***Studying in this England is wahala (trouble)'*: Analysing the experiences of West African students in a UK higher education institution.**

Introduction

The number of students travelling abroad for education has increased substantially over the past 20 years (Ye and Edwards 2017). UK Council for International Student Affairs data shows that during the 2015-16 academic year, 19% of students came to Britain from outside the European Union. Of this number, 8% were from African countries. Most were South African (22%), with numbers from West African countries marginally less at 21%. Despite notable numbers of African students in Britain currently, their presence is not a recent phenomenon and dates back to the 1700s (Killingray 1994). Yet little research acknowledges this, or 'the choice and decision making of African students who choose to study HE abroad and especially in Britain' (Maringe and Carter 2007: unpaginated). The body of literature examining African students' *experiences* in these institutions, and adjustment to life and learning in Britain is also limited (Ssekai *et al* 2014). Contrastingly, in America several studies have been undertaken (e.g. Boafo-Arthur, 2014, Nsangou and Dundes 2018). These highlighted students' experiences of racist marginalisation, low academic expectations on the basis of their ethnicities, and acculturative stress.

This paper aims to critically explore educational experiences of 12 undergraduate and postgraduate students from three West African countries (Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone), based in a London post-1992 university. In so doing, I examine their reasons for studying in Britain, adaptational experiences to teaching and learning and how far these factors enhanced or undermined their education here. To do this, I use data from interviews conducted with the students, which formed part of a wider university project around Black and Minority Ethnic attainment. As noted above, there remains a dearth in the number of studies exploring the experiences of African overseas students in British universities. Thus, a further aim of this study is to begin to address this gap.

African students' presence in Britain.

West African students' presence in Britain's universities dates back to the 18th century when European business owners sought well educated Africans' assistance in costal trading (Killingray 1994). Wealthy African traders also sent their children to Europe/Britain for similar reasons. Initially, African students in Britain were few, but notably increased during the late 19th century- early-mid 20th century. During the interwar years, they were encouraged to study here, and were given scholarships via the Colonial Development and Welfare Act (Keith 1946 in Ssekai *et al* 2014). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Ghana, Nigeria and other West African countries became independent from British colonial rule. Africans were thus required to take up civil service positions, previously occupied by the British. Some Western educated Africans were already in these roles, thus influencing decisions of other Africans aspiring to undertake

similar jobs, to travel abroad in order to acquire relevant qualifications/work experience then return 'home' to work (Muir Groothues and Goody 1972, Bailikin 2012). Many did not achieve these goals due to challenges faced in adapting to British education. Moreover, bursaries provided by African governments were insufficient for UK living costs. Students often worked long hours to survive, leaving little study time and took longer to complete their education, or failed to do so.

'Push/Pull' factors shaping African students' decisions to study in the UK

As discussed, reasons for Britain as a preferred destination for African students are diverse. Here 'push' and 'pull' factors is used as a theoretical framework. It was initially used to analyse economic migration during the 1960s, but more recently applied to analysing students' decisions to travel abroad for study (e.g. Wilkins *et al* 2012; Hyams-Ssekasi and Caldwell 2019). Giddens's 'Structuration model' (1984) which examines structural and individual issues impacting on personal motivations is also relevant here.

'Push' factors can force a person/group to leave their home country. Examples include 'prevailing levels of economic stagnation or decline' in various African countries (Maringe and Carter (2007: unpaginated). The quality and quantity of universities are also 'push factors', as limited numbers of institutions and unavailability of particular subject areas 'drive' people to leave. (Wilkins *et al* 2012). This is partly attributable to UNESCO's *Education for All* policy which prioritised primary and secondary educational provision over tertiary education in parts of Africa, resulting in a glut of people with pre-university level qualifications who cannot progress any further educationally. Thus, they may feel 'pushed' to seek education elsewhere (Maringe and Carter 2007).

In other African countries numbers of institutions, and prospective students are increasing. Adjei-Mensah et *al* (2014) for example, report that numbers on degree programmes in some Ghanaian universities reach thousands. Large class sizes, however, can hamper teaching and learning quality, since support and guidance from lecturers may be inadequate due to lack of time.

Growth in student numbers also means an increase in graduates, thus creating greater competition in terms of labour market opportunities and 'best fit' for graduate positions. Qualifications are no longer enough, since graduates require additional skills and work experience through unpaid internships, further qualifications and/or social capital and networks to be at a competitive advantage (Ryan and Lorinc 2018). Without these factors, gaining graduate employment will be difficult.

A longstanding perception amongst some Africans is 'that those trained in the UK must be more skilled than ones who had studied at home' (Muir Groothes and Goody 1972:176).…Therefore

> '…a 'Been –to' [an African who had studied in the UK or other parts
> of the West] was more likely to be given preference in competition for

a job and promotion and in any case receive added respect from colleagues, friends and kin…' (ibid).

These ideas are rooted in beliefs that 'extra virtue' was/is accorded to Western educated/trained graduates and are traceable to the colonial era when those in powerful positions had received a Western education and perceived as having 'superior' knowledge. Seemingly, little has changed, since, as noted by participants in Hyams Ssekasi and Caldwell's research (2019), and also by some in this study, there is preference for graduates with international degrees. Graduates returning to their respective countries will probably capitalise on opportunities gained from their foreign degree. Some students, however, choose to remain abroad, arguably negatively impacting on further socio-economic development in their home countries.

In contrast to 'push factors', 'pull factors' draw students to other countries. These include 'institutional reputation, international and globalised recognition of qualification and teaching and learning quality' (Maringe and Carter 2007: unpaginated). Perceptions of a vast array of courses enabling prospective students to specialise alongside 'images of high quality' learning and teaching are also 'pull factors' contributing to the increasing number of African students in Britain (ibid). These factors also enhance cultural and social capital for these students.

Cultural capital refers to non-financial assets transmitted and reproduced through families which facilitates their social mobility (Bourdieu 1977). It is comprised of three different forms: embodied (e.g speech and linguistic ability), objectified (books, art collections etc) and institutionalised forms (educational qualifications), each reflecting dominant capitalist cultural ideals. Upper and upper middle class groups are seen as possessing greater amounts of 'the right' cultural capital, than less affluent classes, who as a result, are regarded as 'culturally disadvantaged'. Acquiring cultural capital may partly inform students' decisions to travel abroad for education, and be considered as a 'pull factor'. Regardless of where they study *all* students obtain institutionalised cultural capital. Their embodied cultural capital may also improve as a consequence of being educated in another language. For the purpose of this study, 'cultural capital' is used as an analytic tool to conceptualise the importance attached by participants' to the acquisition of institutionalised and embodied forms (e.g a British degree, and for some, enhanced command of written and spoken English).

Social capital, 'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 119), can also be obtained by travelling to another context for education. This results from engagement with different cultures, broadening cultural and social knowledge (Miller and Shaw 2014), from which students can build international social networks, potentially bringing dividends, such as employment opportunities. For these reasons, 'social capital' may also be considered as a 'pull factor' for overseas students. Social capital, as a concept is also relevant for understanding how the participants in this study developed social networks for emotional support to avoid isolation, and how undertaking important roles in established organisations enabled them to broaden their connections and develop valuable skills for their futures.

The push/pull model enables understanding of structural factors (e.g. political, social and economic instability, insufficient education systems etc) shaping people's decisions to be educated outside their countries of origin, especially if they have the means to do so. This model, however, does not recognise *individual motivations*, which are arguably as important as structural issues. Hence Giddens' 'structuration approach' is also relevant, as it illustrates how structures (education systems and economies) impact on individual's agency, or capacity to make their own choice (e.g. educational choices). It challenges notions that structure and agency should be viewed as separate entities. Rather, Giddens argues that they intersect, and both are restrictive and enabling of opportunities. Thus, it is applied here to provide an understanding of how the participants regard educational structures in their countries as 'constrictive' or inadequate and deciding to travel abroad for university 'enabling' in terms of obtaining qualifications and potential contacts/work experience.

Another theme arising within this research, is institutional racism, which operates within social and political institutions, including the education system. This term was coined by Carmichael (1967) who explained it as a subtle, less discernible type of racism. More recently the Mc Pherson Report (1999) defined it as:

> The collective failure of an organization to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.

This concept, as it relates to racist stereotyping, prejudice and ignorance is utilised here to understand students' experiences of low academic expectations expressed by their tutors, which shaped their overall student experiences.

Perceptions versus reality: Teaching and learning experiences

Seemingly, prospective African students expect learning and teaching experiences in Britain and Western contexts to be positive, though it is not always the case. Kanu and Marr (2007: 15) report that although some students commend their experiences, others struggle with adapting to more independent, student-centred learning as opposed 'teacher centred', 'chalk and board' methods or rote learning. Focusing primarily on these issues, however, can result in 'emphasis on what they [overseas students] 'lack', rather than what they bring to the new setting' (Ye and Edwards 2017:866) and reinforces negative assumptions about overseas students' engagement in class and academic abilities.

International students also often express concerns about their academic skills, specifically the ability to produce 'passable' essays (Kanu and Marr 2007). Yet, poor quality assessment feedback hinders progress, thus potentially contributing to 'academic stress' and 'illness, both physical and psychological' amongst students. (Niven 1987 in Li and Kaye 1998:43)

Life Abroad: racism and marginalisation in university

As mentioned, students' international educational experiences can enhance cultural and social capital through engagement with host countries' peoples and cultures. Such engagement *should* help adaptation to life in these contexts. Many, however, encounter cultural alienation and isolation (Boafo-Arthur 2014), due to longstanding racist preconceptions and media representations of Africa as a marginalised and subordinate continent/peoples, which impact negatively on perceptions of African international students. (Maundani 2001)

Lee and Opio (2011:631) in a study exploring experiences of African student athletes in American universities, highlight racism and marginalisation faced by African and African American students. They are frequently 'lumped together' and 'subjected to the same negative stereotypes'. Despite being seen as 'posess[ing] innate athletic abilities, both supposedly 'lack' 'academic competencies and abilities'. African-Americans also seemingly held stereotypical views about African students, notably that they were 'savages' and that 'Africa is a jungle'. More recent research by Nsangou and Dundes (2018) focusing on university students and graduates suggests that the tensions between the groups result from social and economic rivalry. The view that '[African Americans] lack a sense of connection to Africans, -due to Africans' purported sense of superiority and disregard for African Americans' ongoing struggle to end oppression.' (2018:1) This is problematic, as one might expect that shared experiences of racism could facilitate a sense of unity. Yet Arthur (2000:72), concludes that cultural, political and economic affinity between African immigrants and their African American counterparts is not as strong as it should be considering the historical cord which ties them together…'

Social isolation reinforced by racism and discrimination underpin psychological problems that students face alongside difficulties in adjusting to their new environment, or 'acculturative stress' (Boafo Arthur 2014). Marginalisation transpires in other ways, for instance through curriculums and class discussions which prioritise dominant White Western cultures and perspectives over 'others'. Even if African students' perspectives are included:

> it is piecemealed into the learning process as a 'side dish' and consequently, when nonWhite students embark on the educational process, they are met with indifference because their perspective is not incorporated into the fabric of the university (Benton 2001:3)

Other experiences of racism within universities include tutors' expectations of underachievement amongst Black And Minority Ethnic (BAME) students, reinforced by 'negative stereotypes of their abilities' (HEA 2008:23). Maundeni, (2001:270) reports that academics' low expectations of African students contributed to 'distress in overt ways'. She mentioned an incident whereby an African student obtained high grades, yet 'professors expressed negativity and disbelief'. Others felt that despite putting considerable effort in their work, they were frequently given lower grades because of their colour. Transmitting low expectations to students, can, as a student in Lee and Opio's research explained, 'make it difficult to believe that it is possible to succeed…'(2011:638). It also highlights a

sector wide lack of staff awareness of BAME issues, which amongst other things includes a tendency to frame the issue of differential attainment by problems associated with the student (the deficit model (Miller 2016:53)

Methodology

My sample of students from Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone reflects the broader make up of African students in the university, and in London generally (Arthur 2012). Interview questions used in the discussion were designed to address and answer the main themes below:

- What made the students choose Britain for their education?
- How did they find adapting British life and culture?
- How did they find teaching and learning experiences in Britain?

The research involved discussions with 12 participants. Their details are as follows:

Name	Age	Sex	Country of Origin	Programme/level
Chisom	28	F	Nigeria	IT Postgraduate
Ben	27	M	Nigeria	IT Postgraduate
Kwamena	33	M	Ghana	Business Management Post Graduate
Franklyn	30	M	Ghana	IT Postgraduate
Betsey	27	F	Nigeria	Education Undergraduate
Jenna	42	F	Sierra Leone	Education/Teaching Postgraduate
Mensah	28	M	Ghana	IT Postgraduate
Sam	39	M	Sierra Leone	Pharmacy Post Graduate
Blankson	24	M	Ghana	IT Postgraduate
Kumba	21	F	Sierra Leone	Social Sciences Undergraduate
Jimoh	23	M	Nigeria	Pharmacy Postgraduate
Morolake	22	F	Nigeria	Social Science Undergraduate

This research formed part of a University wide initiative aimed at addressing Black and Minority Ethnic attainment disparities. Recruitment was conducted via emails to department heads to identify potential participants from their data on West African students. To secure additional participants, I employed snowballing methods using personal contacts, and those offered by participants. A disadvantage of snowballing was limited diversity amongst participants (Gray 2004), arguably due to common background and interests.

Twelve interviews were conducted which lasted 40-120 minutes. They included questions on students' reasons for coming to Britain to study; experiences of adapting to life here; comparisons of teaching and learning experiences in their home countries and in Britain; relationships with course peers/tutors. For ethical purposes and identity protection participants were given pseudonyms.

Data analysis

Themes arising from the discussions included studying in Britain to enhance career prospects 'back home'; perceptions of improved quality teaching and learning; struggles associated with adapting to the British education system, learning and teaching; difficult interactions with lecturers and course peers. These themes represented sub-categories which were analysed under broader themes (e.g. 'push and pull' factors). To further inform the analysis, I revisited existing literature for deeper understanding of similar issues which emerged from the interviews (see for example Maringe and Carter 2007; Wilkins *et al* 2012, Hyams Ssekasi and Caldwell 2019). The data highlighted some positive student experiences, including learning and contributions to university life, which is often negated or under explored in case studies concerning overseas African students.

Insider/outsider issues

Various factors shaped interactions with participants, for example my status as both an 'insider' and 'outsider'. 'Insiders' 'share characteristic[s], role[s] or experience[s] with participants' whereas 'outsiders' have fewer commonalities with them (Corbyn Dwyer 2009:55). I shared insider status with my participants in several ways. For example, we are all Black, with West African origins. Additionally, I shared a common heritage with Ghanaian participants.

However, I was born, raised and educated in Britain, whereas the participants had spent their lives in Africa. This also meant that my understanding of the British education system and its functions differed from theirs, which positioned me as an outsider. Nevertheless, we shared common experiences such as low academic expectations, which we perceived stems from our ethnicities. There were also commonalities in terms of upbringing, such as strong parental emphasis on educational and professional attainment. Discussions of shared experiences increased our rapport and participants appeared relaxed and candid when giving their accounts.

I was conscious of possible insider bias. However, this position was also useful for data analysis, because it 'helped in arriving at further useful insights that have implications for [policy and] practice…' (Todres, Galvin *et al* 2014: unpaginated). This was particularly important, since the research aimed to understand their educational experiences, which would help shape and inform policy and practice around BAME student experience in our institution.

While I sought to ensure 'democratisation' (Smith and Khawaya 2014) or 'balance' in relationships between myself and the participants, power relations shape interactions on factors such as race, class, gender, age, sexuality, professional positioning, etc. Key issues arising in this study included professional status and class. My qualifications and academic position placed me in a differential position with my participants. As Morolake explained: 'back home

we were always taught to look up to our lecturers'. Although like me, my participants had institutionalised cultural capital (e.g qualifications), I was educated in Britain, so they possibly perceived me as having the 'type' of cultural capital for which they aspire.

Several came from very wealthy families, which arguably placed them in a position of power over my working class origin, though my current professional status makes it more difficult to identify myself as working class. Nevertheless, class differences between myself and participants were particularly evident in discussions about their lives in their respective countries. Several, for instance mentioned that they attended excellent private schools, whereas I was state educated. This, however, did not significantly impact on our interactions.

Data and discussion

University Strikes, impacts on education 'back home' and the exodus to the UK

Participants shared reasons for travelling to Britain to study. Analysis involved considering them in relation to the 'push'/'pull factor framework, echoing Maringe and Carter (2007). A 'push factor' for some was lecturers' frequent strikes in their countries of origin impacting on degree completion:

> Chisom: I started my MSc at university ages ago, and because the teachers weren't being paid enough, they kept striking. Many of my friends went to America, and some came here. I decided to come to UK…I'm more likely to finish and get a job.

While lecturers *should* express dissatisfaction about their working conditions and pay, unfortunately striking has detrimental effects on students' education. Sometimes this leads to changing institutions, or withdrawing from university and seeking employment, or for those like Chisom with the financial means, traveling abroad to study.

Kwamena experienced similar issues to Chisom and left Ghana to study in Britain. He recognized problematic implications of not returning 'home': 'If people don't come back and use what they've learned abroad, it's kind of a waste'. He was alluding to the issue of 'brain drain', an issue in many African countries. Chimankere expressed similar views to Kwamena stating that 'there is a debilitating flight of professionals and skilled people' (2005:6) which reinforces economic crises in some African contexts. To prevent further hemorrhaging of skilled people, he advocated establishing programmes 'encourag[ing] immigrants to return, so that they can contribute to the economic development of their home country' (2005:2).

Other participants explained how their countries' labour markets displayed preference for British (or other Western) qualified workers. As Franklyn noted, 'I knew that by coming here,

my chances of getting a good job in Accra would be better. They like people who have studied in the West'.

Franklyn's point supports historical and current arguments concerning beliefs that British degrees enhance opportunities for career progression in their countries of origin (see for example Nworah 2006, Hyams Sseskasi and Caldwell 2019). However, this perspective can be problematic as it reinforces inherent beliefs amongst some Africans that their education is somewhat 'inferior'. Yet, many high quality African institutions produce excellent graduates with similar capabilities to those who studied abroad (British Council.org.uk 2014).

Transitioning to life and education in Britain

Participants described issues in transitioning to life and culture in Britain, including difficulties learning to be 'self-reliant', especially if they were from close-knit collective environments. These challenges engendered feelings of loneliness. As Kumba and Morolake found, this was compounded by a lack of friends. According to Kumba:

> I don't know what it was, but I tried to make friends with some of the guys on my course, but they didn't seem to want to know. I just remember seeing a group and though I didn't feel that confident, I thought 'let me go and ask them to lunch and maybe we can go on from there…' So I approached one of the girls, this Indian girl. She just kind of looked me up and down and was a bit funny so I don't know…I kind of felt a bit sad. A few weeks later, I got talking to Morolake because we were a bit stuck on something, and since then she's become like my bunky [best friend].

These issues echo Boafo-Arthur's (2014) observations concerning African students' marginalization by peers, making it difficult to establish networks, thus, reinforcing their sense of isolation. Nevertheless, as a consequence, Kumba and Morolake established a strong emotional bond and supported each other academically, which facilitated their progress. Morolake, suggested that universities needed to do more to help international students:

> Frankly, these people (universities) can be doing more stuff to help people like us. We are new here. We don't know how things work. We don't know the culture, and if we don't meet people, it can be hard as me and Kumba know.

Bamford (2006:7), whose research explored similar issues in a London university supports Morolake's argument. She too suggests that institutions need to take responsibility to ensure integration of overseas students, and should 'consider the social context of students' adjustment in order to address this isolation'.

Other participants made conscious efforts to form friendships with African students. As with Morolake and Kumba, these friendships started as 'study' groups and evolved into socializing and participating in African Unions, enabling them to build social and cultural capitals. As Hanks and Eklund (1976 in Some and Orelus 2015), found, engaging in extra-curricular activities like these, facilitates academic success, builds self-esteem and network development.

Participants' accounts of their academic experiences were mixed. Several were positive, whereas others, less so. Betsey appreciated the support she received:

> The lecturers were very helpful. I wasn't used to asking for help. We didn't really do that back home. So I was really struggling to get on. But once I got the courage to do it, my lecturers took time to explain things

Learning to seek assistance formed an important element in Betsey's transition to education in Britain, and boosted her confidence. Her lecturers were supportive, and sympathetic to different learning experiences in her home country. Swisher and Schoorman, (in Bamford 2006:5) argue that tutors must continue to work on understanding cultural differences in teaching and learning experiences for overseas students, since this represents an important part of improving progress and experience. Essentially, they must acknowledge 'that their own classroom interactions and expectations are also 'culturally rooted', in the same way as their students' (ibid). In her own reflections of teaching international students from a range of different backgrounds, Ryan (2011) endorses Swisher and Schoorman's views, adding that teaching and engaging with these students are enriching experiences. She too emphasizes the importance of classroom discussions which encourage *all* students to participate and share experiences to enhance the depth of the conversation and students' engagement with content. In terms of the teaching process, she suggests making lectures 'more transparent' by 'repeating key ideas', to facilitate the learning of all students. The following from Sam and Jimoh, who became friends after meeting on their pharmacy programme illustrate this view, albeit for different reasons.:

> Sam: Ok…well you know, I told you that I did some pharmacy back in Sa Lone (Sierra Leone). I liked it very much, but we did not go into it as deeply as we are here. I did it as an undergraduate, but still I don't think that we would have covered things with the same deepness as they do in this department. There was not time and my classes were too big. It is really good here because I am being challenged in my course

> Jimoh: It was a bit hard to start with…Things like learning in different ways. It wasn't just those old text books where you learn it then chew and pour for exams (learn by rote and reproduce course material) – we do more experiments and you can see how you would use it in the real world. Also the facilities are much better than what we had at my university in Nigeria. At least you know that if you go into a lab here, something won't stop working because of no electricity.

Their reflections on experiences in Nigeria and Sierra Leone respectively support issues raised in research examining negative impacts of large class sizes, and poorly functioning equipment on student teaching and learning experiences (see for example Olowe and Ayani 2016). Jimoh also provides interesting insights into his education in Nigeria, involving 'chew and pour' approaches, which prioritized textbook/theoretical knowledge over applied methods. Friere (1968:21) refers to this approach as 'narrative education'. He criticises it because although the student receives and records the information, it is not always fully understood, neither can it be applied elsewhere. Thus, education merely becomes 'depositing' of knowledge, stifling students' creativity.

Jenna completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), and a Masters' in Britain. Her aim was to teach at a Sierra Leonean university, and in the future, engage in reforming education systems in her local area. She described her experience as a 'mixed bag'. Her PGCE, was positive, because her tutor was supportive, and continually encouraged her participation in class discussions, which as Ryan (2011) emphasizes is necessary to promote inclusion amongst international students. Bamford (2006) also notes that 'tutors need to be aware that the international dimension of the classroom can provide an added benefit (Bamford 2006:7) because by sharing encounters of life and education in different contexts, overseas students can broaden their colleagues learning experiences. Yet, this is an area that sparse in the literature on overseas students in British education.

Inadequate support and low teachers' expectations as potential barriers to educational experience and success

As indicated above, some participants reported issues, which negatively impacted on their experiences. Jenna, for instance noted how her Masters' degree was very different to her PGCE She described an unhelpful course tutor who offered little clarity concerning coursework:

> We had this portfolio to do, and I wasn't sure about what had to go in it or how we had to structure it. We were all confused, actually. So I asked and asked… but he didn't really help. In fact he made it more confusing... When I went to see him on one of the last times, he was a bit, you know, grumpy…

Jenna's decision to address the issue backfired:

> I didn't like how he was being to me, or to the other students, so I had to tell him, and he snapped at me. Then when we had class later that week, he told everyone off for asking for help…This wasn't on, so I went to my programme leader and told her… She asked him to change his method of working with us…It got better, but it took time

Ben also recalled negative experiences pertaining to limited guidance regarding coursework:

> Sometimes we did not know what the hell we were meant to be doing with our courseworks. Also, it was like they were trying to put too much into the course. I know we only had a year, but still, it was too much. Too much!

> LOK: Can you explain what you mean when you say that 'they were trying to put too much into the course?'

> Ben: Yeah…I mean too much knowledge and contents. All this theory stuff, and you know, the experimental stuff, trying to implement and manage systems. It would have been better if we had less of it so we could learn it in more detail. But because of these things, it was packed. We were just touching on this that and the other. And then we had all these deadlines, and they were too close mehn (man). A lot of us had very little Christmas because of it.

As research shows (see Ye and Edwards 2018) academic transitioning can be stressful for overseas students. Carroll (2002), also emphasises the importance of explicitness in assessment expectations for overseas students, since they differ to previous experience. Support should be given in terms of decoding assignment criteria and formats. Lecturers must also recognise that international students might take longer to learn when adapting to new approaches. Hence extra guidance on time management is key.

A further issue raised by Ben was about lecturers' racist comments concerning academic expectations of students from Nigerian backgrounds:

> In our group, it was mainly Indians, Nigerians, and some few other guys from England, Ghana…one from Sierra Leone. Anyway, one of our lecturers said that plagiarism is more likely amongst us than with other groups. I just couldn't believe he said that. What made it worse was when one of my Nigerian colleagues was defending his project. Basically he was accused of the same thing. He'd been getting 70s throughout, and he was given 72 for his project. But at the defence, he was made to feel that they didn't believe that he wrote it. Hey…ooooh studying here, in this England is wahala (trouble), sha!

Biggs (1999 in Bamford 2006: 7) highlights similar problems and notes that tutors often expect overseas students to plagiarise because 'they don't understand what plagiarism means'. Yet as he rightly suggests, little knowledge about what constitutes plagiarism is something that could also be equally applicable to home students.

Mensah, who studied with Ben, reported that during the period leading up to their examinations, the same tutor expressed his thoughts on the students' likelihood of passing the course:

> This guy[tutor]…said that in the past only 25 percent of people passed the course. So there are… let me think. about 200 of us. It is a big class, and he said that for us, it would be even less than that! Can you imagine?! It was not encouraging at all, at all!

Mensah believed that perhaps his lecturer was 'making us all think we would fail so we worked harder and passed', which is 'negative reinforcement', and entails encouraging desired responses through the use of negative stimuli, (e.g comments). Mensah, Ben and others, however, felt undermined by the lecturer. Their experiences are in line with research findings (see Caldwell and Hyams Ssekasi 2019) reinforcing problematic notions that African (and other overseas students) possess an inadequate academic ability. This also constitutes institutional racism, thus potentially impeding their performance.

Rubie-Davies' (2017) also undertook a case study analysing relationships between teachers' expectations, ethnicity, gender and dis/ability. He observed that these (often negative) views are sometimes applied to a whole class, echoing Ben, Mensah and Jenna's experiences. Rubie-Davies also highlights direct correlations between teachers' expectations and students' outcomes, and advocates the need for more positive reinforcement. Ben, Mensah and others received none, however. Nevertheless, they challenged their lecturer's low expectations by obtaining good exam results. This is something which many BAME students do (see Rhamie; 2003; Lee and Opio 2011), although institutional racism like this could have impacted on their educational experiences in other ways.

Conclusions

Most participants reported that they benefitted from their experiences in different ways. All recognised improvements in their skills. Emphasis on activities focusing on written and verbal communication facilitated development of valuable attributes, including embodied cultural capital, and qualifications, enhancing their institutional cultural capital. Some participants undertook key roles in the African Union, which improved their social experiences, enabling them to develop important and beneficial contacts institutionally and beyond.

Although many experienced initial problems transitioning to new learning and teaching methods, they commended their overall teaching experiences, which facilitated critical analysis. Others emphasised the benefits of what they learned beyond the classroom.

Some participants 'felt short changed' by their teaching and learning experiences. In particular, they were disappointed by the lack of support in adapting to new teaching and learning methods. This was compounded by explicit racism and low expectations regarding their abilities. Their accounts echo findings from similar research (see for example NUS 2011). Nevertheless, they too recognised positive outcomes. All successfully completed their courses and acknowledged that newly developed skills would help their future careers. Ben, for instance, indicated how the course will help him create business intelligence systems for Nigerian companies. Mensah is using research skills obtained from the programme to prepare for his PhD and plans to become an IT researcher to further develop this field in Ghana. Jenna will also pursue a PhD in preparation for teaching in Sierra Leone.

Arguably, while participants feel that they gained positively from studying in the UK, much is still needed to improve experiences of international students. I strongly advocate for curriculums and teaching methods that include perspectives which speak to both local and international students' experiences. This could include focus groups comparing teaching and learning methods between home and abroad and highlight areas for improvements. Together, this will bring enhanced awareness of benefits to the globalised teaching and learning approaches within institutions (Bamford 2006).

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