

Breaking the mould: Aspiring PE teachers from a Bangladeshi background

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Abstract

This study uses the qualitative approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to reveal the motivations behind three participants of Bangladeshi background to become Secondary School PE teachers and lecturers in Higher Education (HE). Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to draw on the meaningful experiences of the participants. Interview data was analysed to understand the lived experience of participants and how they made sense of those experiences. A systematic qualitative analysis of transcripts of semi-structured interviews was then conducted to draw out themes which illuminate aspects of the emerging concept of teacher motivation. The study found that prospective PE teachers from a Bangladeshi background had family responsibilities that potentially hindered their individual career aspirations and that the identity of these teachers changed as they fought to break free of cultural expectations and seek new career paths away from parental expectations and cultural norms. This research study concludes that HE institutions need to consider their recruitment programmes for new trainee teachers to ensure successful transition into an under-represented profession and suggests that consideration needs to be given to the ongoing role of an assigned mentor to support individuals as they find themselves in a new workplace.

Keywords: teacher, lecturer, mentorship, motivation, retention, profession, identity

Introduction

Research into teachers' motivation to teach and to remain teaching in the past decade has gathered momentum as we have seen teacher shortages and career terminations from graduates who have only been in the profession for less than five years; current research explores early teacher attrition, teaching force ageing, imbalance of high demand with less reward, limited career opportunities, less job security and low prestige (OECD, 2005; Richardson and Watt, 2005, 2006; Sinclair, 2008; Sinclair, Dowson and McInerney, 2006; Watt and Richardson, 2007; Watt et al., 2013 cited by Han and Yin, 2016).

There is limited understanding of the barriers to Bangladeshi and South Asian (SAARC) trainee teachers in Physical Education hence the need for this study. The unique contribution made through this study is through the use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which allows for close, detailed analysis of a small sample to shed light on the phenomenon that is a lack of representation of the SAARC community in England in PE teaching positions.

Research questions

What impact does this study have on creating more opportunities for prospective trainee secondary school teachers from ethnically diverse backgrounds?

What are the most effective strategies universities can employ to help prospective students from diverse backgrounds with career aspirations in PE teaching?

What are the similarities between the different Bangladeshi men interviewed for this research?

Methodology

This paper investigates the motivations and trepidations of three prospective PE teachers whose parents came to England from Bangladesh. The personal interviews reflect on their lived experiences through the sharing of honest, and often raw, narratives using Smith et al. (2009) framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is phenomenological in that it attempts to understand the lived experience of participants and how participants make sense of those experiences, but it emphasises that this involves a process of interpretation by the researchers. IPA also has an idiographic commitment to the detailed study of each individual case. This study involves the systematic qualitative analysis of transcripts of semi-structured interviews conducted with these three participants, and themes are drawn out from the data to help contribute to the still emerging domain of teacher motivation (Kaplan, 2014).

As is recommended for IPA research (Smith et al, 2006), a small group with a shared phenomenon should be recruited. For this study, three participants were recruited. Firstly, each narrative was gained via one to one semi-structured interviews which allowed the trainees an opportunity to discuss their individual experiences and journeys to becoming PE teachers for secondary education.

The representatives of the sample came via an open invitation to all trainee secondary school teachers from a diverse ethnic background who were given a chance to volunteer for an upcoming piece of research within the education department. The three young men who came forward were all from a Bangladeshi background and this subsequently steered the title of the research.

Each interview was analysed individually, and then themes across the whole data set were explored. Themes drawn out include: underpinning motivations to be a teacher, maintaining a positive outlook in the face of adversity, and the sense of community and togetherness in university. The reasons for wanting to become a PE teacher in each of the three participants are also investigated and discussed, and links are made to identity theories as the authors of this paper endeavour to ‘make sense’ of their own identity constructions through the double hermeneutic that IPA provides (Smith, 2009).

From these themes, three theoretical statements around the phenomenon of trainee PE teachers from the Bangladeshi community.

The three statements are:

1. Motivated trainees are committed to their education as they see their key role as ‘making a difference’ for learners.
2. Motivated trainees maintain a positive outlook to stay resilient in the face of adversity and change.
3. Trainee PE teachers from the Bangladeshi community perceive PE roles to be attainable and can overcome cultural and historical barriers.

Picture portraits

Before extracts from the narratives are shared and themes considered, ‘picture portraits’ will be shared to familiarise the reader with the participants in this study (Smith, 2012). All participants are undergraduate students at the University of Easthampton, a

London university. All three participants have applied to various PGCE PE programmes in the UK to become subject specialists secondary school PE teachers.

Aji

Aji has gained experience working in both the primary school and secondary school. Aji has a sports background, with his father still playing football in his mid-fifties and his uncle being a Paralympian in basketball. After entering HE as an undergraduate Aji knew he wanted to become a PE teacher and had to convince his family it was a suitable career for him as his two sisters had both gone to Cambridge University and this had put pressure on Aji to pursue an academic undergraduate career in accountancy, medicine or law.

Abu

Abu reflects on how his primary school setting offered a true sense of community for him. This sense of community began to get lost in secondary school and so Abu sought refuge with his old primary school friends in the evening after school and would play football in the streets and parks of his local area. Often his sporting activities were frowned upon by his mother who would call him in before it got dark outside. Much to his disappointment

Anu

Having grown up in London near to where the Olympics were happening Anu was captivated by the international event on his doorstep. Intrigued by the athletics, swimming and cycling, Anu also became intrigued by the more unusual sports like judo, slalom canoe and volleyball. Anu started to read about a range of different sports and would use the internet to look at videos and the main competitors for each activity. All the time being an avid Manchester United football fan, Anu became engrossed in sport in his late teens and when it came to applying for university courses his parents begrudgingly allowed him to follow his dreams into sport.

Theoretical statements

As stated in the methodology above, each individual transcript was analysed before being compared to the data set. An initial statement was created as a baseline, from which the analysis could evolve naturally:

PE trainees are motivated when they feel skilled, experienced and see a purpose to their role.

The researcher wanted to explore how the lived experiences of the three participants could unpick this initial statement. Themes were then drawn out across the transcripts from all three participants, and four theoretical statements were created.

1. Motivated trainees are committed to their education as they see their key role as 'making a difference' for learners

The strongest theme across the data set was that of participants being committed to physical education. Although even in this homogenous group, several differing experiences had been encountered, the core drive to motivate and support learners, particularly to help learners to fulfil their potential, was present in all three narratives.

Anu reflects on how his aspirations to become a teacher:

When my parents asked what I wanted to be when I grew up I said, "A PE teacher". I've always wanted to be a PE teacher. They questioned me on this and explained I wouldn't earn much money and that it was a very tough

job and I would say, “Yes, I know this, but I love sport and I love PE and I just want to be a teacher”. My understanding has improved since then and so has my parents as back then as a teenager I thought PE teaching just involved me playing sport. Now I appreciate the subject much more, the holistic aspects of it, you know, building character, being resilient, abiding by the rules, but also the classroom based stuff, the physiology and anatomy. I love all of it.

Anu’s extract above highlights his determination to follow a vocation he was passionate about. There was also a tonal shift in his response about the broader aspects of PE, almost as though he was justifying the value of the subject to allay the aspersions of his parents. This justification for the subject was also seen in Abu’s comments when he was interviewed as he said,

Yeah you know in my final year of Primary school here in England I injured my hand playing in goal and then my mum wouldn't let me play sports in secondary school. She thought PE was a silly subject and took me out of the school football team in Yr7 on the assumption it would be rougher than when I was at Primary School. I didn't mind cos on weekends I was still allowed to play outside with my friends, but the older I got the more protective my mum got and the less she wanted me to take part in PE at school. I had to explain that PE was spent half the time in the class room, but she didn't believe me. As I got older towards the end of school and I started to think about teaching and coaching more. I think my mum was more relaxed as she could see I wasn't participating so much, but was coaching more in local youth clubs. She was fine with me being on the touchline as she had always been paranoid about me injuring my hand again. Eventually my mum supported me into the career I now want to do, even if I had said I wanted to be a doctor than yeah she would have pushed me in that direction, but because I loved coaching she was fine with pursuing a career in PE teaching.

2. Motivated educators maintain a positive outlook to stay resilient in the face of adversity and change.

One significant shared theme was that of the need for resilience as all three participants experienced change, not only in their only professional career paths, but also within their family networks. Here Anu describes his mother’s fears.

For me both my parents are from Bangladesh and even now my mum doesn't like me playing sport in fear of getting injured and not being able to provide for the family. My dad is less fearful, but would always say 'ask your mum' if I wanted to go and play some sort of team sport. My mum sometimes wouldn't let me play or go our saying 'oh no you're too small and you're going to get injured', she thinks it is very physical and dangerous rather than seeing it from the side of me having fun and enjoying it. I

think there is still a stigma attached in the Bangladeshi communities (in London particularly) that sport is not a profession to pursue as a career.

3. Trainee PE teachers from the Bangladeshi community perceive PE roles to be attainable and can overcome cultural and historical barriers.

Aji

My mum is cool with it; she understands that not everyone is going to grow up being a doctor. She was raised in the UK and her parents were from Bangladesh so she's with the times. My Dad is ok too, even though he grew up in Bangladesh, he knows how hard it is to become a doctor but he was ok for me to choose the route of becoming a teacher and a PE teacher and although I don't know any other Asians in PE it is something I love and I know it will be good for my future. When I have kids down the line I'll be able to share holidays with them compared to a normal office job that doesn't get these, a doctor for example wouldn't get this and I want to be there for my kids

Anu

My situation is very different, my dad came to England from Bangladesh when he was 7 and when I was born he definitely didn't look at sport as a career I could get into, he always wanted me and my sisters to be lawyers, doctors or accountants and so on, but my dad plays football on weekends and he still plays now in his fifties and he encouraged me to play, but didn't look at it in terms of being a profession. It wasn't until my uncle who is paralysed went to the Paralympics and played wheelchair rugby that my parents opened their eyes to the possibility of sport being a profession. However, even at 11 yrs old Leyton Orient offered me professional football trials and my parents wouldn't let me go, because in the Bangladeshi community, and I don't know if it's the same with the other boys but families are very tight knit and being the eldest son they tend not to like you leaving the home.

Abu

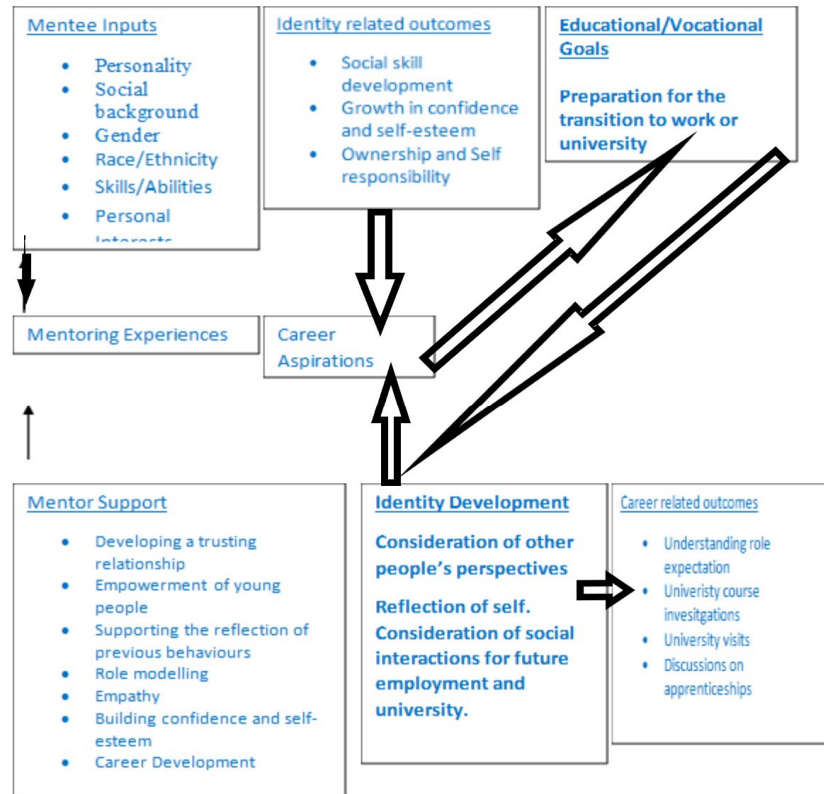
Yeah that's true that's a cultural thing. Families expect you to provide for them as well as they see at that they provide for you and when they get older it's your turn to provide for them. With me when I said I wanted to be a teacher in sports my parents just thought I meant be a coach or professional player of football or basketball, they didn't even think about teaching. When I said teaching and showed them other ways I think this broadened their view of the opportunities out there in sport and I just want to provide kids with a similar background to me the same opportunities I've had in sport growing up and be a role model to them.

Conclusion

Assessing the participants' responses against the research questions of the study it can be seen that students from diverse opportunities need opportunities in PE and secondary education to highlight to their families' alternate career paths as opposed to existing professions which are 'deemed suitable'. When Abu discusses his parents seeing professional sport as the only career path in sport it shows studies like this can help impact families by showing them that there are careers in education which are progressive and fulfilling for young men within the Bangladeshi community. Anu also highlighted 'being questioned' by his family with his desire to become a PE teacher and by exploring these negative overtones studies like this can impact 'traditional views' within the older Bangladeshi community. In consideration of how universities are recruiting from a diverse range of backgrounds unfortunately the government statistics are not complimentary. Over 80% of secondary school teachers are still white and this does not reflect the communities across the United Kingdom being served. As such, policies need to be written and a better understanding needs to be obtained of the diverse communities that exist within society. This is because studies like this highlight how views of older generations may be inhibiting the career aspirations of younger generations who in turn could inspire change and cultural shifts in embedded views. This research found clear similarities relating to older age group cultural views within the Bangladeshi community. The young men expressed a similar 'pessimism' within their families to their choice of pursuing sport and teaching career pathways. There was also a similar tenacity, verve and resilience in these young men to break free from the existing stereotypical views held and show that they could become role models for future generations of Bangladeshi's wishing to pursue PE teaching careers. Who enters teaching and why, are questions of immense social and political importance throughout the world (Fray and Gore, 2018). This paper has allowed for an insight into the difficult transition and choices some trainee teachers face when choosing a career in Physical Education. To ease this transition, a mentorship model could be used to best support trainee educators as they move from a school environment to a university workplace. One such model has been established in previous research (Coombes 2016) to assist young people trying to understand themselves and the career goals they aspire towards.

The concept of mentorship is phrased as preceptorship in other professions such as nursing and helps nurture and support young professionals into their job. It is important to recognise this study shows that these Bangladeshi men may not have many role models when entering the profession and as such the mentoring they receive is critical to retaining them within teaching and providing a legacy for other up and coming Bangladeshi teachers within secondary education.

Figure 1: Mentoring model to support career aspirations and identity development



There is a close relation between the perception of the teaching profession and motives for choosing teacher education. The success of teachers has been found to be influenced by the dominant perception of teaching but also by one’s own perception (Bergmark et al., 2018).

Considering the three theoretical statements drawn out from the interviews:

1. Motivated trainees are committed to their education as they see their key role as ‘making a difference’ for learners
2. Motivated trainees maintain a positive outlook to stay resilient in the face of adversity and change.
3. Trainee PE teachers from the Bangladeshi community perceive PE roles to be attainable and can overcome cultural and historical barriers.

It must be recognised that trainees, especially those from a BAME background come into the profession with a desire to positively change the representation of roles for the future generation. To shape, steer and breakdown existing cultural barriers. The bravery they show must be reciprocated in the offer universities and other education providers are giving the trainees from BAME communities. As can be seen in this research there are cultural barriers and views that young people are often fighting against and can be assisted through HE institutions.

One of the main discussion points from Smith, Sanchez, Suarez, Stubbs, Dowling, Scruton, Roberts, Johstone and Pardhan (2018) was South Asian families placing a ‘low level of importance’ on physical activity. This was resonated in my own research with young trainees from this background trying to overcome this prob-

lem. Thorjussen and Sisjord (2018) also highlight how ‘ignoring the ways ethnicity shapes both individual experience in PE as well as the interaction amongst students might result in ethnic and cultural differences becoming sources of tensions and exclusion rather than enrichment in the PE learning environment’.

At University of Easthampton last year, we invited a kabaddi team in to show our trainee PE teachers a different approach to invading space. In England, culturally the predominance of football and netball in our PE departments may inhibit the opportunity of learning other activities to broaden the understanding and breakdown cultural myths in young people. When Walseth (2006) discusses Muslim women in sport there are echoes of the same story from her research when coming home late or leaving the family home can cause angst and possible sanctions. Parents voicing concerns about involvement in sport based on wrongful stereotypes of sport involving young people drinking and smoking afterwards.

There is a distinct theme here both in the research presented and that of existing research (Smith et al, 2018, Thorjussen et al, 2018 and Walseth 2016) that a two-way understanding is necessary. South Asian communities need to be invited into HE institutes and sports activity organisations to fully embrace the culture that exists and similarly HE institutes need to continue research and better their own understanding into PE teacher trainees from these specific communities. Flintoff (2015) raises this exact point that race and ethnicity is often marginalised as part of minority ethnic students’ experiences of physical education teacher education. If we are going to provide role models to young people in school to break down societal stereotypes we need as HE providers to work together in supporting BAME trainees and celebrating the differences different communities and backgrounds bring to our teacher training courses.

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