

We've heard you – now let's listen :A listening rooms analysis of the experiences of black and ethnically minoritized students.

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Introduction

Students' experiences at university largely affect their attainment, BAME students have been shown to have a 13.2% awarding gap, with Black students in particular presenting the highest awarding gap of 17% even when all previous factors are accounted for (Universities UK, National Union of Students, 2019). This means that ethnically marginalised students are less likely to achieve a 1:1 at university than white students. This is only the surface of inequalities faced, different lived experiences shows the divide, these experiences also affecting how well they perform at university (Miller, 2016).

Aims and Objectives

- To listen to ethnically minoritized students' experiences at university
- To better understand uniqueness of experiences between ethnically minoritized students and white students, and how they may need different approaches
- To produce recommendations based upon the main themes that have emerged

Methodology

The listening rooms approach was used in order to allow participants to freely discuss their experiences (Parkin and Heron, 2019). Two students, preferably friends, sit down and talk, using 6 prompts, about what they've experienced, the positives, negatives and anything they'd hoped to see change at the university. After collecting the data over various listening rooms, data analysis using the Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis approach was conducted. The final thematic map can be seen under results.

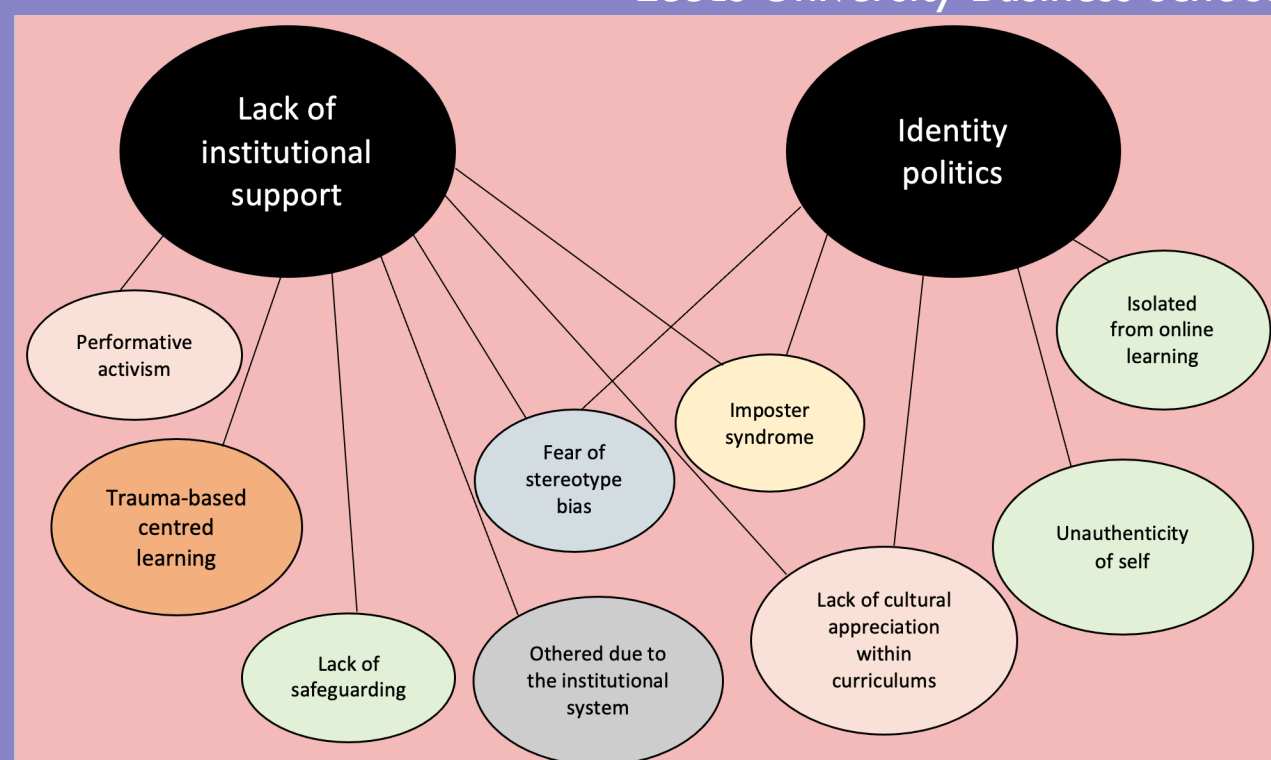


Figure 2: Thematic map showcasing the themes presented of significance though they had to codeswitch and switch parts of their cultural identity in order to fit in.

Imposter syndrome

Imposter syndrome, a belief of feeling doubtful or undeserving of achievements and feeling displaced where one is, was described throughout the studies (Abari and Roberts, 2019). An absence of Black lecturers that can explore topics centered around Black history and trauma had produced the feeling of "Imposter Syndrome", meaning students felt they did not belong despite achieving the same requirements as everyone else to enter university. They mentioned feeling targeted to speak when certain topics were explored.

Lack of cultural appreciation within curricula

Having a lack of modules within schools exploring Black history within different topics had caused a feeling of lack of cultural appreciation within curricula.

Not having sufficient amounts of culture and history within curricula causes students to not grow in terms of their cultural identity, stunting their growth in some areas of their lives therefore having a negative effect on them. As per the fear of stereotype bias point, students also became uncomfortable speaking about this history and identity.

Unauthenticity of self

Participants brought up feeling unauthentic as they felt as though, with no one around that was similar to them, they had to change their tone, language, personality, taste in music, and ethnic side in order to fit in. They felt the need to do this not just with students, but additionally with staff.

Isolated from online learning

Students mentioned they felt most in their element and authentic when they were in the classroom, engaging with others around them, being able to see others. Switching to online caused them to feel isolated, unable to feel comfortable and feeling as though lecturers did not care if they were engaging or learning.

Main conclusions and recommendations

Our main conclusions that can be seen are that, firstly, although some students felt adequately supported by their personal tutor and pastoral care and university in general, a number of students felt less supported by the university and more reluctant to reach out to access support, and secondly, that whilst a portion of students felt themselves unapologetically, a majority do not feel as though they can be their authentic self in most university situations, on the other hand a few of the same students who did not feel like their authentic self mentioned feelings of belonging when put in positions of power as they felt as though they can be heard. Therefore, our main recommendations are:

- Increase number of Black and ethnic staff in the university, especially lecturers and those holding higher positions
- University to continue the work that's already been done with the career centre but additionally host targeted open days, career fairs, and events for personal development for ethnically minoritized students
- Making emotional support available and known before specific sections and topics in curriculum are approached, additionally reducing graphic photos
- Increasing number of staff working only in support (personal tutors, pastoral care, support services, etc.)
- Increasing number of modules related to Black history in schools as options, specifically in Psychology, Sociology, and English
- Bring nationals and internationals together with non-specified events and less international targeting and labelling
- Once safe enough, to switch completely to face-to-face in order to reduce tagging/targeting and bring students comfort



Figure 1: A wordle of the most significant words and phrases participants have used

Results

The thematic map shown in fig.2 visually illustrates the main themes found in the research. There are two, main overarching themes, lack of institutional support and identity politics. The subthemes are used to explain how they are related and linked to the theme and the significance of this subtheme.

Performative activism

Students communicated on multiple occasions that they felt as though the steps and measures usually taken by the university had come off as performative activism due to issues not being addressed and no long-term action plans put in place.

Trauma based/centred learning (Lack of safeguarding)

The trauma they had to revisit on their courses when it came to Black history caused a negative impact on students' mental health and studies due to not wanting to explore the topic, making them feel as though lecturers desensitised and disregarded the history.

Othered due to the institutional system

Not properly advertising opportunities that may support students as well as having rigid rules and regulations causing extreme difficulties to disabled and BAME students causes a sense of otherness within the institution.

Students also mentioned feeling unable to reach out to pastoral care and personal tutors as they felt as though they could not relate to them or they had too much work on their plate. They wanted the university to hire more Black staff that solely have those responsibilities.

Fear of stereotype bias

The University not providing enough housing support to international and mature students that encounter racial discrimination when renting reinforces stereotype bias as they do not have references, aid, recommendations, and have to continuously deal with racial abuse within the market. Additionally racially motivated rejections in the job market causes students to be less inclined to apply to jobs and fearful of stereotype bias.

Students mentioned moving away from their cultural identity in order to relate to and fit in with others at university, this included not speaking about culture in essays. Therefore, students felt as