

Cultural Inclusiveness for International Students in American Schools: A Case Study for Saudi Student in American Schools

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Abstract

Cultural inclusiveness for international students in American schools is essential for creating a safe and welcoming environment that promotes academic success and personal growth. This case study investigates the impact of cultural inclusiveness on a 16-year-old Saudi student, Ahmad (pseudonym), at Vestal High School in New York. Through semi-structured interviews, the study explores the challenges Ahmad faces due to a lack of cultural sensitivity and support within the school environment. The findings highlight the need for teachers to understand their students' cultural and religious backgrounds, the importance of building cultural bridges through education, and the necessity of cultural learning and communication skills. Additionally, the role of technology and new media in enhancing cultural communication is examined. The study concludes that fostering an inclusive environment through culturally sensitive curricula, support services, and a culture of acceptance and respect is crucial for the well-being and academic achievement of international students. Despite its limitations, this study underscores the importance of addressing cultural inclusiveness in educational settings to ensure that all students feel valued and supported.

Keywords: Cultural inclusiveness, international students, American schools, cultural sensitivity, cross-cultural communication, educational environment, diversity and inclusion, support services, technology in education, religious diversity.

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1. Introduction

Cultural inclusiveness for international students in American schools is an essential concept that schools must consider providing a safe and welcoming environment for students from diverse backgrounds. Cultural inclusiveness for international students is crucial for creating appropriate environments in American schools. When schools prioritize cultural inclusiveness, they ensure that international students feel valued and respected, which can lead to their academic success and personal growth. Additionally, creating an inclusive environment benefits all students by promoting cultural understanding, respect, and tolerance, which are essential skills for living and working in a diverse and globalized world. Therefore, schools must prioritize cultural inclusiveness by providing support services, culturally sensitive curricula, and promoting a culture of acceptance and respect for all cultures.

Many studies focused on the cultural issues for international students in the United States. Li & Zizzi (2018) stated that international students encounter obstacles in their social interactions with American students, including both language and cultural barriers. Recent studies have shown that students from different cultural backgrounds often experience a sense of isolation due to a lack of understanding and acceptance from their peers and school staff (Bunce et al., 2019). To create an inclusive environment for international students, schools should strive to provide a space for students to feel comfortable with their cultural backgrounds and to express their beliefs without fear of discrimination or judgment. Schools should provide culturally sensitive curricula that offer a broad range of perspectives and experiences. This could include classes on different cultures, language classes, and activities that promote cultural understanding and appreciation. It is also essential to foster a safe and welcoming environment where students of all backgrounds can interact and learn from one another (Khalfaoui et al., 2020). In addition, they should provide support services that address the specific needs of international students, such as counseling, mentoring, and language tutoring. These services can help international students to become more familiar with American culture and to better connect with the school community. Moreover, schools should promote a culture of acceptance and respect for all cultures. This could include instituting anti-discrimination policies, implementing diversity and inclusion training for faculty and staff, and creating opportunities for international students to share their experiences and perspectives with their

peers.

Cultural inclusiveness is an essential aspect of education for international students in American schools. International students bring diversity to American schools and offer unique perspectives that can enhance the educational experience for all students. Thus, this study explores many issues that prevent international students from feeling inclusiveness. The research question for this study is, "How do international students perceive the level of cultural inclusiveness in American schools? By understanding how international students perceive the level of cultural inclusiveness, school leaders can identify areas that need improvement and develop strategies to support international students' needs.

2.Participant

The participant in this study is a 16-year-old Saudi student at Vestal High School in New York. Ahmad (pseudonym) is Muslim and from a conservative family. He attended school for three years because he came from Saudi Arabia with his parents. His father is studying for a doctorate at Binghamton University, and they live in Vestal, New York. The participant for this study was selected after a brief conversation in which I determined that his personal characteristics and experience aligned with the purpose of this study. In addition, to avoid bias in my study, I preferred to choose a participant who could answer the questions clearly and carefully. Therefore, the participant has completed three academic years and knows about the school's regulations. Therefore, his opinions can help me to answer my questions about cultural inclusiveness in American schools. Furthermore, having lived in the United States for three years, he has adapted to a co-educational school, which is quite different from the all-boys school he attended in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, I can assume that the participant meets all expectations I need to conduct my study about cultural inclusiveness in American schools.

3.Methods

3.1. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through two semi-structured interviews conducted through an in-person interview. The first interview was themed around inclusive classrooms and the necessity for knowledge of cultural and religious diversity and building cultural bridges through education. I developed many questions to understand different aspects of international students and how they interact with their peers and teachers. The first interview focused on general questions such as "what is your favorite class? And why. These questions may help to initiate a good discussion with the participant. In addition, I asked many questions about cultural inclusiveness and the school's environment to understand Vestal High School's nature. The second interview was themed around the need for cultural learning and communication skills and the role of technology and new media in the classroom. Hence, I developed many questions such as the role of students in promoting diversity and how schools encourage international students in cultural communication. In addition, follow-up questions were asked during the interviews that were not included in these guides to provide clarity and a deeper understanding of Ahmad's responses. The summary areas of focus from all interviews included: cultural inclusiveness, the nature of communication inside the classroom, diversity, and using technology to enhance cultural communication. Each interview was recorded in front of the participant. Interviews were conducted two weeks apart and were approximately one hour in length. After all, interview sessions were completed, the researcher listened carefully to the recordings to ensure transcription accuracy. As a result, all filler words (you know, um, like) were removed from the data sets, and any incorrectly transcribed words or phrases were corrected.

3.2. Data Analysis

All interview recordings were replayed prior to the next interview session. Coding categories that emerged from each interview session were identified as relevant to the study, and questions were developed for the proceeding interview based on these topics. After coding the transcripts for accuracy, I played each recording. Next, I followed along on the printed transcripts to begin coding sections that applied to areas of interest for this study (inclusive classrooms, the need for the knowledge of cultural and religious diversity and building cultural bridges through the education process, diversity, and using technology in enhancing cultural communication). I then re-read the transcripts and noted data that fit multiple themes by highlighting with two or more colors. Moreover, I reviewed the transcripts packets once more, took notes on which section I found to have key evidence, wrote my initial claims in the margins, and constructed my argument. Finally, I used the themes identified to narrate the participant's experiences and perspectives on cultural inclusiveness in American schools.

4. Findings

The findings of this case study support the argument that Ahmad faces many issues in his classroom. The data depicted a clear view of the issues that prevent the participant from a sense of belonging. In addition, the data shows that the participants suggested many ways to help international students bridge cultural communication. The findings generated this study into four themes: inclusive classrooms require cultural and religious diversity knowledge, building cultural bridges through education, the necessity for cultural learning and communication skills, and the role of technology and new media in the classroom.

Inclusive Classrooms Require Knowledge of Cultural and Religious Diversity.

The first theme highlights the importance of teachers having a basic understanding of their students' cultural and religious backgrounds to show respect towards them. In a diverse classroom setting, students come from different backgrounds and hold unique values, beliefs, and traditions. It is crucial for teachers to recognize these differences to create an inclusive learning environment where students feel valued and supported.

The student explains the responsibilities of teachers and administrators in supporting diversity: "I believe that teachers should have at least basic understanding of their students' cultural backgrounds and beliefs. I also believe this will make teachers more connected with their students and more respectful of their religions and beliefs," "I am Muslim, but I cannot pray in my school because there is no certain place to practice my religion." The participant believes that teachers should try to understand their students' cultural backgrounds and beliefs. This understanding can help teachers connect with their students and create an inclusive learning environment, which can positively impact students' academic performance and well-being. It is important for teachers to be aware of cultural differences, religious practices, and potential biases in the classroom, and to make accommodations and create an environment of acceptance and respect for all students. Teachers should also be open to learning from their students and engaging in meaningful discussions about culture and religion.

Building Cultural Bridges Through Education

The second theme highlights the importance of cultural communication and how Students should be encouraged to learn about each other's cultures to build cross-cultural understanding and empathy. In addition, cultural diversity can sometimes create challenges in interactions among students from different backgrounds in schools. During the interview, the student explained, "In my school, there are many students from different countries and cultures, and this diversity makes it a little hard to interact with individuals from different backgrounds."

The student's statement acknowledges the presence of cultural diversity in their school but also recognizes the potential difficulties that can arise from interacting with individuals from different backgrounds. These challenges may stem from differences in language, customs, and traditions and possible misunderstandings or stereotypes. The student's quote underscores the significance of fostering cross-cultural understanding and communication within the educational system to ensure that all students feel a sense of inclusion and value, regardless of their cultural background. By actively promoting empathy and cultural exchange, educators can create an environment that celebrates diversity and encourages a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures.

The Necessity for Cultural Learning and Communication Skills

The third theme focuses on the necessity for cultural learning and communication skills because of the importance of cultural exchange in today's diverse world. Therefore, schools should have cultural activities that allow learners to learn about other cultures and promote cross-cultural understanding and empathy among students.

The student narrates his learning experience: "My favorite class is Spanish class because we are not just learning about the Spanish language; we are learning about language, history, culture, and traditions."

The student finds their Spanish class enjoyable not only because they are learning the language but also because it provides a deeper understanding of language, history, culture, and traditions. Through the class, the student gains insights into the rich history and culture of the Spanish-speaking world, including customs, traditions, and beliefs that have shaped the language and its usage.

The Role of Technology and New Media in the Classroom

The fourth theme focuses on the importance of technology and new media in improving classroom intercultural education. For example, students can have group chats to plan meetings, and then through this kind of communication, they can teach each other more about their cultures and traditions. Additionally, online platforms can also be used to facilitate conversations between students from different cultures, which can help to build cross-cultural understanding and empathy.

The student recommends a strategy suitable for students by outlining that “Students could have group chats for planning any meetings and then through this kind of communication they will be more connected and included. In other words, I mean they can teach each other more about their cultures and traditions without using pen and paper. Then, their teachers can ask them what they learned from their friends. This kind of learning is funny, and I tried that last year. We had fun, and I found a lot of exciting things about my friends and how they live with their families and their relationship with their relatives.”

The student suggests using technology to promote inclusion and cultural learning among students. He suggests that students create group chats to plan meetings and use this to connect and learn from each other about their respective cultures and traditions. The student believes this kind of communication would help them feel more included and connected. The student believes that this approach to learning is enjoyable and engaging, as they have tried it themselves and had fun while also learning about their friends' cultures and relationships with their relatives.

5. Conclusion

The study focuses on the importance of cultural inclusiveness for international students in American schools. The themes highlighted in the case study emphasize the importance of cultural inclusiveness in the classroom and the role of teachers and administrators in promoting a welcoming and inclusive environment. One of the key takeaways is the need for teachers to have a basic understanding of their students' cultural and religious backgrounds to create a respectful and supportive learning environment. In addition, by recognizing and valuing cultural differences and religious backgrounds, teachers can help students feel more connected and accepted. Religion is another critical issue in multicultural education in US schools. The participant mentions the word "religion" in many areas of this interview, and he states he is eager to pray in school. Gay (2015) believes that students need religion for personal development and to understand their cultural, moral, spiritual, and social questions from time to time. Banks (2016) argues that religion is essential as it offers students insight into promoting cohesion, challenging stereotypes, and tackling extremism. In a multicultural set-up, religion can be a dividing tool among the school, teachers, and students, as they come from various religions with various beliefs, and each person feels their religion is better. Studies have shown that higher religious engagement and observance levels lead to outstanding educational achievement (Banks, 2016).

Similarly, according to Gay (2015), higher grades in school are correlated with increased religious attendance and sticking to the teachings of one's religion. In this case, religion teaches believers about discipline and working hard in school, coupled with being honest and people of unquestionable integrity. In contrast, Yilmaz (2016) states that some religious ideologies are unsuitable for multicultural education because they are full of violent activities, bigotry, and prejudice and do not allow others to exercise their religious beliefs. Therefore, even though religion positively impacts the students' lives, it can make students of one religion discriminate against other students with different religious views. Nevertheless, religion is essential in multicultural education. Religion is a fundamental part of the culture which shapes identity, and religious understanding is vital for constructing an ideologically multicultural society. Furthermore, religious worldviews are not necessarily similar to each other or secular humanistic worldviews, and understanding the lenses of different religions is crucial for critical education and acquiring intercultural competence. Therefore, religions should be considered in multicultural education, and students should have opportunities to understand how the world looks from religious viewpoints. In addition, religious diversity is also becoming more prevalent in many societies worldwide, and individuals need to be aware of the different beliefs and practices of people from different religions. This knowledge can help prevent misunderstandings, prejudice, and discrimination based on religious differences.

The case study also highlighted the importance of cross-cultural understanding and communication among students. With the increasing cultural diversity in schools, fostering empathy and cultural exchange is essential to

build bridges across different cultures. Educators can play a critical role in promoting this through various cultural activities and encouraging students to learn about each other's cultures (Eliyahu-Levi, 2020).

In addition, technology and new media can effectively promote cultural inclusiveness in the classroom. For example, students can use group chats and online platforms to connect and learn about their respective cultures and traditions. This approach to learning can be engaging, enjoyable, and help students feel more included and connected. Teachers can also use these platforms to assign readings, research papers, and other assignments related to different cultures, which can help students learn more about each other's cultures. Technology and new media can also create virtual cultural exchanges, where students can share stories, discuss their beliefs, and learn about each other's cultures (Lomicka & Ducate, 2019).

Furthermore, this case study highlights the significance of cultural inclusiveness in the classroom, emphasizing the crucial role of teachers and administrators in fostering an inclusive and accepting environment. By promoting cross-cultural understanding and communication, students can cultivate empathy, respect, and appreciation for diverse cultures, which can positively impact their academic achievements and overall well-being. Furthermore, incorporating technology and new media can facilitate cultural exchange and promote inclusion in the classroom, enhancing students' learning experiences.

To sum up, this study has many limitations because of many reasons. The limitation of this study is that it involves a single participant, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. In addition, while the participant's perspectives and experiences are valuable, it is essential to note that his experiences may not represent other individuals' experiences with cultural inclusiveness in the educational setting. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that the findings of this study may not be applied to all students or educational institutions. The limitations identified in this study suggest several directions for future research in the field of cultural inclusiveness in the educational setting. Some potential areas for future work include expanding the sample size where researchers can conduct larger-scale studies that involve multiple participants to increase the generalizability of findings. Examining diverse populations is essential to discovering cultural inclusiveness and how it works in educational institutions. Future research can focus on including participants from diverse cultural backgrounds to understand how their experiences differ from those of the current study's participants. Finally, conducting longitudinal studies will help researchers to conduct longitudinal studies to assess changes in cultural inclusiveness over time in educational settings.

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