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About *Education in Practice*

Education in Practice is the learning and teaching journal of the University of Birmingham. It provides an accessible publication route for all University staff and students looking to disseminate learning and teaching practices, ideas and developments in a scholarly and evidence-informed manner.

Education in Practice focuses upon educational practices within the University of Birmingham, and a range of contributions are sought: from full scholarly papers; reflective or discursive articles; reviews; short case studies and examples of practice, and 'how to' guides.

Contributions are aimed at informing the work of others and at directly influencing practices and approaches that enhance student learning.

About this special issue

This Birmingham Business School special issue of *Education in Practice* hosts some of the proceedings of the 2024 BBS Education Conference, and was prepared by Inci Toral and Maria Psyllou, in collaboration with the EiP editorial team.

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Shaping the future of Business and Management Education: aiming at creating the critical thinking business leaders

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Business Education Research and Scholarship (BERS) plays a crucial role in shaping the future of higher education (Hwang et al., 2021). BERS bridges the gap between rigorous business education research and impactful educational practice, influencing how we teach, support students, and prepare future leaders (Peng and Dess, 2010). As global business environments evolve, the methods we use to educate future business leaders must also adapt. The world of business demands practical, adaptable, and innovative thinking (Ross and Robinson, 2015). BERS positions itself at the intersection of scholarship and pedagogy, focusing on how we teach, what we teach, and the environments in which learning takes place.

Moreover, research in business education allows us to evaluate how effectively we are preparing students for this dynamic world. It challenges us to rethink traditional curricula, adopt novel teaching methods, and incorporate technology and experiential learning into classrooms (Brammer and Clark, 2020). This, in turn, contributes to the development of graduates who are not only academically accomplished but also equipped with the practical skills and critical thinking needed to meet today's industry demands (Toral and Montano, 2022). It is essential that teaching strategies remain dynamic, inclusive, and aligned with real-world business challenges. These challenges require universities to focus on beyond pedagogical applications of education. Recent years have seen university career paths changing to embrace these challenges by offering teaching excellence centres and education focused career paths (Igwe et al., 2021). Teaching qualifications are gaining more attention while the pressures from the industry coupled with other external forces, such as changing student demand and employability concerns are affecting the degree offers (Suleymenova and Toral, 2024). To deal with these challenges, Birmingham Business School has empowered its Education leaders with funds that encourage staff to organise events and attend to external conferences. Additionally, BERS activities are encouraged with seed corn funds, trainings, writing retreats and more. BBS Education Conference, which is growing every year and creating a bigger impact, is one of these activities.

In 2024, at the 4th BBS Conference, we introduced exciting "firsts". One of these was that the Conference invited two of the local universities, Aston University and Birmingham City University to participate as track leads, presenters, and attendees. This collaboration broadened our academic community and raised the profile and reputation of the conference, solidifying its place as a prominent regional event in business education. With this initiative, BBS is aiming to lead the local universities in developing a BERS agenda and a national and international reputation in this area. With the conjecture surrounding universities and business schools and the UK university market, this initiative is crucial.

The other key development, in collaboration with Dr. Marios Hadjianastasis, this year marked the first implementation of Conference Proceedings, published as a special issue in the Education in Practice Journal. The primary aim of the conference proceedings is to foster confidence among colleagues and encourage them to publish their pedagogical work. By providing a platform where they can share teaching innovations and classroom practices, we hope to make the publication process more accessible and supportive. With workshops and guidance such as writing retreats, presenters who may have never published before are now equipped with the necessary support to write up and showcase their work in a friendly journal environment. This initiative represents a significant opportunity for colleagues to build their research profiles while also contributing to the academic prestige of Birmingham Business School. Such publications shift the perception of business education research—often seen as the 'stepchild' of the business school—into the spotlight, enhancing both personal and institutional recognition.

In summary, BBS is one of the pioneers of BERS activities in the UK and internationally, by creating a role as BERS conveners. BBS BERS conveners' mission is to promote and support innovative educational research and practices while advancing the quality and impact of business education. While the annual BBS Education Conference brings together educators and researchers to share insights, best practices, and innovative teaching methods, the special issue aims at facilitating the development of these practices and encourage colleagues to engage more deeply with pedagogical research. We hope that these publications will not only inspire BBS staff to read, learn, and adopt best practices from one another, further enriching the learning experience for students and enhancing the quality of education across our institution, but also set an example to other colleges and schools at the University to encourage pedagogical and educational research and scholarship publications.

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Insights from the 2024 BBS Education Conference

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This special issue arises directly from the scholarly dialogues initiated at the Birmingham Business School (BBS) 4th Education Conference, held in collaboration with Aston University and Birmingham City University in September 2024. The conference convened over one hundred delegates and featured more than forty presentations, encompassing keynotes, panels, papers and posters drawn from across the business education community. Its principal themes—ranging from the pedagogical implications of Generative AI (GenAI) to strategies for enhancing student motivation, engagement and employability—were explored through case studies, empirical research and innovative practice. These themes underpin the contributions in this issue, which together offer critical insights for contemporary management education.

Against this backdrop, the four featured papers exemplify the conference's commitment to research-informed innovation in business education. Solanki et al. (2024) investigate motivations of Accounting and Finance undergraduates; Gracey and Rogers (2024) critique and reimagine authentic assessment practices; Timlon and Yao (2024) demonstrate the pedagogical impact of gender representation in case studies; and Al-Samarrai and Jeffrey (2024) propose a taxonomy of barriers in transnational higher education contexts. Their combined findings illustrate core trends and challenges, proposing answers an increasingly complex pedagogical landscape.

Solanki and Kandasamy (2024) investigate the shifting motivations and expectations of undergraduate Accounting and Finance students, noting a movement away from intrinsic academic interest towards more extrinsic, career-oriented goals. Their mixed-methods study reveals that students increasingly prioritise employability and career outcomes, echoing trends identified in earlier research (e.g. Byrne & Flood, 2005; Tomlinson, 2017). Additionally, the authors highlight influential factors such as course scheduling and community engagement, which significantly affect student attendance and participation. They observe that over a three-year programme, interest in the subject-specific content tends to decline, aligning with broader findings where pragmatic, employment-related considerations increasingly shape student decision-making processes (as in Tomlinson, 2017; Jackson, 2016). This research contributes meaningfully to discussions surrounding student motivation in accounting education (such as Jansen et al., 2022), emphasizing the need to reconsider curriculum design and educational priorities to better reflect current student objectives and societal demands.

In parallel, Gracey and Rogers (2024) critically examine assessment practices within postgraduate business and management programmes, particularly focusing on the construction of assessment briefs and their potential to foster authentic learning. Their findings indicate that while efforts to incorporate real-world relevance and higher-order cognitive skills are evident, significant gaps remain in providing formative feedback, collaborative opportunities, and reflective practice within assessments. Positioned within a particular business school context, this study underscores an ongoing tension between conventional summative assessment models and the necessity for more dynamic, authentic evaluation

methods. The authors' advocacy for assessments reflecting real-world complexities resonates with longstanding educational principles outlined by Wiggins (1990) and Gulikers et al. (2004), and recent scholarship underscoring the critical role of authenticity in student engagement, well-being, and employability (McArthur, 2022). Gracey and Rogers (2024) ultimately encourage a strategic and iterative approach to assessment design that moves beyond mere compliance, embedding meaningful and professionally relevant tasks that enhance both academic achievement and professional readiness.

Focusing on diversity and inclusion within educational materials, Timlon and Yao (2024) explore how integrating female protagonists into business case studies significantly improves engagement and facilitates the creation of inclusive classrooms for diverse cohorts. Using Gestalt theory and the exposure effect (Zajonc, 1968), their study demonstrates that repeated and authentic representation of women leaders effectively challenges entrenched gender stereotypes, enabling students to envisage themselves in entrepreneurial and leadership capacities. While previous literature, such as Hussain and Scott (2013) and Sealy and Singh (2010) have already highlighted the value of experiential learning methodologies and visible role models in fostering engagement and identity formation, Timlon and Yao (2024) extend this discourse into business education providing a literature review complimented with evidence of own experience. Building on earlier evidence, they show that the repeated, authentic inclusion of women protagonists in case studies not only challenges gender stereotypes but also deepens students' sense of belonging and leadership self-efficacy across diverse cohorts. A recent systematic review by Szlavi et al. (2024) in computing education highlights similar findings. Collectively, these studies underscore the imperative of incorporating diverse and relatable role models into educational practices, reinforcing equity, diversity, and inclusion, and effectively preparing students for a professional landscape marked by greater representational diversity.

Lastly, Al-Samarrai and Jeffrey (2024) propose a taxonomy detailing the barriers to Emirati student success in transnational higher education settings, categorizing challenges into academic, cultural, institutional, personal, and social dimensions. Their research adds to the ongoing dialogues surrounding the complexities inherent in delivering cross-border education. Recent contributions from Schueller et al. (2024) similarly emphasize methodological and contextual complexities in transnational education research, advocating for nuanced, context-sensitive analytical frameworks. Al-Samarrai and Jeffrey's work resonates with analyses from international branch campuses, which consistently underline the critical impact of cultural and institutional barriers on student experiences and institutional effectiveness (Paniagua et al., 2022). Persistent concerns regarding quality assurance highlight an ongoing need for robust regulatory frameworks and culturally adaptive pedagogical practices to maintain academic standards and effectively support diverse student populations (Zwanikken et al., 2013). The findings also align with broader scholarly calls for culturally responsive education strategies within the context of higher education internationalization (such as Singh et al., 2023).

Together, these four studies address key concerns for business educators: adapting to students' changing motivational profiles; developing assessments that reflect professional challenges; incorporating diverse role models into teaching materials; and understanding the barriers faced by students in globalised educational settings. They also echo the principal themes explored throughout the conference—namely, the pedagogical implications of GenAI, strategies for enhancing student engagement and employability, and innovative approaches to curriculum design. Together they reflect the BBS community's commitment to evidence-based, research-

led pedagogical practice, and initiate ongoing conversations that will further refine these approaches in future scholarship.

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Exploring the motivations and expectations of BSc Accounting and Finance students

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Abstract

This study explores the evolving patterns of student motivation and expectations as drivers for engagement within the BSc Accounting and Finance programme at Birmingham Business School. It aims to addresses a gap in UK-based literature on accounting students' motivations and expectations. The study draws on a multidimensional conceptual framework to explore the nature of student engagement and why students engage in the way they do. A mixed methods approach was employed combining survey data and focus group discussions across each year group. Findings reveal that students predominantly exhibit goal-oriented motivations. The majority cited career prospects as their primary driver for attending university. Only a small minority chose the degree based on subject interest, with this interest being lowest among final-year students. The study also identifies misconceptions about the subject and the broad scope of the degree when students first join the programme. First-year students' expectations show significant misalignment with academic reality, particularly in relation to assessment preparation and attendance requirements. While behavioural engagement often varies based on practical considerations, cognitive engagement appears relatively weak across the cohorts. Emotional factors such as sense of community and lecturer approachability emerges as significant influences on participation. The study also identifies a typical shift from learning-oriented to outcome-focused engagement, with an increasing emphasis on degree classification over subject mastery as students progress through the programme. The findings offer valuable insights for enhancing teaching practices, curriculum design, and student support services. Curriculum adjustments could better align academic content with professional practice and skills-based outcomes. Understanding diverse motivational profiles could help develop more targeted support interventions, such as enhanced career guidance for goal-oriented students and more challenging academic opportunities for learning-focused students. Finally, the study highlights the need for more explicit communication about the course's nature and demands, particularly at the recruitment and induction stages, to better manage student expectations.

Introduction

Student engagement has evolved into a complex, multidimensional construct, encompassing affective, behavioural, and cognitive dimensions. Kahu and Nelson (2018), in their refined conceptual framework, have synthesised diverse perspectives, highlighting the importance of self-efficacy, emotions, belonging, and wellbeing within an educational interface in mediating engagement. This educational interface is expected to be influenced by the students' background including their motivations and expectations. Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, plays a crucial role in influencing students' connection to learning. Motivation, expectations and student engagement are key determinants of success in higher education, influencing not only academic performance but also personal development and graduate

attributes. Understanding these factors is essential for fostering a supportive and engaging learning environment that aligns with students' personal interests and academic capabilities. In recent years, the BSc Accounting and Finance programme at the Birmingham Business School (BBS) has observed noticeable changes in student cohorts' behaviours and participation levels. A contributing factor has been the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in teaching and learning practices, potentially reshaping student expectations and engagement patterns. Furthermore, the growing emphasis on inclusivity in wider higher education amplifies the need for a better understanding of the student perspective. This study aims to gain a better understanding of our students' motivation for coming to university and pursuing an accounting and finance degree including how they engage with their degree across the 3 years and why do they engage the way they do. While student engagement and expectations are widely researched, the specific motivations and expectations of Accounting and Finance students in the UK context have not been significantly studied since Byrne et al. (2012). The last longitudinal study in this area, conducted by Marriott and Marriott (2003), predates many of the recent changes in higher education. This study simultaneously examines motivations, expectations, and engagement patterns across all three years of study—an approach not previously undertaken in UK accounting education research. Its exploratory approach to understanding student engagement by examining the affective, behavioural, and cognitive dimensions provides a holistic view of how students connect with their learning. This could then be translated to initiatives to improve academic outcomes and student satisfaction.

In this paper, we start by examining concepts of student engagement and then linking to motivations and expectations. Following this, we explain our research methods and data collection. The findings and discussion section provide key insights and analysis of our findings. We then consider limitations and recommendations including potential implications for the programme and higher education followed by an overall conclusion.

Framework for Study

Concepts of student engagement

Kahu and Nelson's (2018) refined conceptual framework provides the theoretical foundation for this study. This model identifies four key psychosocial constructs that mediate student engagement: self-efficacy, emotions, belonging, and wellbeing. The framework conceptualises student engagement as occurring at an 'educational interface' where institutional and student factors interact leading to the affective, behavioural, and cognitive dimensions of engagement. Each dimension represents a different aspect of how students connect with their learning (Figure 1).

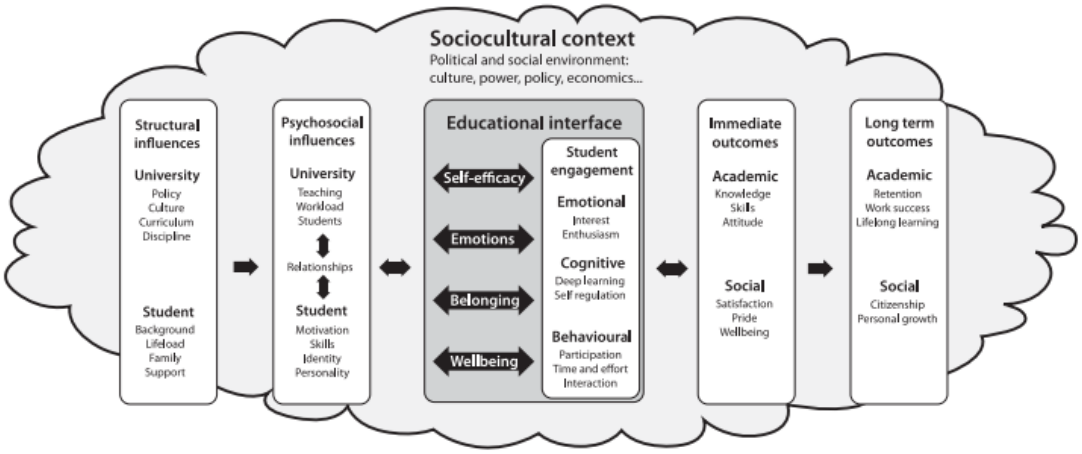


Figure 1: Refined conceptual framework of student engagement (Kahu and Nelson, 2018)

Engagement is viewed as an individual student's psychosocial state, comprising their behavioural, emotional, and cognitive connection to learning (Fredricks, et al., 2004; Kahu, 2013). Behavioural engagement is the easiest to measure as it considers student engagement to be a series of behaviours such as, attendance, adherence to rules and participation; cognitive engagement implies deep learning due to a genuine interest in the topic; and emotional engagement considers feelings or a personal sense of engagement within a learning community (Fredricks, et al., 2004; Kahu, 2013). Milburn-Shaw and Walker (2017) suggests that considering student engagement as a series of behaviours is a one-dimensional view highlighting compliance rather than 'true' engagement and so behavioural factors should be given the least attention in comparison with cognitive and emotional approaches. We draw on Kahu and Nelson's (2018) conceptual framework, which identifies self-efficacy, emotions, belonging, and wellbeing as key constructs mediating engagement within an educational interface. This educational interface is influenced by structural and psychosocial influences including the students' background, their motivations and expectations. Kahu et al. (2015) then suggest that within the educational interface, emotional engagement improves when curriculum content aligns with students' personal interests, experiences, and aspirations, while cognitive engagement is optimised when students' capabilities align effectively with academic tasks (Schunk and Pajares, 2004). Therefore, the educational interface is where students live and learn (Nakata, 2007), with higher education seen as a partnership between students and their institutions (Kahu and Nelson, 2018). We aim to understand the influences of this educational interface mainly motivations and expectations, to then consider how to foster a supportive learning environment that aligns with students' personal interests and graduate attribute.

Motivation for learning and for pursuing higher education

The self-system model of motivational development conceptualises engagement as the quality of students' participation in the classroom (Connell and Wellborn, 1991) and "the outward manifestation of a motivated student" (Skinner, Kindermann and Furrer, 2009, p.494). This framework acknowledges the reciprocal relationship between motivation and engagement, wherein motivational factors predict engagement, which subsequently influences future motivation (Martin, et al., 2017). Students' motivations for learning typically fall into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsically motivated students engage in learning driven by

interest, enjoyment, or curiosity, focusing on intellectual development and personal growth (Paulsen and Gentry, 1995). Conversely, extrinsically motivated students pursue learning to achieve external goals, such as vocational or career advancement, or for collegiate and lifestyle reasons (Donald, 1999; Byrne et al., 2012).

It is worth considering student motives for coming to university as this may serve as an indication of the level of motivation they will have towards their learning (Byrne, et al., 2012). Kember, Ho, and Hong (2010) note six facets of motivation: compliance (normal to proceed to university after school); individual goal (personal desire to progress educationally); university lifestyle (social/sporting activities as the main attraction); sense of belonging (influence of parents, teachers and peers); career (to satisfy career aspirations), and; interest (to pursue a personal interest in a particular discipline). Houle (1961) suggests a narrower framework with three distinct motivational orientations that closely link to the six facets:

1. Learning orientation – enjoys learning, desire to learn more and experience intellectual growth;
2. Goal orientation – see education as enabling them to achieve a specific vocational outcome i.e. to pursue a particular type of career; and
3. Activity orientation – desire to meet new people and enjoy extra-curricular/social activities.

Students with learning orientation as a key reason for coming to university tend to engage more deeply with course material, seeking understanding beyond assessment requirements aligning with intrinsic motivation (Paulsen and Gentry, 1995). Goal-oriented students may adopt more strategic approaches to learning, prioritising content or activities directly related to their career aspirations or lifestyle reasons, aligning with extrinsic motivation (Byrne, et al., 2012). Students coming to university because of activity orientation may value collaborative learning experiences that build their social connections aligning with extrinsic motivation for learning (Byrne, et al.,2012).

Expectations

In transitioning to university, expectations are identified by numerous researchers as a key factor that affects success and the ability to adapt (Hassel & Ridout, 2018; Money, et al., 2017) where a mismatch between expectations and experience can impact transition, engagement, achievement and retention (Maloshonok & Terentev, 2017; Borghi, et al., 2016; Byrne, et al., 2012). Initial campus experiences significantly shape student expectations, with Tomlinson, Simpson, and Killingback (2023) highlighting how institutional practices, such as readily available online resources and traditional lecture formats, can inadvertently influence student engagement patterns. While students often hold misconceptions about learning resources and teaching delivery - largely influenced by media portrayals, family experiences, and prior education - they demonstrate openness to diverse teaching methods beyond passive lectures, including active learning approaches and group work (Tomlinson, et al., 2023). While lectures allow for resource efficiency for large numbers, they do not necessarily encourage engagement, attendance and critical thinking (Schmidt et al., 2015). Students may think that they are being provided comprehensive knowledge, but this may contribute to the lack of independent study

(Sajjad, 2010). Wick (2013) suggests that managing expectations is a collaborative process based around open communication, creating and accepting new realistic expectations.

Research method/data collection

This research employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the motivations, expectations and engagement levels of students as they progress through their course. The data for the study was collected using surveys and focus groups. This approach was adopted to gather multiple perspectives through the survey from the wider population of students and then be able to contextualise results from the focus group discussions. The survey included questions that were devised based on examination and interpretation of concepts identified in Kahu and Nelson's (2018) framework around student engagement. Questions about motivations were structured to allow distinction between motivation orientations/facets, while engagement questions were separated into behavioural, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. The response rates varied considerably across years (see Table 1), which we thought represented the level of engagement of the year groups.

For first years, the first section of the survey gathered background data including gender identity, age, home or international, commuter students, if they worked part time and had caring responsibilities. The second section of the survey identified students' key motivations for coming to university, for choosing to study Accounting and Finance and the most important outcome of their degree. The third section involved students responding to various statements including what they will be expected to do, feelings and beliefs using a five-point Likert scale and one question on independent study hours to identify expectations.

The survey for year 2 and 3 was different in section three where it asked for some historic attendance data and students' plans for attending (more or fewer lectures) in the current year including why and the factors that influenced their attendance using a five-point Likert scale (behavioural engagement). Section four then included cognitive and emotional engagement factors using a five-point Likert scale. Both surveys allowed students to provide their thoughts on things that could be worrying them in progressing through their course at the end.

The focus groups were conducted after the surveys with small groups of up to 8 students (split between Home and International and by year). This was facilitated by someone who was not involved in teaching the students. The aim of the focus group was to provide a deeper and more authentic understanding of student perspectives that could enrich the findings from the surveys.

	Respondents	Cohort size	Survey response rate	Focus group participants
Year 1	86	190	45%	16
Year 2	62	210	30%	4

Year 3	46	290	16%	10

Table 1: Breakdown of the sample and response rates

Findings and discussions

Motivations

Students were allowed to select up to three reasons why they decided to come to university. For all three years, there is a strong goal orientation for coming to university with more than 80% citing career prospects as a key motivation (Figure 2).

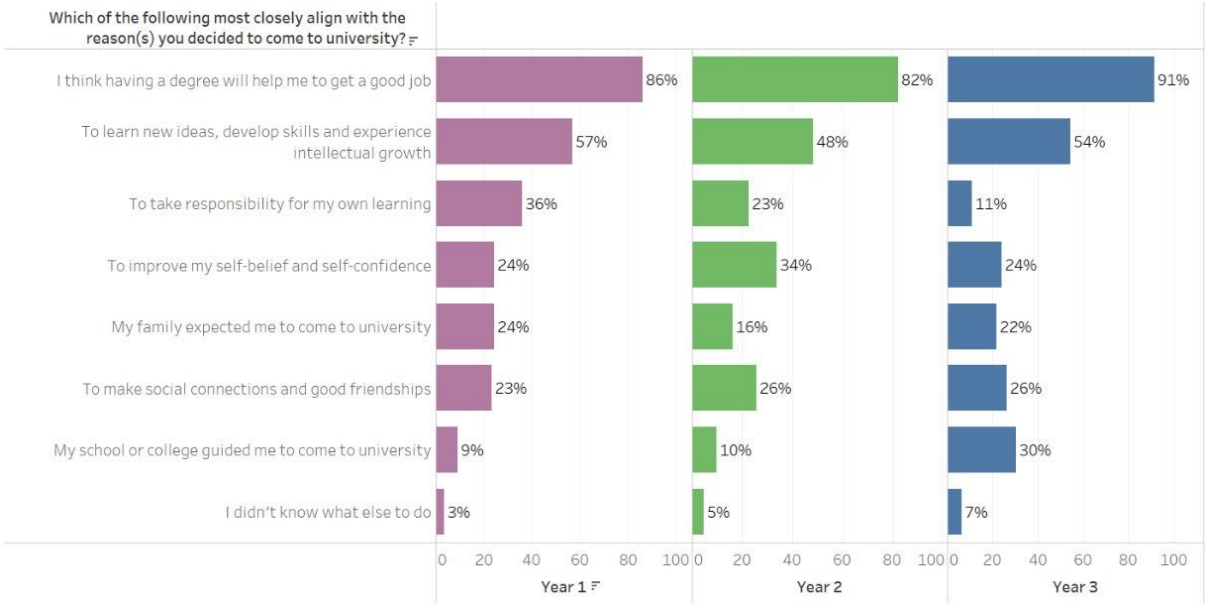


Figure 2 – Reasons for deciding to come to university

This aligns with Houle's goal orientation, where students view education as a means to achieve specific vocational outcomes or the degree as a stepping stone to these outcomes. For example, one first-year student stated, "I chose Accounting and Finance because I want to become a chartered accountant. This degree is the first step towards that goal." The second most popular reason for coming to university is to learn new ideas, develop skills and experience intellectual growth, which is a learning orientation. Some students are motivated by the broader university experience, including to make social connections and good friendships (activity orientation). (Figure 2)

It is noted that these motivations are not mutually exclusive, with many students exhibiting a combination of orientations. The highest combinations are shown in Table 2. The focus groups identified a mix of academic learning, career opportunities and extrinsic factors as well such as parental expectations and societal pressures as per Kember, Ho, and Hong (2010) compliance facet. This was especially the case for international students. As expected, we see variations in the prevalence of these orientations among individual students, these reflect differences in demographics, prior experiences, and individual goals.

Year 1	I think having a degree will help me get a good job To take responsibility for my own learning To learn new ideas, develop skills and experience intellectual growth
Year 2	I think having a degree will help me get a good job To learn new ideas, develop skills and experience intellectual growth To improve my self-belief and self-confidence
Year 3	I think having a degree will help me get a good job To learn new ideas, develop skills and experience intellectual growth To improve my self-belief and self-confidence

Table 2: Highest combination of reasons why students decided to come to university for each year group

On motivations for choosing the programme (Figure 3), again there is a strong goal orientation with the most popular reasons being the belief that it will lead into “a high-paying job” and “wanting a career in accounting and finance”. Interestingly, only a small group of students identify subject interest as one of their main reasons for choosing Accounting and Finance and this interest drops across the years (Year 1: 23%; Year 2: 19%; Year 3: 17%). About 39% of third years indicated that their key motivation to study the subject was because they like maths, which highlights a common misconception about the subject. The focus group identified that many do not fully understand the degree’s broad scope at the start.

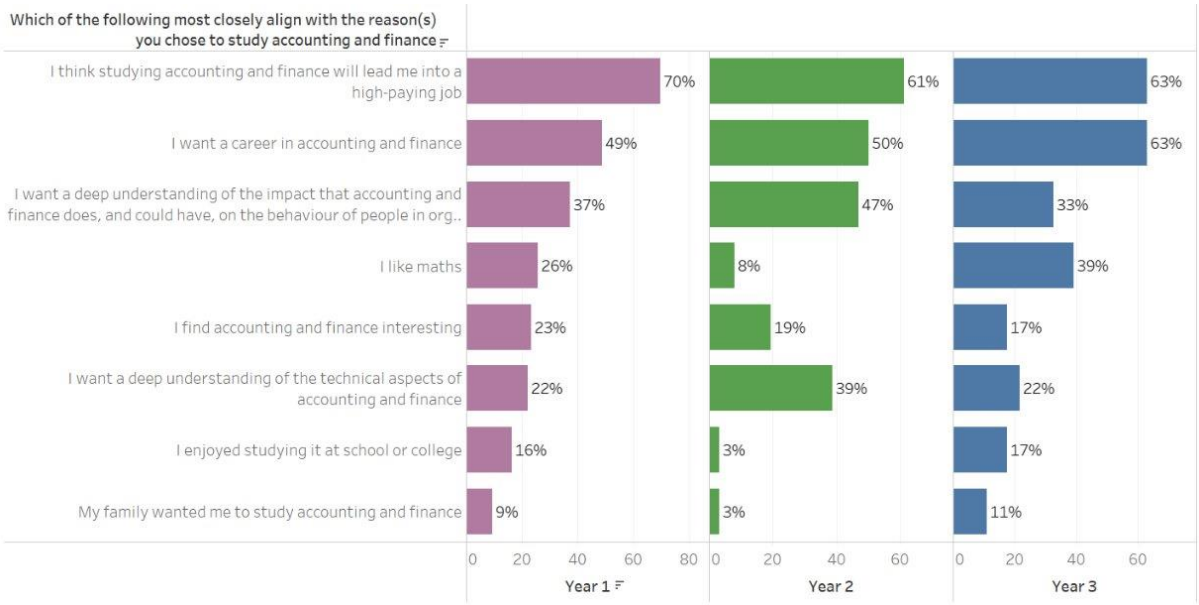


Figure 3 – Reasons for choosing to study accounting and finance

The most important outcome of the degree (Figure 4) for all three years varied, with Year 1 being the ability to apply for graduate jobs in accounting and finance, Year 2 being the knowledge and skills developed and Year 3 being degree classification. Another interesting trend here is that the ability to apply for jobs in other fields rises, which indicates that a higher proportion of students look for careers outside Accounting and Finance once they have studied it for 3 years. This could align with Marriott and Marriott's (2003) observation that accounting education could be 'turning students off' the subject.

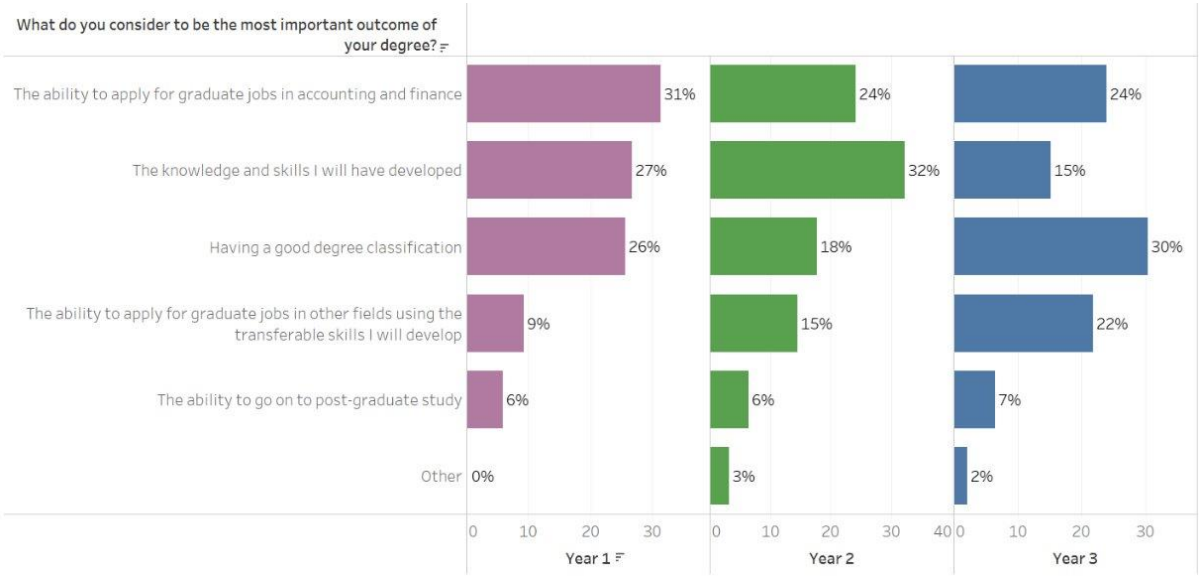


Figure 4 – Most important outcome of degree

Expectations (Year 1 only)

The Year 1 survey and focus groups found a mismatch between students' expectations and reality, which could affect motivation and further contribute to disengagement. 71% of students (n=86) believe that lecturers will teach them everything they need to know to do well in assessments and this expectation was stronger among international students. 21% of students think they will do well even if they do not attend and again this expectation is stronger among international students. The majority expect to make friends and to work with other students on the course. Almost 90% agreed that they will need to take notes in the lectures and 84% agreed that they will need to prepare for lectures/seminars, but our experience tells us that only a minority do. This pattern may be linked to how initial experiences on campus shape new expectations especially when abundant online learning resources and post-lecture materials are made available with minimal pre-sessional work requirements (Tomlinson, Simpson, & Killingback, 2023). Most international students (60%) consider that they will have easy access to lecturers outside of the classroom while 45% of home students thought this. International students have less of an expectation about working in groups (67% expect to work in groups vs 82% for home students). The results show that the transitional period (very early on) is important in shaping new realistic expectations and acceptance of these. It also supports that student engagement is influenced by interactions between institutional and student factors (Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

Factors influencing engagement (Year 2 and 3 only)

Analysis of student engagement reveals some patterns across behavioural, cognitive, and emotional dimensions. Some year 2 students appear intrinsically motivated to attend more sessions because they find the subject interesting and want to broaden their knowledge. Whereas the majority were extrinsically motivated by factors influencing academic achievement such as degree classification or to get good grades to support postgraduate applications. One student's perspective resonates with Milburn-Shaw and Walker's (2017) findings on "true" engagement, having achieved academic success previously by engaging in more independent study at home rather than attending sessions. This finding suggests that compliance-based measures of engagement (such as attendance) may not accurately reflect true cognitive engagement. Some students consciously prioritise independent study over lecture attendance, having found this approach more effective for their learning style and circumstances. This supports Milburn-Shaw and Walker's (2017) argument that meaningful engagement involves free and critical thinking rather than mere behavioural compliance.

Third-year students demonstrated predominantly extrinsic motivation, primarily focused on securing strong degree classifications, with data showing a notable decline in subject interest between second and third year. Practical factors significantly influenced attendance across both year groups, including session timing and assessment relevance, with over 60% of students indicating that the availability of recorded sessions influenced their attendance decisions. These findings suggest students adopt a strategic approach to engagement, balancing academic requirements with practical considerations like convenience and assessment outcomes. Kahu and Nelson (2018) recognises that non-traditional students struggle with reduced self-efficacy, negative emotions, a lack of belonging or wellbeing, and increased stress, therefore, lead to a more challenging experience with higher education. Thus,

institutional practices, flexibility, and the curriculum itself can serve as key mediating mechanisms to enhance the wider student experience (Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

	Year 2		Year 3	
	Agree/Strongly Agree	Average (1-5)	Agree/Strongly Agree	Average (1-5)
The time of day of the session	81%	4.08	80%	4.09
How convenient it is to attend, given the timing of other lectures or seminars	68%	3.87	67%	3.72
My interest in the topic	69%	3.87	46%	3.30
Whether I like the lecturer's approach to teaching	68%	3.85	61%	3.63
Whether I have found previous sessions in the module useful	74%	3.98	70%	3.87
Whether the session is relevant to an assessment	76%	4.03	76%	4.11
Other university commitments (e.g. assignments)	61%	3.64	74%	3.89
Commitments outside of university (e.g. paid work, caring responsibilities)	58%	3.52	43%	3.37
Whether my friends are attending	53%	3.31	28%	2.87
Whether there will be a recording of the session available	65%	3.75	61%	3.80

Table 3 – Factors affecting attendance

Cognitive engagement (Table 4) appears relatively weak, with more than half of students reporting they complete only the minimum work required for assessment success. While 73% of second-year students (n=62) report enjoying deeper subject exploration through additional research and reading (whether they do or not is another question), this drops to 43% among third-year students (n=46), indicating declining subject interest over time. The study reveals stronger emotional engagement factors with friendships, learning communities, and lecturer approachability emerging as significant themes. Students report anxiety or lack of enthusiasm about participating in large lectures, suggesting that emotional factors significantly influence participation. Kahu and Nelson (2018) suggests that feedback to students increases their self-efficacy and that staff getting to know their students facilitates a sense of belonging, which then encourage engagement.

	Year 2		Year 3	
	Agree/Strongly Agree	Average (1-5)	Agree/Strongly Agree	Average (1-5)
I complete the preparation and consolidation work my lecturers suggest	89%	4.15	78%	3.80
I enjoy doing extra research and reading to deepen my understanding of topics covered	73%	3.69	43%	3.07
I only do as much work as is needed to do well in assessments	66%	3.56	63%	3.41
It is important to me to have friends on my course	69%	3.60	70%	3.72
My lecturers are approachable and I feel comfortable asking them questions	82%	4.08	74%	3.70
I feel part of a supportive community of students and staff on my course	77%	3.90	61%	3.40

Table 4 – Cognitive and affective factors

Limitations and Recommendations

While this study aims to provide comprehensive insights into student motivations and engagement in Accounting and Finance education, we acknowledge several potential limitations. One being the reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias. Students' perceptions of their own motivations and engagement levels may not always align with their actual behaviours or experiences. Additionally, isolating the specific impact of motivations and expectations on engagement presents a complex challenge, given the multitude of factors influencing student experiences. In the focus groups, there was a tendency for participants to discuss the university and its structures (similar to a customer experience survey) rather than the process of their learning and engagement. This serves as an exploratory study to understand why students engage the way they do and to identify themes within this cohort of students. It does not serve as a comprehensive study to test a specific framework or develop one. This study does not look at individual students' profiles but the overall perspectives of each year group.

These initial findings suggest several potential implications for curriculum design and student support. The curriculum would benefit by being adjusted to better align with student

motivations and expectations, potentially incorporating more explicit links between academic content and professional practice or skills-based outcomes. Understanding the diverse motivational profiles of students could inform the development of more targeted support interventions, such as additional career guidance for goal-oriented students or more challenging academic opportunities for those with strong learning orientations. Insights into engagement patterns will help to inform the development of more effective teaching and assessment strategies, potentially incorporating more interactive or applied learning experiences. There may also be a need for more explicit communication about the nature and demands of the course, particularly at the recruitment and induction stages, to better manage student expectations. Beyond the immediate context of Accounting and Finance education, our findings may have broader implications for understanding of student motivations and engagement in higher education.

Future research could explore the relationship between specific motivational profiles and academic outcomes, potentially identifying which combinations of motivations best predict success in accounting education. Longitudinal tracking of individual students throughout their degree programme would provide deeper insights into how and why motivations and engagement patterns shift over time. Additionally, comparative studies across different types of institutions could illuminate how institutional cultures influence student engagement in accounting education. We plan to expand this research approach to other universities in Birmingham from 2024-25, to enable comparison of the BSc Accounting and Finance students' motivations and attitudes towards accounting as a study and profession in different types of higher education institution.

Conclusion

This study highlights that BSc Accounting and Finance students' engagement is predominantly shaped by pragmatic considerations (such as convenience and achievement outcomes) and emotional factors (including interest levels, anxiety, and sense of belonging) rather than deep cognitive engagement with the subject matter. In terms of motivation, the majority cite career prospects as the primary driver for coming to university rather than subject interest, with an increasing focus on degree classification as students' progress through their studies. This potentially explains the lack of deep cognitive engagement. First year expectations are typically misaligned with the realities of higher education particularly regarding assessment preparation, independent learning and the role of lecturers. They also lack understanding of the degree subject and the broad career pathways. This potentially leads to students' engagement patterns that are influenced by practical factors including assessment relevance, session timing, and resource accessibility. Our findings indicate that lecturers' approachability and having a sense of community are significant influences on engagement. These insights suggest that enhancing student engagement in accounting education requires attention to both emotional and practical aspects of the learning experience, while also finding ways to foster deeper cognitive connection with the subject material beyond traditional measures of engagement. It suggests a curriculum update to better align with student motivations, a re-think of our teaching and assessment strategies, as well as interventions to manage expectations that will hopefully feed into the educational interface.

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Interpreting assessment briefs: a shift towards authenticity in assessment practice

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Abstract

The design of assessment briefs, the tasks they outline, and their communication with students play a pivotal role in enhancing assessment quality in higher education (HE) (Sokhanvar et al., 2021), as well as supporting developments in pedagogy and teaching philosophy (Buswell & Berdanier, 2020; Krishnamurthy, 2020; Pring, 2015). This paper, a reflection-in-action, practice-based perspective undertakes a document analysis of 52 assessment briefs from postgraduate business and management programmes to identify key trends in current practice and identify areas for future development. Adopting a content analysis approach, this scrutiny of assessment briefs evaluates the tasks themselves but also considers the clarity, consistency, and coherence of instructions provided to support student learning (Biesta, 2009).

Introduction

This project critically analyses assessment briefs in business and management programmes, evaluating task design and content currently in practice. Findings will be used to develop recommendations and propose strategies for a shift towards more authentic assessment practices that better align with students' academic and professional development needs.

Objective:

To critically evaluate current assessment practice in summatively assessed work for business school students.

The design of assessment briefs, the tasks they outline, and their communication with our students play a pivotal role in understanding, supporting, and enhancing assessment quality for business and management students. Prior research suggests that students struggle to understand assessment tasks and the briefing documents in which they are located (Gustafson-Pearce, 2009). Prior research suggests that students struggle to understand assessment tasks and the briefing documents that hold them. It is suggested that students may struggle with assignments due, in part, to feelings of reduced competence and confidence in understanding assignments and in leveraging them to demonstrate their learning in summative assessment (Jopp et al., 2023). For some, this is about being new to HE itself, whereas for others this is about their first experience with the norms and expectations in British HE, a particularly salient consideration within a business school.

The role, then, of assessment practice should be carefully considered, is there a way to approach assessment brief design more intentionally, in keeping with the argument provided by McArthur (2023) for a shift from traditional assessment methods towards a more authentic assessment paradigm? By integrating McArthur's insights into a developing understanding of assessment briefs as an artefact of assessment quality, this study underscores the importance of designing assessment briefs that foster genuine learning experiences. This requires broadening the scope of assessment to consider academic rigour, differing forms of

assessment validity (Janusheva et al., 2021), and the practical and personal development of students (Pang, 2022). Authenticity in assessment emphasises real-world relevance and student engagement, thereby aligning educational outcomes with employability skills.

Following this identification of trends and content evaluation, a second phase is exploratory, inspired in part by an iterative approach to assessment briefs, involving a cyclical process of reviewing each brief against an author-designed rubric (provided in Appendix). It is not just a quality perspective; emphasis is also placed on prioritising incremental shifts that place authentic assessment closer and closer to the core of our assessment practice over time. This paper invites educators to engage in critical analysis, professional development, and forward-thinking dialogue to foster authentic student learning experiences.

Literature Review

The concept of authentic assessment has undergone significant theoretical and practical evolution, particularly within higher education. Rooted in Wiggins' (1990, p. 1) foundational argument for assessments that position students as "effective performers with acquired knowledge," authentic assessment has since become integral to pedagogical discussions emphasising real-world application, student agency, and competency-based evaluation. Given its significance to this study, authenticity merits further definition. Gulikers et al. (2004) propose that authentic assessment requires real-world relevance, alignment with professional practices, and opportunities for students to construct meaning through engagement with complex, discipline-specific challenges. These principles are particularly pertinent to business school students, who must navigate applied problem-solving and decision-making scenarios in preparation for professional roles.

Since Wiggins' early work, scholars have expanded on the concept, exploring its role in fostering deep learning and employability. McArthur (2023) highlights the necessity of moving away from decontextualised assessments toward models that situate students in real-world contexts. Similarly, Ajjawi et al. (2023) emphasise that students perceive authentic assessment as more relevant and engaging than conventional summative tasks, reinforcing the link between perceived applicability and learning motivation. This shift is particularly salient in business education, where assessments should reflect industry-relevant challenges and competencies. Karns (2006) found that students prefer learning activities that are enjoyable, challenging, and similar to the tasks they would be performing in the business world. This aligns with the broader literature on authentic assessment, which emphasises its role in bridging academic learning with professional practice. In line with existing research, this study predicts that students will perceive the subject of study with authentic assessment more favourably because they will be offered the opportunity to solve real business problems throughout their learning experience.

A key aspect of assessment design is its influence on student engagement. Research suggests that students prefer assessments aligned with their learning styles and professional aspirations (Jopp et al., 2023; Pang, 2022). Preferences vary across student populations, necessitating an approach that accommodates diverse learning strategies. Assessment briefs play a pivotal role in this process, guiding student engagement and performance. Clarity in briefs is essential, as overly complex or ambiguous instructions can contribute to student disengagement and diminished confidence (Gustafson-Pearce, 2009). Thus, well-structured briefs should explicitly outline task expectations, align with learning outcomes, and integrate formative feedback mechanisms to support iterative learning.

Assessment quality and validity are critical considerations. Harlen (2004) warns against "assessment drift," where iterative modifications without a structured framework can undermine consistency. A systematic approach ensures that assessments maintain coherence across modules while allowing for disciplinary innovation. Janusheva et al. (2021) argue that authentic assessments must evaluate not only theoretical knowledge but also practical application, considering construct validity, content validity, and consequential validity. In business education, this alignment between assessment tasks and industry expectations enhances graduates' career readiness.

A notable omission in discussions of authentic assessment is the role of digital skills. Given the increasing digitisation of professional environments, assessments should incorporate elements that develop students' technological competencies. This integration ensures that students are equipped with the digital literacy required in contemporary workplaces, further bridging the gap between academic learning and industry demands.

Authentic assessment serves not only as an evaluative mechanism but also as a developmental tool, fostering transferable skills. Institutions must embrace frameworks that balance academic rigour with real-world applicability, ensuring that graduates are not only knowledgeable but also proficient in applying their learning to complex professional contexts. The factors discussed—clarity in assessment briefs, engagement, quality assurance, validity, and digital skills—underscore the need for a holistic approach to assessment design, reinforcing its role in shaping both intellectual and professional competencies.

Summary

In summary, the literature underscores the importance of integrating authentic assessment within higher education, particularly in business and management disciplines. Effective assessment practices are those that balance academic rigour with real-world relevance, fostering skills that prepare students for their professional futures. The challenge lies in crafting assessments that meet these goals while remaining clear, consistent, and engaging for students.

Methodology

A qualitative, inductive approach has been chosen for this project due to its flexibility and detail-oriented nature, which is well-suited to the applied and problem-oriented rationale of the project. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of the complexity across different modules and varied assignment briefs, allowing for the identification of similarities, differences, and trends in current practice.

The principal method of data collection is organisational document analysis, specifically focusing on assessment briefs and enclosed assessment tasks. This method involves a systematic evaluation and analysis of assignment briefs, individually and as a unified corpus, to identify emerging patterns in the data and practice-oriented insights for authenticity in assessment practice.

The sampling strategy is purposive and criterion-based, focusing on summative assessment briefs from modules at masters' level. The available sample was 52 briefs, including tasks such as written reports, time-constrained assessments, and in-person presentations.

Qualitative content analysis was chosen for analysis, being systematic and detail-oriented, allowing for coding and categorisation of information across the identified documents. The

analysis follows the structure presented in Krippendorff's content analytic approach (2018), supporting trend identification and pattern analysis across assessment briefs to inform recommendations for future practice.

The authors synthesised key literature findings to generate an authentic assessment rubric included below. Drawn from supporting sources, a series of questions were posed within the rubric as to the extent to which an assignment task meets the current understanding of authentic assessment. Following methodological recommendations for undertaking qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012), each task was evaluated against this rubric, scoring 0-2 across ten items, (0 = does not meet criteria, 1 = partially meets criteria, 2 = fully meets criteria).

Findings

A total of 52 assessment briefs were analysed across five postgraduate business and management programmes for the academic year 2023-24. A systematic content analysis approach was employed, informed by an authentic assessment rubric developed from the literature. Each assessment brief was deconstructed into individual components and scored against the rubric dimensions. Where modules were shared across programmes or repeated for different cohorts, only a single instance was included in the analysis.

The briefs varied in assessment weighting: 22 (42%) were fully summative (100% weighting on a 20-credit module), while the remaining ranged between 20% and 80%, most commonly split at 50% (n=14). Reports emerged as the dominant assessment type, accounting for 43 out of 52 tasks, with 22 categorised as general reports and 5 as specialised tasks (e.g., market entry reports). Other types included presentations (n=6), portfolios (n=2), and reflective pieces (n=1).

Despite the diversity of formats, several trends were observed:

- Strengths included alignment to real-world professional scenarios and use of contemporary business issues to frame tasks, which aligns with authentic assessment criteria.
- Weaknesses clustered around limited opportunities for formative engagement, lack of explicit student agency (e.g., task choice or co-creation), and minimal evidence of scaffolding or feedback guidance.

The formative dimension was especially lacking; only 9 briefs (17%) made explicit reference to formative processes or feedback loops. The weighting of assessment tasks did not seem to correspond with higher levels of task authenticity. For example, many 100% weighted assessments were generic reports, offering little opportunity for iterative development or feedback prior to submission.

Discussion

The findings indicate that while there is a clear trend toward incorporating professional and applied scenarios in assessment briefs, several critical aspects of authentic assessment remain underdeveloped. This aligns with prior literature suggesting that authenticity is multidimensional, encompassing not only the nature of the task but also the learning processes embedded within it (Gulikers et al., 2004; Ashford-Rowe et al., 2014).

From a programme perspective, the dominance of traditional report formats—particularly in 100% weighted summative assessments—raises concerns about the over-reliance on familiar assessment types at the expense of diversity and formative development. It also prompts

questions about how risk aversion, standardisation, or even accreditation requirements may influence assessment design choices.

Interestingly, no clear correlation was found between the type of module (e.g., core vs. elective) and the quality of assessment design, suggesting that issues with authenticity may be systemic rather than isolated. Similarly, the presence of multiple module leaders did not appear to improve task clarity or variety. This supports the argument that institutional and cultural factors may constrain innovative assessment practices more than individual educator choices (Boud & Falchikov, 2006).

Building on this, a more practice-focused implication of the study lies in the utility of the scoring system itself. By embedding the rubric into programme review processes, course teams can more easily self-evaluate their briefs and identify opportunities for improvement. For example, greater emphasis could be placed on designing tasks that:

- Enable student choice or negotiation,
- Include explicit formative elements,
- Integrate professional tools or real-time feedback mechanisms.

These insights point toward an incremental model of assessment enhancement, where even modest refinements—such as clearer instructions or built-in scaffolding—can collectively elevate the authenticity and clarity of assessment design.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study explored the design of assessment briefs across postgraduate business and management programmes, using a content analysis of 52 summative tasks to evaluate how authenticity is embedded into current assessment practices. Drawing on a literature-informed rubric, we assessed key dimensions of each brief, including clarity, relevance, structure, and opportunities for formative development.

A key contribution of this research is the development and application of an authentic assessment scoring framework, which provides a structured method for reviewing and enhancing assessment design. Findings suggest that while many briefs demonstrate professional relevance and contextual grounding, critical elements such as feedback scaffolding, student choice, and iterative learning opportunities are often missing. The overuse of report formats, particularly in high-stakes assessments, highlights a need for more diverse and formative approaches to task design.

We propose that this scoring system be used as part of regular programme review processes, enabling educators and programme leaders to self-evaluate and iteratively improve assessment practices. In particular, the framework can support reflection on how tasks communicate expectations, offer opportunities for student engagement, and reflect real-world complexity.

Future research could involve co-creating versions of the rubric with students and evaluating its use across different disciplines and institutional contexts. More broadly, we argue for recognising the assessment brief as a key site of pedagogic practice where clarity, authenticity, and student support intersect. By embedding review tools into routine practice, institutions can foster more inclusive, meaningful, and transparent assessment strategies.

Authentic Assessment Rubric

1. Real-world Relevance
    - Does the task reflect real-world challenges, experiences, or scenarios that a recent graduate is likely to encounter following their exit award?
    - Does the task demonstrate a clear connection to professional practice, or explicitly integrate industry standards into the task or supporting information?
2. Application of Knowledge and Skills
    - Does the task require students to apply their learning in a practical context?
    - Are students expected to use higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, evaluation, and/or creation?
3. Complexity and Adaptability
    - Is the task sufficiently complex, avoiding simple right/wrong answers?
    - Are there multiple diverse approaches or multiple accurate solutions to the task?
    - Could task findings be scaled or adapted to different contexts, reflecting a dynamic industry environment?
4. Integration of Learning
    - Does the task require students to synthesise knowledge from various parts of the course or multiple disciplines?
5. Reflection, Self-assessment, and Metacognition
    - Does the task include opportunities for students to reflect on their learning, the performance, or the task itself?
    - Is self-assessment incorporated into the task?
6. Audience Beyond the Instructor
    - Does the task have an audience or purpose beyond just the instructor (e.g., peers, industry professionals, public)?
7. Collaboration and Interaction
    - Does the task involve teamwork, peer review, or other forms of collaboration?
    - Is there an element of communication or presentation involved, demonstrating commensurate skills?
8. Use of Authentic Resources and Tools
    - Are students expected to use resources and tools that professionals in the field would use?
9. Formative Opportunities
    - Does the assessment process include opportunities for feedback and improvement before summative submission?
10. Demonstration of Competence
    - Does the task allow students to demonstrate mastery of professional skills or competencies?

Scoring

For each criterion, the assessment task would be scored as follows:

- 0: Not present
- 1: Partially present
- 2: Fully present

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Portraits of women protagonists to empower gender equity in the workplace: a gestalt theory perspective

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Abstract

Gender inequality in the workplace is a timely topic in business and education. This essay takes stock of gender inequality in case research and management education and reviews six published exemplary articles. A common theme is that gender equity plays an important role in creating inclusive classrooms to educate the next generation global leaders and that most management faculty has neither been trained nor provided resources for preparing students to lead in a gender diverse workforce. This collection of articles is intended to provide a guide to not default to avoiding gender-related discussions but navigate through the unprecedented challenges associated with teaching gender equity or having difficult discussions about fairness and justice in the workplace. A Gestalt theory perspective frames this collection of articles and helps to answer the research question: how can effective management of gender diversity in the classroom empower gender equality in the workplace.? This essay: (1) advances the way we think about gender-related issues, (2) reflects on effective management of gender diversity in the classroom, and (3) provides a useful resource for management faculty to educate next generation global leaders to be effective in promoting gender equity in the workplace.

Keywords: gender equality, management education, women protagonists, case research, woman leadership development, a Gestalt theory perspective

Introduction

Gender equality initiatives are a key topic in both business and education in the U.K. as well as globally. Academic institutions persist in including gender equity in their leadership programmes (e.g. IMD, Harvard and London Business School) and industry reports, such as the 10th anniversary report by McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.Org. Evidence shows that companies taking action that goes beyond a marketing promise, leading to important progress, such as more women in leadership, better policies for employees, and increased efforts to foster inclusion https://www.kcl.ac.uk/visit/bush-house. Despite considerable progress over the past decade, a closer look at the numbers, gains are more fragile and less extensive than they first appear: the primary driver of progress for women in senior leadership has been a reduction in line roles; too few women, and especially women of colour, are advancing into managerial positions and at the highest level, the C-suite. In particular, what drove gain in representation will be nearly impossible to replicate in the years to come; at the current situation and rate of progress, it will take more than 30 years to reach parity for all women in the corporate U.K. (PwC, 2025).

We commence with a narration of character development in case writing when using the Harvard case method of teaching, a pedagogical approach adopted in most business schools designed to stimulate the challenges of real-world decision making, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations. This narration took place at the business school when the author was teaching strategic entrepreneurship with emphasis on inclusion, which is strongly embedded in the school's vision and commitment to the principles of responsible management education. While preparing for the teaching, thoughts were given to how to portray

the protagonists in the teaching case which was used in the classroom. A source of inspiration was a study profiling women innovators and innovation practices, strategic and organizational factors that separate successful innovators from the rest of the world, recognizing unsung pioneers continuing to change and making the world a better place. These heroes are unnoticed because almost every published list of leading innovators are largely dominated by men (Furstenthal, et al., 2022). Four teaching cases were written about women innovators with careful consideration of characters' detailed personas of each woman innovator to help the reader step into the role of the decision maker, and the innovative practices that help their companies outperform peers, as well as offering the opportunity to critically analyse each case: Guo Pei, China's Design Queen, Iris van Herpen who uses water to make dresses in French Haute Couture, Jennifer Doudna, a pioneer in biochemistry, awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 2020, who developed technology for targeted genome editing, and Rihanna, the founder and leader of Fenty Beauty that changed the rules of the game for inclusivity in retailing. The students were instructed to: (i) read the case and put themselves in the position of the case protagonist and actual decisions maker; (ii) discuss within small groups to identify key issues and formulate their own opinions and recommendations what they themselves would have done given the information available at the time; (iii) engage in the following class discussion, debate and argue their viewpoints, and explore various angels and aspects of the case; (iv) reflect on fundamental assumptions, link the case to theoretical concepts and develop solid understanding of perspectives, motivations, and decisions faced by the protagonists in the cases and their consequences. This method offered a 'forward-learning' experience with cold calls so that students should be ready to participate, engage, and learn deeply about female entrepreneurship. A survey asked 125 students, 72 male and 53 female, enrolled in the course taught about woman entrepreneurship that used a model of analysis derived from gestalt theory The survey results showed that 50 percent more female students thought about being an entrepreneur very often, 8 in the pre-study and 12 in the post-study. This suggests a way to teach gender equality initiatives that may have an impact on women in the workplace.

The classroom experiment and survey results raise an important question as how we encourage faculty to include potentially sensitive gender equity issues when perhaps a safter path is to avoid and when social identities clash in the classroom. Faculty may not feel prepared to discuss difficult topics with students with a background different than their own (Edmondson et al., 2020). How do we prepare faculty to promote an open climate in the classroom where students are equipped with and exposed to difficult conversation around potentially uncomfortable topics? The goal of this article is to highlight tools and perspectives that help answer these questions.

A literature review was undertaken of gender equality articles in management education and case research. A broad net was cast regarding inclusion criteria for gender equity topics intending to move beyond categorical variables of race, gender, and cultural background. We also wanted to represent the different types of research published in various journals, including theoretical and empirical papers, as well as provocative essays. The final selection of six articles, a collection that can be used as a resource for management education instructors and case writers, is divided into three categories by common themes and detailed below with brief commentary. Each theme highlights different features of pedagogical research. Table 1 shows the list of reviewed articles categorized by theme.

Table 1. Portraits of women protagonists that empowers gender equality in the workplace: A gestalt theory perspective

Familiarity	Description	Articles
• **Fluid cognitive ability** (FCA) - Reflects an individual's capacity to process, integrate information, act, and solve novel problems in relation to general intelligence*. *the ability to understand and learn to deal with new situations.	• **Challenging the status quo** These articles provide an overview on theory on character within case writing and prompt case writers to become aware of 'gender blindness' in management education by questioning biases of protagonist descriptions and proactively portraying women protagonists in case research.	• Peters and Brooks (2023) • Grandy and Ingols (2016)
• **Prototypicality** - Reflects the degree to which an item is an exemplar of the category of which it is a member, that is, how well a portrait of a women protagonist represents gender diversity among students.	• **Effective management of gender diversity in the classroom** These articles report on pedagogic research to make sense of effective management of gender diversity in the classroom.	• Bilimoria et al., (2010) • Schachter (2024)
• **Habit** - Reflects any repeated behaviour that requires little or no thought, and is learned rather than innate, developed through reinforcement and repetition and an integral part of case writers' learning.	• **Gender equality in the workplace. T**hese articles provide a holistic review and the state of art on factors and processes that facilitate and hinder gender equality in the workplace. Highlighted is the dynamics between gender inequality and equality that explains the slow progression to gender equality in a variety of areas on different levels. Beyond persistent institutional barriers for women, the empirical findings reveal collective practices that can contribute to gender equality in one important organizational area: the board room.	• Son Hing et al., (2023) • Blommeart and Van den Brink (2020)

A Gestalt Theory Perspective

Gestalt theory is a psychological perspective that emphasizes the holistic nature of perception and experiences that focuses on how humans perceive objects, shapes, and forms as integrated wholes rather than isolated components (Wertheimer, 1938); also known as the 'whole is greater than the sums of its part'. This perspective is useful for understanding and promoting gender equality by emphasizing the interconnectedness of individual experiences and societal structures, encouraging holistic understanding of gender dynamics, and promoting a focus on the whole person rather than just individual parts (e.g. Son Hing et al., 2023; Blommeart and Van den Brink, 2020). Gestalt theory includes the principle of familiarity and refers to a cognitive phenomenon known as the mere-exposure effect where repeated exposure to stimuli, like people, objects, or places, leads to a preference for them over unfamiliar alternatives (Zajonc, 2001). Highlighted by this perspective is a pattern of three themes:

- Fluid cognitive ability (FCA) reflects case writers that have the capacity to become aware of 'gender blindness' and proactively portray women protagonists in case research
- Prototypicality reflects effective gender management in the classroom that aid management educators are central in preparing students to enter, work, and lead multicultural organizations
- Habit reflects management education that produces managers who are effective in promoting gender equity in the workplace

Challenging the Status Quo

A common theme in this collection is that portraying protagonists in case studies is not just about including the character of the protagonist, the decision maker in the case who grapple with the business, societal, or organizational problem or opportunity, to tell a better story that engages the reader, reinforcing the themes, and advancing the plot. Rather, portraying a protagonist requires persona, ie., identity markers such as demographics and personality traits of the protagonist that are central to the pedagogic goals of the case. Seeing these challenges and opportunities through the eyes and experiences of another person enables students to sharpen their analytical skills and build their empathetic capabilities. A protagonist portray is not established by one description, but by the consistency of the protagonist being 'carried throughout' the story. This means that the story utilizes dialogue, and characters' actions and behaviours to shed light on the characters to move the story forward, which can include other characters, such as an antagonist or other supporting characters to help advance the plot. These articles prompt case writers to be aware of character and avoid 'gender blindness' by questioning biases of protagonist descriptions and proactively portraying women protagonists in case research.

The first article entitled "Character development in case writing: Theory and practice" by Peters and Brooks (2024) provides a state of art on character usage and development in cases published by the Society for Case Research, a renewed international organization dedicated to promoting, improving and recognizing excellence in case research, writing and teaching. The authors are curious about the scarcity of research examining how characters are utilized in cases and whether authors are fully utilizing characters in their cases to drive the plot forward, illustrate the theme, and engage the reader. In total they review 40 articles and find that although a majority of the cases seemed to embrace the theory on character inclusion, including a protagonist, had additional characters, and utilized the throng of characters to carry

the story forward, the development of the protagonist's and other characters' personas was rather thin, leaving the case plot-heavy and character-light. The authors provide a theoretical framework for character inclusion and development that case writers can utilize to develop characters' personas and include sufficient details about them to engage the reader. The next is "Writing cases about women protagonists: Calling for gender awareness in traditional case portraits" (Grady and Ingols, 2016). This article exposes gender blindness in teaching cases, which is less about advocating for a recognition of 'real' or stereotypical differences between men and women in leadership positions. Rather it is about recognizing that the absence of women decision-makers and the portrayals of those women leaders who are featured in teaching cases assume a gender neutrality that ignore possible gender specificities and diversity in experience. Failing to do so might restrict effective leadership and, in turn, limit opportunities for how women and men can enact leadership and management. Case writers are encouraged to acknowledge gender considerations in their instructor manuals, even when the learning outcomes for a case do not directly pertain to gender and women's leadership. Case writers may, however, feel uncomfortable in doing so because of a lack of expertise in gender and women's leadership and think that issues of gender are irrelevant to the case decision, issues and disciplinary focus. The article offers guidance and constructive tips to acknowledge gender, explicitly in instructor manuals, which offers an important learning opportunity for case writers and instructors as well as students and remains cautiously optimistic that cases written about women leaders will increase the breadth and diversity of industries featured.

Effective Management of Gender Diversity in the Classroom

Gender is an important topic in the classroom and holds a special place in the literature as the starting place for gender equity in the workplace and the implications for portraying women protagonists in case studies. Case research reveals effective management of gender diversity in the classroom. To help mitigate prejudice and handle discriminatory stereotypes in new ways, it is suggested that case writers should give attention to refining intersectional analysis of organizations where gender equity is the norm.

"Gender in management education classroom: a collaborative learning journey (Bilimoria et al., 2010) is a fascinating article that highlights the challenges of teaching gender diversity courses and provides a vivid example of unexpected events in the classroom. The article is valuable on two fronts. First, it represents a rich source for theorizing about gender and group dynamics. Second, it provides the opportunity to consider the practical aspect of unpleasant episodes in the classroom, particularly around usually controversial issues or concerns that trigger immediate intense reaction, such as gender diversity. Professors teaching gender in management courses must anticipate and proactively tackle the "it's not a big problem anymore" syndrome that can affect gender equality issues. The article proposes two approaches designed as interventions to examine conflicting viewpoints in the classroom and offers practical suggestions for improved pedagogy in management education settings, specifically fostering greater gender reflexivity in the classroom, and using functional subgrouping to encourage understanding and integration of differences. Moving on to "Gender in Journal of Management Education (JME): A discussion of content, change, and whether any of these contributions matter" (Schachter, 2024), this article reports on content of research on gender in the JME between 1975 and 2023, identifies a shift from gender as a binary to a fluid gender discourse, and shows that women in management courses and gender-related experiential exercises actually fostered managers who were more effective at promoting gender

equity than managers who had not participated in such interventions. Still, patterns of systemic discrimination stubbornly persist, leading to disparate career outcomes and disparate day-to-day occupational experiences based on gender. The article suggests that to help mitigate prejudice in new ways authors should give attention to refining intersectional analysis, giving management educators a more precise handle on the stereotypes involved in fostering current discrimination which may make it easier to prepare exercises to unmask implicit prejudices. Management professors are advised to understand new technologies well enough to know where it would be beneficial to introduce them into exercises on gender in organizations; and case writers to analyse gender by expanding their research horizons toward understanding how to move closer to organizations where gender equity is the norm.

Gender Equality in the Workplace

Drawing on robust empirical evidence, these articles provide a holistic review and the state of art on factors and processes that facilitate and hinder gender equality in the workplace. Highlighted is the dynamics between gender inequality and equality that explains the slow progression to gender equality in a variety of areas at individual-, organizational-, and societal levels. Beyond persistent institutional barriers for women, the empirical findings reveal collective practices that can contribute to gender equality in one important organizational area: the board room.

“Gender inequities in the workplace: A holistic review of organizational processes and practices” (Son Hing et al., 2023) is an impressive integrative review of the factors and processes that facilitate and hinder gender equality in the workplace. The article explains how gender inequalities cumulate across the employee lifecycle and are reinforced across individual, organizational, and societal levels in areas such as performance evaluation, compensation, leadership, work-family conflict, and sexual harassment, spanning the employee lifecycle from selection to exiting the organization. “Gender equality in appointments of board members: the role of multiple actors and their dynamics” by Blommaert and van den Brink (2020) is an article that provides concrete examples of gender equality in the workplace. It moves beyond studying persisting barriers for women, exploring collective practices that can contribute to gender equality. Drawing on in-depth case studies of appointments to corporate boards, the article finds that a group of ‘moderate change agents’ are crucial for outcomes of appointment procedures. The finding suggests that if frontrunners receive support from and mobilize moderate change agents, routine gender practices can successfully be challenged as the moderates give legitimacy to more radical actors that can bridge the gap between the latter and resisting actors in the organization.

Concluding Thoughts

The goal of this essay is to review current gender equality research to provide a resource for management faculty that can be useful for educating next generation global leaders to be effective in promoting gender equity in the workplace. As gender related issues are receiving increasing attention in research, practice, and education, the goal is to help guide management faculty through the unprecedented challenges associated with teaching gender equity or having difficult discussions about fairness and justice in the workplace. An identified common theme was that gender equity plays an important role in creating inclusive classrooms to educate the next generation global leaders and that this task should be done proactively by questioning biases of protagonist descriptions and proactively portraying women protagonists in case research.

This essay provides a snapshot of gender equality in case research and management education from a Gestalt theory perspective. It represents 'a road not taken' very often on gender equality, a different lens that allows the reader to consider ideas that may not have been considered before. Highlighted are, for example, the shifting nature of gender research from binary atomistic to intersectional holistic and the dynamics between inequality and equality practices embedded in an organizational context. This dynamic helps to explain why efforts made by organizations to deal with gender inequalities often fail because gender equality practices are embedded in an organizational context where other practices may counteract gender equality. This is an eye-opener because ultimately case writers and management faculty may be reinforcing counteracting practices, such as preference for simple solutions, and therefore benefit the most from reading this article. A Gestalt theory perspective is profound in that it suggests the need to change institutional beliefs of organizations that are based on questionable assumptions, such as fix women rather than fix systems or that certain practices can be implemented to wash away gender inequality.

Although not a comprehensive review, I hope that sharing and reviewing these articles is developmental and provides management faculty with knowledge and resources to proactively engage with gender- related issues with exercise and other pedagogical activities in the classroom. Through teaching and scholarship, faculty has an exciting opportunity to craft the narrative of gender equality in case research and management education, and I would argue that our collective, reasoned participation in this space can contribute to gender equity in the classroom as well as in the workplace.

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A Taxonomy of barriers to Emirati student success in transnational higher education in the UAE.

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Abstract

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) higher education sector has experienced significant growth and transformation since the establishment of its first university in 1976. Over almost five decades, a vibrant higher education landscape has developed. This paper presents a comprehensive taxonomy of barriers to Emirati student success in higher education in the UAE through an integrative review of literature published since 2017. Our analysis identified five dimensions of barriers: academic factors; cultural factors; personal factors; institutional factors; and social factors. This taxonomy provides educators, policymakers and researchers with a structured framework for understanding and addressing specific barriers to enhance Emirati student success and support UAE's Emiratisation goals in an increasingly diverse higher education landscape.

Introduction

The UAE has witnessed remarkable development in its higher education sector since the establishment of the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) in 1976. From an initial enrollment of 502 students, UAEU has grown thirty-fold, with women comprising the majority of students. This growth reflects the vision of His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who believed that education is the way forward to create an inclusive and prosperous society. The establishment of several public institutions and the subsequent growth of transnational education have further expanded educational opportunities for Emiratis. UAE Higher education is split into two distinct groups: public institutions usually catering to Emirati citizens and over 70 private Higher education institutions with a predominant non-citizen resident student body (Buckner, 2022). In Dubai alone there are 38 higher education institutions with almost 35,000 registered students of which just over 3000 are Emirati citizens (KHDA, 2024). Changes in scholarships, local accreditation, and increased supply are driving a growing body of Emirati citizens to private higher education institutions.

This rapid expansion has yet to deliver a model that responds to local challenges, particularly in the context of Emirati employability and workforce integration. Employers consistently identify three core deficiencies in Emirati graduates: problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking (Al-Ali, 2008; Accenture & Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation for Education, 2023). This consequently contributes to Emiratis representing only 4% of the Private sector workforce and overreliance on expatriate workers (PwC, 2023). These challenges demand that higher education institutions consider their important role in developing the necessary skills to help local students succeed in higher education and beyond. Problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking are often presented as cornerstones to Western higher education, but as more Emirati students enroll in transnational higher education, student success must be understood.

Kuh et al. (2006) offered one of the most widely cited definitions of student success as academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance. While many of the papers reviewed here have not included a full consideration of student in the UAE context, it has primarily been reduced to the notion of achievement (McClusky & Allen, 2023). This reduction may be linked to collectivism, where collectivist cultures may emphasise external indicators of success and strive to conform (McLaughlin & Durrant, 2017).

Building on this understanding of student success, this article presents a taxonomy of barriers facing Emirati students in higher education, it draws together the extant literature to create a clear classification that can be utilised to explore student success in transnational education. While research on higher education in the UAE has grown, there are significant limitations in the existing literature regarding transnational education settings. Of the extant empirical studies, many are focused on local public institutions (Engin, & McKeown, 2017; Harb, N., & El-Shaarawi, 2007; Johnson et al., 2022; Rapanta, 2014; Singh et al., 2021) which is unsurprising as they have a longer history and, in many instances, more support for research. Additionally, transnational education institutions in the UAE have historically welcomed few local students. As such, the creation of a taxonomy is timely but also limited by the literature available, which provides an opportunity for future empirical work to build upon this taxonomy to assess its validity and enhance understanding of student barriers in transnational education.

Research Approach

This study employed an integrative review methodology to identify and synthesise existing research on barriers to Emirati student success in higher education settings in the UAE. An integrative review is "a specific review method that summarises past empirical or theoretical literature to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon or healthcare problem" (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005, p. 546). The integrative review method is "the only approach that allows for the combination of diverse methodologies" and is particularly appropriate for emerging research areas where literature may be limited or dispersed across disciplines (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005, p. 546).

An integrative review approach was selected as particularly appropriate for this research area due to several factors: the relatively niche nature of the topic with limited available literature; the heterogeneity of existing studies employing diverse methodological approaches; the need to combine both empirical and theoretical sources; and our aim to develop a comprehensive taxonomy rather than assess intervention effectiveness. Integrative reviews are "considered an appropriate method for reconceptualising an established topic area as the literature broadens and for new, emerging or diverse topics where there is limited research" (Torraco, 2005, p. 356), making this methodology well-suited to examining barriers to Emirati student success in transnational higher education—an area where research remains limited and dispersed across different institutional contexts and disciplines.

Our integrative review followed the five-stage framework established by Whittemore and Knafl (2005): (1) problem identification, (2) literature search, (3) data evaluation, (4) data analysis, and (5) presentation of results.

The guiding research question was: "What barriers to student success do Emirati students face in higher education settings in the UAE?" To identify relevant studies, we conducted a

comprehensive search using Google Scholar, which has been recognised as appropriate for integrative reviews due to its breadth of coverage across disciplines (Haddaway et al., 2015). We used the search terms 'Emirati student', 'Emirati learning', and 'UAE Higher Education' to capture relevant literature addressing our research question.

For data evaluation, we applied the following inclusion criteria: (a) publications from 2017 onwards, coinciding with the launch of the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030; (b) studies focused on Emirati student experiences or outcomes in higher education; and (c) research conducted in UAE-based educational settings. The 2017 cutoff was strategically chosen as the National Strategy for Higher Education 2030 was launched that year, establishing new priorities for developing technical and practical skills to drive economic growth in both public and private sectors. We excluded studies that did not specifically address Emirati students or were not relevant to higher education contexts. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts against these criteria, 14 studies were selected for inclusion in our review.

Data charting involved extracting key information from each study, including study characteristics (authors, year, methodology), identified barriers, educational context, and main findings. Both authors independently charted data from each study, then compared findings to ensure consistency and comprehensiveness.

For data analysis, we employed thematic analysis to identify patterns across the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006), following Whittemore and Knafl's (2005) recommendation to use "data analysis methods of qualitative research as strategies that enhance the rigour of combining diverse methodologies as well as empirical and theoretical sources" (p. 550). Through an iterative process of coding and categorisation, we identified five major dimensions of barriers: academic, cultural, personal, institutional, and social factors. Within each dimension, we further categorised specific barriers based on their nature and impact on student success. This approach allowed us to develop a comprehensive taxonomy that captures the multifaceted challenges facing Emirati students in higher education settings.

To enhance the rigour of our analysis, we used Claude AI as a supplementary tool to validate our taxonomy structure. The preliminary taxonomy was input into Claude AI with instructions to review the categorisation for logical consistency and comprehensiveness based on the extracted data. This process served as a form of triangulation to validate our human-generated taxonomy, with Claude AI confirming our major categories.

We acknowledge a significant limitation in our methodology regarding the treatment of Emirati students as a homogeneous group, as highlighted by Buckner (2018), who notes important variations across different emirates, socioeconomic backgrounds, and family educational histories that may influence student experiences differently. Future research should employ more nuanced approaches that account for these intra-national differences to provide a more accurate understanding of the diverse barriers facing distinct Emirati student populations.

Additionally, as noted by Whittemore and Knafl (2005), integrative reviews face challenges in combining diverse methodologies which can contribute to complexity in analysis and synthesis. Our reliance on a single database (Google Scholar) and limited search terms, while appropriate for this emerging research area, represents a constraint on the comprehensiveness of our literature capture. Furthermore, our final sample size of 14 studies, while reflecting the limited available literature in this emerging field, may restrict the generalisability of our findings and the comprehensiveness of our taxonomy.

Presenting a taxonomy of barriers to Emirati student success

This taxonomy outlines the key barriers facing Emirati students in higher education. Drawing from multiple academic sources and research studies, it categorises challenges into five main dimensions: Academic, Cultural, Personal, Institutional, and Social factors. The framework provides a comprehensive overview of the complex interplay between educational preparation, cultural values, individual circumstances, systemic constraints, and social dynamics that impact Emirati students' academic success and subsequent career trajectories. Each category is subsequently explored:

Category	Barriers	Authors
Academic Factors	1. English as second language challenges	(Ashour, 2020; British Council, 2018; Suleymanova & Hysaj, 2022; McClusky & Allen, 2023; Johnson et al., 2022)
	2. Gap between high school and university expectations	(Johnson et al., 2022; Suleymanova & Hysaj, 2022)
	3. Transition from rote learning to critical thinking	(Al Ghurair Foundation, 2023; McClusky & Allen, 2023; Johnson et al., 2022)
	4. Lack of skills required for private sector employment	(PwC, 2023; Al Ghurair Foundation, 2023; Kurian & Al-Assaf, 2020, Ibrahim et al, 2022)
Cultural factors	1. Collectivist mindset vs. Western education model	(Rapanta, 2014; Singh et al., 2021; Engin & McKeown, 2017)
	2. High-context communication style	(Singh et al., 2021)
	3. Flexible time orientation	(Singh et al., 2021)
	4. Strong religious/spiritual values affecting priorities	(Rapanta, 2014; McClusky & Allen, 2023)
	5. Reluctance to seek clarification or admit lack of understanding	(Singh et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2022)
	6. Challenges in adapting to Western-style feedback	(Singh et al., 2021)
Institutional Factors	1. Reliance on expatriate faculty	(Singh et al., 2021; Kurian & Al-Assaf, 2020)
	2. Rapid expansion of higher education system	(Badry, 2019, Ibrahim et al, 2022)
	3. Gender disparities in academic performance	(Buckner, 2018; Johnson et al., 2022)
Personal factors	1. Extended family obligations	(Ashour, 2021; Mahani, 2022; Johnson et al., 2022)

	2. Pressure for early marriage/children (especially women)	(Ashour, 2021; Mahani, 2022)
	3. Motivation issues	(Engin & McKeown; Jackson & Jackson, 2020; Johnson et al., 2022)
Social factors	1. Gender segregation impacts on group work	(Rapanta, 2014; Mahani, 2022)
	2. Challenges in mixed-gender collaborative learning	(Mohammed, 2017; Mahani, 2022)

Figure 1 : A taxonomy of barriers to Emirati student success

Academic Factors

Academic Factors specifically relate to learning processes, educational transitions, and curriculum alignment with employment needs. They focus on the educational content, delivery, and outcomes rather than on cultural, personal, social, or institutional contexts in which education occurs English language proficiency remains a fundamental challenge for Emirati students, with proficiency levels "often insufficient" despite established entry standards (Ashour, 2020, p.216). This language barrier affects program selection, deterring students from STEM fields (British Council, 2018), and significantly impacts academic performance and retention. While foundation programs help mitigate these challenges, research has primarily examined language acquisition in traditional settings rather than transnational contexts. Singh et al. (2021) highlight methodological limitations in existing English-centric studies, suggesting the need to explore Arabic-language research approaches.

In addition to English language, a significant disparity exists between high school and university expectations. Johnson et al. (2022) identify several contributing factors, including deficiencies in time and study management skills, poor attendance patterns, and inadequacies at the secondary education level. Furthermore, a report commissioned by the Al Ghurair foundation (2023) highlight students who have received prior education via rote learning struggle to transition from passive receivers to active critical thinkers. Consequently, Ibrahim et al (2022) urges universities to focus on quality education that produces students that can “compete and contribute to the knowledge-based society” (Ibrahim et al, 2022 pg. 92).

Cultural Factors

Cultural factors focus on deeply embedded values, beliefs, and behavioral norms within Emirati society that shape how students approach learning. A tension between collectivist Emirati culture and Western educational models exists. While Western education often emphasizes individual achievement, Emirati culture balances both individualistic and collectivistic elements. This cultural dynamic affects student identity and motivation, suggesting the need for pedagogical approaches that accommodate high-context communication styles and interpersonal relationships. This contrast is acute in the UAE with more than 90% of faculty being Western expatriates, results in clashes of contrasting faculty and student perceptions amongst misunderstood cultural barriers (Kirk,2018). Singh et al. (2021) identify four key areas of disconnection between expatriate faculty and local students: approach to the culture of learning; conceptions of teaching and learning; understanding of students' academic needs; and understanding of student motivations.

Cultural challenges extend to classroom interaction and feedback processes. Singh (2021) identifies student reluctance to seek clarification, particularly among males, due to fear of humiliation. This cultural preference for avoiding potential loss of face conflicts with Western educational emphasis on continuous improvement through active questioning and engagement. It has elsewhere been suggested that strong conformity tendency affects education (McLaughlin & Durrant, 2017).

Religious and spiritual values significantly influence educational experiences but are often not understood as a barrier by students. McClusky & Allen (2023) note this is part of students' persistence and success. Students maintain strong connections to their religious values rather than seeing them as a barrier. This may be misunderstood by expatriate faculty, Rapanta (2014) highlights the importance of "Insha' Allah" (God's will) in learning, which Western educators

might misinterpret as passive behaviour rather than understanding its deeper cultural and spiritual significance.

Singh (2021) highlights the importance of western faculty fostering familiarity and rapport with Emirati students. Buckner (2018) suggests that where there is a lack of rapport, a lack of trust in the student-teacher dynamic might occur. Faculty relationships emerge from literature as particularly important for student success, especially for first-generation students lacking family experience with higher education (Jackson & Jackson, 2020). Ashour (2020) highlights that although Emirati families are supportive of education, older generations may lack the education to support academic performance. Buckner (2018) also highlighted that this varies across the Emirates, especially between income levels and therefore, intersectionality must be considered in primary research.

Personal Factors

Personal factors focus on individual circumstances and obligations that are specific to the student as a person. These include family obligations; pressure for marriage/children; motivation issues. Personal factors are characterised by their direct connection to the individual student's life circumstances, choices, and internal motivations. Emirati students navigate complex family obligations and social expectations. Gender disparities are evident in both pre- and post-higher education experiences that affect obligation and expectation (Ashour, 2021).

Traditional family values and expectations often create tension between educational pursuits and social roles, with males typically having greater freedom while females manage more domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, Ashour (2020) suggests that there is an expectation of high grades without required work, a prioritisation of credentials over knowledge and easy access to public sector jobs. Conversely, Engin & McKeown (2017) reveal that Emirati students' motivation for university education often centres on securing future prospects and achieving higher social status. For male students, motivations include pragmatic goals like career advancement, which interweave with factors such as marriage prospects and family status (Jackson & Jackson, 2020). Both male and female students express a desire to make their families proud and contribute to Emirati society, reflecting a blend of individualistic and collectivistic motivations.

Institutional Factors

Institutional factors refer to systemic and organisational aspects of the educational environment that impact Emirati student success. These factors are primarily related to how higher education institutions are structured, operated, and developed in the UAE context. The relatively young state of UAE higher education presents unique challenges. Limited cultural research and understanding, combined with heavy reliance on expatriate faculty, can create barriers to effective education delivery. Singh (2021) advocates for more culturally responsive pedagogy to enhance student engagement and for faculty to be trained to recognise barriers and learn to adapt. Similarly, Ashour (2021) highlights that the rapid expansion of the UAE higher education system requires careful attention to maintaining educational quality to avoid assuming existing methods will continue to be effective. Buckner (2018) emphasises the importance of connecting learning to students' lived experiences and fostering supportive relationships through effective scaffolding and course structure. This is perhaps underscored by Badry (2019) and Ibrahim et al (2022) who stress that there is currently misalignment with

labour market needs, furthering the advocation for education to be contextualised, driven by lived experience and linked to UAE values and policy. While some research exists, it often focuses on one institution, and there is a notable gap in understanding how different institutional models affect student success in transnational contexts.

Social Factors

Social factors refer to broader societal structures and dynamics that affect how students interact within the educational environment. These include: gender segregation and its impact on classroom dynamics; and collaborative learning. Social factors are characterized by their focus on interpersonal dynamics and societal structures rather than individual circumstances. Ashour (2021) and Ridge (2014) find that female Emiratis consistently outperform male Emirati colleagues at various levels of education, yet women made up only 25% of the national UAE workforce (Ashour 2021). Therefore, gender considerations must be carefully managed at higher education level when devising educational strategies to encourage opportunities for each gender. Furthermore, from a classroom design perspective, Rapanta (2014) identifies that Emiratis excel in group work due to their familiarity with close collaboration. Personal and social factors are entwined when related to gender which embodies family expectations and societal obligations (Mahani, 2022; Jackson & Jackson, 2020; Engin & McKeown, 2017). First-generation Emirati female students face unique challenges in balancing traditional cultural values with academic pursuits while receiving varying levels of parental support (Mahani, 2022).

Conclusion

The taxonomy provides a comprehensive review of the complex barriers facing Emirati students in higher education, particularly within the UAE context. By identifying and categorizing these challenges across multiple dimensions, this work contributes to the development of more effective educational strategies and policies. Future research should focus on validating this taxonomy across different institutional contexts and developing specific interventions to address identified barriers. In particular, no evidence was found in our research of separating the undergraduate and postgraduate needs of students and the development of this taxonomy highlights significant gaps in understanding of student success in transnational higher education settings.

While existing research provides valuable insights into individual factors affecting student success, there is a clear need for more comprehensive, methodologically robust studies that specifically address the unique challenges and opportunities presented by transnational educational environments. Future research should prioritise broader sampling across institutions, longitudinal studies, and mixed method approaches to better understand the complex interplay of factors affecting student success in these settings. The limitations in existing research suggest several priority areas for future investigation, such as:

1. Larger-scale studies across multiple transnational institutions to provide more generalisable findings
2. Comparative analyses between different models of transnational education delivery
3. Investigation of the intersection between local educational traditions and imported educational systems
4. Longitudinal studies tracking student success beyond graduation in transnational education contexts

5. Research incorporating both Arabic and English language methodologies to capture more nuanced cultural and educational perspectives

As transnational education continues to be viewed as a desirable model for Western institutions, educators must consider the context within which they are working. There is a clear ethical impetus to ensure that our classrooms are inclusive of all students, but to deliver on our promises to our hosts we must ensure that we adapt to our new home students. This article contributes to both education practice and the literature on higher education in the UAE by unpicking some of the barriers to Emirati student success in higher education in the UAE.

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