


Chapter 6

An Exploration of Teaching Diverse Students in a Higher Education Context in the UK: A Case Study of a University in London

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ABSTRACT

The present study analyses and presents insights and practices implemented at The University of Sunderland in London for embedding race equality in the institution. The research makes use of semi-structured interviews held with students of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) heritage, BAME members of staff, and other BAME individuals involved at any stage with the university. Seven main themes have emerged in the present research: Curriculum, covid, diversity, personal sphere, institution, belonging, and technology. Considering these seven themes, some important recommendations can be drawn for higher education institutions in the UK for improving the diversity of students and staff and enriching the academic experience in toto.

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INTRODUCTION

The benefits of racially diverse universities and classrooms are well-documented (Borg, 2001; Tsuo, 2015). Diversity among students in education has a direct impact on their achievement and performance. Working in a diverse environment enables students to work better and achieve greater outcomes as they concentrate and push themselves further when they work and interact with people of other backgrounds. Diversity in education, particularly on university campuses, has been shown to improve students' academic skills (e.g., critical thinking, problem-solving, and writing), intellectual engagement, citizenship, self-motivation, and cultural engagement for students of all races (Tsu, 2015). In addition, diversity in education has been indicated to promote students' creativity, as well as better education, as those with differing viewpoints are able to collaboratively create solutions (Borg, 2001). Despite all these well-established benefits, the education system privileges and disadvantages certain racial and ethnic minority groups, i.e., students of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) heritage, in the UK. This is shown in attainment gaps across specific racial and ethnic groups, experiences of racism among students and staff, and disproportionate rates of exclusion (Show Racism the Red Card, 2020; Swiszcowski, 2022).

Schools and universities must have policy frameworks and strategic equality that are reflexive and subject to regular evaluation and review, which is a legal requirement under the Equality Act 2010 (Hancock, 2007). This enables educational institutions to foster educational systems, institutions, and environments that promote race equality. These legal requirements play a significant role in how schools operate and should therefore ensure that race equality is embedded and normalized within them and how they can address the experiences of ethnic minority students. (Alexander, Weekes-Bernard and Arday, 2015). However, racial inequalities are still reported as a significant issue within higher education (Advance HE, 2022; Wong et al., 2021).

UK higher education can only reach its full potential when individuals from all ethnic backgrounds can benefit equally from the opportunities it offers and it can benefit from the talents of the whole population (Advance HE, 2022). Across UK higher education, concerns are reported about differential degree outcomes, also known as attainment gap or the ethnicity awarding, which refers to the difference in the proportion of White and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students awarded a 'good' degree (a first or upper-second class degree classification) (Wong et al., 2021). This degree outcome difference varies significantly within minority ethnic groups (BAME), with the largest gap between White and Black Other students, at 28.3% (Office for Students, 2018). This gap is often attributed to microaggression, unconscious bias, and inadequate attention to access, support, and wellbeing for minority ethnic students (Botticello and West, 2021).

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