having their conversations recorded and would prefer notes taking instead because they feel safe with that “This confirms my belief that safe places are very important to all human beings” Beyond this report, future work on this project may include the option of creating resource  through open conversations with students with the possibility of no recording.

References

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