

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

**0485**

(Re)connecting The Fashion Management Curriculum At A UK Business School: Steps To Implementing A Culturally Relevant Framework

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**Research Domain:** International contexts and perspectives (ICP)

**Abstract:**

This study utilises a critical qualitative iterative approach to investigate the current state of curriculum development at universities in the United Kingdom. In particular, to what extent do fashion business programmes embrace a culturally relevant curriculum through enquiry and values-based learning to respond to recent unprecedented challenges (Brexit, Black Lives Matter, Covid-19). Secondary research conducted online was advanced by key informant interviews with seven fashion academics on their educational philosophy and specialist knowledge underpinning programme design. Findings showed slow progress in addressing these issues. Consequently, four inter-related dimensions were identified as core enablers to create a culturally relevant curriculum: 1) multi-directional enquiry-based learning, 2) a values-based learning experience, 3) effective transfer of new and existing knowledge, and 4) engagement in real-world practice and discourse. In piloting the framework as a transformative pedagogic device, initial staff and student feedback has been positive, confirming the effectiveness in increasing learner engagement and satisfaction.

**Paper: Introduction**

Unprecedented socio-economic and cultural challenges demand higher education institutions in the UK deliver a high quality and relevant academic experience in response to the needs of a diverse body of learners (Brookfield, 2002). Growing discontent from students about their learning experience is being expressed through the National Student Survey, social media campaigns and protests such as 'Why Is My Curriculum White?' Increasing nationalism, the Black Lives Matter movement and Covid-19 pandemic has further divulged the disparity in equality of learning and amplified the need for social justice through a culturally relevant pedagogy. This led to three research objectives: a) to review existing pedagogical and fashion management literature in the context of decolonisation (b) online analysis of UK fashion business programmes (c) propose a framework to critical awareness and reflexivity.

**Literature**

In the Global North, fashion business schools continue to deliver a centre-periphery model of teaching and learning heavily reliant on a dominant contemporary Euro and ethnocentric curriculum to learners, whom a large proportion are international. The field's doxa and habitus continue to

express a performativity for teaching and learning through capitalist ideologies by predominately upper-middle-class heterosexual ableist male authors such as Michael Porter, Clayton Christensen and Peter Drucker (Alcadipani, 2017). Presented as authoritative narratives these publications ignore the consequences of slavery, forced mass migration, racism and despotism as well as the significance of indigenous, religious and caste systems. Several authors (Mazzarella, Storey and Williams, 2019; Jansen, 2020) have written about decolonising fashion studies from an historical and sustainable perspective, but little exists on how these initiatives inform the fashion management curriculum. Subsequently, across cognitive, emotional and social dimensions students describe their learning as 'Too White' and incomprehensible to their individual setting and circumstances, which reduces their interaction and motivation for learning. As evidenced in the awarding gap with 67.7% of BAME students obtaining a First or Upper Second honours degree versus 80.9% of white learners. Additionally, Black African and Caribbean learners are further disadvantaged with a 23.4%-point awarding gap (Advance HE, 2019). The Covid-19 pandemic is likely to exacerbate this trend further (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2021).

The current fashion management curriculum discounts a learner's home and community-based knowledge. This limits inter-cultural knowledge exchange, which affects learner commitment, peer interaction, self-confidence and well-being. In reframing the gaps, a dialogical and emancipatory curriculum that employs a pedagogical orientation towards real-world multi-directional enquiry-based learning can help to strengthen skills such as problem solving, creativity and reflection (Levy and Petrusis, 2012). For successful active learning, students should be immersed in a radically humanistic, authentic and deeply democratic values based-learning experience. This facilitates knowledge exchange, whilst preserving a learner's cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through their unique knowledge, identity and skills. Operating within this community of practice (Wenger, 2000) equips individuals to succeed socially, academically and for graduate employment.

## **Methodology**

Drawing on the concept of bi-cultural research (Smith, 1999) and employing a critical qualitative iterative method based on constructivist epistemology (Creswell and Creswell, 2018) online web research examined 35 UK undergraduate and postgraduate fashion business courses. Using a four-point rating scale, programme handbooks and outlines of modules were reviewed to identify whether these institutions offered a culturally relevant curriculum through enquiry and values based-learning. To gain deeper insights, a subject leader, two programme directors and four members of the fashion business academic team at a London University were purposively sampled as key informants (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). A large proportion of the university's full-time student population were international and of mixed ethnicity. Further feedback was solicited from staff and students through a modular level pilot study to assess the effectiveness of the framework.

## **Findings**

The analysis revealed limited evidence in institutional approaches and practices to decolonise teaching, learning and assessment in fashion management, marketing and business related programmes. Instead, there was a strong orientation towards an Anglo-Saxon philosophy and narrow awareness to embedding a culturally relevant curriculum based on the backgrounds, experiences and needs of the target students. Applying thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and using the principles of constructive alignment (Biggs and Tang, 2011) the authors developed a framework as a

pedagogic device (Bernstein, 2000) to facilitate critical awareness and reflexivity. The framework allows for flexibility and local customisation through four inter-related dimensions: 1) multi-directional enquiry-based learning, 2) a values-based learning experience, 3) effective transfer of new and existing knowledge, and 4) engagement in real-world practice and discourse. Positive feedback from the pilot study confirmed the effectiveness of the framework through increasing student engagement and end of module satisfaction scores. Whilst the framework promotes critical interrogation and epistemic reflexivity it does not assume that implementation will be straightforward, as it requires pedagogical training and institutional support. It can, however be considered a transformational tool for creating immense social, cultural and economic wealth in a period of increasing debate on the value of universities.

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