Introduction

Contemporary British culture cannot help but be inflected by its Empire-building past in ways which are both explicit acknowledgements of that history but also attempt to negate those aspects which contribute to a formulation of British national identity. Like many countries in Europe, Britain is experiencing a high level of short-term immigration from countries within the expanded EU and increased economic; and political freedom to travel globally, with the rising middle-classes of many developing countries, has meant that the British Higher Education system has seen record rises in International students across the board since 2003. This has been particularly evident in terms of China, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ghana, Estonia, Poland, Greece, Turkey and Russia and has brought its own set of issues which UK universities have had to address. Simultaneously, the number of Home students within the UK has increased as a result of both an increase in 18 year olds on the market because of raised birth-rates in the 1980s and a government policy of limited success ‘Widening Participation’, which aims to have 50% of all 18 year olds in higher education by 2010. In addition to this, UK universities and their students have seen the introduction of fees since 2004/5 in English and Welsh universities whilst the Scottish institutions have returned to a grants system and rejected the charging of fees to students. When fees were initially introduced, they stood at £1000 per annum for Home/EU students and £7-8000 for Overseas (i.e. non-EU international) students whilst the ever-increasing average now stands at £3000 for Home/EU and £9-10,000 for Overseas students per year. There is an ongoing debate whether these fees will be raised further. As such, and with the cost of living in the UK being commensurate with Japan (i.e. quite expensive when compared globally), the rise in international students at UK universities is a real marker of the desire of students from some countries, when they see the expense as an investment they know they will benefit from, to study in the UK irrespective of other possibilities open to them.

Another marker of the esteem in which studying in the UK is held can be seen in terms of the dirty underbelly of the HE industry, the fraudulent entry ‘agents’ who fake qualifications and identities for people who want to become what, at Leicester, we call ‘ghost’ students, people who are, in fact, illegal immigrants. About four or five years ago, there was a specific problem with Chinese ‘students’ in these regards and record numbers were deported back to the republic, or at least an attempt to do so was made but many had disappeared into illegal work. Three years ago, a group of illegal Chinese workers, most of whom had entered on fake student visas, were killed in an horrific accident as they picked cockles on the north-west coast of England and to date, even some genuine international students from specific countries (China, India, Pakistan and Nigeria) are frequently required to leave their passports in the care of the Home Office to prevent them from disappearing. The most recent example of fraudulent entry (at Liverpool John Moores University in April 2009) has also highlighted the risk of ‘ghost’ students who are linked to terrorist activities (real or
imagined). As Melanie Newman wrote in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* on the 9th April, in a rather more measured report than was featured elsewhere in the British press:

A student at Liverpool John Moores University has been arrested on suspicion of terror offences. He was one of 12 men arrested in the North West of England on 8 April under the auspices of the Terrorism Act 2006. Several of the men are believed to be Pakistani nationals. As many as ten of the suspects are reported to have been in the UK on student visas, although this has not been confirmed by police [...] It is not known whether the Liverpool John Moores student is studying for a postgraduate or undergraduate qualification.

Anthony Glees, director of the Centre for Security and Intelligence Studies at the University of Buckingham, said: "This again raises [the] question of whether our universities are taking the severe security threat to this country seriously. Academics think it has gone away now that there is a new US President, but that clearly isn’t the case.” He added: "I would be interested to see whether [Liverpool John Moores] and any other universities [that may be] involved had submitted the names of these students to the Foreign Office vetting service. Most universities did not want to use this system as they thought it would deter applications from overseas.”

The Academic Technology Approval Scheme (Atas) to vet postgraduate applicants from outside the European Economic Area and Switzerland has been operational since November 2007 [...] Last November, MI5 and MI6 revealed that Atas had intercepted up to 100 potential terrorists posing as postgraduate students. A Foreign Office spokesman was quoted as saying that the applicants had been denied clearance to study in the UK under powers "to stop the spread of knowledge and skills that could be used in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery". He added: "Here is empirical evidence of a problem with postgraduate students becoming weapons proliferators." At about the same time, MI5 issued a warning to the Foreign Office that the al-Qaeda terrorist group was attempting to recruit scientists and university students with access to laboratories.

These fears remain and the admissions process has become, for many universities, a poisoned chalice which must be carefully tested before potential international students are offered places. As such, whilst the history of empire has aided in the recruitment of international students, so too has it alienated and helped to create a radicalised proportion of international students for whom UK institutions, including universities, are the targets for destruction. This perception is itself weighed down by post-colonialist guilt in the UK and the tension between most academics’ liberal leanings and a largely conservative society’s failure to recognise that its own institutional racism, on all levels, has done nothing to assuage the fears of the Other (that which is ‘other’ is not ‘us’, to paraphrase Julia Kristeva’s *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. 1994), from wherever s/he comes. The same phenomenon can be witnessed in most Western nations with an imperial history (*de jure* or *de facto*).

This paper discusses both the context of growing numbers of international students coming to study in the UK but also the way in which the university curricula have responded to this within a context of post-colonialist engagement with the other. The paper also seeks to
outline the perception, by both staff and students, of the impact of Britain’s imperial past on
teaching in UK universities and draws on research and practice over the last 20 years on
intercultural communication, including a national pilot study survey conducted especially for
this paper (and which shall be developed for further research on the topic to be presented
at Beppu University in May 2010 at the Japanese Society of Western History conference).
Firstly, however, the key focus of the paper is to establish the theoretical and actual
contexts of the issues which face UK higher education and its international students and to
set up why it is that post-colonial guilt and prejudices still inflect how international students
are taught and processed by universities in Britain. I shall then present the findings of the
study and analyse the implications of the survey.

Part 1: Contexts

What is the reason why so many students want to come to the UK from abroad? It is not
simple but it is a combination of six things:

1) The historically based status of the UK as a world-player
2) The UK as a bridge between other countries (past colonies, including the US)
3) The allure of the Oxbridge idea of university
4) The development of English has a lingua-franca (especially Panglish)
5) The fact that UK qualifications are internationally recognised in many countries
   making international work possible in the future
6) The UK as more open to people from other cultures

None of these elements are absolutes, but all are based upon how the UK is perceived by
others and not how the UK perceives itself, which is far more problematic and I shall discuss
it later in terms of British national identity and post-colonial guilt. However, if we look
behind all six aspects, there is a key factor behind them and that is the effect that Britain as
an Imperial power has had upon how ‘globalised’ culture is manifested. When we define
globalisation we typically determine it within a set of very American ideas and brands (Coca-
Cola, McDonalds) and it is true that the way in which we recognise what globalised culture
looks like is through these images but the mechanisms of globalisations, the way in which it
happens is a combination of British history and ideologies and American mass marketing, all
of it in English. As Scollon and Wong Scollon observed in 1995:

[N]ot only in contemporary Asian society, but worldwide as well, a very large
segment of day-to-day professional communication takes place in the international
language, English [and a] result, the use of English carries with it an almost
inevitable load of inter-discourse or intercultural communication.

(Scollon and Wong Scollon (1995): 4)

The British Empire may have controlled a third of the globe but once America controlled
mass communications, since 1914 (even if it had not invented all the technology), it
controlled how the world spoke; and the spoken English which has spread quickest has been
the English of Hollywood, not the formal English of the British empire. Countries in the mid-
twentieth century which held out against American technological development found
themselves in a communications bubble out of which it was difficult to break: and since the
1960s, we all know that great technological developments have been made because of Japanese innovation and we would not have the mass communications world in which we exist today without companies like Sony or Toshiba and much of urban Asia is ahead in terms of speeds for broadband, quality of digital technologies and sheer blue-sky thinking by comparison with Europe and the US. Yet the impact of these systems has been largely because of the processes of Empire: in this case the American cultural empire which makes so many shopping malls recognisable the world over. However, the access point for much American culture into other countries has been via the presence of English being used not because of, most of the time but not always, American presence but because of the legacy of the British empire in education, political systems and, to a lesser extent, religious ideology. The formal English written into former British colonies laid the groundwork for a different form of cultural colonisation in language. In India, for example, the spoken languages of the cities are an intercultural combination of the varying Indian languages, especially Hindi, the official language, Urdu and Gujurati alongside the English which is taught in schools (British English) and the English which is heard through mass communications (American English). Would *Slumdog Millionaire* have won global distribution if it had been purely a Bollywood film? Was the fact it was a UK financed film, US distributed movie rather more important? Indeed would *Slumdog Millionaire* have been possible without format television (a US idea) and the Indian diaspora (in the UK and US, particularly)? No. Despite being a story ostensibly about an Indian boy and Indian television, the film exists because of a nexus of post-colonial relationships between India and the UK and the UK and US: if the British Empire had not existed, this film would never have been imagined. But there is a sour flavour in the coverage of *Slumdog Millionaire* that can be said to truly exemplify post-colonial concerns and guilt, however inaccurately believed, and tinged the way in which British audiences are engaging with the film: that any UK production company making a film which is representing another country, which ships in a UK-Asian lead actor (Dev Patel), and which uses children from the location, is ultimately exploitative – and this exploitation process reveals the ‘real’ ideology behind making such a film in the first place: India not as co-producer but as a co-operating in a power-less relationship. The *LA Times* critic, Mark Magnier, wrote, for example, that:

> Even as American audiences gush over *Slumdog Millionaire*, some Indians are groaning over what they see as yet another stereotypical foreign depiction of their nation, accentuating squalor, corruption and resilient-if-impoverished natives. […] “It’s a white man’s imagined India,” said Shyamal Sengupta, a film professor at the Whistling Woods International Institute in Mumbai. “It’s not quite snake charmers, but it’s close. It’s a poverty tour”.


If this concern about the film is true, and I shall leave it as a matter of debate for those others who have seen the movie, then it is reflecting an orientalism in intercultural relationships which affects how people produce and respond to texts which ostensibly aim to engage with other cultures in a contemporary context. In other words, in the attempt to disavow the prejudices of the past, created by racism and perpetuated by empires in their dealings with the Other, when one culture engages with another those institutionalised issues (albeit often couched in a different linguistic framework) still emerge. The film
industry offers society one very visual way in which this is articulated and the divide between the concept of first and third world provides further economic bases from which these thorny vines can weevil their ways into ideology: but it is in education that these issues are more evident than ever and more dangerous and debates around international students in the UK and teaching international issues, even within a society which attempts to be multicultural, do manifest complex historical and institutional prejudices which must be overcome.

The ‘Problem’ With…

Before I go any further I want to state something very clearly: there is a difference between racism and xenophobia, and prejudice, when the political context has changed. Very few academics or students would describe themselves as being racist or xenophobic towards their colleagues or students from other countries; and as the UK government has debated immigration issues in recent years in the UK, the language has not been one of racism: but there is an uncomfortable sub-text in the terms of reference being used in trying to solve ‘problems’ in the entirety of the UK education system... the ‘problem’ of language; the ‘problem’ of people who do not want to culturally integrate; the ‘problem’ of cultures which end up being described as ‘black’, ‘asian’, ‘eastern european’ or ‘moslem’ without any real understanding of what these categories mean: and as Foucault noted in his *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (1978), once you have categorised people, you have placed them within a system of control. If this argument, which was fundamentally about how people who have ‘abnormal’ sexualities, is extended into an engagement with the Other more broadly, what is reflected is the Orientalism and Occidentalism of 19th Century European Imperial cultures; the language of which Foucault uses himself throughout the three books of the *History to articulate sexual codifications as part of patriarchal ideologies. As such when people are now codified as belonging to another culture, irrespective of race and religion, the way in which their otherness is debated is still within a frame of abjection and thus, whilst there may not be a dialogue in racial or xenophobic terms, there is still one which is shaped by prejudices. Even when a society says “we are multi-cultural” or “we are cosmopolitan” that very statement implied positions outside and separate but equal concepts existing within.

Education is no exception. Current figures published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency and the BBC state that there are 240,000 Non-European Union students studying in the UK and around 112, 150 EU students in the UK. The knock-on effects for universities, the UK central and local government systems are seen in terms of Non-EU VISA requirements, Language requirements (UK universities use three language qualifications, IELTS, TOEFL and the University of Cambridge ESOL), raised translation needs (reflected in the rise in general immigration to the UK since 2004 and the rise for the NHS of 50% in translation requirements), more time needed for assessment (some universities permit non-British students extra time for examinations but work always takes longer to mark) and debates about academic quality. This latter point is something of a sore point in UK academia and a quick survey of articles and discussion online reveals that there are many different views about the extent to which some academics feel they ‘dumb down’ in the current educational environment. This variation may be partly a reflection of the fact that in the current UK market, if all the international, higher fee paying students were to depart, the university system would collapse into a pit of debt. There are also other issues which
lecturers will be baring in mind: not least of which the fact that UK lecturers are not taught how to teach students from other cultures who speak in other languages and much of what has been experienced since 2004 (when fees came in, opening the market to a wider student population) has been the result of trial and error and needing to learn all those complexities of intercultural communication. I am sure the majority of academics are in a similar position: we learn how to teach our own culture’s students and then we almost have to re-learn or develop a new set of skills to teach those who are labelled as Other. The extent to which we are successful with this largely depends upon our individual cultural sensitivities: and we must never forget that students also experience problems from their perspective. Too often education can feel one-sided, especially in academic cultures where the non-interactive lecture is paramount; but if some of the linguistic prejudices held between students and staff are to be overcome, there must be a better recognition of education as a dialogue between minds.

If we can accept the concept of the dialogue, then it becomes easier to overcome the ‘problem’ of language: and to negate one of the key post-colonial prejudices which manifest in any former Empire. Post-colonial guilt means we are protective of and careful with our criticisms of language because we recognise it as part of the machinery of empire. If we understand a little better the schisms that develop between the language as taught and the language as spoken and that, for many people, the form of English known as Panglish is linguistically more comprehensible between those who speak it, then we should also be able to lose grasp of English as the property of the English and thus shed English post-colonial guilt about this matter.

When it comes to addressing the ‘problem’ of integration in UK higher education, the issue is actually far more complex. As the numbers of overseas (non-EU) students have risen in UK universities (now making up 43% of the post-graduate and 14% of the undergraduate figures according to HESA, rising by 6% since 2003-4) and EU student numbers have risen by 3% since 2003-4, so too has there been a fall in the number of Home students taking postgraduate courses by 3%. This many not seem like much of a difference but it is leading to a concern within academia about, especially, postgraduate taught programmes which are dominated by students from one or two specific markets. Culturally, this makes it harder for international students to integrate with the British students (and coincides with students making little progress with their speaking abilities) and to fully experience their period of study as an immersive experience. For over twenty years, students have travelled around Europe on the Erasmus scheme and are expected to live predominantly within that language for their period of study. For modern languages students this has become an important part of their degree programmes. The philosophy was about the immersive quality of international study being essential to the personal and academic growth of the student. For international students in the UK, the problem of integration (and the lack thereof) has an impact upon their academic studies because whilst their writing skills develop, typically, their listening and speaking skills do not grow significantly. This issue is not something which can be easily rectified but it is something which universities can address systematically. For example, whilst a degree programme may be dominated by, for example, and quite typically, Chinese or Indian students, students should not be placed in a Halls of Residence or flat with a majority one language group. In the 1990s, at the University of Exeter, this policy ensured a good level of integration and intercultural communication and whilst there
were social groups to help students feel something of their home cultures, there were not
the academic problems being experienced in UK universities today.

Integration is something of a dirty word when discussing issues of short and long-term
integration. The US has for decades embraced the concept, if not the reality, of ‘the melting
pot’. The philosophy being that all the different cultures which contribute to the population
of the US, combine together equally, more or less, to create ‘the American identity’. Clearly,
this concept, a kind of pre-globalisation idea which is, we could say, proto-Imperial (in that it
is an imposed idea), is idealistic but it is also un-workable. Immigration from one country to
another does not mean the abandonment of one culture for another but the adoption of
one alongside another identity. This adoption process permits a space for multiculturalism.
Multiculturalism does not mean separate but equal, as Malcolm X’s Black Panthers
demanded in the 1960s, but what is does say is that what is central to identity is the
permission to be involved with both cultures and to be able to voice one’s complex
interactions with each. In recent years, film-makers (such as Gurinder Chadha) and cultural
commentators (for example Trevor Phillips, the head of the UK Commission for Equalities and
Human Rights) in the UK have commented widely on the tension between identities and
what it means to be between cultures. This is a sensibility which is specific to cultures with
post-colonial issues to work through: second or third generation members of diaspora live in
a position of ‘between-ness’ which could only have arisen through the choice of their
parents or grandparents to come to the UK and become part of society. This identity crisis is
one of the key elements which has been argued as being behind the radicalisation of some
second and third generation South-East Asians (especially from Pakistan) and two things
seen in contemporary British culture: greater separation and less integration (both
informally and formally, through the growth of faith schools). That identity crisis, however,
is not part of the average international student’s experience, although they may, when in
the UK for a longer period, experience cultural confusion and noticeable behavioural
modification (in dress, etiquette or diet, for example).

If the ‘problem’ of integration could be solved, systematically and informally, both
international and British students would benefit but until the walls of ignorance are broken
down British students will continue to vote not to do postgraduate taught courses which are
dominated by overseas students. Part of the reason why many UK students do not want to
study alongside international students is the perception and sometime reality, of language
issues meaning that classes cannot progress as a speed appropriate for the UK students.
Linguistically, teaching OS students needs to be simplified, even when the content is not
‘dumbed down’ as some believe; and UK students tend to be unsympathetic to international
students who have an effect on their own learning. This is a prejudice on one level because
it typically comes from an un-founded believe; but which more and more international
students coming into undergraduate studies, it is a prejudice which persists and serves to
emphasise the othering of the overseas students.

A Square Peg in a Round Hole: Labelling the Other

Finally, in this part of the paper, I want to discuss the ‘problem’ of labels, or categorising. In
every university system students of different types are given labels: in the case of UK, as you
may have realised from above, these labels are Home, EU and Overseas. However, because
the UK postgraduate system is now dominated by specific markets outside the UK, further labels arise, Chinese, Indian and African. On the surface, these appear to be mere geographical descriptors, if a little vague in their scope. The problem occurs, however, when it is recognised that these terms are categories into which the following cultural prejudices/concepts and expectations can fall and, ultimately, affect the students’ education (all of which are the result of imperial history and failure to understand cultural differences, rightly or wrongly):

**Chinese**
- Orientalist ideas: passive women; well educated; very poor spoken English; will not get involved in discussions; more likely to plagiarise; very short; middle-class; emotionally cold; politically sensitive (i.e. do not be critical of the republic); enigmatic.

**Indian**
- Orientalist ideas: passive women; well educated; good spoken English; romantics; affected by caste system ideas; technically minded; artistic; musical.

**African**
- ‘Third world’ ideas: poorly educated; little technological experience; domineering men; decent spoken English; peasants; hot-headed and impassioned; booming voices.

Of course, these are only a few examples which represent prejudices which are beaten down and challenged every day but we do see programmes being designed along the lines of “what are my students going to be like”. This might seem like a normal process for many of academics to engage with when designing curricula but if we re-examine the list, this is potentially a huge problem and as any of us who have been teaching for long enough know, the best thing you can ever do in teaching is to abandon expectations and teach based only upon what you know the students know and what they will respond to. Good teaching is always about adapting your content to each cohort you teach and not about changing what a programme **fundamentally** is based upon a prejudice. However, if you genuinely know something about a cohort’s broad identity (for example, that they are 99% Chinese) and how that will affect their interrogation of texts, then making adaptations is not just desirable but beneficial as long as it is not to the detriment of the achievement of a programme’s learning outcomes. For example, the number of non-Chinese films seen by students in China is very low by comparison with many other countries and so films we may use in teaching may be entirely novel on many levels (censorship being one important issue). Cultural sensitivity is the key aspect for curriculum development in this context. Equally, we should not adapt curriculum too much for our international students to the extent that they might as well be studying this content in their own country. That defeats the point of travelling abroad to study and removes the student’s added employability factors in terms of their careers (for which many postgraduates are already mid-career).

Consequently, if we want to resolve the ‘problem’ of labels we must abandon what our colonial cultural **histories** tell us in favour of a post-colonialist embrace with the contemporary and political realities.

So, to conclude this outline of the theoretical and contextual backdrop to the matter of how we teach from within a post-colonialist position and how the international students themselves raise specific sets of issues which must be addressed from a mature recognition
of what post-colonialist guilt can mean within UK higher education. All teaching exists within history and culture: this is the reason why students want to study in the UK and the reason why the UK wants to teaching students from other countries. Yet students study amidst a tension between orientalist concepts and social dejection which deprives them of a complete immersion in teaching which is a shame when UK teaching should be at its peak in embracing and challenging the ideologies of Empire. The reason for this is because higher education, an industry, one could say jokingly, filled with people who think too much, finds it difficult to go beyond the post-colonial and, in doing so, seem only to re-iterate the very problems they are trying to solve. In the second part of this paper, I shall report on the findings of the national pilot study survey undertaken across UK universities’ students and staff and look at some specific examples of how UK academic is seeking to go beyond the post-colonial and to shatter the remaining embers of Empire.

Part Two: Perceptions

Methodology

It would not be correct for me to argue that this survey was comprehensive in that the percentage of return was lower than anticipated. It is partly for this reason that the study is in the process of being developed further for a wider return. However, the different academics and students who responded from around the UK represent a good spread of universities from different parts of the UK with different specific issues which are of interest in examining the impact of post-colonialism on curriculum and teaching. There are 133 higher education institutions in the UK and 100 academics from 100 universities were emailed a questionnaire for them to complete and asked to forward on the student questionnaire to two of their own students, ideally one a home student and one an international student. The universities chosen were selected from the list of universities on the Universities UK website (which is the body which represents UK HE as a whole) and individuals were identified based upon a) if they were known to the researcher (and therefore more likely to respond) and b) the subject area in which they taught (with an explicit desire to gain information from varying disciplines). The survey was sent out during March, April and May 2009 and had been assessed in line with the University of Leicester’s ethics procedures. Results were obtained from staff and students in the South, the North, the Midlands, London and Wales. It was also useful to note that the results which were returned came from institutions operating at a variety of levels on the various university league tables: from the top 15 to the bottom 15 universities.

Further to asking basic information (regarding age, gender, discipline and location), the following key questions were asked of academic staff:

- Number of UG modules taught:
- Number of PG modules taught:
- Number of PhD students:
- Do you teach anything which may be described as a history of your subject?
- Do you teach anything which is concerned with ideology in your subject?
- How many of your students, percentage-wise, would you say are international?
- How many of these students come from countries with whom the UK has historical connections?
Do you believe you have ever made curriculum choices based upon the specific cohort of students you are about to teach?

On what bases have you made these curriculum choices? If you wish to identify more than one occasion, please do so indicating what kind of group you were to teach (e.g. M Level, 90% international or Level 1, 50/50 UK(&EU)/OS).

Have you changed how you teach and not just what you teach in response to specific cohort considerations?

What changes did you make and why. If you wish to identify more than one occasion, please do so indicating what kind of group you were to teach (e.g. M Level, 90% international or Level 1, 50/50 UK(&EU)/OS).

In general, do you believe that Britain’s imperial past impacts upon curricula in HE? Why do you believe this?

Please tick (or place in bold) any of the below that apply to your assessment of how post-colonialism impacts upon UK HEIs (these are a mixture of positive, negative and neutral impacts):

- Student profiles (countries of origin)
- Greater language problems
- Political sensitivity in HEIs
- Diversity of ideologies in discussions
- Multi-culturalism in HEIs
- More international teaching staff
- Assessment methods
- Positive Discrimination
- Teaching content
- Wider opportunities for Study Abroad
- Simplification of content
- Higher competition for places on degrees
- Cosmopolitanism
- Saturation of PG programmes by OS students

Lastly, do you agree with this statement: UK HEIs are too reliant on OS students and it is impacting upon teaching and curriculum?

If so, why; if not, why not?

These questions were selected and developed upon the grounds of wanting to gain open but guided responses from colleagues and the question regarding the individual’s assessment of the influence of post-colonialism on UK HEIs was designed to enable staff to say negative things but within a rational context if they felt generally negative. For example, “simplification of content” is a less judgemental and loaded term than “dumbed down”. Staff responses came from 80% men and 20% women, from universities in England and Wales (sadly there were no respondents from Scotland or Northern Ireland, which is part of why this study is being further developed) and whilst 45% were in the sciences and 45% worked in the humanities, the final 10% worked in technology.

The survey above was then adapted to gain information from students in order to assess their perception of similar issues. Questions were very similar and were rephrased for the new focus, for example:

- Have you studied anything which may be described as a history of your subject?
- Have you studied anything which is concerned with ideology in your subject?
- How many of your co-students, percentage-wise, would you say are international?
- How many of these students come from countries with whom the UK has historical connections?
- Do you believe you have ever been taught on module where the content has been tailored to your group?
- Please give me two examples.
Students were also asked to respond to the impact keywords as discussed previously and to agree or disagree with reasons with the final statement as outlined above.

Student respondents were more balanced in terms of gender with a 45%/55% female/male. All of the students were undergraduates and studied in the sciences (mainly mathematics, geography and physics). 50% of the respondents were home students and 50% international but not EU members. 55% came from universities in the south and 45% from universities in the north. The comparative lack of diversity is probably a reflection of if the student survey was forwarded and if the student was interested enough in the profile. However, the universities represented were from urban areas with distinct socio-political histories which make the student’s responses all the more interesting.

Once the data was returned to the researcher via email, the information was processed and tabulated for use and in processing the data the following limitations were highlighted: firstly, the size of the sample is too small to draw significant conclusions but is varied enough to encourage interesting evaluation and wider development of the project. Consequently, a new survey will be carried out at a different time of year and sent more widely to multiple academics in all 133 institutions. Secondly, not all questions were responded to (when appropriate) and this led to some gaps in the data held at present. This may be tied into the format of the survey and another format, such as an online surveying programme will afford greater ease of use and anonymity for both academics and their students. Finally, thirdly, universities in Scotland and Northern Ireland need to be particularly targeted in order to get a geographic profile within the study.

The results which emerged from the survey are, however, of interest and do enable us to draw certain temporary conclusions which contribute to our understanding of the interaction between history and higher education.

Results and Analysis

The average number of undergraduate modules taught by members of staff in the UK is 6. This includes whole modules for which staff have responsibility for in addition to those on which they guest teach. In terms of postgraduate modules, most academics, teach only one and have 1.6 PhD students at any one time. However, in terms of the spread, more staff teaching more modules in Post-1992 HEIs than in Pre-1992 HEIs and those in Pre-1992 HEIs have greater opportunities for teaching upon postgraduate modules. At this point, it is worthwhile establishing that even if a university pre-existed the 1992 watershed year in another form, the designation relates to when they acquired degree awarding powers.

Most university lecturers have, at some point, taught on a course within their discipline which might be described being based upon a history of the subject. The results similarly
provide evidence for the teaching of ideology within programmes and the tailoring of teaching to cohorts. Most academics felt Britain’s imperial past does, inevitably impact upon the teaching curriculum but at the same time did not feel that the impact of overseas students alongside this issue was over-ridingly negative, with many rejecting the idea that UK HEIs were too reliant upon OS students.

Students, in contrast, widely believed that the tailoring of courses for student cohorts does not happen and were more split in their thoughts about the domination of UK HEIs by OS students.

The presence of International Students in the majority of respondents’ comments was notable, with an average of 42% and with 47% of these coming from countries with which Britain has a historical connection. This means, roughly, that around 20% of all international students come from countries with which the UK has shared history. This is supported by the UK universities applications operator, UCAS, who say that of the 1.6 million full-time students in the UK studying at undergraduate level, over 99,000 (or 15% are international): and of that 15%, if 20% are from countries with which the UK has a shared history, then around 10,800 people come to study from these places every year. The remaining 80%, from countries with no shared history, would number 79,200 of which the majority are Chinese and have been since the mid 2000s.

In the survey I conducted, it was clear that two thirds of staff respondents agreed that student profiles were affected by the impact of post-colonialism leading to an attendant increase in multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism in UK universities, and, similarly, that there had been a related rise in political sensitivity within UK HEIs. However, only one third felt that this had had any effect upon assessment methods, despite the agreement of two thirds that teaching itself had been modified as a result of the impact of post-colonialism. Largely the same people who assessed there to be little effect upon assessment, however, did believe that there had been a simplification of content in the wake of increased numbers of international students. What is sadly of concern, here, is that this reflects a concern about the pragmatics of teaching students who are struggling linguistically, as all but one respondent agreed that there were language issues (and he was from an institution where the impact of international students is negligible). In addition to greater diversity of people, the impact of post-colonialism has lead to another positive aspect in the diversity of ideologies expressed in discussions. Students typically find it difficult to judge, at least at undergraduate level, when the expression of beliefs and ideas is appropriate because in some academic cultures, students’ individual opinions are sadly deemed irrelevant or of no matter in the academic discourses of a given subject. Half of all staff also agreed that the kinds of colleagues being recruited also now came from a wider range of backgrounds and could identify examples of positive discrimination. This concept itself (positive discrimination) is highly problematic but can, by its very nature, be highly beneficial to those who teach or study within UK HEIs. One such example can be found in admissions procedures: someone who comes from a former British colony is more likely to have a higher quality of skills in English that someone for whom English is not institutionalised. Another example, from the other side of the fence, is the funding programmes in existence in former colonies which are expressly designed to support scholarships in the UK. Whilst half of all academic respondents also agreed that post-colonialism had lead to wider
opportunities for study abroad, few believed that there was higher competition for places on degrees (and those who did were responding from institutions where a recruitment cap had been securely placed for the coming academic year, a pre-1992 institution). However, one third of respondents did believe postgraduate programmes were becoming saturated by overseas students, and these were mainly universities in areas with high numbers of immigrants in the general population.

The perspective of these issues from the students was just as interesting and quite similar, with all the southern university students who responded identifying an impact in terms of greater diversity of ideologies in discussion, and all the northern university students, agreeing that there was an impact in terms of greater political sensitivity and language problems. Notably, the northern respondents were all home students whilst the southern universities feedback came 66% from overseas students. 65% overall identified political sensitivity as a discernible impact whilst 45% (and home students from different institutions) considered there to be evidence of positive discrimination in the way in which international students were treated. However, whilst the academic staff selected a wider range of possible statements with which to identify, the students notably did not select the following: Assessment methods, Simplification of content and Saturation of PG programmes by OS students. It must be observed that it is difficult for undergraduates to assess the numbers on postgraduate courses because many know little about the postgraduate lives of their departments or universities and therefore the absence of comment can be ignored in this context. The fact that students did not perceive and impact upon modes of assessment and the kind of content they study, however, is of keen interest, especially when coupled with the fact that 80% of the students believed that their teaching was not being tailored to the cohort whilst 66% of the academics responded that the teaching was altered for each year group.

The direct tailoring of teaching and changes to curriculum was demonstrated repeated by the case studies that the survey provided. These included what we can label as ‘open’ development, designed to increase participation and contribution but not in terms of an kind of ‘lessening’: “I take a student cohort on a field course to Hong Kong and China. If I have students from this part of the world in this cohort, I will adjust my curriculum to enable these students to share their knowledge and experience” (Southern university academic). Another noted that: “In [a] module students are asked to write an account of their childhood and are encouraged to comment on the impact of colonialism on the society they grew up in” (Southern university academic). In contrast, we also see ‘closed’ development, which can be seen in terms of those ‘problems’ which I discussed earlier. One Northern university academic said s/he had to include “more elementary material, particularly at level 1 [year one] Calculus and level 2 [year two] Dynamics, delivered with the support of extra tutorials” whilst a colleague at a Midlands institution said that “Different presentation formats, greater teaching on writing and logic“ were required. Further to this, and referring to a largely home studentship, one Northern university colleague commented that her/his students required “a little more presentation leading from the specific to the general, for a local (NW England) –dominant intake”.

Consequently, we may be able to suggest from these comments, based upon real world teaching experience, that there are issues in learning styles where universities need to strip
level 1 back to a foundation level to a much greater extent than twenty or thirty years ago. The extent to which this is connected to internationalisation in UK HE is tentative and falling cognitive performance has been observed by academics globally as students become less able at autonomous learning and self-discipline as a result of the shallow learning most cheap modular systems encourage. As Simon Marginson argued in ‘Is Australia Overdependent on Overseas Students?’ in *International Higher Education* (No. 54, Winter 2009): “The problem for the universities is that their state is not as “healthy” as the export figures suggest. Perversely, the export industry has been built not on a solid base of quality, but on the deliberate underfunding of the Australian system. Underfunding drives export growth but also empties out quality”.

In recent years, the UK has increasingly modelled its education system on the Australian system but when this system was at its best it was well-financed and now it is “underfunded”. We are seeing an echo of this is the UK in the pressure placed upon universities to earn money from the government through graduating students, recruitment and research: none of which has been properly funded for decades, with the UK government education policy lurching from one idea to another with little consideration of the effect of large scale curriculum changes on school children: and these children have become divorced from the depth of learning which thorough contextualisation enables. As one Southern university respondent said, of the impact of empire on his/her teaching:

[I]t is impossible to separate history from my subject. Everything is linked: you drink a cup of tea, how did it arrive in the English culture? Was it a fair process? You drive a car: what are tyres made from? Where does the rubber originate, and where is it grown now and why? Look at water resources, oil and mineral resources: what structures were put in place by the British, what encouraged the exploitation, why are certain wars fought, why were wetlands drained? Uh, the list is endless…So, if you want to teach holistically, you need to look at the main cornerstones of history, as well as current affairs.

**Conclusion**

The cohort of students, from wherever they come, need historical, content based contextualisation if quality is to be achieved. That history pervades everything means that the history of empire cannot but help inflect the teaching we undertake and the curricula we design. As a Northern university lecturer observed: “it liberates us in order to present post-imperialist topics and add them to a Euro-dominant pre-existing mix”, the implication being that British identity is more than the people living on a group of islands but it inevitably entwined with the people who live beyond it: in order to be ourselves, we must welcome those strangers and admit our kinship. Postcolonial guilt seems to find shame in that kinship, on the one hand, and glory in the end of empire on the other, but in fact, it is merely a reflection of the fact that globalisation is shattering national identities faster in those countries which embrace the world that those which reject the gurgle of the modem.

This, ultimately, is what is shattering the legacy of empire and making HE teaching go beyond post-colonial guilt. Fundamentally, the history affects what we teach and the cohort of students affect how we teach it but it is now possible to say that we can go beyond the
specifics of British post-colonial guilt and start to think about a more generalised Western orientalistic guilt which means that cultural sensitivity is more around East versus West as Other versus Us that India versus Britain or some other permutation.

The majority of UK overseas students are Chinese and the reason they come to Britain? A history in which they are interested and a contemporary culture which is as confused as their own ideologically in term of tradition and identity. The next largest group are Indian and then Pakistani: why do they come? Empire meant they were taught English is school and that their families often have diasporic off-shoots which make the strange more familiar – but is it the visiting students who have difficulty with the colonialist past or is it the people who have been brought up here, those who, as Gurinder Chadha’s film of 1989 stated “I’m British... but”?

This pilot study survey has emphasises some key elements in curriculum design but what has been most noticeable amongst all of the data has been the positivity which dominates academic and student opinions on this topic and the great difference between what the students thought and the staff did regarding programme design. Fundamentally, what we have learnt is that empire has given the UK and education legacy but that the extent to which that legacy is explicit varies hugely. In the study as it develops, the coming questions, amongst others shall be asked: why does this gap in perception exist and what impact does the geographical locations which are relevant to those who completed the questionnaire impact upon their ideas. In other words, if post-colonial guilt is on its way out, then what is the ideology by which it is being replaced?

Bibliography


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