Telling real stories to make a difference! Podcasting for inclusivity in higher education

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Abstract

In the 21st century, there is a growing demand for decolonizing, globalising, and de-nationalising higher education curricula. However, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) struggle to achieve practical inclusivity due to neoliberal perspectives that marketize inclusivity, leading to structural, systemic, and implicit biases. Reflecting broader inequality in the UK Higher Education systems, severe disparities affect marginalised, minoritised, and underrepresented students, creating significant gaps in understanding implicit bias and unintentional discrimination that obscures addressing and dismantling discrimination. This paper highlights unintentional discrimination in HEIs using innovative storytelling and proposes inclusive frameworks through diverse lived experiences to improve outcomes.
Employing interpretive narrative, thematic analysis and storytelling methods through a series of podcasts; hidden commentaries were revealed. Participants included current and former students and staff with diverse characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, neurodiversity, and disability, were recruited voluntarily. The participants' experiences coalesced around six themes informed by the literature review. These themes are decolonization of the curriculum and cultural sensitivity, inclusivity and flexibility, addressing unintentional exclusion, practicalising inclusivity, improving students' experience, and exploring lived experiences. Each theme embodies the voices and experiences of participants, highlighting the existence and impact of unintentional discrimination and implicit bias in higher education. The study affirms the existence of unintentional discrimination in HEIs and importance of comprehensive and practical inclusive pedagogical approaches using storytelling for

authenticity and rigour, advocating the practical application of the generated themes (using a framework and toolkit) to develop inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: Unintentional Discrimination, Implicit Bias, Discrimination, Lived Experience, Storytelling, Podcasting

Introduction

The marginalisation of minoritised groups within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has become increasingly apparent, underscoring the need for inclusivity in the academic experience of students and staff from underrepresented backgrounds, including Black and Asian students, and those with learning differences and disabilities (Lincoln and Stanley, 2021). This raises the importance of a curriculum that truly reflects student diversity. When asked about equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), students highlighted the need for practical EDI strategies, policies, and tangible actions, rather than mere "lip service" or theoretical commitments (Wallbanks and Page-Towers, 2024). Consequently, disconnects between policy and practice highlight the need of a flexible, accessible, and inclusive curriculum, moving away from a "one size fits all" approach (Bain, 2018; Xiangge et al., 2024). Despite advancements in EDI frameworks, systemic issues like institutional bias and "theoretical inclusion" remain, challenging the realisation of true inclusivity in higher education (Arday, 2021; Svendby, 2024).

Although the ethical and moral consequences of intentional discrimination are well documented, more subtle forms of systemic incivility and hidden discrimination often go unaddressed in HEIs. This is due, in part, to the façade of inclusion campaigns that suggest HEIs are free from discrimination (Gebhard et al., 2022). Consequently, discrimination continues to persist, particularly against marginalised groups (Edna et al., 2019). Furthermore, the lack of a standardised conceptualisation of discrimination contributes to unintentional bias and exclusion (Collier-Sewell, 2023). The rise of neoliberalism in higher education, which prioritises institutional and political gains over a culture of inclusivity, perpetuates these structural barriers, reinforcing implicit biases and systemic inequalities (Antwi-Boateng, 2017; Morrish and Sauntson, 2019). This aligns with broader trends in UK HEIs, where significant

disparities continue to affect minoritised and underrepresented students throughout their academic journeys (Amos et al., 2019).

The debate around intentional versus unintentional discrimination reveals how both forms can have similar moral and practical consequences, with implicit bias playing a significant role in perpetuating exclusion (Dinur, 2021). Critiques of implicit bias suggest that focusing on it alone can divert attention from the real lived experiences of affected students and distract from the deeper structural barriers they face (Saul, 2018). This paper aims to explore the nature of unintentional discrimination, how it intersects with intentional forms, and the impact of institutional barriers from the perspective of lived experiences.

Historically, HEIs have been built on the foundations of colonialism, with admission processes, curricula, and student experiences reflecting a "White curriculum" or an "ableist" framework (Shizha & Makuvaza, 2017). This results in a standardised approach that assumes a homogenous student body, leaving little room for the diverse needs of marginalised students. This creates challenges in terms of learning support, as students are expected to fit into an inflexible system that prioritises efficiency, standardisation, and neoliberal goals over inclusivity (Mintz, 2021; Andrew, 2024). Consequently, minoritised students often face a suboptimal educational experience, with increased attrition rates, threats to mental health, and a significant awarding gap. Statistically, in the UK, the awarding gap between Black and White students is 22%, and 11% between Asian and White students (Office for Students, 2021). Although there are no specific figures on the gap between disabled and non-disabled students, significant disparities exist in attainment and outcomes.

Despite frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which aim to create equitable learning environments, HEIs often adopt surface-level inclusion strategies that fail to account for the complexities of diverse student populations (Darbyshire, 2022). This superficial approach to inclusion further obscures the realities of non-dominant student groups and the nuanced barriers they face. As HEIs become more diverse, there is a growing call for a decolonized curriculum. Allan and Thomas (2023) argue that decolonization involves adopting a global perspective in the curriculum, moving away from colonial biases and fostering an inclusive, adaptable, and accessible educational framework. Such a curriculum

would not only reflect local needs but also engage with global contexts, creating a more inclusive environment for all students.

However, while the principles of social inclusion have been embraced by many HEIs, the practical application of these principles remains insufficient (O'Shea, 2015). Although the rhetoric of inclusivity has gained ground, the structural changes required to make these ideas a reality are often lacking. The persistence of institutional practices that reinforce exclusion and marginalisation suggests that we need to examine "unintentional exclusion" more closely. This includes assessing the roles of policies, practices, and the epistemology of ignorance in perpetuating unintentional discrimination (Bain, 2018). Thus, addressing these issues is crucial to fostering a genuinely inclusive and flexible educational environment.

Ultimately, this literature highlights the need to focus on the lived experiences of students from minoritised, neurodiverse, and disabled backgrounds, as they are disproportionately affected by unintentional discrimination. By examining how exclusion impacts students' learning, assessment outcomes, and employability, we can better understand the systemic barriers that continue to shape their academic and professional journeys (Ball, 2012; Ball, 2018). A comprehensive understanding of discrimination, including both intentional and unintentional forms, is essential for challenging the commodification of diversity in higher education and creating an environment where all students can thrive. Through a deeper understanding of implicit biases and institutional barriers, we can move towards a more equitable, inclusive, and decolonized higher education system.

Aims

This project aims to facilitate an understanding of the systemic and unintentional discrimination challenges faced by underrepresented groups in HEIs. It focuses on creating an intentional, practical, equitable, and inclusive higher education curriculum and practices that can be applied in real-life scenarios.

The objectives for this project include:

1. Understand current gaps in practical inclusivity in higher education by documenting the lived experiences of students and staff as lived experience experts.
2. Raise awareness of the challenges related to exclusion practices, bias, and unintentional discrimination in Higher education.
3. Provide opportunities to reflect on individual experiences and the journeys of lived experience experts.
4. Improve learning and teaching practices by incorporating voice and supportive techniques into curriculum design, assessment, and feedback.

This paper examines the project through the perspectives of experts with lived experience from diverse backgrounds, utilising podcasting and storytelling as a lens. Highlighting key insights and outlining the approach that informed a series of recommendations, offering a framework to promote greater inclusivity in learning and teaching practices, thereby improving educational experiences and outcomes."

Utilising podcasts as a method of narrative and storytelling

Research Design

This study employs qualitative research design to explore the impact of unintentional exclusion and the effectiveness of storytelling in creating an inclusive curriculum. The rationale for utilisation of storytelling as a methodological choice is focused on the use of narratives to delve deep into the richness of the lived experiences of participants (Lewis and Hildebrandt, 2019). Furthermore, for marginalised groups often regarded as 'hard to reach' in research due to fears of victimisation, storytelling as a method enhances comfort in expression, alleviates fear, and ensures accessibility. It also fosters reflection and creates a trauma-sensitive space for data collection (Fox et al., 2024). As a result, we aim to provide a safe space that encourages participants to 'speak up', 'feel heard', and become partners in their journey towards inclusivity. The research is grounded in the principles of decolonization, globalisation, and de-nationalisation of higher education curricula, aiming to implement strategies that foster inclusivity, flexibility, and accessibility

(Thambinathan and Kinsella, 2021). The main method used was narrative analysis from the podcasting transcription.

Participants

Participants in this study include former and current students and staff from diverse backgrounds, focusing on race, international perspectives, ethnicity, neurodiversity, and disability. The selection criteria for students and staff to volunteer to take part helped to ensure a representative sample of individuals from both staff and student communities who have experienced or are experts through their lived experience within Higher Education. Participation was sought on a voluntary basis and consulted throughout the podcast recording and editing process.

Data Collection

Data was collected through a series of co-produced podcasts, where participants shared their lived experiences and journeys. A total of six podcasts were developed in this initial first study. These podcasts served as a narrative tool to capture the nuanced experiences of unintentional exclusion, and the practical measures needed to address it. The podcasts were designed as semi-structured interviews and discussions. The interview questions were informed by themes from the reviewed literature which formed the basis for podcast prompts that facilitated discussions with the primary aim of gathering authentic, in-depth insights into participants' perspectives on equity, diversity, and inclusion strategies.

Data Analysis

The collected data (the podcast narratives) were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. This method allowed for the identification of core categories that were grouped into key themes and patterns related to unintentional exclusion, inclusivity, and the effectiveness of storytelling as a pedagogical tool. The themes, emerging connections, alignment to the literature and research is summarised in Table 1, building on the narratives explored.

Theme	Origin	Alignment with the Work
Decolonisation of Curriculum	Allan and Thomas (2023); Enslin and Hedge (2023); Insight from podcast narratives	Challenges colonial biases; integrates diverse perspectives; enriches educational experience.
Inclusivity and Flexibility	Universal Design for Learning (UDL); El Galad et al. (2024)	Emphasises understanding individual learning needs; promotes flexible learning practices.
Addressing Unintentional Exclusion	Dinur (2021); Batisai et al. (2022)	Highlights impact on students' confidence; calls for proactive measures and clear communication.
Practicalising Inclusivity	Moreu et al. (2021); Insights from podcast narratives	Stresses practical measures like clear explanations; involves students in developing inclusive practices.
Improving Student Experience	Cho et al. (2021); Lived experiences from podcasts	Recognises and values diverse experiences; calls for clear guidance and open communication.
Exploring Lived Experiences	Cervantes and Inlow (2022); Narrative approach in podcasts	Uses personal narratives to enhance understanding and empathy; fosters critical thinking and skills for diverse world.

Table 1: This table outlines key themes, their theoretical origination and how they align to the goal and methodology.

Additionally, a word-cloud was used to help identify common themes within the language, providing a visualisation of the frequency of language used and emerging themes to explore further. Whilst preserving the anonymity of the subjects, the word-cloud immediately highlighted common themes and phrases in the narratives (DePaolo & Wilkinson, 2014). The analysis focused on understanding the impact of institutional policies, practices, and procedures on staff, students' learning

experiences, assessment outcomes, and employability. These findings were then linked back to the initial literature-generated themes, with depth added from participant discussions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University's ethics committee. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained before participation after explaining the research processes. Confidentiality and awareness of how the podcasts were to be used was maintained throughout the research process to protect participants' personal information, represent them accurately and in a way they were comfortable with. This included considering the editing process and off-line conversations in our approach. Emotional sensitivity, distress protocol and reflexivity were considered throughout the research process due to the awareness of emotional elements associated with narrations and reflections on lived experiences (Borgstrom, Mallon and Murphy, 2022).

Findings: The agent of change and the agency in the room

The project aims collectively focus on creating a more inclusive, equitable, and practical higher education curriculum and specifically support:

- **Decolonization of Curriculum:** Implementing strategies to create and maintain a curriculum viewed from a global perspective rather than a colonial one.
- **Inclusivity and Flexibility:** Develop a curriculum that is inclusive, flexible, accessible, and avoids a 'one size fits all' approach.
- **Addressing Unintentional Exclusion:** Identifying and tackling 'unintentional exclusion' which disproportionately affects minoritised, neurodiverse, and disabled students.
- **Practicalising Inclusivity:** The use of storytelling, through podcasting to map lived experiences and journeys, focusing on race, ethnicity, neurodiversity, and disability to create an intentionally inclusive and accessible curriculum.
- **Improving Student Experience:** Enhance the student experience by addressing unintentional discrimination and promoting belonging.

- **Exploration of Lived Experiences:** The use of narratives to explore the impact of unintentional discrimination and sharing lessons learned to support inclusive practices.

Through these six key themes, we explore narratives to extract insights into enhancing cultural inclusivity and strategies to mitigate unintentional discrimination. The podcasts provided a rich resource for analysis, whereby authenticity of individual accounts was preserved through a storytelling approach. This was achieved by augmenting thematic analysis with word-cloud analysis, identifying frequently used words in the transcribed narratives, reflecting what participants valued most and the vocabulary that they connected to their lived experiences.

The words 'think' and 'know' appeared frequently, indicating the reflective and introspective nature of the narratives, these words also link to the challenges of knowledge sharing, agency over the knowledge, and barriers to access explored in the podcast content. The word-cloud also retained natural and authentic language used that we deliberately retained in the transcription to maintain the true voice of those sharing their experiences. Words such as 'yeah', 'just', and 'really', were repeatedly used, capturing the emotional depth, and connected resilience of the narratives. HEI-contextual words also emerged, such as 'university', 'learning', 'courses', and 'curriculum', revealing how the individuals felt their lived experience was not separate from but immersed and integrated into the learning and teaching environment.

Suffering of discrimination shared by participants

The key points related to the suffering of discrimination and its impact shared by the participants was highlighted through the transcript analysis. These lived experiences contribute to the themes and framework development:

- Feelings of incompetence and self-doubt, significantly affecting confidence.
- Students felt their faith and beliefs were being challenged, causing discomfort and a sense of exclusion. Despite self-implementing content and trigger warnings, the underlying issues remained unresolved.

- Neurodivergent individuals often face a lack of understanding and support, leading to significant stress and the need for constant masking to fit in. This can severely impact their mental health and sense of belonging.
- Lack of support and understanding led to feelings of isolation and confusion, highlighting the importance of breaking cultural barriers and providing clear guidance to international students.

These experiences highlight the various forms of discrimination and exclusion faced by individuals in educational and professional settings, emphasising the need for more inclusive and supportive environments.

Participants brought their 'whole selves' to the podcasts, sharing their real, candid and poignant accounts of their experiences in Higher Education. One of the advantages of using podcasts as a storytelling tool is the authenticity that comes through, feeling natural, relevant, honest and less contrived. The word-cloud underscored elements resonating with the lived experience experts, forming a foundation for deeper thematic exploration.

Figure 1. Word-cloud generated from the transcription.

This section draws from the transcribed podcasts and provides excerpts that highlight the various aspects of inclusivity, to support addressing unintentional exclusion within the curriculum. We explore how these connect to current literature

and knowledge as well as the importance of understanding and integrating the lived experience expert practices. The transcription has been anonymised and quotes used in full where possible.

Decolonization of Curriculum and cultural inclusivity

There is a need to view neurodiversity not as a disability but as a variation in humanity. Similarly, race should be seen not as a difference but as diversity, challenging the traditional, colonial perspectives that dominate higher education. Although perceptions are changing, barriers still exist.

One perspective from the podcast narratives suggests,

> "I think we must stop thinking about neurodiversity as a disability. It's a variation in humanity; it's just a different way of being to me as a neurotypical person. Unfortunately for neurodivergent individuals, the world is run by neurotypicals, and we don't think, feel, and experience the world in the same way."

Another perspective emphasizes,

> "There is a need for co-creation to achieve an inclusive curriculum".

This breaks the colonial superiority in our curriculum, which consequently, represents the diverse backgrounds of students in our curriculum development and delivery. Recognizing that there are differences in how the world is viewed and navigated, we start from where the narratives begin. This aligns with the broader aim of decolonizing the curriculum, which seeks to dismantle and remove colonial biases and incorporate diverse perspectives.

According to Allan and Thomas (2023), decolonizing our curriculum involves implementing strategies that create and maintain a curriculum seen from a global lens rather than a colonial one. This approach calls for a curriculum that is inclusive, flexible, accessible, and not a 'one size fits all' approach. Enslin and Hedge (2023)

further argue that decolonizing higher education involves addressing both the cultural and material legacies of colonialism and emerging cultural inclusivity. By recognizing neurodiversity as a natural variation rather than a deficit, educators can create a more inclusive curriculum that respects and integrates diverse ways of thinking and learning. This approach not only dismantles colonial biases but also enriches the educational experience by valuing different perspectives and experiences. The shift towards a decolonized curriculum is crucial for fostering an educational environment that is equitable and reflective of a global society, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and effective higher education landscape.

Inclusivity and Flexibility

The excerpts draw on the importance of understanding individual learning needs and building on this as a culturally inclusive approach. Flexible learning practices, such as collaborative deadline setting and hybrid learning models, have been shown to accommodate diverse student needs and enhance accessibility (El Galad et al., 2024). By recognising and addressing the unique challenges faced by students from different backgrounds, we can create a more supportive and effective learning environment.

> "I think that on reflection that was one of the most important things that I implemented in my teaching in my previous role and I'm going to implement in this role as well, is that understanding every learner, and where they're coming from. Identifying their learning needs and not just having a common one-size-fits-all."

> "So, breaking that cultural barrier, telling the learners, telling your students that it's OK to ask for help and there is help available."

The emphasis on flexibility and inclusivity in the curriculum is crucial for ensuring that all students, regardless of their background, can succeed and thrive in higher education.

Addressing Unintentional Exclusion

The narrative excerpts illustrate the impact of unintentional exclusion on students' confidence and sense of belonging, highlighting the need for proactive measures to address this issue. Across all podcasts, the individual confidence of the interviewee is affected in various ways from self-doubt and over-thinking to avoiding or missing out on opportunities due to low confidence because of their exclusionary experiences. This is echoed in some of the language frequency and has significant implications for the way we support mental wellbeing in universities and thinking more holistically about how we do this. Addressing academic exclusion requires a responsive and integrative approach that considers the emotional Environment for students (Batisai et al.,2022). Staff are also subject to these feelings of low confidence or imposter syndrome in these reported scenarios indicating that low confidence because of unintentional discrimination has similar impacts regardless of stage in life or status in the educational environment.

> "So initially I was a bit worried to, and even questioned myself, that I was incompetent, I was not doing what I needed to do. So, I realised that it was going on for some time and it wasn't really pleasant because there were times by the time I got to hear the information, it has already got into the next level where and to some extent it sounded like I didn't know what I was doing."

> "So, I think we need to regularly put it out there on their blackboard, on pamphlets or banners, and to encourage everyone or encourage all the Staffs and the administration and everyone in the university to practise it, rather than just keeping it buried in policies."

Interestingly, individuals often reported their low self-confidence as self-doubt and as an internal reflection despite factors attributing to this being external and beyond their sphere of control. They put emphasis on taking control, suggesting the need to take ownership of the discrimination which further adds to their burden. This seems an unfair and additional workload for individuals affected to have to further

accommodate deficiencies in the learning and teaching environment. These insights provide practical ways as educators, where we can make the accommodations, such as improving access to critical information, providing 'safe' spaces to explore ideas and normalising the feelings of low confidence and self-doubt for example.

Practicalising Inclusivity

The importance of practical measures, such as providing clear explanations and breaking down cultural barriers are evident in the narrative. Actively involving students in the development and implementation of inclusive practices, educators can create a more responsive and supportive learning environment, fostering a sense of belonging and community. Practicalising inclusivity is crucial for ensuring that all students feel valued and supported.

> "So, when I opened up and she was able to make me understand, she was able to explain a lot and one thing, was acronyms. There are loads of acronyms. People tend to think that everyone knows acronym, but they forget that there are always a new starter and people need to know. People need to tell others about acronym as well."

> "So, breaking that culture barrier, telling the learners, telling your students that it's OK to ask for help as well, there is help available."

The use of language and actively considering its impact, providing a clear way to support individuals and avoid unintentional discrimination. The narratives suggest that simple changes such as unpacking jargon and acronyms can have a dramatic effect. In addition to this, recognising there may be barriers and what it's like 'not to know' can further support developing an inclusive environment.

Improving Student Experience

Recognising and valuing the diverse experiences, involve creating a supportive and inclusive environment that addresses the unique needs of everyone (Cho et al.,

2021). The narratives suggest that a re-focus on student engagement and autonomy could significantly improve learning experiences. By providing clear guidance, fostering open communication, and ensuring that all students feel valued and included, a more positive and effective learning environment can be created. This resonates into the experiences of staff who also identified the need to feel welcomed and benefit from being supported and valued.

"So, I think that in the 1st place, people coming from different backgrounds to the university or to different services and the fact that there are new doesn't mean that they don't know anything. They are experts in their own areas before they came to university, they were experts in their various fields."

"So, I think curriculum can be more flexible in that sense where you have everything streamlined to the needs of individual students, instead of, you know, lumping everything together."

Here we hear that individualisation is important and understanding the consequences of un-inclusive environments, appreciating the variety, uniqueness and value of different backgrounds to help counter the sense of low value experiences through the lived accounts.

Exploring Lived Experiences

The excerpts underscore the value of incorporating lived experiences into the curriculum to enhance understanding and empathy among students. Exploring lived experiences involves using personal narratives to create a more relatable and impactful learning experience for students (Cervantes and Inlow, 2022). By fostering a deeper understanding of complex social issues, promote critical thinking, developing the skills and empathy needed to navigate a diverse and interconnected world.

> "So, my experience about inclusion, and inclusivity, I did a course in one of the universities in Northwest in 2022. And that was the first time I was doing a course outside my country. Because I've always studied in my country."

> "So initially I was a bit worried and even question myself, that is that I was incompetent, I was not doing what I needed to do. So, I realised that it was going on for some time and it wasn't really."

In analysing the podcast narratives, they reveal some of the key aspects of unintentional discrimination, supporting how the project highlights the importance of creating a Higher Education curriculum that is inclusive, equitable, and practical. By focusing on decolonizing the curriculum, promoting inclusivity and flexibility, and addressing unintentional exclusion through these mechanisms, we can better support minoritised, neurodiverse, and disabled students. Innovative storytelling methods, such as podcasting, to map lived experiences can enhance the student experience, through storytelling approaches and reflection. The significance of integrating these inclusive practices into educational frameworks is essential to enable those unheard to be heard and by drawing from a collection of narratives, we can do this more readily. The different voices expressed and process of connecting lived experiences with current literature, promotes inclusive learning and teaching approaches and environments.

Framework development

The findings from the transcript analysis were used to develop key learning (a framework) around the six research aims. This framework incorporates the insights gained from the podcasts and interviews, emphasising practical measures to tackle unintentional exclusion and discrimination. The analysis aimed to identify best practices and areas for further improvement in promoting an inclusive and accessible higher education environment.

Discussion: Reflections on the podcasts and process

Reflecting on these themes and drawing evidence from the lived experiences shared in the podcasts has been a powerful tool to consider the impact of established structures and processes. Seeing this through the lens of individuals who have experienced unintentional discrimination or exclusion emphasises the impact of inclusive learning and teaching environments. Through the project research themes and mapped to the collective narratives, we can begin to explore actions and activities that may reduce unintentional discrimination and support culturally inclusive environments. These themes are present in the narratives and provide insights into communities of students and staff who have experienced discrimination.

Culturally Inclusive

Cultural inclusivity is a recurring theme, particularly in the experiences of international students and professionals. For instance, the narratives underscore the challenges faced by international students in understanding and integrating into the educational system in the UK. We see described, the initial confusion and the lack of guidance on university processes, which highlights the need for institutions to provide clear, culturally sensitive orientation and support. The key learning emphasises the importance of recognising and addressing the diverse cultural backgrounds of students to foster a more inclusive environment.

Inclusivity and Flexibility

The podcasts also focus on the experiences of staff and their approaches to curriculum design, outlining the necessity of flexibility in educational content. Rigid curricula that did not consider students' diverse backgrounds and beliefs led to significant discomfort and disengagement; by creating awareness of this, we can facilitate positive change. The narratives describe the impact of the introduction of content and trigger warnings was a step towards flexibility, allowing students to prepare for potentially distressing material. This approach, while not entirely resolving the issue, demonstrates a move towards a more inclusive and adaptable educational framework that's underpinned by empathy and awareness of individual and diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Addressing Unintentional Exclusion

Unintentional exclusion is vividly portrayed in the experiences. Accounts of being overlooked and undermined in professional roles due to background, highlights how unintentional biases can lead to significant professional and personal setbacks. Similarly, struggles with understanding university acronyms and processes points to a broader issue of assuming prior knowledge that not all students possess. These narratives underscore the need for institutions to actively identify and mitigate unintentional exclusion through comprehensive support systems and clear communication. Therefore, clear communication and the way we communicate should be considered as a practical step to support inclusive environments.

Practicalising Inclusivity

Practicalising inclusivity involves implementing tangible actions that promote an inclusive environment. The podcasts provide some insight into this with reflections given on what happened to change the 'Status quo' and very specific examples of steps taken that could provide strategies to improve inclusivity and reduce discrimination. In these scenarios, the experience led to changes in communication protocols within the workplace, ensuring that all staff members were included in decision-making processes. This practical change not only improved experience but also fostered a more inclusive and respectful workplace culture.

Improving Student Experience

Improving the student experience is a central theme, particularly in terms of support and guidance. The narratives reflect on how confidence and self-doubt influence feelings of being valued and included. They emphasise the importance of seeking help, with individuals taking responsibility for their own support. The reflections reveal how ingrained unintentional discrimination may be in the Higher Education setting and the need for a more equitable model to prevent individuals from feeling burdened. The narratives also stress the critical role of supportive relationships between students, staff, and the broader institutional community. Through lived experiences, suggestions emerge to improve future scenarios, such as providing clear, accessible information about support services from the outset. This could greatly enhance the student experience, particularly for those from diverse cultural backgrounds who may hesitate to seek help. Opportunities to foster belonging could

further support this, strengthening 'supportive relationships and networks' to enhance inclusion and self-value perceptions.

Exploring Lived Experiences

The collective transcript is rich with personal narratives that provide deep insights into the lived experiences of individuals navigating educational and professional environments. We benefit from a holistic view of the interactions between learning and teaching environments and life. For example, there's an account of parenting an autistic son and the participants professional journey in supporting neurodivergent individuals offers valuable perspectives on the intersection of personal and professional experiences. It emphasises how important it is not to see the space of education separate to other aspects of life and development and how there is an interdependency between these areas. In this personal account, they talk about their professional work in creating enabling environments for autistic students and emphasise how their own experiences have contributed to their approach to support. This facilitates the idea of empathy and empathetic pedagogies contributing to improving the learning and teaching environment and exemplifies how lived experiences can inform and drive meaningful change in educational practices.

Conclusion

This study underscores the critical need for inclusive pedagogical practices in higher education, emphasising the importance of decolonising the curriculum, fostering inclusivity and flexibility, addressing unintentional exclusion, and Practicalising inclusivity through innovative storytelling.
Recognising neurodiversity as a natural variation rather than a deficit is essential and understanding race and ethnicity as a biological distinct that brings diversity rather than a social stratification is paramount. This approach challenges traditional colonial perspectives and promotes a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. We encourage strategies that view the curriculum from a global perspective, integrating diverse ways of thinking and learning and recommends further explorations of the intersections of marginalisation.

Different sizes = a better fit

A one-size-fits-all approach is inadequate for addressing the diverse needs of students. Flexible learning practices are crucial for accommodating different learning approaches and enhancing accessibility. Understanding individual learning needs and creating supportive environments that foster a sense of belonging and engagement are all part of addressing unintentional exclusion. Open communication and valuing diverse student experiences are key to creating a supportive educational environment.

Storytelling

Innovative storytelling, such as podcasting, can effectively map lived experiences and journeys. This approach not only enhances engagement but also fosters a sense of community and belonging. Practical measures, such as providing clear explanations and breaking down cultural barriers, are essential for enhancing inclusivity in the curriculum. Incorporating lived experiences into the curriculum enhances understanding and empathy among students. Personal narratives and real-world examples help illustrate key concepts and promote critical thinking. This approach enriches the educational experience and helps students to develop the skills needed to navigate a diverse and interconnected world. Finally, as a storytelling tool, podcasting is authentic, playing a crucial role in promoting inclusivity and empathy. It provides an honest and transparent way to experience the lived experience, further application and use of this storytelling tool could reveal other possibilities and enhancements to support elevating the lived experience.

Reflections of the development journey

Reflecting on the four objectives of the project, the study has provided a rich insight into the problem of unintentional discrimination that now forms the basis of a series of artifacts to support inclusivity in the curricula. These are further outlined through the lens of each objective:

1.   **Understand current gaps in practical inclusivity in higher education by** documenting the lived experiences of students and staff as lived experience experts. The project has demonstrated the value of the lived experience and what's hidden through these accounts. The accounts themselves are valuable artifacts - giving

insight and weight to unintentional discrimination and the very real but often hidden barrier both students and staff alike face in navigating HE environments.

2.   Raise awareness of the challenges related to exclusion practices, bias, and unintentional discrimination in Higher education.

This work affirms the existence of gaps in a practical and tangible format through the podcasts and that these challenges are not currently or fully addressed. The narratives reveal common themes and frequencies and although the sample is small, it provides a unique insight to further develop research in this area. Furthermore, this work has sparked conversations and discussions with students and staff, elevating the awareness of exclusion through the lived experience.

3.   Provide opportunities to reflect on individual experiences and the journeys of lived experience experts.

Analysis of the podcasts provided essential data to start to build a framework and toolkit; the podcasts as individual artifacts have been useful in aiding reflection of what discrimination 'looks like', 'feels like' and its impact on confidence, performance and perspective. The podcasts as an investigative methodology were chosen to provide an honest and authentic account of experiences that other formats such as focus groups and surveys may be unable fully unveil. In addition to the podcasts as a method of narrative exploration, the podcasts as short films are compelling and stand alone as reflective resources, highlighting the power and impact this format has and other useful applications.

4.   Improve learning and teaching practices by incorporating voice and supportive techniques into curriculum design, assessment, and feedback.

The lived experience brings the voice of individuals and key learning to facilitate a more inclusive approach to curriculum, assessment and feedback design. At Salford this work has supported the development of Programme Equality, Impact Assessments, providing practical tools and different lenses to review and consider inclusive practice. The outputs from the project such as the framework and toolkit also provide a starting point to help leverage further exploration of the lived experience space.

Recommendations and framework

In summary, the narratives from the podcasts highlight the importance of cultural inclusivity, flexibility, addressing unintentional exclusion, Practicalising inclusivity, improving student experience, and exploring lived experiences. These themes are crucial for developing an inclusive educational environment that respects and values the diverse backgrounds and needs of all students and staff. These six themes form a framework of potential actions that can potentially reduce unintentional discrimination and increase cultural inclusivity.

A toolkit that provides reference prompts to explore the themes and actions of lived experiences in more detail from this project is available from 10.17866/rd.salford.27952461 (ISBN: 978-1-912337-83-5).

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All the materials included within this article represents the author's work. Any citations or work that is paraphrased is included within the reference list. This article has not been previously published, nor is it being considered for publication elsewhere. The authors have no conflict of interest to declare in relation to this article.

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