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Scholarship
& Research
at Regent

School of Health and Sports Science: Editor's introduction to a special issue

Welcome to the 11th issue of the Research and Scholarship Quarterly!

It is with great pleasure that we present this special issue showcasing the research and scholarly work emerging from Regent College London's (RCL) School of Health and Sports Science (SoHSS). An inspiring introduction from Morris Anglin, Dean of the School, highlights the School's innovative approaches to using VR and AI, recognises the growth of partnerships and student outcomes, and celebrates the milestone achievement of validating their own Bachelor of Science in Health and Social Science programme.

This issue brings together 13 original contributions from SoHSS faculty, representing the breadth and depth of research and scholarly work ongoing within SoHSS. We begin with Associate Provost Siobhán Strike's work in biomechanics, which bridges critical gaps between sports science and sports medicine, advancing rehabilitation practices for athletes and individuals with limb amputations. Tricia Tikasingh examines Education for Sustainable Development through enhanced pedagogy, not only in health and sports science, but across all subjects.

This issue features several projects supported by the Regent Research Fund (RRF). Athina Ntasioti examines bias in artificial intelligence within healthcare settings, addressing crucial ethical implications for patient care. A collaborative team led by Alex Avadanei, including Fatemeh Azizi, Emma Buhtina and Elizabeth Kaplunov, investigates the development of emotional intelligence amongst UK higher education students and staff, analysing its impact on academic performance. Alicja McGarrigle and Elizabeth Kaplunov explore the phenomenon of academic underachievement, while another RRF-funded study led by Elizabeth Kaplunov and Alex Avadanei examines culturally responsive teaching practices within UK higher education.

Additional contributions include Glory Aigbedion's equity-focused analysis of micronutrient malnutrition in maternal-child health, and Maryam Rouintan's comparative study of spatial democracy and public pedagogy in Tehran and London. Amberlee Green investigates psychological safety in higher education, while Gayani Gamage addresses post-pandemic challenges in lecture attendance patterns. Fatemeh Azizi contributes valuable insights on the intersection of education and ethnicity in cases of domestic violence amongst Afghan refugee women in the UK, and Elizabeth Kaplunov explores the philosophical foundations of modern psychological practice.

These contributions reflect our commitment to interdisciplinary research, scholarly advancement and academic excellence, while addressing pressing contemporary challenges in health, education and social science. We trust readers will find these contributions both enlightening and thought-provoking.

The issue concludes with a celebration of recent SoHSS faculty achievements, including publications and conference presentations. We also maintain an open call for contributions to future issues of the Quarterly and invite scholars to submit their work for consideration.

May this Quarterly continue to inspire you as researchers and scholars!

Anna Wharton, Editor

From the Dean: Innovation, growth, and achievement in the School of Health and Sports Science

Morris Anglin

As the Dean of the School of Health and Sports Science (SoHSS), I am incredibly honoured to lead such an innovative and forward-thinking faculty. Since its launch in 2019, SoHSS has evolved into a dynamic hub for teaching and learning, offering a diverse range of programmes, including Health and Social Care, Sports and Exercise Science, Sports Nutrition, and Social Sciences.

Growth and academic partnerships

Delivered in collaboration with our valued partners, University of Greater Manchester[1] (UoGM), Buckinghamshire New University (BNU), St Mary's University (SMU) and Pearson; these programmes have over 1,200 students enrolled across four annual intakes. Together, we have established a strong reputation for delivering high-quality education that equips graduates for impactful and meaningful careers.

In November 2024, we were delighted to see over 100 students, who enrolled across several intakes during the Covid-19 pandemic, become graduands. This achievement is a testament to the resilience of our students and the unwavering support of our faculty during unprecedented times. These graduates exemplify the transformative power of education in overcoming challenges and achieving success.

Infrastructure and innovation in teaching

SoHSS has developed a robust infrastructure to support our mission, including a dedicated laboratory facility for sports, specialised holistic academic support, and a Work Placement Coordinator who guides students through invaluable industry experiences. By emphasising work placements and practical learning opportunities, we bridge the gap between theory and practice. Our strong partnerships with healthcare organisations continue to enhance the delivery of our programmes, providing students with real-world exposure that sets them apart in competitive job markets.

Innovation is at the heart of our teaching. The integration of virtual reality (VR) technologies into sports and health education allows students to engage in immersive simulations that mirror real-world scenarios. Coupled with a focus on individual wellbeing and societal health, our programmes equip students to address global challenges such as mental health, physical inactivity and community wellbeing.

We are also actively addressing the challenges and opportunities presented by artificial intelligence (AI). While AI introduces complexities, such as ethical considerations and the need for digital literacy, we are leveraging its potential to support students through personalised learning, adaptive technologies and enhanced access to knowledge.

Academic achievements and programme development

This year, we have achieved remarkable milestones in student success. Our continuation, completion and progression rates have shown significant improvement, reflecting the dedication of both our students and faculty. Students have excelled in applying theoretical concepts to real-world challenges, aided by enhanced work placement opportunities and a strong emphasis on experiential learning. These accomplishments highlight the strength of our programmes and our commitment to transforming lives through education.

In addition, we recently successfully validated our own BSc Health and Social Science programme with Buckinghamshire New University (BNU). This achievement not only reflects the growing strength of SoHSS but also marks an important step in developing our capacity to deliver programmes that align with professional and academic standards under our own validation. It demonstrates our ability to innovate and lead in curriculum development, further solidifying the School's reputation and supporting Office for Students (OfS) regulations and RCL's own goal of achieving New Degree Awarding Powers (NDAPs).

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[1] Formerly the University of Bolton.

Our team and community

Faculty development has been another key highlight this year. In September 2024, several team members presented on innovative teaching practices at the annual UoGM TIRI Conference, while others engaged in Academic Faculty Development and Scholarly Activity Funding Schemes, further demonstrating our commitment to research and scholarship.

In September, SoHSS also held an Away Day to set a positive tone for the year and align our priorities. The day focused on crucial topics such as working as a team, understanding roles and responsibilities, maintaining professionalism and effective communication, and deepening our knowledge of our academic partners UoGM, SMU, BNU and Pearson and their respective academic regulations.

We also explored exciting new developments for the 2024-25 Academic Year, reviewed our performance with a focus on the OfS B Conditions, and planned ahead to foster staff development, research and knowledge exchange. This collaborative day was instrumental in ensuring a cohesive and forward-thinking approach for the academic year.

Our success in supporting students is built on the dedication and teamwork of our exceptional faculty. With a robust structure that includes two Heads of Programmes, seven Programme Leaders, seven Senior Lecturers, 28 Lecturers and 34 Associate Lecturers, we work collaboratively to provide high-quality education and support. Our Laboratory Technician, Work Placement Coordinator and Academic Administrator play essential roles in ensuring students have the resources and guidance they need to thrive. Together, this team embodies the proverb "it takes a village" and fosters an environment where every student can achieve their full potential.

In addition to academic success, initiatives such as our weekly "Bring a Cuppa" sessions have significantly enhanced our community engagement and support. This informal space for SoHSS staff and other colleagues to meet has fostered collaboration across different services throughout the College and opened dialogue amongst our faculty, enabling the sharing of best practices and addressing challenges collectively. The success of this initiative reflects our commitment to cultivating a supportive and inclusive environment that values teamwork and innovation.

Future developments

Looking ahead, SoHSS is poised for even greater success. In 2025, we are excited to launch our undergraduate psychology programme, validated by the UoGM in November 2024, with plans to expand into postgraduate offerings. Other key priorities include strengthening industry partnerships by forming an employer advisory board, aligning our curriculum with emerging sector needs and continuing to work with our partners to enhance programme delivery. These efforts will ensure our students are future-ready and equipped to navigate an ever-evolving landscape.

As we celebrate the many accomplishments of SoHSS, we remain inspired and motivated to continue improving outcomes for both students and faculty, supported by the talent, determination and passion that define our community. This issue of the Research and Scholarship Quarterly offers a glimpse into the high-quality work going on in SoHSS. I am confident that we will continue to grow, excel and make a lasting impact in the years to come, fully supporting RCL's mission and vision to provide transformative education and empower students to achieve their fullest potential.

Biomechanics: Bridging gaps between science and medicine to improve rehabilitation and enhance mobility

Siobhán Strike

Having recently joined RCL as an Associate Provost, I am delighted to be working within and across Schools and liaising with partners to enable staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience to students. This builds on my previous role as Deputy Dean with an educational portfolio at the University of Roehampton, in the School of Life and Health Sciences, where I combined management with research. In this article, I provide a brief overview of my research in biomechanics, a discipline of Sport and Exercise Science and Sports Medicine.

Research collaboration and impact

I have been fortunate to work with collaborators across a wide range of teams in different countries and to present my research across the world. In bridging the gap between sport science and sport medicine, my research has focused on improving rehabilitation techniques and enhancing mobility for different populations from elite athletes to those with lower limb amputation. By taking the scientific process into applied practice, the research has had real-world impact, reshaping clinical practices and improving quality of life.

My research to enhance the mobility of people with lower limb amputation has resulted in over 20 peer-reviewed articles. Working with prosthetic companies, I have used biomechanical analysis to evaluate and improve prosthetic design, increasing the mobility of people after amputation. As the prosthesis functions in coordination with the person, I have worked with user-charities and physiotherapists to develop evidence-based physical activity interventions to enhance physical activity levels. A recent publication presented the first validated fitness programme for people with limb-loss to enhance mobility. This work has been presented around the world, with particular impact in Japan and Mauritius.

Another important strand of my research is with athletes and improving the rehabilitation process and return to sport criteria following injury. Along with colleagues, we created an analysis protocol which used biomechanical data to quantify the strength, movement and functional deficits to implement personalised and targeted interventions through the return to play continuum. This practice enhanced outcomes by returning athletes to sport earlier and with reduced re-injury rates. The result was not only happier athletes but also financial gain as we saved athletes and sports teams millions of pounds by reducing lost player-time.

Throughout various research projects, I have mentored early career researchers and supported them toward impactful careers, which are equally as important as the research they complete. Additionally, students who have worked on this research have gone on to careers with world-leading sports medicine clinics, to industry and even to NASA.

Looking forward

By using science to discover and to make a difference, I have led a productive and meaningful research career. This has involved looking at problems from a mechanistic research perspective in order to develop understanding of the primary factors involved in the musculoskeletal system's ability to produce movement; and moving from an applied perspective to have real-world impact.

As I have settled in at RCL with an enhanced focus on educational enhancement, I aim to foster the same collaborative spirit that has informed my work so far. I look forward to developing research in education and quality practice, while maintaining research in biomechanics. Together, we can continue to make meaningful strides in both research and practice.

Education for Sustainable Development: Pedagogy for developing ESD competencies across subject areas

Tricia Tikasingh

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is often viewed as taking a sole focus on environmental or climate change issues. However, ESD is not simply about the "greening of education", but rather embracing pedagogical approaches that support the development of competencies, knowledge, skills and attributes in graduates, which enable them to find solutions and innovations to address the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) globally.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and Advance HE define ESD "as a lens that permits us to look critically at how the world is and to envision how it might be, and equips us to deliver that vision". This is important as trends and surveys indicate that students want to see issues of sustainable development being considered within their curricula across all subject areas, while employers are increasingly seeking graduates who have transferable skills which are relevant to a more sustainable workplace and world.

Sustainable Development vs Education for Sustainable Development

The QAA and Advance HE understand Sustainable Development as "an aspirational ongoing process of addressing social, environmental and economic concerns to create a better world". Education for Sustainable Development is the process of creating curriculum structures and subject-relevant content to support that sustainable development.

There are 17 SDGs, as seen in Figure 1, with SDG 4 being Quality Education. The other goals centre on reducing inequalities, building strong and inclusive communities, and preserving the environment. There are debates regarding action on the SDGs within the context of the current global challenges and conflicts. Such perspectives provide further rationale for embedding the principles of ESD within our teaching practices and approaches in order to meet emerging risks and to adapt to ongoing challenges.

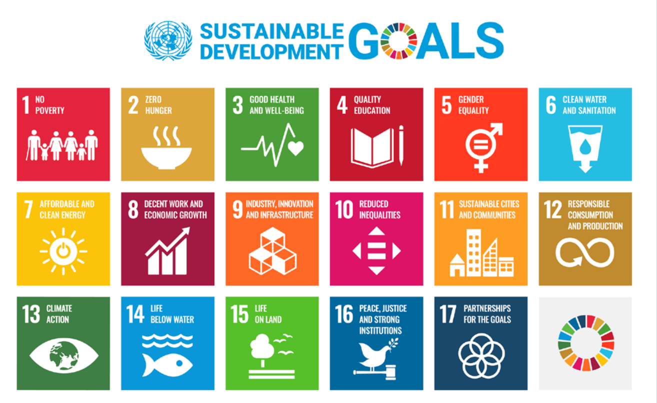
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
1 NO POVERTY
2 ZERO HUNGER
3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
4 QUALITY EDUCATION
5 GENDER EQUALITY
6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION
7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY
8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES
12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
13 CLIMATE ACTION
14 LIFE BELOW WATER
15 LIFE ON LAND
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS
17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

Figure 1

ESD focuses on the connections between economic, social and environmental factors. It is an educational change agenda grounded in transformative learning and critical pedagogy. With this understanding, the role of higher education is:

1. *to support students and staff to develop the knowledge, competencies and abilities to pursue sustainable visions of the future;*
2. *to support students and staff to appreciate the complexity of our world, the "wicked problems" that continuously emerge, and demonstrate how they can personally and professionally contribute to positive change; and*
3. *to challenge, support and enable students and staff to co-design solutions and drive change for a more sustainable world.*

Learning spaces and curricula should therefore seek to embed themes such as enterprise and entrepreneurship; equality, diversity and inclusion; decolonisation of the curriculum; employability; students as partners; internationalisation; civic engagement; health and wellbeing; and research and knowledge exchange. In these intersections, graduates can find opportunities for transformative learning and development of the UNESCO competencies in ESD.

Competencies, skills and behaviours

The eight competencies are systems thinking, anticipatory competency, critical thinking, strategic thinking, collaboration, integrated problem-solving, self-awareness and normative competency; which map well onto the descriptors of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications at both the Bachelors and Masters levels. The QAA have also embedded ESD as a key theme in all their recently published Subject Benchmark Statements, including the Health Studies benchmark statement published in April 2024 for which I was an advisory group member. Other key themes reflect the ESD principles and include equality, diversity and inclusion; accessibility; and employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise.

Transformative learning and critical pedagogy offer conceptual frameworks which promote a learner-centred approach and participatory/action-orientated approach to learning. Transformative learning refers to:

> *"experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions... a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world... that involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class and gender."*

Here, it is necessary to conceptualise transformative learning as a process of change both in the learner's thinking and participation within a community.

There are a variety of ways to design learning activities to stimulate competency and skills development. Examples include active and collaborative learning activities; problem-based learning scenarios or case studies; learning through storytelling/ narratives; gamification; simulation based learning through technology or real-world settings; enquiry-based learning; reflective practice; mentorship opportunities; critical thinking/analysis frameworks; and experiential learning through apprenticeships, placements or volunteering.

The concept of ESD focuses on the role of individuals to become "change makers", and highlights how ESD can be embedded within all educational contexts from primary to tertiary, and in non-formal and informal education. Indeed, ESD "asks for an action-oriented, transformative pedagogy, which supports self-directed learning, participation and collaboration, problem-orientation, inter- and trans-disciplinarity and the linking of formal and informal learning".

As educators, it is therefore necessary to widen our teaching, learning and assessment toolkit in order to provide opportunities and experiences that promote and support independent and collaborative learning, innovative and creative problem-solving, and interdisciplinary work which address real-world "wicked" and complex challenges.

Understanding ethical implications and addressing bias in artificial intelligence for healthcare

Athina Ntasioti

The issue of bias in artificial intelligence (AI) is a significant challenge in healthcare, where AI-driven decisions can have a profound impact on patient outcomes. Bias in AI manifests itself in two primary ways: statistical bias and social bias. Statistical bias occurs when the data sets used to train AI models do not accurately reflect the diversity of the target population, resulting in models that make biased or inaccurate predictions. Social bias, on the other hand, reflects prevailing social inequalities, often resulting in biased or suboptimal outcomes for certain demographic groups. Researchers suggest that the existence of both types of bias underscores the urgent need to ensure that AI systems neither perpetuate nor exacerbate inequalities inherent in their training data.

Training AI on diverse datasets

The necessity for diverse and representative datasets in healthcare AI is critical, as algorithms trained on homogenous data are prone to perform inadequately when generalised across varied populations. For instance, an AI model developed to detect skin cancer that relies predominantly on data from white patients may fail to accurately diagnose patients from other ethnic groups.

Such a discrepancy underscores the importance of comprehensive data inclusion to mitigate blind spots that disproportionately affect marginalised or underrepresented communities, including ethnic minorities, the elderly, children and those with disabilities. These biases may remain undetected unless proactively identified and addressed early in the AI model development and validation phases.

As healthcare increasingly adopts data-driven, AI-enabled solutions, reliance on vast health data repositories has enabled AI to inform decision-making, enhance emergency response times and improve public health outcomes.

However, according to one study, a significant barrier to integrating AI into clinical practice is the challenge of mitigating algorithmic bias, which, if left unaddressed, risks exacerbating health disparities.

Researchers and practitioners must strive to incorporate diverse datasets and develop transparent, ethical models that accurately reflect and serve the populations they aim to support. Research highlights that open science practices and adherence to ethical frameworks are critical to developing AI models that are fair, accountable and generalisable across diverse patient populations.

Another study discusses the limitations of AI algorithms due to data and model bias, which can be illustrated with diagnostic tools used in hospitals. AI models trained primarily on data from younger, healthier individuals may have reduced accuracy in diagnosing conditions in older adults or those with more complex health profiles.

This limitation, often due to data bias, highlights the critical need for AI systems to be trained on datasets that span the full spectrum of patient diversity. In addition, the “black box” nature of many AI models presents an additional barrier for clinicians, who may struggle to interpret AI-driven recommendations when the inner workings of the AI systems are not visible or understood. These limitations require rigorous testing and validation to ensure that AI applications in healthcare are both reliable and equitable.

Diagnostic tools and health monitoring

Additionally, research demonstrates that with rising rates of anxiety and depression linked to today’s social pressures, AI-driven diagnostic tools, such as natural language processing (NLP)-powered chatbots, may offer innovative solutions for early intervention. By analysing text data from social media and other online sources, these tools have the potential to detect early signs of mental health problems.

However, these AI tools can also risk perpetuating bias, especially when trained on data that lacks linguistic or cultural diversity, which can lead to misdiagnosis or misinterpretation for individuals from diverse backgrounds.

NLP algorithms, critical for mental health diagnosis, have become essential for public health monitoring. By examining online health discussions, NLP systems can identify symptoms, anticipate disease trends, and improve understanding of healthcare barriers. However, when NLP algorithms are biased, they can produce distorted or misleading results that misrepresent certain communities or exacerbate existing health disparities. Addressing these concerns requires open collaboration, regular review, and the development of rigorous guidelines to ensure that NLP algorithms remain accurate and equitable in public health applications.

Ethical considerations of AI in healthcare

The growing use of AI in healthcare requires a heightened ethical commitment to creating transparent, equitable and unbiased algorithms. Without such measures, AI risks not only replicating but worsening health disparities. A deep understanding of bias, where data representation, societal dynamics, and technological limitations converge, is essential to developing AI models that serve diverse communities equitably. Technologies that facilitate bias detection, model interpretability, and transparency play a critical role in fostering a responsible AI ecosystem.

Empirical research has explored approaches to mitigating bias in healthcare AI, particularly through the use of electronic health records (EHRs). One recent study demonstrates that incorporating postcode information into the preprocessing of EHR data can help mitigate location-based bias without compromising model accuracy. Another study examining patient readmission prediction shows that incorporating proximity data improved model performance, highlighting the value of incorporating diverse factors to improve both fairness and accuracy in AI-based healthcare predictions. These findings underscore the importance of comprehensive data preprocessing and accounting for demographic diversity when refining healthcare algorithms.

In the context of AI bias in healthcare, several key recommendations for future studies have emerged, focusing on four main areas:

a. *the inclusion of sociodemographic data;*
b. *comprehensible AI architecture;*
c. *careful dataset design; and*
d. *clinical evaluation and validation.*

Recent studies have explored the need for AI models' inner workings to be more transparent in order to understand how different features contribute to outcomes, as the "black box" nature of AI limits generalisability and can contribute to incorrect diagnoses.

Emerging challenges and opportunities

Indeed, while current research on AI bias in healthcare is comprehensive, it is understood that the rapidly evolving field presents new challenges and opportunities. Future AI developments are likely to focus on:

a. *pruning techniques to improve model efficiency and decrease bias;*
b. *the fusion of algorithms, such as ensemble methods, to improve performance and address data inconsistencies; and*
c. *the integration of disparate data frameworks to create larger, more accurate data sets.*

These advances will shape the future of AI in healthcare and contribute to the reduction of bias.

In conclusion, while AI offers transformative potential in healthcare, addressing bias remains a fundamental challenge. By prioritising representative data, transparent methodologies, and adherence to rigorous ethical standards, researchers and healthcare professionals can develop AI systems that honour the principles of equity and justice. Addressing bias is not only an ethical imperative, but a necessary step in realising the full potential of AI to improve human health and wellbeing.

** This article reports on the topic of a research project funded by the Regent College London Regent Research Fund (RRF).*

The impact of emotional intelligence on student academic performance

Alex Avadenei, Fatemeh Azizi, Emma Buhtina and Elizabeth Kaplunov

Emotional intelligence is defined as the understanding and monitoring of emotions. This project aims to explore how students' Emotional Intelligence (EI) can be improved and how that can potentially positively affect academic achievement. Participants will be taught EI through the curriculum as part of this project.

Emotional intelligence

Research shows that having a high level of EI can lead to stronger relationship-building skills, which enhance intellectual development and can lead to improved academic performance. EI is also linked to high levels of motivation and self-regulation, both of which are behaviours that can foster enhanced academic performance due to better management of time and stress.

According to a well-known theoretical model, EI can support the monitoring of one's own emotions or the emotions of others, and use this information to guide how one acts. This model includes four branches – perceiving emotion, understanding emotion, using emotion to facilitate thoughts, and regulating emotion. The perceiving branch has to do with appraising the emotions of self and others while the understanding branch is about the labeling of emotions and understanding of the meaning and consequences of emotions.

The branch on using emotions to facilitate thought is concerned with using emotions in activities like problem-solving and creative tasks. Finally, the regulating emotion branch is about managing emotions, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and using strategies to regulate emotional reactions based on the requirements of a situation. This theoretical approach uses a performance-based test to measure EI as an ability.

Academic performance and employment

It is essential to investigate EI delivered within the curriculum as opposed to within the context of extracurricular activities outside the classroom. EI is a key factor affecting academic performance and motivation. Indeed, research shows that when students are trained in EI skills as part of the curriculum, academic performance is increased to a larger extent compared to those students who do not receive EI training as part of the curriculum.

Furthermore, direct EI training will support students when they enter the workforce. Possessing a high level of EI has been shown to lead to enhanced work performance through increased motivation to problem-solve within the context of a team.

Methodology

The project will recruit a minimum of 30 students to complete three surveys and will invite them to a series of workshops on EI. Data analysis will look at pre and post levels of EI, and results will be shared both within Regent College London and beyond with an aim to present at a Learning and Education conference.

The first survey the project will utilise is based on the ability model which has been validated with 346 participants. For the survey, participants self-rate statements on a five-point Likert scale. One key advantage of this survey is that it includes all four branches of the ability model. However, a disadvantage is that a Likert scale cannot account for the difficulty of the items or participant ability of performance. Additionally, self-report ratings can be biased, as participants may want to appear to have higher EI than they do, especially if they feel they will be judged on their answers.

This project will administer two additional surveys looking at situational EI, around understanding and around emotional management, both of which are branches of the ability model. Both surveys are based on item response theory (IRT), an approach to designing scales which measure abilities. This statistical approach does not assume that items are weighted equally. The strength of the approach is that it can take account of the ability of each participant.

In comparison, classical theory of scale design does not account for participant ability. The abovementioned two surveys looking at situational EI focus on just one branch of EI each because IRT models only work if all items are about one trait. In this model, each question describes a situation and asks participants to select their reaction from a list of options.

It is useful, then, to use all three surveys in order to compare the IRT and classical theory of scale design, as well as to see how participants respond to self-reporting and to situations as they relate to measuring EI.

Following on this project, future research into EI should also explore the extent to which engagement in extracurricular activities develops EI and correlates with academic success amongst students. This can provide valuable insight into the potential academic benefits of integrating certain extracurricular activities into the classroom, with a particular aim to more holistically develop students.

**This research project is funded by the Regent College London Regent Research Fund (RRF).*

The psychology of academic underachievement in higher education

Alicja McGarrigle and Elizabeth Kaplunov

Academic underachievement in higher education (HE) is a challenge that students may face for a variety of reasons. This research project seeks to examine the causes of underachievement. These causes are often psychological, and being able to identify and understand them will support the addressing of underlying issues such as self-confidence, low language level and cultural misunderstanding. The main aim of this research project is to explore how students understand underachievement, and to consider how contributing psychological factors such as self-confidence, self-belief and culture may affect their performance.

Underachievement can also be linked to students' lack of understanding of how education contributes to the development of the professional skills needed for future employment. Therefore, this project will also investigate how a focus on developing professional attitudes in the classroom can have a positive impact on student achievement.

Underachievement

Research understands underachievement as a discrepancy between a student's potential, and their actual performance in academic settings. Underachieving students often have a negative academic self-concept, viewing themselves as less capable than they actually are. Studies suggest that this distorted self-perception, poor assessment of one's own skills, and lack of understanding of future professional contexts can undermine motivation and effort, creating a cycle of underperformance and low self-esteem.

It is possible that cultural factors may also affect underachievement. For example, research demonstrates that in some cases, students of colour are less likely to reach their full academic potential. Another study found that during lessons, both Japanese students and Australian students were likely to self-handicap and experience a feeling of helplessness when they had a high fear of failure.

It was also shown that there was no difference between the performances, achievements and goal perceptions or motivations of Asian American and Anglo American students. It is unclear from existing research whether differences in achievement relating to culture truly exist or not. However, it is likely that underachievement is exacerbated by differences in understandings of underachievement across cultures, and by inequality.

Methodology

In order to examine the causes contributing to academic underachievement, these researchers plan to employ a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to collect data, leading to triangulation. One of the researchers will focus on designing and administering the quantitative survey on factors related to underachievement. The second researcher will undertake a select number of semi-structured interviews seeking to understand students' challenges and the psychological nature of underachievement with particular regard to impact in a professional context.

The findings of this project will be shared at RCL in multiple forums, which will provide an opportunity for collaboration and feedback from colleagues in the short-term. In the longer-term, the researchers aspire to publish in an academic peer-reviewed journal in order to engage with the wider academic community and foster dialogue around the psychological factors influencing underachievement. This will additionally extend the impact of the study, ensuring continued knowledge exchange across institutions and contexts. This project is committed to addressing the underlying causes of students' underachievement in an academic context and to utilising evidence-based strategies to support students to achieve academic success.

**This research project is funded by the Regent College London Regent Research Fund (RRF).*

Enhancing culturally responsive teaching practices to improve student outcomes

Elizabeth Kaplunov and Alex Avadenei

The motivation framework for culturally responsive teaching states that learning situations are never culturally neutral. It is therefore important to create conditions which satisfy the basic psychological needs of students in a culturally responsive manner. This project intends to investigate how lecturers utilise culturally responsive teaching practices and to validate a survey of culturally responsive teaching practices within the UK higher education (HE) context.

There is a framework of four motivational conditions which teachers should seek to put in place in order to set the scene for culturally responsive teaching and encourage the growth of intrinsic motivation. The conditions are to:

a. *establish inclusion,*
b. *develop a positive attitude,*
c. *enhance meaning, and*
d. *engender competence.*

Establishing inclusion means ensuring that the learning environment fosters connectedness and respect. Developing a positive attitude speaks to learning that is made relevant to student interests and promotes choice.

Enhancing meaning is when learning moments include different perspectives while engendering competence is about helping students achieve their goals in a way that is relevant and authentic to the student's identities. These four conditions work together over time to grow intrinsic motivation for learning.

Culturally responsive teaching surveys

More than one survey has been produced to measure culturally responsive teaching (CRT) skills, knowledge and views on the importance of CRT and self-efficacy. The majority of surveys have been created to investigate school-level teaching while only a small number of research projects have considered the context of teaching adult learners. Studies that did focus on the work of teachers of adult students used the Culturally Responsive Teaching Survey (CRTS) and the Culturally Responsive Teaching Knowledge and Practice Survey (CRTKPS). The CRTS is directly based on the motivational framework for CRT, whereas the CRTKPS is based on a review of literature about CRT. There are a few key differences between the CRTS and the CRTKPS, and the foundational study of each survey.

CRTS

The CRTS has just 17 survey items and focuses on the frequency of the lecturer's use of cultural practices. In a key CRTS study conducted in the USA, participants were adult education ESOL instructors (n=134) teaching face to face.

The study showed that the most frequently used practices were "examine class materials for appropriate images and themes" and "use mixed-language and mixed-cultural pairings in group work". The least frequently used practices were "include lessons about anti-immigrant discrimination or bias" and "students work independently, selecting their own learning activities". Additionally, a high percentage of staff stated that they never "encourage students to use their native language with their children".

CRTKPS

The CRTKPS has 73 survey items and has a wider scope with sections exploring knowledge, value and importance of CRT, use of skills, meeting the needs of different communities, and abilities. In a key CRTKPS study conducted in the USA, participants were tutors (n=39) working at a higher education institution teaching undergraduates and graduates online.

The study reported that most staff agreed with the high value of CRT but did not perceive themselves to have good knowledge of CRT. However, participants felt they had higher knowledge of CRT than knowledge of how to meet the needs of different communities.

CRTS vs CRTKPS

At just 17 survey items, the CRTS is a shorter survey choice than the longer CRTKPS, which has 73 survey items. Additionally, the CRTS sample was larger, making the study more generalisable, and is directly based on theory of motivation and CRT, rather than on literature about CRT. Therefore, this research project will use the CRTS and seek to validate it within the context of UK higher education. The CRTS results will then be used to generate reflection from lecturers at a particular UK HE institution.

There is another difference in the context of this study as compared with the foundational CRTS study discussed above. The student demographic at the UK HE institution in this study has a higher than average proportion of mature students and those from widening participation backgrounds, who often come from a cultural background that is different from their lecturers.

Intended outcomes

This study will aim to recruit 30 lecturers from a particular UK HE institution to complete the survey on culturally responsive teaching practices. Ten participants will then be invited to be interviewed on the topic of barriers to and facilitators for culturally responsive teaching.

The data from the surveys will be analysed descriptively to understand how many lecturers use the practices indicated in the survey. The interviews will be analysed thematically using grounded theory to discover the barriers and facilitators.

Findings will be share both internally and externally, and the researchers will offer a training on culturally responsive practices for lecturers to upskill. The project results will be submitted to a conference for Learning and Education.

Key message

Understanding culturally responsive practices in teaching is essential as this approach can lead students to feel more motivated to learn as they experience an increased sense of inclusion and connection with lecturers and other students. Research also shows that applying culturally responsive practices in the classroom leads to increases in student autonomy and competence. Students feel they have more choice as tutors become increasingly aware of their cultural needs and traditions, and work toward more culturally inclusive assessments. Increases in autonomy, connectedness and competence can contribute to long-term behaviour changes and higher quality motivation to achieve in the classroom environment.

This project is one of the first of its kind, utilising a culturally responsive teaching survey in the context of UK higher education. It is an important step toward enhancing culturally responsive teaching practices in UK HE and has the potential to have a notable and positive impact on students' academic motivation, especially for students from a widening participation or international background.

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Micronutrient malnutrition and maternal-child health: An urgent health equity issue

Glory Aigbedion

Micronutrient malnutrition remains a critical global health issue, particularly impacting maternal and child health. Despite advancements in healthcare, many communities, especially those in low-income regions, face disproportionate risks to micronutrient malnutrition. Micronutrient deficiency is also known as "hidden hunger", because unlike other forms of hunger, the clinical symptoms are not always overtly visible and develop late but have far-reaching consequences, influencing not only individual health outcomes but also broader societal wellbeing.

As the world becomes more attuned to the complex interplay of determinants of health, examining micronutrient deficiencies through an equity lens becomes crucial, as these deficiencies affect vulnerable populations, perpetuating health disparities across generations. This article highlights micronutrient deficiencies as an equity issue, examines their impact on maternal and child health, and advocates the need for equity-focused, multi-sectoral interventions to address underlying causes and health disparities.

Micronutrients in maternal and child health

Micronutrients, including vitamins and minerals such as iron, iodine, vitamin A, folic acid and zinc, are essential for human development and function. While required in small amounts, these nutrients are fundamental to various physiological processes, including immune function, cellular growth and neurological development. For pregnant women, micronutrient needs increase due to the metabolic demands of supporting foetal growth and preparing for childbirth.

Deficiency in key nutrients during pregnancy could affect foetal growth, metabolism and vascular development with adverse short- and long-term health outcomes, both for the mother and infant.

In children, micronutrient deficiencies, particularly in the first 1,000 days of life (from conception to age two), can result in lasting developmental consequences. Robust evidence links nutritional deficiencies during this period to stunted growth, cognitive impairments, weakened immune systems and increased susceptibility to infectious diseases and chronic diseases. These early health challenges create obstacles for children's abilities to achieve their full potential, perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage that impacts educational, social and economic outcomes over the course of their lives.

Global burden of micronutrient deficiency

Despite being preventable, micronutrient deficiencies affect a staggering proportion of the global population. Although global estimates are scarce, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimates there are more than two billion people with micronutrient deficiencies, with the most common nutrients of interest being iron, zinc and vitamin A.

Iron deficiency anaemia, for example, affects nearly 40% of pregnant women worldwide, contributing to a large portion of maternal mortality, preterm births and low birth weight, all conditions associated with long-term health complications. This prevalence, however, is inequitably distributed with pregnant women and young children in deprived communities at higher risk. Gender-related disparities also lead to a higher prevalence of inadequate intake of iodine, vitamin B12 and folate in females, and conversely higher inadequate intake of magnesium, vitamin C and thiamine in males.

Using Nigeria as a case study, a national estimate of anaemia showed that more than one in two children are deficient in iron or vitamins and one in two pregnant women are deficient in iron (Aigbedion, *2024 PhD thesis yet to be published*).

Micronutrient deficiency as a health equity issue

Micronutrient deficiency is a significant health equity issue because it disproportionately affects populations already facing disadvantage. WHO understands health equity as the absence of unfair, avoidable and remediable differences in health status amongst groups of people; health inequities are therefore systematic differences in the health status of different population groups. Like other global health challenges, its unequal distribution reflects broader inequities in access to nutritious food, healthcare, finance, housing and education, amongst others. These inequities make micronutrient deficiencies not just a biological problem but also a social and economic justice concern.

Research consistently shows that the root causes of ill health lay in the social and environmental conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. Factors such as poverty, limited access to nutrient-rich foods, inadequate healthcare systems and entrenched systemic inequalities significantly increase the risk of micronutrient deficiencies. Vulnerable groups such as low-income families, marginalised communities, women and children are most affected, as evidenced by the high prevalence of conditions like iron deficiency anaemia among women and vitamin A deficiency in children under five.

Tackling micronutrient deficiency as a priority

The effects of micronutrient deficiencies are not confined to a single generation but have cascading effects on families and communities resulting in a multigenerational cycle. Children born to malnourished mothers are more likely to experience stunted growth, cognitive delays and chronic health issues, perpetuating a life cycle of poverty and limited opportunity. When children begin life with compromised health, they are often at a disadvantage in educational attainment and economic productivity. As these children grow, they are more susceptible to chronic diseases, further burdening healthcare systems and economic resources.

Maternal and child health and wellbeing are pressing global health issues and addressing all forms of malnutrition, including micronutrient malnutrition, should be prioritised.

While efforts are being made by international organisations such as UNICEF and WHO, the persistent unequal distribution of deficiency signals a need for more context-specific interventions and collaborative efforts combining nutrition, education, healthcare and social support — ultimately contributing to more equitable and healthy communities. Promoting maternal and child nutrition is not only an investment in individual health but a pathway to social justice, as it helps dismantle cycles of poverty and creates opportunities for future generations.

Addressing micronutrient deficiencies requires moving beyond purely biological or dietary interventions. A health equity approach recognises the interconnected social determinants – the "causes of the causes" – that perpetuate these disparities. This means ensuring equitable access to affordable, nutrient-dense foods, strengthening healthcare systems to prioritise vulnerable populations, and tackling structural inequities that maintain cycles of deprivation.

By framing micronutrient deficiency as a health equity challenge, I emphasise the need for systemic, justice-oriented solutions to create lasting change. By investing in maternal and child nutrition, societies can break the cycle of disadvantage, promoting not only improved health outcomes but also greater social and economic equity.

Exploring spatial democracy and public pedagogy through “retrotopia” and “utopia”: A comparative study of Tehran and London

Maryam Rouintan

In recent decades, the concepts of retrotopia and utopia, as developed by Zygmunt Bauman, have become increasingly relevant in understanding the evolving dynamics of urban spaces and their role in shaping democracy and public pedagogy. This paper explores how these two concepts influence spatial democracy and public pedagogy in two cities with contrasting socio-political landscapes — Tehran and London. By examining these cities, we aim to unravel the interplay between utopian aspirations, retrotopian longings and the socio-political forces that shape public spheres, civic engagement and identity politics in urban environments.

As an Iranian immigrant, this researcher is informed by a deep understanding of the cultural and political dynamics in Tehran and a lived experience of the multicultural complexities of London. Recent social movements in both cities, such as the “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests in Tehran and the far-right demonstrations in London underscore the importance of public spheres in promoting or hindering democracy. By examining these movements, this study seeks to raise awareness of the transformative potential of public pedagogy and contribute to a nuanced understanding of spatial democracy.

This study employs a comparative historical approach, drawing on ethnographic observations, photo archives and thematic analysis. By examining Tehran and London, it aims to highlight how socio-political contexts influence the manifestation of retrotopia and utopia in urban environments. The study also incorporates narrative analysis, exploring the stories and symbols that shape public pedagogy and collective action in these cities.

Retrotopia vs utopia

Zygmunt Bauman introduces the concept of retrotopia as the idea of a longing for an idealised past as a response to disillusionment with modernity and the failure of progressive promises. In this context, retrotopia fosters a desire to restore an imagined, cohesive past, often excluding marginalised groups and reinforcing social hierarchies. Such nostalgia manifests in various forms, from populist movements to far-right protests, where individuals resist diversity and pluralism to reclaim a perceived lost identity.

Conversely, utopia represents an aspirational vision of a better future, rooted in inclusivity, diversity and social justice. Although Bauman warns of the erosion of utopian thinking in a consumer-driven society, he argues that utopia remains vital for inspiring collective action and societal transformation. Utopian thinking pushes for flexible, evolving approaches to social improvement, balancing the preservation of historical identities with an openness to future possibilities.

Public pedagogy

Public pedagogy, as initially conceptualised by theorists such as Henry Giroux and Paulo Freire, explores how learning and civic engagement occur outside formal educational institutions. It focuses on how public spaces, media, culture and social movements serve as platforms for collective learning and dialogue. Hannah Arendt’s insights into public pedagogy emphasise the role of civic spaces in fostering democratic discourse and enabling individuals to act as political beings. Together, these frameworks allow for an examination of the interplay between retrotopic and utopian visions and how they shape spatial democracy and public pedagogy in Tehran and London.

Spatial democracy

Accordingly, spatial democracy refers to the equitable access to, and agency within, public spaces. These spaces, whether physical, social or digital, are critical for democratic dialogue, civic participation and the negotiation of collective identities. In both Tehran and London, public spaces serve as arenas for contestation and transformation, reflecting broader socio-political dynamics.

Bauman underscores the erosion of public spaces in contemporary society, where commodification and control undermine their democratic potential. This phenomenon is evident in Tehran, where public spaces are tightly regulated by the state, and in London, where privatisation and surveillance shape spatial access. Despite these challenges, public spaces remain sites of resistance, where marginalised groups, youth and activists reclaim their agency and challenge hegemonic structures.

Public spaces in Tehran and London serve as symbolic arenas for contestation and transformation. In Tehran, streets and squares become sites of resistance against authoritarianism while in London, parks and civic centres host protests advocating for social justice. These spaces embody the aspirations and struggles of their communities, reflecting the broader dynamics of spatial democracy.

Youth activism and civic engagement

Youth movements play a pivotal role in shaping public pedagogy and spatial democracy. In Tehran, young people have defied authority by reclaiming public spaces, from schools to streets, as arenas of resistance. The "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement exemplifies this spirit, where Generation Z and feminists unite to challenge patriarchal and authoritarian structures.

Similarly, in London, youth activism has emerged as a response to social inequalities and far-right populism, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity and pluralism.

These movements highlight the indignation of youth as a response to hegemonic structures, resonating with Charles Spinosa's idea of channelling dissatisfaction into transformative action.

Integration and intersectionality

Both Tehran and London demonstrate the potential for public spaces to foster integration and intersectionality. In Tehran, protests have brought together diverse groups, including feminists, religious minorities and secular activists, pointing toward a vision of an inclusive, pluralistic society. In London, the intersectionality of gender, race and class is evident in movements advocating for social justice and equity. By addressing these inequalities, public pedagogy cultivates a collective identity that transcends individual differences, fostering a sense of shared purpose.

Retrotopia and far-right sentiments in London

In London, retrotopian sentiments are evident in the rhetoric of far-right movements, which idealise a homogeneous past and resist multiculturalism. These movements highlight the tension between utopian aspirations for an inclusive society and exclusionary ideologies rooted in nostalgia. Bauman's critique of retrotopia underscores the dangers of such ideologies, which reinforce social divisions and hinder democratic progress.

Utopian aspirations in Tehran

In contrast, the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in Tehran embodies a utopian vision of a just, equitable society. Rooted in Bauman's idea of flexible, evolving social improvement, this movement seeks to bridge the gap between tradition and innovation. By reclaiming public spaces and challenging oppressive structures, Iranian activists envision a future that honours cultural heritage while embracing diversity and pluralism.

Narrative and storytelling

The power of narrative and storytelling is central to public pedagogy. In both Tehran and London, youth movements use stories to frame their struggles, mobilise support and create a shared sense of purpose. From slogans like "Woman, Life, Freedom" to symbolic acts of resistance, these narratives resonate across social boundaries, amplifying the voices of marginalised groups and fostering solidarity.

This interplay between retrotopia and utopia offers valuable insight into the dynamics of spatial democracy and public pedagogy. In Tehran and London, these concepts shape how public spaces are contested, reclaimed and transformed. A balanced approach that draws on both past and future visions can create democratic spaces that honour historical identities while accommodating evolving societal needs. By fostering inclusivity, diversity and collective action, public pedagogy can bridge the gap between tradition and innovation, paving the way for a fairer and more just urban future.

This study highlights the potential of public spaces as arenas for learning, dialogue and resistance. By examining the transformative power of youth activism, intersectionality and storytelling, it underscores the importance of public pedagogy in cultivating collective identities and advancing social change. As cities like Tehran and London navigate the complexities of modernity, the lessons from their public spheres offer a blueprint for fostering spatial democracy in diverse urban contexts.

The duality of preservation: Psychological safety in higher education

Amberlee Green

In today's complex academic landscape, a pressing question arises: how can we cultivate environments that foster psychological safety, particularly for marginalised groups in higher education (HE)? This article explores the concept of psychological safety as it is understood in various contexts and environments, the challenges it could potentially address if brought into an academic context, and actionable strategies for implementation.

Contextualising psychological safety in HE

Psychological safety, a term with a history across clinical, aviation and business industries that was popularised by Amy Edmondson in 1999, refers to an environment where individuals feel safe to express themselves, take risks and engage without fear of negative consequences to their identity, status or career. In HE, this concept gains profound importance when examining the experiences of marginalised staff and students. Despite the potential for intellectual and cultural enrichment, many institutions struggle to create genuinely inclusive environments. This gap not only impacts individual wellbeing but also hinders institutional success.

As Audre Lorde poignantly articulated whilst reflecting on her academic career as she managed her cancer recovery, self-care is not an unnecessary indulgence, it is self-preservation, which is a political act. For staff and students from marginalised groups, preserving mental, emotional and professional wellbeing is a necessity in navigating largely white, male-dominated academic spaces. Psychological safety becomes a tool not just for survival but for thriving in these environments.

Influence of war metaphors in HE

Language shapes perception, and the use of war metaphors in public discourse often evokes fear and division. Again, referencing Lorde who spoke of "political warfare", terms like "the war on misinformation" or "the war on AI" create a binary dynamic of hierarchy, battle, and winners and losers. In the context of HE, these metaphors can exacerbate adversarial relationships rather than foster collaboration.

By reframing the narrative, institutions can move away from combative metaphors toward an environment that promotes growth, inclusion and collective progress. This shift is particularly important when addressing systemic issues such as inequality and exclusion.

The need for self-preservation

On going unrecognised, untrusted and feeling like an outsider in one's own institution, Kalwant Bhopal and June Jackson's research participants say,

> *"Just that I think it is a struggle, it is a struggle. And you feel like you are constantly battling to fit in… it's not that I am trying to be someone different, but maybe I am more conscious of it being visible, to show that I can fit in (Research Fellow)… Higher education institutions state a commitment to equality and diversity through their adherence to equality policies. However, there is limited evidence to assess the real impact of such policies."*

On the conspiracy of silence surrounding inequality in predominantly white institutions, Christine Stanley's study reveals that,

> *"When members of the dominant group speak up, it has tremendous impact because the dynamics of power, positionality and authority are attributes that can only serve to deepen dialogues and influence policy and decision making on diversity and social justice in our colleges and universities. Conversely, when members of the targeted group speak up, the cost for us is enormous because these same dynamics are not yet equitable."*

Intersectionality in academic spaces

The concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1991, emphasises the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, gender and disability. Her reflective paper coining this term underscores the importance of considering multiple identities simultaneously.

Both students and staff often navigate complex, layered identities, such as being both a person of colour and a woman, or a disabled immigrant. Intersectionality provides a framework for understanding and addressing the compounded challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities, and HE needs to consider how to create an environment that recognises and empowers these nuanced experiences.

Bridging the disconnect between staff and students

A recent qualitative study explored the perceptions of staff and marginalised students, revealing a significant disconnect. While staff often viewed student reactions as stemming from arrogance or misunderstanding, students reported feeling unheard and unsupported. This disparity highlights the need for introspection and meaningful dialogue between these groups.

One academic in the study reflected on the importance of personal conversations and self-awareness in building connections with students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These reflections highlight the value of relational approaches in fostering psychological safety. Staff must actively engage with students to bridge gaps in understanding and create more supportive environments.

Strategies for implementing psychological safety

Fostering curiosity and vulnerability: Creating spaces where both staff and students feel comfortable sharing their experiences requires curiosity and vulnerability. Staff must model these behaviours, demonstrating openness to learning from others' perspectives. Training programmes can help educators develop these skills, emphasising the importance of empathy and active listening.

Building rituals of connection: Regular, structured opportunities for dialogue between staff and students can strengthen relationships and reduce misunderstandings. For example, facilitated discussion groups or roundtable events can provide platforms for sharing experiences and co-developing solutions.

Auditing psychological safety: Institutions need to systematically assess levels of psychological safety within their environments. This involves identifying areas where safety is already present and pinpointing gaps that need attention. For instance, auditing staff meetings, classroom dynamics and institutional policies can reveal opportunities for improvement. Proposed tools for auditing psychological safety could include surveys, focus groups and observational studies, tailored to the unique contexts of different departments and institutions.

Reading lists and curriculum design

One fundamental issue lies in the resources and narratives prioritised in academia. Reading lists often reflect the identities and biases of those who create them, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion. For instance, the underrepresentation of authors from diverse backgrounds in libraries and course materials limits the perspectives students and staff are exposed to, thereby constraining intellectual growth.

Addressing this requires intentionality in curating resources. Educators need to audit their reading lists, ensuring they represent the diverse realities of their student populations and the broader society. Institutions can establish special collections that highlight works on social justice, critical practice and intersectionality, fostering a more inclusive academic culture.

Investing in psychological safety

Investing in psychological safety has far-reaching benefits. For marginalised staff, it can lead to increased retention and professional satisfaction. For students, a psychologically safe environment enhances learning outcomes and overall wellbeing.

Institutions benefit from improved collaboration, innovation and knowledge creation, aligning with their mission to generate and disseminate ideas.

Indeed, fostering psychological safety supports the preservation of talent within academia. Retaining diverse voices enriches the intellectual and cultural fabric of institutions, driving progress and inclusivity.

To advance this work, I am planning for further research exploring the real-world application of psychological safety in HE, especially as these two concepts have not been considered together before. Primary qualitative research can shed light on the lived experiences of staff and students, informing strategies for fostering safety and inclusion. Developing a comprehensive audit tool will also be crucial in measuring progress and identifying areas for intervention.

Ultimately, the question remains: can a focus on psychological safety transform HE? The answer lies in the collective awareness and commitment of educators, senior leadership and students to embrace curiosity, connection and inclusivity. By prioritising psychological safety, we can build academic communities where everyone feels valued and empowered to contribute their best.

Duality of preservation

The duality of preservation highlights the intersection of personal wellbeing and institutional success. Psychological safety is not merely a concept but a practice that demands intentionality and action. By addressing systemic barriers, fostering meaningful connections and committing to introspection, HE can evolve into a space that truly supports all its members. As we move forward, it feels crucial to remember that the preservation of ourselves and our communities is both a necessity and a shared responsibility.

Student perspectives on lecture attendance and engagement in a post-pandemic era

Gayani Gamage

Higher education (HE) institutions in the post-pandemic era have faced the challenge of enticing students back onto campuses following an online lecture mode; this has been aptly labelled an “attendance crisis”. Online lectures and recordings of lectures during and even after the pandemic era paved the way for a conversation around what constitutes a “lecture” and what purpose it serves for students and lecturers to attend lectures in person at the same time. In the context of abundant online Open Educational Resources (OERs), lecture content is no longer necessarily exclusive to those who attend in-person.

Indeed, during and after the pandemic, lectures delivered in-person were also recorded and made available to be viewed at the convenience of students. Such strategies facilitated education at that time to move forward with less disruption. However, those same strategies have since become one of biggest challenges in the effort to bring students back into the classroom in person.

Online vs in-person learning

Research suggests that in-person lecture attendance has decreased with the growing availability of online lectures and resources. Another study argues that there is a “crisis in lecture attendance” in HE and it is “a sign of the nature of educational change brought forward by the pandemic”. It appears that education has only begun to catch up with more recent technological advancements due to the recent pandemic.

As HE students have experienced the convenience of participating in online lectures and submissions, many have shown a preference to continue in that way. Indeed, one study suggests that where in-person lecturers were considered passive and lacking interaction between teachers and students, online lectures were identified as more interactive.

Other factors may also contribute to students preferring online lectures such as (1) the convenience of recorded lectures and resources, (2) the reduced financial burden of traveling to the educational institution and (3) the need for many students to work more hours.

However, the benefits of in-person lectures have also been recognised by students as research demonstrates the development of students’ professional and social skills through interactive, group activities. It is important to note that different cohorts of students may have different views about online versus in-person lecture delivery. Therefore, this researcher designed an action research project to explore students’ perspectives of in-person lecture attendance and engagement.

Action research

This study adopted a qualitative approach in order to allow the unique voices of each participant to be heard and to attain in-depth responses. The project recruited seven participants who had recently graduated from an undergraduate psychology programme. This cohort of participants was selected for recruitment due to reports of low levels of attendance compared to other groups. Ethical approval for the project was obtained from St Mary’s University.

An online survey was shared with participants which asked three questions and requested a minimum of 50 words in response to each. The questions were on reasons for attending or not attending lectures, and on what constitutes a lecture that they would attend in person. Analysis of the data followed Braun and Clarke’s approach to thematic analysis, including coding of significant words, phrases and the following development of sub themes and main themes.

Data indicated that there are complex (e.g. travel times and lecture allocation per day) and deep-rooted socio-economic challenges (e.g. having to work to afford university) that students face in the current social-economic context.

Figure 1 below provides a visual summary of participants' responses.

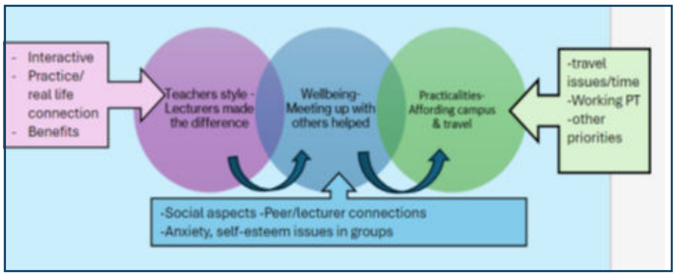
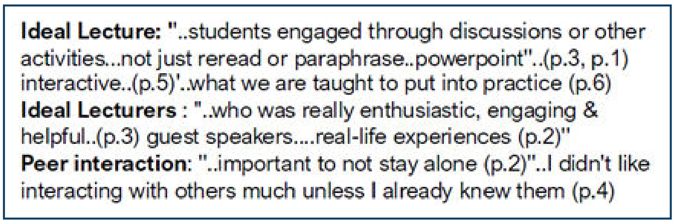

- Interactive
- Practice/ real life connection
- Benefits
Teachers style - Lecturers made the difference
Wellbeing- Meeting up with others helped
Practicalities- Affording campus & travel
-travel issues/time
-Working PT
-other priorities
-Social aspects -Peer/lecturer connections
-Anxiety, self-esteem issues in groups

Figure 1

Figure 2 below highlights key participant responses about the ideal lecture, ideal lecturer and peer interaction.



Ideal Lecture: "..students engaged through discussions or other activities...not just reread or paraphrase..powerpoint"..(p.3, p.1) interactive..(p.5)'..what we are taught to put into practice (p.6)
Ideal Lecturers : "..who was really enthusiastic, engaging & helpful..(p.3) guest speakers....real-life experiences (p.2)"
Peer interaction: "..important to not stay alone (p.2)"..I didn't like interacting with others much unless I already knew them (p.4)

Figure 2

Data also highlighted the needs for peer interaction and for the development of positive mental health and wellbeing which produce a confident graduate who is prepared for the workforce. In order to foster these confident graduates, HE institutions must take into account the complex interaction of factors such as attendance, mental health and wellbeing, and learning support provisions, amongst others.

The results of this action research resonate with findings reported by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) on student engagement as they considered strategies used during the pandemic in ten UK modern universities. One of the QAA's key findings was that attendance as a single factor is not a strong indicator for student engagement in the post-pandemic era.

Student recommendations for HE institutions in the QAA report also align with the results of this action research, and include (1) more flexible timetables, (2) content that is linked to employability, (3) support for gap year training or volunteering, and (4) the addition of sufficient online resources to supplement lectures.

In conclusion, this action research recommends that HE institutions engage in further dialogue with all stakeholders to improve understanding of the potential benefits of increased in-person attendance to lectures and other learning sessions. This will enable both appropriate policy-making for HE institutions and provide an enhanced and more engaged learning experience for students.

Intersectionality of education and ethnicity in domestic violence: Afghan refugee women in the UK

Fatemeh Azizi

This research examines the intersectionality of education and ethnicity in shaping domestic violence experiences among Afghan women refugees in the UK. Drawing on qualitative interviews with 15 Afghan women at a London refugee centre, the study highlights how educational backgrounds and ethnic affiliations influence integration and vulnerability to domestic violence in resettlement contexts.

Ethnic and educational dynamics

Afghanistan's ethnic diversity significantly shapes gender norms and access to resources. Hazara women, an ethnic minority long subjected to discrimination and violence by the Taliban, have historically prioritised education as a means of empowerment. Their educational background contributes to stronger adaptive capacities in navigating resettlement challenges in the UK. In contrast, Pashtun women, the dominant ethnic group, often face stricter patriarchal controls, limiting their access to education and increasing their dependency on male family members. This dependency is further reflected in their greater vulnerability to continued domestic violence post-migration.

Domestic violence post-migration

Migration does not eliminate domestic violence and, in some cases, reinforces patriarchal practices within Afghan families. Hazara women's relative educational advancement provides them with tools to seek support through UK systems, such as legal protections and community organisations. On the other hand, Pashtun women report compounded barriers, including limited English proficiency and awareness of their rights, exacerbating financial dependence and isolation.

Another striking finding in research with Afghan women is the perpetuation of female-to-female oppression in which older women within the household uphold traditional gender roles, intensifying control over younger women.

The role of education in resilience

Education emerges as a critical factor in reducing vulnerabilities. Women with higher educational attainment display greater confidence in accessing resources and asserting their autonomy, aligning with research on the empowering effects of education in refugee populations. For less-educated women, tailored interventions focusing on language acquisition, legal literacy and vocational training are essential to break cycles of dependency and provide pathways to independence.

Implications for policy and practice

This research highlights the impact of education and ethnicity on Afghan refugee women's experiences with domestic violence in the UK. Addressing these dimensions holistically through tailored interventions is vital for fostering empowerment and effective resettlement.

This study also underscores the importance of culturally sensitive and intersectional approaches to addressing domestic violence in resettlement contexts more generally. Practitioners must consider the varying experiences of ethnic groups and their access to education when designing support programmes. For example, for Hazara women, leveraging their educational backgrounds can amplify their autonomy, while for Pashtun women, targeted outreach addressing isolation and patriarchal norms is crucial.

Policymakers must ensure refugee services are adaptable to meet the diverse needs of women from different ethnic and educational backgrounds. Further research is needed to explore long-term outcomes of interventions and their role in mitigating domestic violence across refugee populations.

From nihilism to radical acceptance: How philosophy supports the study of psychology

Elizabeth Kaplunov

Philosophy is the study of existence, reason, knowledge, mind and language while psychology looks at the mind and behaviour. It follows then that philosophy and psychology are closely linked disciplines. Wilhelm Wundt, the so-called father of psychology, was able to distinguish psychology from philosophy by analysing how the mind works in a more structured way. He focused on "objective measurement" at his lab at the University of Leipzig, and primarily used the technique of "introspection", during which participants were asked to describe their perceptions of visual images or pieces of music.

Around the same time as Wundt, Sigmund Freud lived in Vienna, setting up his practice in 1886. Freud thought that behaviour was determined by the unconscious mind, and observed his patients' behaviours, as opposed to asking them to introspect as Wundt had done. However, given that Freud's approach of psychoanalysis is a talking therapy, it can be understood that there is perhaps an element of introspection involved. Other approaches to psychological studies are biomedical, cognitive and behavioural. These lean increasingly toward the empirical and scientific, with a focus on testing and analysing behaviours that can be observed, or measuring cognitive responses such as reaction time to stimuli.

Students of psychology are generally taught that these approaches are related to the scientific study of psychology. In fact, it was a philosopher who first arrived at the key ideas underpinning current psychological approaches. Aristotle was a philosopher in ancient Greece who put forth notable ideas on the mind, behaviour and biology of behaviour. He proposed that the body and soul are inseparable, and that the mind (the soul) and body affect each other.

Furthermore, Aristotle believed that the body should be studied to understand the mind, using observation and classification methods. He also suggested that the mind is a blank slate which can be filled up with experiences, and viewed wellbeing as important, introducing the concept of eudaimonia (or self-actualisation). Aristotle opined that virtues and habits can be developed through practice and can lead to a more positive life.

Psychology, then, can be seen to be based on multiple key philosophical ideas. Indeed, there are many useful philosophical ideas that can be applied to modern-day psychological practices.

Schopenhauer and compassion-focused therapy

Arthur Schopenhauer was a pessimistic man who believed that everyone is going to suffer and there is no purpose to life. However, to make the most of one's state of suffering, he also suggested that a person can help himself by making art, being compassionate and not being tied down by possessions. For example, a person could draw or write in a journal, be kind to himself and to others, or consider letting go of items that he did not need.

The current psychological approach of compassion-focused therapy can be linked to Schopenhauer's ideas as, like Schopenhauer was, it is influenced by Buddhism and aims to guide clients to develop feelings of safety and to learn to self-soothe by being compassionate to themselves.

Nietzsche and overcoming perfectionism

More than a century ago, Friedrich Nietzsche talked about how to embrace failure, saying,

> *"To those human beings who are of any concern to me I wish suffering, desolation, sickness, ill-treatment, indignities — I wish that they should not remain unfamiliar with profound self-contempt, the torture of self-mistrust, the wretchedness of the vanquished: I have no pity for them, because I wish them the only thing that can prove today whether one is worth anything or not — that one endures."*

Although worthwhile and fulfilling projects can be difficult at times, the challenge and the joy of success can benefit us deeply. This is because in order to achieve that success, one must first become an expert in the relevant field. To become an expert, one must prepare to experience pain and anxiety as fulfilment and goal achievement do not often come easily. For example, while a student may struggle to complete an assignment, the process of learning the material and compiling the assignment is itself an experience on which future successes can be built.

Thomas Curran is a current researcher who studies how perfectionists handle failure and suggests ways to overcome unhealthy behaviours of perfectionism. He proposes that people should aim to enjoy the process of work, failure and life in general.

Existentialism and humanistic therapy

Existentialism is the philosophy of dealing with the difficulties of life. This view is about valuing authenticity, making choices that are linked to individual values and valuing being alive with others. This approach promotes the idea of creating one's own values rather than basing them on existing moral codes. That is, considering what matters most to oneself such as honesty, bravery, kindness, achievement or assertiveness, etc. Existentialism also focuses on developing the self – for example, learning a new skill, a new language or going to therapy. Examples of existentialist philosophers include Soren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Rollo May was the first psychologist to apply existentialism to therapy. According to May, therapy should focus on individual needs and resources, as well as empowerment. Based on May's work, Carl Rogers developed humanistic therapy approaches, which focus on client-centred and relational therapy.

Nihilism and acceptance

Nihilism, the belief that nothing matters and that morality, values and existence are all devoid of meaning, arose out of a realisation that we are fundamentally alone and that our values and justifications are simply arbitrary feelings. Many people feel nihilistic at some point in their lives when nothing they do seems to matter, and they lose interest in things once loved. Fortunately, there are nihilist thinkers that can provide insight into how to approach such feelings.

One optimistic way to view these feelings is that if nothing matters, then an individual is free to choose what is truly meaningful for them. They do not need to justify why they find something meaningful beyond that it makes them happy. It is, of course, essential to remember that committing a crime, if that were what made someone happy, can negatively affect not only society but oneself.

The modern idea of radical acceptance is an aspect of dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) which aligns with such nihilistic thinking. Marsha Linehan, a developer of DBT, suggests that clients should be aware that reality cannot be changed and should try to avoid judging themselves. Rather, they should try to understand how to accept their situation and determine which aspects are within their control.

The above examples demonstrate how the study of philosophy can help us in our daily lives, particularly through the application of psychological practices. Indeed, recognising the connections between philosophy and psychology serves to enrich both disciplines as it supports psychology's strong empirical basis and highlights philosophy's desire to understand and improve the human condition.

Publications and presentations

Morris Anglin recently published two articles. The first article is titled “Adapting to the digital age: An evaluation of online learning strategies in public health and social care education” and published in Education Research International in the Wiley Online Library. The second article is titled “Public health implications amidst the British curry conundrum: Challenges and opportunities for Bangladeshi restaurants and workers in the UK” and published in the SSRN Electronic Journal.

Siobhán Strike has presented a paper titled “Walking with a prosthesis: Gait and gait analysis” at The Vascular Societies’ Annual Scientific Meeting 2024. She was awarded the Best Presentation Prize for her paper, which was delivered to the British Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in the limb Absence Rehabilitation (BACPAR) stream.

Alicja McGarrigle and Elizabeth Kaplunov have published an academic blog post titled “Why some students fail to reach their academic potential” on Psychreg.

Alex Avadenei and Dr Elizabeth Kaplunov have published a paper titled “The impact of motivation on learner retention” in the Psychreg Journal of Psychology. They have also published an academic blog post titled “Why should teaching be culturally responsive?” on Psychreg and were interviewed about their work in another post titled “Motivation shapes learning outcomes in students, according to new study”.

Alicja McGarrigle has signed a contract with Routledge to adapt her doctoral research into a book as part of a Russian and Eastern European Studies book series.

Elizabeth Kaplunov has published an academic blog post titled “Psychoanalysis through the ages: How Freud and Jung shaped modern psychotherapy” on Psychreg.

Call for contributions

We maintain an ongoing call for contributions to future issues of RCL's Research and Scholarship Quarterly publication. We welcome ideas and research from staff at RCL, and are happy to support you to develop an idea into an article. We also invite members of staff to recommend student contributions to the Quarterly that are especially well done, original or innovative.

Issues for this academic year are themed by School and aligned with the annual RCL Learning and Teaching Conference, which will take place in April 2025. More detailed information about each issue will follow closer to the time. For now, please note the following themes and their submission deadlines:

- **Issue 12 –** School of Engineering and Computing: Submission deadline is Friday 14th March 2025
- **Issue 13 –** RCL Learning and Teaching Conference: Submission deadline is Thursday 20th May 2025
- **Issue 14 –** School of Business and Law: Submission deadline is Saturday 19th July 2025

If you would like to contribute to or support future issues of this publication, **please contact Anna Wharton, Editor.**