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Identity and academic performance in higher education: The effects of racial profiling on the motivation and psychological needs of foreign students in Europe

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to outline the effects of racial profiling and stereotypes on the motivation of foreign students and their academic performance. Foreign students tend to attribute a lack of motivation and low academic performance to the struggle they face when they are classed as a minority. Many exhibit and adapt myriad social identities to survive such struggle. This study explores this struggle and its effects on foreign students' perception of their identity and how they employ that to boost their academic achievement. This study approaches the above issue through autoethnography. The methodology is based on a reflective autoethnographic account, which sheds light on my personal experience as a foreign student from the Middle East in the UK. My autoethnographic accounts employ a set of timelines during which I experienced many racial profiling incidents that affected how I perceived my identity and how that affected my academic journey in the UK. The analysis of my reflective accounts outlines that foreign students' identity is hugely impacted by racial profiling and negative stereotypes. As I explored my motivation through relatedness and autonomy, the study concludes that racial profiling could be invested as a threshold for autonomous motivation. Foreign students may channel racial profiling's negativity to achieve autonomous motivation and therefore better academic performance.

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1. Introduction

The interests of investigating the impact of racial profiling on foreign students' motivation and identity stem from my personal experience as a Middle Eastern foreign student in a university in the UK. Throughout my undergraduate years, I had encountered numerous incidents of racial profiling within university premises and classroom settings. Reflecting on those experiences through autoethnography, the research focuses on how those experiences have been affecting my academic and social perceptions and how I have altered my behaviour to survive and fit in. Exploring those experiences, I am certain, will shed a light on the way many students in higher education, in foreign countries, behave with their peers and academic community, succeed in accepting incidents related to their race and ethnicity or fail to adapt and confront those incidents and preserve their native identity.

Foreign students, Middle Eastern (my case in particular), tend to attribute lack of motivation and low academic performance to the struggle they face when they are classed as a minority (Baysu & Phalet, 2019). Many exhibit and adapt myriad social identities to survive such struggle. This calls for a thorough investigation of the students' personal experience and their psychological perception of each incident. Racial profiling has long-term psychological effects on foreign students, which will surely influence their success levels at the time of the incident or even 13 long years after their first encounter, my case.

Racial profiling can act as a powerful tool that aims, at least to the foreign students' understanding, to detach them from the dominant others. Foreign students can interpret this act as an act against their race, culture, religion or even the way they dress which affects directly on how they related they feel towards the dominant others (Pepanyan et al., 2019).

This study has three interlinked aims which serve as the foundation to answering the research questions below. Firstly, the study explores foreign students' motivation whilst battling stereotypes on daily basis in higher education. Secondly, it focuses on types of motivation within classroom settings will be outlined in relation to students' academic performance. Thirdly, the research will attempt to investigate how students' psychological needs are affected by what they encounter on the social level within university premises.

Feeling detached and consequently demotivated, can lead foreign students to academically struggle and in many cases fail to achieve their academic goals (Chin & Vernon, 2015). Throughout the methodology section, which is based on my personal experience and autoethnographic account, I will explore how racial profiling affected my relatedness and motivation and how the latter affected my academic performance. This inquiry will be guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: How does racial profiling affect the perceived relatedness of foreign students from non-European countries in European HE?
- RQ2: How does racial profiling affect the autonomous motivation of foreign students from non-European countries in European HE?
- RQ3: How do foreign students' perceived relatedness and autonomous motivation affect their academic performance?

2. Literature review

Investigating racial profiling and student identity effects on the academic performance of foreign students requires exploring specific areas of literature. In this section and in light of the research questions, racial profiling and social identity will be investigated further to unpack their influence on foreign students' academic performance. Using the keywords mentioned earlier, I have used Scopus to explore previous studies on the topic and to build a parallel study that could interpret my unique experience with racial profiling. Therefore, this section explores the definition of Racial Profiling and Social Identity and their connection to students' academic performance.

2.1 Racial profiling and academic performance

Racial profiling is described as an act or a discriminatory activity against a minority or a group of inferior individuals within a certain community (Noor, 2011). This act is based on generalized perception of a certain minority group based on their race, ethnicity, religion and country of origin etc. Racial profiling is also described as a prejudgment based on stereotypes- which simply means an individual from a superior group acts against another inferior individual or group based on a particular preconceived notion "stereotype" (Pepanyan et al., 2019). Racial profiling occurs nearly in all facets of society, one of which is education.

Many may perceive education as a safe haven from the outside brutal world. Students often develop a feeling of being shielded and protected from abuse and stereotypes when they enter the university campus (Bliuc et al., 2011).

Students see university or college as a progressive community of elites that does not approve of inequality and social injustices. This is definitely not the case (Tehranian, 2009). As novel as it sounds, the educational community is hugely influenced by stereotypes and racism. It may not be as explicit as what individuals experience those incidents off campus, but they do exist (Arevalo et al., 2011). Racism and stereotypes are used in forms of codes within a certain group, unconsciously to a huge extent, due to being so deeply embedded in society- such as study conducted by Aguirre on the harmful effects of racial profiling on the Hispanic Identity of Mexican American students in the USA (Aguirre Jr, 2004).

Racial profiling minorities in education, staff members or students, is portrayed in insidious actions such as applying disciplinary policies- in case of a staff member from a minority group, or being subject to harassment and abuse from a peer student on campus. Actions of bullying and racism are often subtle and extremely harmful. Students from a minority group may at a later stage of their studies exhibit poor academic performance and apparent negative impact on their psychological health (Greer 2015).

Being classed as a minority and a target of racial slurs etc. may encourage foreign students to devalue education and perceive performing well as a trait that does not pertain to their identity. Foreign students may develop strategies to battle/pivot racial profiling in HE, which ultimately influences their academic performance such as not attending group-based tasks, classroom participation and other extra-curricular activities such as field trips (Bie, 1976).

2.2 Social identity and academic performance

The concept of identity is often defined by individuals as the way we see ourselves and how we are not influenced by others (Baysu & Phalet, 2019). However, identity is often dependent and shaped by the groups we are a part of and the groups we are being distant from in any context (Fernández-Larragueta et al., 2017). Groups therefore are important in a way that they provide us with a sense of belonging and an identity. Tajfel (1981) suggests that we use groups to form our social identity through which we define ourselves as part of a certain group and distant from other groups. According to Tajfel (1981), social groups are defined through three components: Social Categorisation, Social Identification and Social Comparison.

Social Categorisation is sorting groups based on their likes and dislikes, culture, religion, race and social class etc. This component often leads to social prejudice and racism. Social identity is highly context-dependent and multidimensional which as a result affects individual's sense of belonging to a particular social group (Cameron 2004). Social Identification is a process through which group members modify their behavior to match and please their group's expectation- such as a none native English speaking student's attempt to master a native like language skills to gain access to a group of native speakers in a classroom setting. Social Comparison however determines access to a particular social group. A certain social group's expectations dictate its members' qualities in comparison to other groups. This particular component, Tajfel suggests, encourages members to a healthy competition to earn access and become a member or leads to an extreme level of prejudice.

The above components (Tajfel, 1981) have immense influence on learning. According to Bliuc (Bliuc et al., 2011), learners who exhibit strong social identity tend to view learning in a positive way and therefore achieve high marks in contrast with learners who identify themselves as alien from the surrounding groups perceive learning negatively and therefore achieve considerably lower marks.

3. Knowledge gap

This research focuses on one particular intrinsic psychological need, relatedness, which is directly affected by racial profiling to enhance/suppress motivation. There will also be slight incorporation of the effects of autonomy on motivation, and how both relatedness and autonomy can be internalised and earned by individual learners. The notion of the effects of motivation on academic performance in higher education has not been well represented in literature. Rayan and Deci's work on SDT only explores institutional and peer pressure and how they impact motivation and academic performance (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

The importance of conducting this study is that it explains how learning takes place with and without motivation. In addition, a clear focus throughout the study will elaborate on specific psychological needs, relatedness and autonomy, affected by specific social situations (racial profiling). Findings aim to help educators understand what minority students may encounter in higher education and to adapt techniques to foster the integration of the learner's psychological needs to enhance motivation. When the latter is provided within a learning environment, positive consequences and higher success outcomes will emerge (Niemiec and Ryan, 2009).

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4. Theoretical framework

This sections explores motivation, relatedness and autonomy and their effects on academic performance in the lens of SDT. Those particular sections will attempt to interpret the academic performance of foreign students who experience pitfalls on the social level. Motivation is what "moves" us to perform an activity. In education, motivation is key to success and failure- students often attribute their achievement due to being enthusiastic and motivated to real a certain goal in their educational journey (Arevalo et al., 2011).

To perform well in any given activity, education for instance, learners need to be motivated to achieve the goal of the learning activity. Those who feel enjoyment and develop a sense of value during an activity, possess Autonomous motivation. On the other hand, those who feel the pressure to achieve a certain result possess Controlled motivation. Ryan and Deci (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009) argue that to achieve greater performance, learners need to be autonomously motivated (ibid).

The needs of being acknowledged as part of a group (related) and appreciated after performing a task (valued) lead the student to be autonomously motivated. According to Ryan and Deci (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), identified as a part of a group as well as being valued are core components for optimal performance. To achieve autonomy and therefore positive academic performance, relatedness and being valued have to exist in any learning environment.

4.1 Autonomous motivation

Autonomous Motivation is defined as an inherent tendency to perform an activity. According to Deci (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), autonomous motivation describes performing an activity with full sense of willingness, volition and choice. In education, when learners exhibit the latter in any learning activity, they are likely to perform well and achieve their learning goal. Deci also believes that there is a set of prerequisite psychological needs which are required to exist so that a learner achieves Autonomous Motivation; these needs are: Competence, Autonomy and Relatedness. For the purposes of this research, Autonomy and Relatedness will be further investigated as Competence will be interlinked with Relatedness in later sections of this study.

4.2 Relatedness

Relatedness refers to the feeling of connectedness to other human beings. Human beings are profoundly social, we seek social interaction and relatedness in any social situations (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). When this feeling is disrupted, individuals develop a sense of deprivation and isolation from the surrounding others. In education, being distant from others, learners' sense of belonging could erode and consequently affect their academic performance (Jin & Hahm, 2017).

Being a vital psychological need for positive engagement in learning, relatedness is likely to be influenced by prejudices and stereotypes (Tsurkan et al., 2020). Incidents which entail being distant from a certain social group, such as racism, eliminate chances of assimilation with other groups and demotivate learners- that means lower/poor performance, academically.

This particular psychological need, relatedness, has a great impact on both Autonomy and Competence. It enables learners to integrate the three needs and in some cases omits the least salient for the purpose of being motivated (Pepanyan et al., 2019). A learner can be easily motivated and engaged if Relatedness existed, regardless of Autonomy and Competence. Once Relatedness is achieved, a learner is motivated to perform better so that he/she is more competent.

4.3 Autonomy

The learning activity does not occur in vacuum. Students are often influenced by their surrounding circumstances; teacher and peer's support, institution pressure and expectation and the impact of the learning and social community (Johnston, 2017). Autonomy is likely to perish in any learning environment when a student senses any external pressure placed by the teacher or their surroundings- such as their peers (Salas & Amurrio, 2015). The influence of peer and teacher pressure is daunting and has direct impact on how learners perceive education and therefore limits their academic performance. External pressure is not only manifested by the institution's academic performance expectation, learners' autonomy also relies on their social identity and how they are perceived by their social groups.

Students from minority groups often exhibit struggles to achieve autonomy in learning. This is due to the fact that they, in many instances, feel inferior in the learning community. Many factors could influence that and one major factor is how this particular minority is portrayed in the learning and social communities (Bahou, 2016). Academic

achievement is then affected by how the student feels he/she is perceived by their surroundings, mostly culturally, and therefore determine how autonomous their motivation is based on their value in the educational community. Students' psychological well-being is then vital in constructing autonomous motivation and therefore greater academic performance is achieved (Duffy, 2013).

5. Methodology

5.1 Autoethnography

As this research calls for in depth analysis of personal experiences to explain a social phenomenon (Ellis et al, 2010), autoethnography was chosen to be this research methodology. Autoethnography is considered as a method of representing others through the analysis of lived experiences of the author- the latter being part of a particular social group (Adams, 2005; Wood, 2009). This deeply personal research approach that is concerned with knowledge creation based on the personal understanding of the research process. Through reflexive narrative, autoethnography unmasks personal experience and links the researcher's culture and identity and the connection to surrounding social groups (Ferdinand, 2009).

Through autoethnography, this research intends to investigate at a micro level the role of racial profiling in shaping foreign students' motivation and learning in one of Europe's Higher Education Institutions. Through a narrative of a series of personal racial profiling incidents within university premises, autoethnography provides a detailed account of those incidents for a thorough investigation. The research questions require an in-depth examination of the data that is, in my opinion, difficult to deduce from observation and interviews of participants.

5.2 Data collection

This research's data is based on my personal experiences in the form of short narratives. As recalling past experiences is not practically sufficient to deeply unpack the issues raised in this research, I aim to reflectively approach each narrative and reach a conclusion that could best answer and challenge the questions posed in this research.

The Data is based on narratives of incidents which had occurred during my Undergraduate and Postgraduate study between the years of 2008 and 2014 in the UK. Through each narrative, I describe the incident in context, express my feelings which had been stimulated by the incident and briefly evaluate the consequences of that incident on my identity as a foreign student in the UK. The narratives were firstly written based on a distinctive event related to racial profiling, then recollected the dialogue in which the event had occurred and finally presented it in short story format to serve as my primary data source. The amount of data was endless and I have reduced to the particular aims of this study. All of my narratives have incidents which serve as a racial profiling example as well as instances of relatedness to my surrounding community- peers and tutors.

5.3 Data analysis

Analysis of the narratives attempts to outline the context of each incident, my feelings in relation to each narrative and a critical overview of the impact of each incident on shaping my identity and motivation as a foreign student in UK's higher education (Gibbs, 1988). Using this reflective approach is essential in answering the question posed by this research as it helps to critically address each incident in setting standards for future experiences to self and potentially others who feel related to what has been outlined in each narrative.

The narratives are short dialogues with brief reflection between myself and my peers and tutors during my undergraduate and postgraduate study in the UK. In order be able to answer the research questions, the narratives were analyzed to identify themes and patterns- through AtlasTi, themes and patterns were grouped and presented as comments from the narratives and displayed in a graph later in the discussion section. Throughout the thematic analysis, recurring codes appeared to help shape the analysis and reach a conclusive conclusions to answer all of the research questions.

A final step in the analysis involved collecting data from Twitter to verify my narratives. Data was collected based on trending hashtags such as racism, racial profiling, foreign students, and discrimination in higher education in UK etc. The comments "Tweets" were grouped to form categories, which aim to validate my narratives (Ahmed et al, 2017)- names, and pictures were blurred and have been kept anonymous.

6. Findings

The findings of this research are based on two study programs during my time in UK universities, undergraduate and postgraduate. The first section focuses on my first year in my undergraduate program which is split into timelines-

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year 1 June 2008 to September 2009 and February 2009. The second section focuses on my postgraduate program which is also split into timelines- year 2 August 2013 and April 2014. Both timelines were chosen as they carry prominent incidents which practically present two images of my identity as a foreign student. The timelines illustrate my progress from being a demotivated student with poor academic performance to autonomously motivated student with improved academic performance.

6.1 Undergraduate programme: Year 1 2008-2009

Reflecting on my social experiences from my undergraduate study in 2008, it is worth noting that my very first encounter affected and sort of laid the future path of my future interactions with peers, tutor etc.

> Enthusiastic at first, demotivated after all…
>
> How things began - June 2008
>
> After arriving in the UK from Iraq in 2007, I was *keen* on *completing* my studies at a *university* level. Filled with *enthusiasm* after *passing* the admission interview and test. I received a phone call for admission on the day I did my entry test- it was just me for some reason and the *anticipation* started to build up. I walked into the *Admission* office to hand in my high school certificates and other official documents. The admission officer went "It's is *unbelievable* that the *likes* of you managed the test!" I walked out without saying anything back to her, but kept wondering what she could have *meant* by that! Maybe, I was too young or did I not *dress well* for that particular occasion. Things started to *clash* in my head about *interpreting* her statement.

This very short yet extremely vital interaction had made question my relatability to my entire surroundings not just the academic community. This has affected the way I perceived higher education in the UK and on the long term hugely influenced my academic performance. Relatedness to the community I am about to enter remained questionable as I wanted to delve in and pursuit my education regardless.

After recovering from the first encounter, mentioned above, it was finally induction week (August 2008) and my enthusiasm was not how I expected- much lower than anticipated. Unfortunately, in this stage, I had to interact with the same person from the previous encounter and things did not change as I hoped. I was not contacted prior to induction week, so I initiated communication with admission. Clearly, what I experienced in June was not a unique incident.

> Clear signs of being an unwanted outsider - August 2008
>
> The programme starts in a week and I still *haven't* heard from *admission* about where to go and what to do next. So I called admission again and the same officer picked up the phone. After introducing myself she said "Oh, that's you again! Thought you'd never *come back*". Didn't again say anything apart from "would you please tell me what to do for next week as I haven't heard from you since June". The officer then said "*Whatever*, just show up and try not to blow up anything" Here I started to put the two incidents together and *concluded* that it was directed to *who I was* and where I *came from*. I showed up prefilled with a lot of negativity and whether I should actually continue with my studies.

This particular incident triggered something new, which was not expected. I was clearly objectified as an outside/foreigner whose ethnicity is accused of a certain activity. Directing such accusation impacted the way I perceived my interaction and behavior around my peers and university community. Here, I felt unrelated and unconfident in my skills and abilities to continue with my study. It is vital though to mention that both incidents occurred outside classroom settings and in the initial process of admission.

> Ups and Downs - September 2008 and February 2009
>
> It was finally induction week in September 2008. I entered the lecture hall and orientation activities had already started. I sat next to a classmate, we were asked to introduce ourselves to other classmates, and my classmate immediately initiated the conversation:
>
> "Hello, where are you from?"
>
> Here I was skeptical of any interaction with native speakers/home students fearing that I would experience similar incidents to the one with the admission officer. I thought that this question was not appropriate to start a conversation with as I expected we start with introducing our names first. I knew something as appalling as my previous encounter would happen again but I continued anyhow.
>
> "I am Mohanad from Iraq"
>
> My answer here included my name, which I also thought could trigger a problem.
>
> "Oh, Really! You shouldn't be here then, go back to your camel".

This encounter was different. My classmate was blatant and direct. He said it all in one sentence; I did not belong; I did not fit; I did not have the skills to compete and that I should simply go back to, where he believed, I belonged. He managed to actually break me at that time. I was furious and no motive to continue my study. I questioned every skill I had gained over the years to ear entry to this program.

After battling the first few months on the program, results for my first assignments were announced and as expected, performance was below average to disastrous. I failed two modules and was summoned to a meeting with the program director. Here I anticipated the meeting to be a harsh warning with a deadline or just a dismissal from the program.

> "How are you getting on?"
>
> I was not expecting that opening. I then was thorough about what I had encountered since the start of the program. The director was surprisingly sympathetic and agreed with everything I said.
>
> "Look, people can think and say whatever they want and don't let that have any impact on your studies"
>
> As a director, he did not question my abilities after he had heard what I went through. He agreed that those incidents had substantial impact on my performance, but he then said:
>
> "My parents are originally from Poland, they were bullied and racially abused, but here I am a director at this university, this could be you someday!"

I felt at ease and related to his story. I then realized that I was not a unique case. Students could encounter such incidents from different backgrounds and ethnicities not just my own. My enthusiasm and motivation, as I walked out of the meeting, were enhanced with what I heard from the director as I learned how to channel those incidents to my benefit.

6.2 Post Graduate Programme: Work Placement 2013-2014

> Related, stronger than expected- August 2013
>
> After successful completion of my undergraduate programme, I decided to embark on a teacher training programme at the same university. Another admission interview and test past successfully, the experience of admission was completely different. I didn't forget what had happened in my undergraduate admission and expected the same would happen but thankfully it didn't. Induction week was amazing and I already felt that I belong from day 1. When it came to introducing ourselves, I stood in front of my cohort, hands shaking and in a complete mental breakdown. I said "Hello, my name is Mohanad and I come from Iraq" I didn't know why I emphasized on that part and looked my classmates in the eye for negative reaction. They all smiled and gave me a warm welcome. I was approached by a couple of my classmates and said "Hey Mohanad, you must know a lot of languages, would you teach us Arabic?" I was over the moon after this simple yet massively positive interaction.

Years have passed now, I have become more fluent and mastered a good level of the English language. This entailed being able to confront those who may racially abuse me, discuss misconceptions about my identity and isolate what triggers my motivation from my daily encounters.

My postgraduate study was a different story. Mild experiences had definitely occurred but with null long-term effects. During the new programme I felt welcomed and seamlessly assimilated with my cohort- mostly native speakers/home students. The feeling of being foreign did not exist, my peers and tutors were interested in my personality and background; they wanted to know more about my culture and religion. Pronouncing my name correctly, nodding to me as I spoke, sharing their personal stories, all of those seemed natural interactions with my peers during my post graduate study.

> Stronger than ever- April 2014
>
> This time of year in my PGCE course, I was placed in an FE college and was set to teach ESOL classes. During my work placement period, I experienced yet another incident. This time it was slightly difficult for me to interpret the reasons behind this encounter. One of the teachers at that college ran into me in the hallway and said:
>
> "Are you really going to teach here?"
>
> A teacher in a derogatory tone said this to me. I interpreted this encounter in many ways; was I being racially abuse? Did this person intend to shake my confidence and demotivate me?
>
> I by then was ready for this sort of interaction as I felt

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> well equipped to handle any type of degrading and derogatory tone.
>
> "Of course I am, you better watch out".

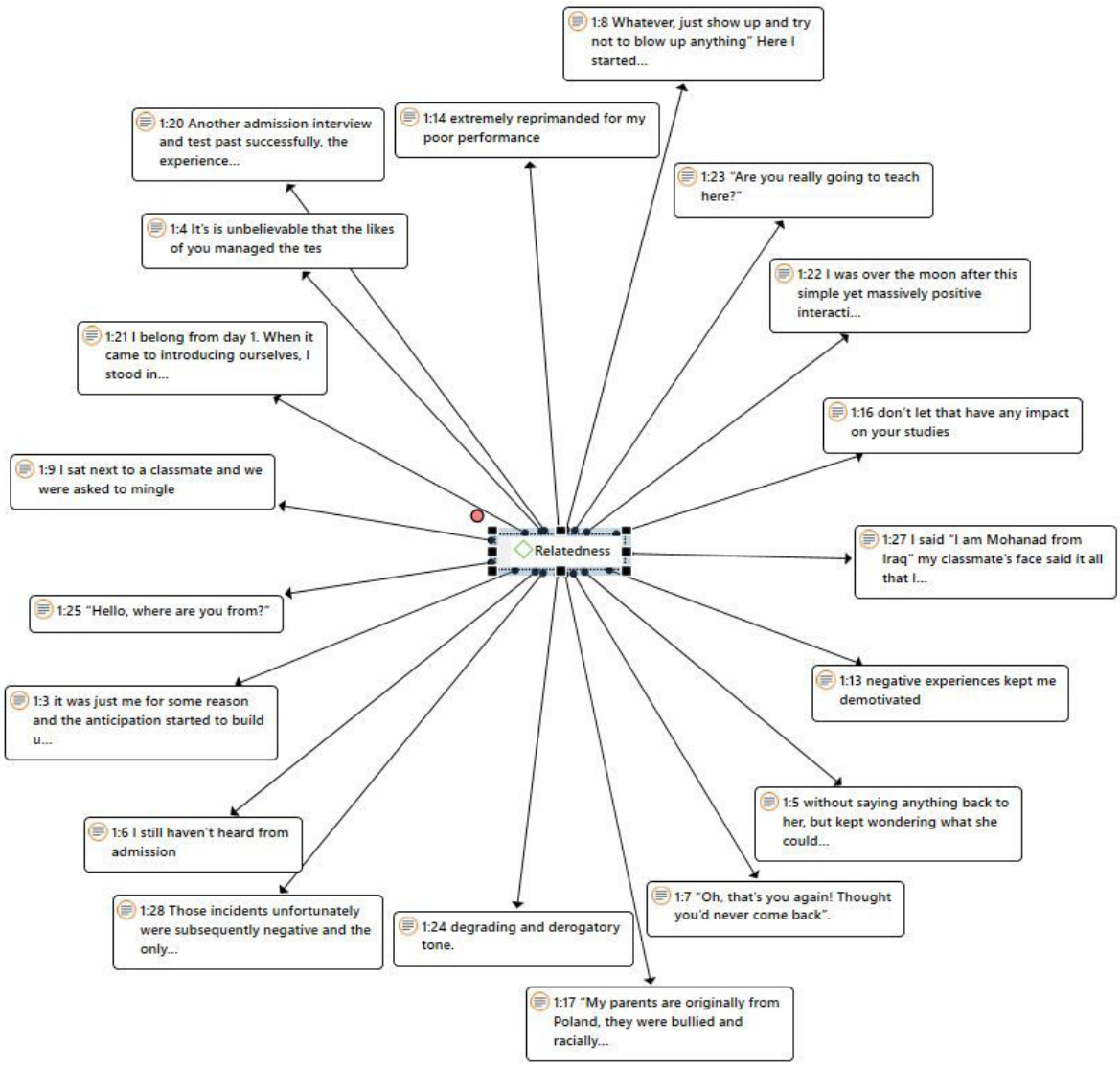
7. Discussion

This section discusses the most salient findings in the light of the literature presented in earlier section. The discussion revolves around three themes; Relatedness to others, Autonomous Motivation and Academic Performance. Those three themes will attempt to provide answers to the research questions: RQ1: How does racial profiling affect the perceived relatedness of foreign students from non-European countries in European HE? RQ2: How does racial profiling affect the autonomous motivation of foreign students from non-European countries in European HE? RQ3: How do foreign students' perceived relatedness and autonomous motivation affect their academic performance?

7.1 Relatedness to others

Relatedness is a vital factor that influences motivation. It is interlinked with identity- how this identity is formed within a particular social group. It is also crucial to outline that relatedness is hugely influenced by how others perceive

Figure 1. Comments from the narratives which highlight Relatedness



us within a certain community. Racial prejudices and stereotypes affect how we treat each other in any social event. I may look and speak differently to the way others do, which signifies a potential compromise of my relatedness to that particular group.

In education, students seem to exhibit better relatedness when they are placed in a mono-cultural/ethnicity institutions. Individual leaners placed in educational institutions where they are classed as a minority, will question their relatedness to that particular community which therefore has a great negative impact on their relationship with others.

Throughout my time in UK universities, I have encountered various types of racial profiling and stereotypes. Those incidents may not at first sight seem very influential but the accumulation of those encounters made me question whether I really relate to my class settings/classmates or simply not. The figure below sums those encounters during my first year during my undergraduate programme in the UK.

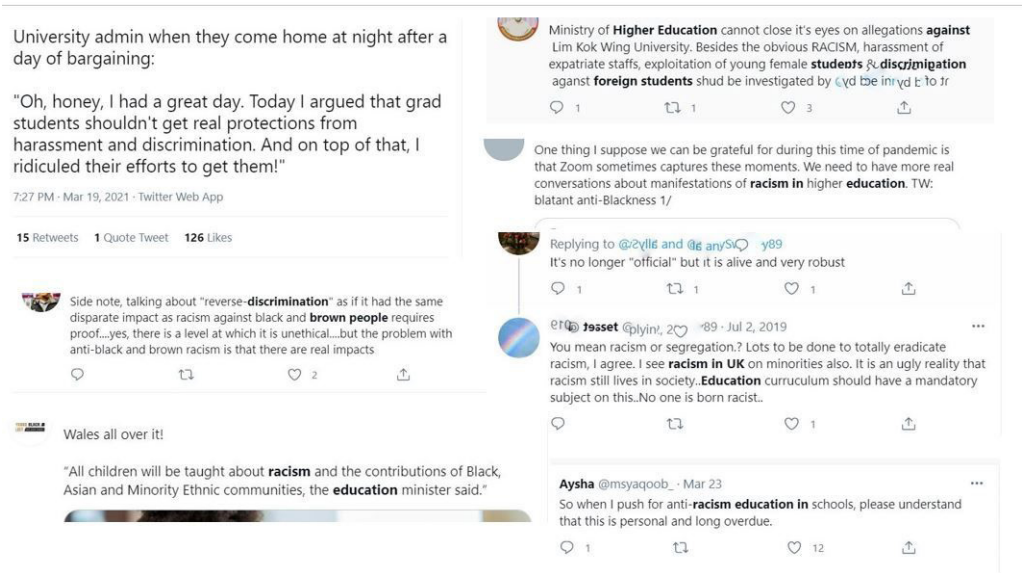
The impact of the above encounters has been both constructive and in many occasions negative. The initial stage of the assimilation had experienced the most negative encounters. As seen in Figure 1 (examples 1:3, 1:4, 1:6, 1:7 and 1:8), my very first encounters were extremely vividly based on negative prejudices and stereotypes. Those encounters did affect how I perceive myself as a foreign student, they did in some instances affect my assimilation in the dominant group and clearly had long term psychological stance (Desai, S. R. 2019). Minority individuals are aware of the social and racial prejudices and in many occasions teach and train each other those differences as a survival skill in difficult situations. This is portrayed in Watson's (2012) letter to her daughter which relates closely to the above:

> I pray that your teachers will not look at you through hurtful racial preconceptions. I pray that they will do the work necessary to eliminate racist practices in themselves and in those around them. . . (para. 18)

Figure 1 also shows instances of manageable encounters, incidents where I managed to face my encounter and defend myself, which did not seem to influence how I perceived my relatability in university. Examples (1:20-1:27) indicate acknowledgment of the encounter with minimal effects on how I had seen myself, as a foreign student, amongst others- I had reached an understanding of how different I may sound and look and how other perceived me as part of their community.

Although I have experienced both negative and constructive encounters, Twitter data based on the keywords and hashtags in Figure 2 indicate otherwise. Many encounters seem to be overly negative and lead their victims to announce them publically. The fact that those issues are publically displayed on such platform shows that foreign students, minorities and ethnic groups perceive themselves as different and such behavior is the norm of the community they interact with (Bahou, 2016).

Figure 2. Data collected from Twitter based on the following hashtags: #discrimination, #higher education, #foreign students, #racism in higher education, #racism in UK and #racism in education.



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7.2 Autonomous motivation

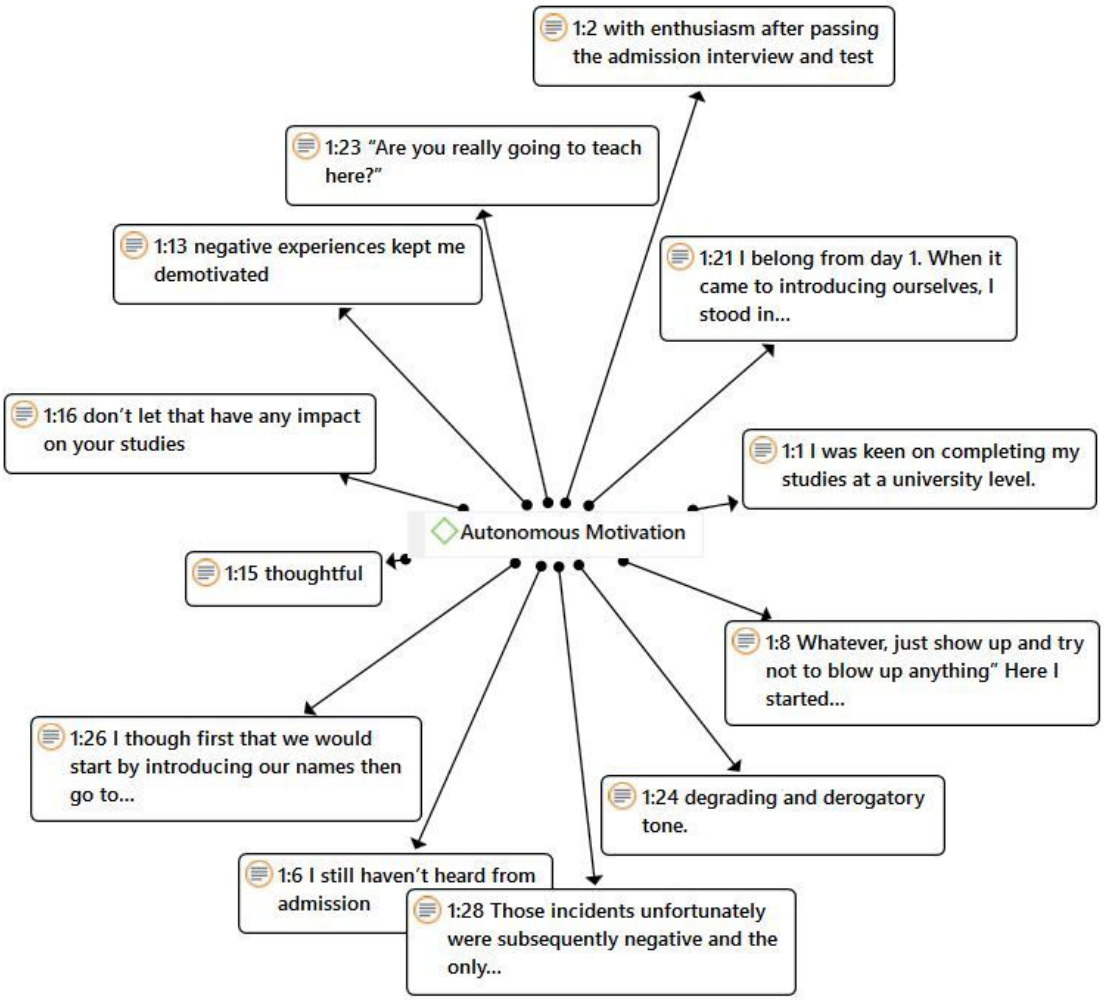
I have always described myself as a very motivated learner. Things which have been motivating me were, before exploring motivation through SDT, pretty generic such as good career, above average marks in my exams and so on.

SDT defines motivation as an innate virtue to strive through an activity. Many factors could influence motivation and can even class it based on the impact of these factors such as peer pressure, situational and context based behavior- such as being classed as a minority or victimized as an outsider in a certain community.

To be able to achieve autonomous motivation, I have exhibited many social identities so that I can be accepted in native speaker dominated groups in the UK. Being fully aware of the charade I had put so that I can access other groups, the struggle to find autonomy outside the pressure of others had been accumulating which as a result affected how I had interpreted motivation. According to Bahou (2019), autonomy is at the risk of being perished if the peer pressure, through a number of racial profiling incidents, existed in any activity the learner is performing.

Examples from Figure 3, particularly (1:1, 1:2, 1:13, 1:26 and 1:28), show my acknowledgment and how self-conscious I have become about each incident. I can clearly see why my motivation was not at all autonomous and how poorly I dealt with most of the incidents. Each insidious comment or even a blatant encounter about my race, culture or even educational background did in fact and still has demotivated me as a foreign leaner in UK higher education.

Figure 3. Comments from the narratives which highlight Autonomous Motivation



In other cases, as seen in examples (1:16 and 1:21), I had experienced quite the opposite. In some of the incidents where I was comforted and welcomed with null insinuation about my race etc. I found enthusiasm and a reason to continue regardless of how negative and aggressive the other encounters have been. Up to this day, I still recharge my motivation with those little encouraging conversations which, according to Duffy (2013) promote the learner's psychological wellbeing which help the learner to achieve autonomous motivation.

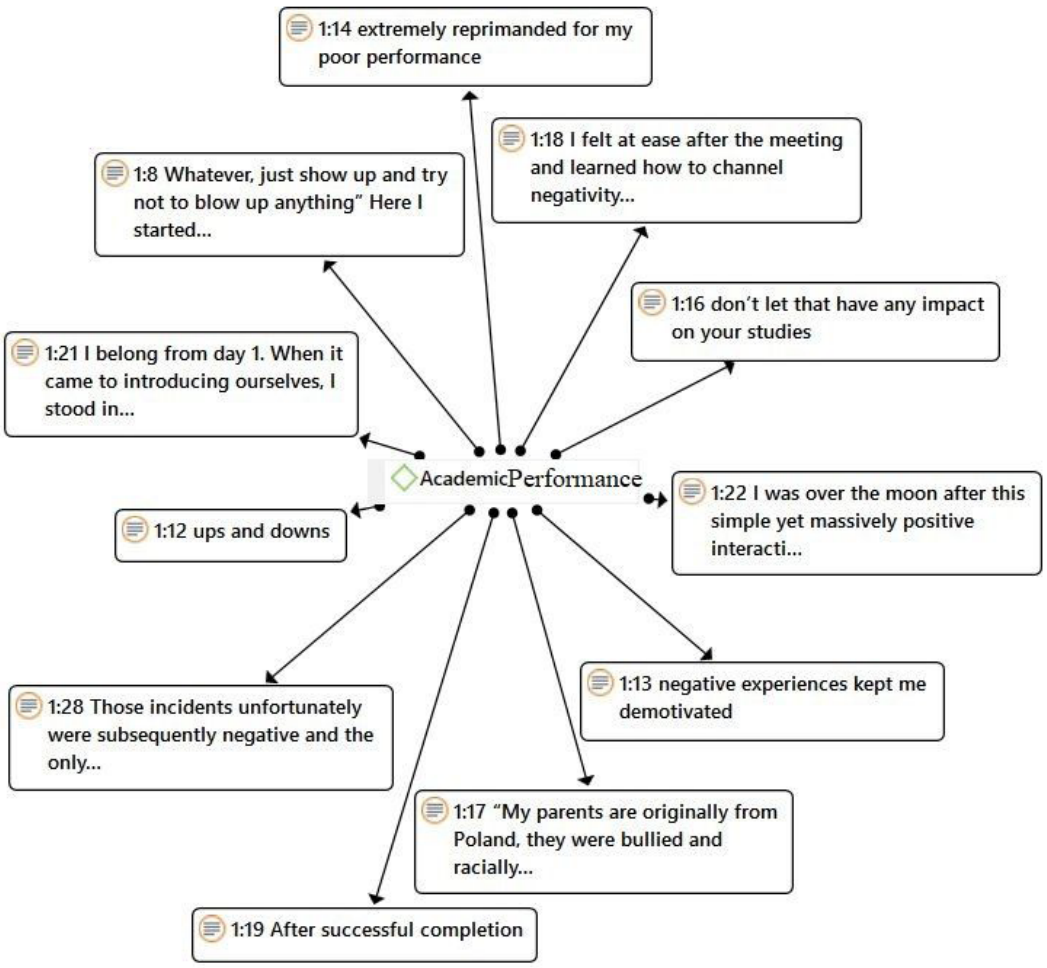
7.3 Academic performance

During my first year in my undergraduate programme in the UK, my academic performance fluctuated and I tended to blame my surrounding for most of my academic failures. The struggle to identify myself with a solid and acceptable social identity affected how I performed at university. Furthermore, a number of racial profiling incidents added insult to injury and influenced my academic performance in general.

Greer (Greer et al., 2015) outlines that learners may exhibit an apparent decline in their academic performance if their psychological well-being was at stake- be it from a simple teacher-student conversation to a prejudice based peer pressure. The psychological well-being is hugely affected by how individuals are classed in a certain community and their identity is categorised (Bliuc et al., 2011). Those categorisation, as outlined by Tajfel (1981), dictate in many instances how individual learners should behave and sometimes set limits to their academic performance.

Figure 4 shows some instances of comments from my findings. In examples (1:8, 1:14 and 1:16), there was a clear evidence of comments which had affected my psychological wellbeing. Those comments from past encounters did blur my view to what my identity was and whether I was competent enough to continue my study.

Figure 4. Comments from the narratives which highlight Academic Performance



Nevertheless, examples (1:12, 1:13, 1:16, 1:17, 1:18, 1:19, 1:21 and 1:22) show quite the opposite. I have managed to recall and reflect on those incidents as being fairly positive and did motivate me throughout my study. Comment (1:17) in particular resonates a sense of acceptance by others, which had influenced how I could steer each comment/incident to my psychological well-being. Achieving a healthy and strong identity had helped my academic performance to improve and retain strong autonomous motivation.

8. Conclusion

This research has outlined the relationship between social identity (perceived through stereotypes and racial classification) and academic performance (perceived by individual learners' motivation and academic achievement). The prospect of being part of a group and the feeling of belonging was the prominent factor through which academic performance was gauged- both failure and success.

Foreign students, regardless of their background, are at the risk of being isolated and not fully integrated in their classroom environment. Some could battle their way in and accept the majority group's expectations- such as language proficiency and academic performance. As we have seen in this research, foreign students' relatedness can be achieved and those students can in fact recover from racial profiling incidents and reach full access to the majority group.

Racial profiling and negative stereotypes have proven, throughout this research, to affect foreign students' motivation and adaptation to the learning environment. Autonomous motivation is influenced by many factors, one of the most vital ones is peer pressure- through racial profiling mostly. Foreign students can overcome this potentially sensitive factor, as proven earlier in this research, through channeling negative stereotypes and racial profiling incidents to boost their motivation.

Throughout my autoethnographic account, it was clear that racial profiling and negative stereotypes did in fact affect my academic performance at a certain stage. However, after examining my autoethnographic account (with the data collected from Twitter) in terms of relatedness and autonomous motivation, it can be deduced that academic performance is interlinked with how we are perceived by others; the key to unravel our true potential is within us if we learn how to relate to others and use it to achieve autonomous motivation.

With access to detailed narratives about every single event that I had encountered which involved an instance of racial profiling would have been handy for this study. Recollection of past events require extreme emotional and physical effort (Gibbs, 1988), which at some point prevented me from elaborating on particular dialogues or interactions. Future studies could delve into those issues in depth so that a clearer conclusion is then to be reached. Moreover, the relevance and application of the results were not tested on other foreign students which calls for a more inclusive study, perhaps a mixed method future studies, so that this research would reach a wider audience.

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