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Socio-Cultural Integration and Academic Understanding of Baloch Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the challenges faced by Baloch students in both social and academic spheres due to cultural diversity. However, cultural diversity, while enriching, can also present communication barriers that hinder effective interaction and communal sharing among students from diverse backgrounds. This paper examined the significance of communication between varied cultural students, and explored strategies for socio-cultural integration and overcoming cultural barriers, using sociological lens. The data was collected from the Baloch students, currently studying subjects of the Social Sciences in the private sector University of Lahore. Qualitative research technique was adopted and purposive sampling was used to conduct in-depth interviews (IDIs)with 10 Baloch students. After interviews, data was transcribed and coded for thematic analysis. The research findings revealed several challenges faced by Baloch students, such as cultural diversity, communication barriers etc. Results informed that educational institutes, by understanding and addressing these challenges, can foster a more inclusive and conductive environment to the academic and social issues of Baloch students. Overall, the findings may be beneficial for policymakers and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to develop an indigenous, inclusive education policy to harness the benefits of the increasing diversity in academic institutions in Pakistan. Moreover, this study recommended to establish a social club for ethnic students, where they can share their cultural values. This initiative will support the building of confidence among diverse students.

Keywords: cultural diversity, communication barriers, cross-cultural communication, non-verbal communication, inclusive

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Introduction

Communication is exchange of meaning through words and behaviors. It is an important tool of culture. Culture exhibits diversity, which is commonly shared through traditions, language, values and customs. The communication requires effectively transferring the information, and avoiding conflicts or misunderstandings. Simultaneously, communication is viewed as the processes of controlling, informing, and coordinating. Cross cultural communication is a broader concept. Communication could be the same within boundaries, but when it goes across the boundary, it is known as cross-cultural communication. Cross-cultural communication may cause language barriers due to varied contexts (Pitt, 2013). Cross-culture communication is mostly considered the combination of two languages across the country, which may represent the regional languages. Even some regions have its own primary, secondary, and tertiary languages, symbolizing individuals' identity, ethnicity and background, associated with different geographies, cultures, and social environment. Similarly in Pakistan, there is a combination of different languages and ethnic identities, based on cultural artifacts communication, ideologies, and history, representing multicultural identities. The interaction between multicultural identities is essential for ethnic people, because it provides basis for social bonding and could lead to the integration of people from different sociocultural backgrounds.

Cultural differences arose when people of two cultures came in contact to interact. On this situation, cultural differences highlight and develop response to contact, and involvement creates domination of one group over the other (Ogbu, 1992). Culture is divided into two types on the basis of differences: primary culture difference between dominant and minorities, and secondary cultural difference among group members. These cultural differences influence individual' day to day interaction, communication and learning aptitude. Most specifically, secondary cultural differences are based on different kind of styles, interlinked with each other and cover some major concepts: such as communication style (Gumperz, 1981), Interaction style (Erickson & Mohatt, 1982), and Learning style (Boykin, 1980).

Communication Barriers are Interlinked with Social Integration

The presence of communication barriers is closely intertwined with social networks. Within these networks, families, relatives, and peers

maintain strong associations, otherwise individuals would be isolated in the absence of these connections (Lacina, 2002). Social networks tend to form around similarities, and when these are absent, feelings of "alienation" can arise, leading to confusion and a heightened desire for dependence. Particularly immigrant students often struggle with accepting cultural differences, finding it difficult to interact with those from different backgrounds; for instance at international mobility, Americans may find it challenging to engage with Asians, while Asians tend to gravitate towards familiar peers, students encounter difficulties in finding leisure activities and forging new relationships within a new cultural context (Zhang, 2002). Similarly, immigrant students at national level face comparable challenges, as Johnston et al. (2014) identified that immigrant student's struggles hard to cope with cultural and language barriers, as well as the academic expectations hindering socialization.

Cultural barriers in social interaction contribute to acculturative stress (Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992), which can manifest as reluctance to engage with individuals from different backgrounds. Additionally, literature indicated that social integration plays a crucial role in determining opportunities for participation in social activities, where students with lower integration levels often cannot fully engage in such activities as native students can (Johnston et al., 2014).

The diversity among students is recognized as a factor contributing to social exclusion, highlighting the failure of individuals to integrate socially. This exclusion underscores the challenges of achieving social cohesion and its potential impact on academic comprehension. This research paper highlights the various issues related to diversity among students with different national contexts, focusing on Baloch students. It suggests that diversity can lead to social exclusion, potentially disrupting social cohesion and, consequently, academic performance.

The relationship between the dominant group and diverse students significantly influences academic life. Valenzuela and Dornbusch (1994) identified motivating factors crucial for student progress and learning, emphasizing the importance of these factors being genuine and supportive. Another study Shih (2000) examined the role of culture, language, and academic progress, revealing a connection between language and class participation. These emphasized to understand the link between diversity

and unity, while recognizing various factors influencing academic comprehension.

On a whole, cultural shocks compel diverse students to adjust in new environment with new principles. These new values and principles change the needs of students as they started thinking about attention, adjustment instead of academic performance. Other studies also endorsed that culture has positive connection with education (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2012).

Generally, the communication can positively impact on the learning of students (Abdullah, 2005). Communication and integration are interlinked with each other. Because without getting into conversation with others you can't reflect your views and problems (Hwang, 1987). These problems were not found only in school-going age but also vary according to age, educational background, and social integration. Social integration is considered a bridge among communication and academic performance. It's a form of bond among people which can be linked with intercultural strategy and diverse ideologies (Berry, 1980). Classification of multicultural education has four types (Grant & Sleeter, 2007);

a) Teaching cultural diversity is assimilations approach

b) Human relation approach improves interpersonal relation

c) Single group study promote cultural pluralism by raising consciousness

d) Multicultural education reflects pluralism and enhances equality

Cultural diversity does not only include diversity of culture but also has political and social diversity (Bauman 2003). The politics of diversity can induce a process of "marginalization" coming from culturally different members of society; immigrants use their cultural differences as a marker to deal with social and political inequities (Rex, 1996). Some of the cultural diversities are inherited, and some are built by societies. Those that are inherited have more impact and influences compared to others which are just generated due to changes in societies. Society is the combination of natives and migrants which has further domains of majority and minority. Majorities are mostly considered natives, and minority is ethnic communities. Social and cultural identities play a key role in determining academic understanding. The dominant culture is considered the culture of native students. In their opposition, people in the minority have different cultures from others on a micro level. High motivation of students can also

lead close to their goals. But it could be possible when they will have a confident personality because of their strong social identity. Students' performance depends on many factors, such as facilities, learning, gender, and age factors. But in ethnic students, these factors are different from others (El-Shaarawi, 2021), such as issues, communication gaps between students and instructors and learning inability. The most important and positive effect on students' performance is competency in English if students have strong communication skills and a grip on English, it could lead to higher grades. Their ideology and perspectives of religion, social, and political can also impact academic achievement (Vilella, 2011).

Mutual accommodation is required to attain integration among society. Acculturation is also a key figure of culture emergence with others on the basis of integration and other social ethnic actions (Yusuf et al., 2016). Acculturation follows four strategies to build intercultural relations which are cultural identities, language knowledge and its use, peer groups integration, and family relationships (Kamau, 2012). These are inter-cultural variables which can code as integration, ethnic, national, and diffuse. Integration is only possible when there will be acceptance for diverse culture and secondly by the promotion of equitable participation by all groups of the large society. This leads to multicultural mutual accommodation which could be sustainable by evolving values of the large society at on platform as an institution or structure (Roland & Galloway, 2002).

There is need to distinguish between individualist integration and cross-cultural integration. Minority communities have their private association, but are not recognized in public sphere due to diversity (Berry, 2006). Cross-cultural is a process in which groups and individuals work different for one way tasks with different ideology (Modood, 2007; Parekh, 2000). This task can be class activities, class participation and peer interaction as well.

Group exploration tells that every group has its own distinctive attributes which leads to diversity of interaction. Interaction use bridge of language. Language is a cultural tool which is used to convey thoughts, ideology and cultural heritage. For this purpose non-verbal signals and written languages are used. When language is linked with diverse students and immigrants it has different situation.

In every institute native language is different but official and formal language is English. And it is compulsory part of academic pattern and society integration to learn and use it. On the basis of native language, diverse students indicate isolation from English speaking peers (Peguero & Shaffer, 2015).

Coping with different languages is considered as stress and this anxiety leads to learning, emotional and behavioral problems. If we talk about problems, these can be with peers but learning has both sided bridge. One is with teachers and other one is with class fellows. As previous study also explored about ignorance and unfavorable attitude of mentor is also observed by diverse students (Peguero et al., 2017).

Language is considered as a barrier for international students which impact on academic concerns. The literature is indicating that communication barriers are linked with social integration, academic understanding and learning skills of diverse students.

Research Objectives

This research paper aimed:

1. To explore how communication barriers and social interaction of Baloch community affect academic performance?

2. To identify challenges faced by Baloch students for social interaction and academic performance.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of social relation and social identity underscores the pivotal role of unity within diverse societies. It posits that although diversity is essential, without a unifying force, however there is a risk of societal fragmentation, often referred to as balkanization. Therefore, it advocates for diversity to be embraced within a framework of unity, whether that unity is based on shared language, ideology, or national perspectives.

Within the realm of social relation theory, two principal elements contribute to social cohesion. It directs attention to critical factors such as language, cultural materials, and commonalities, shedding light on their significance in shaping educational experiences. Along with the purpose of multiculturalism interaction varies according to the situation. The first one in Assimilation in which one person prefers to interact with people of same

culture and avoid communicating with ethnics (Cesar M, 2005). The second one is separation which is alternatively defined as the people who maintain their communication with both kinds of groups. The third one is integration in which some degree of cultural integrity is maintained (César & Kumpulainen, 2009).

Erikson (1956) posits that identity development occurs through engagement with social relations and the experience of various social roles. A cohesive identity emerges when individuals navigate these social interactions, forging connections between their personal identities and societal expectations. Notably, the absence of a distinct identity can result in a perceptible gap between an individual's personality and societal norms.

According to Tajfel and Tunner (1986), our need for positive self-concept leads us to enhance the status of our own group, while potentially devaluing others. This subtle interplay of 'us' vs. 'them' forms the essence of intergroup processes. Social identity theory is particularly evident in the realm of social justice and intergroup relations. Understanding the dynamics of in-group bias and out-group discrimination can help us design interventions that challenge these biases and promote more equitable social structures.

The conceptualization of identity encompasses elements such as respect, social integration, and academic achievement. Students who cultivate a robust sense of identity often exhibit higher levels of engagement and performance in educational settings. Thus, recognizing and nurturing individual identities within a framework of social cohesion is imperative for fostering positive educational outcomes and societal harmony.

In this study, common points are developed on the basis of theories. About social integration and building relationship Face and Favor model is discussed. Theoretical perspective of Fiske based on integration in his book "Structure of social life". He said for survival, it is compulsory to have social engagement. Theory has different constructs which are also forms of social life. Link of one construct is communal sharing which elaborate about interaction of individual with other along with identity of individual is linked with group structure. Instead of "I" they preferred to call "We". Theoretical frame work could be helpful to generate interview guide line and to strengthen literature. After talking about social relation, second theory will highlight aspect of cultural diversity. In order to relate cross-

cultural to theory perspective, it links to bring diversity into main stream because in future universe is demanding positive change for all (Pine & Hilliard, 1990). From educational point of view multiculturalism/cross cultural education is an opportunity to cater diverse ideas from students (Bennett, 1995).

Figure 1
Conceptualization of Identity
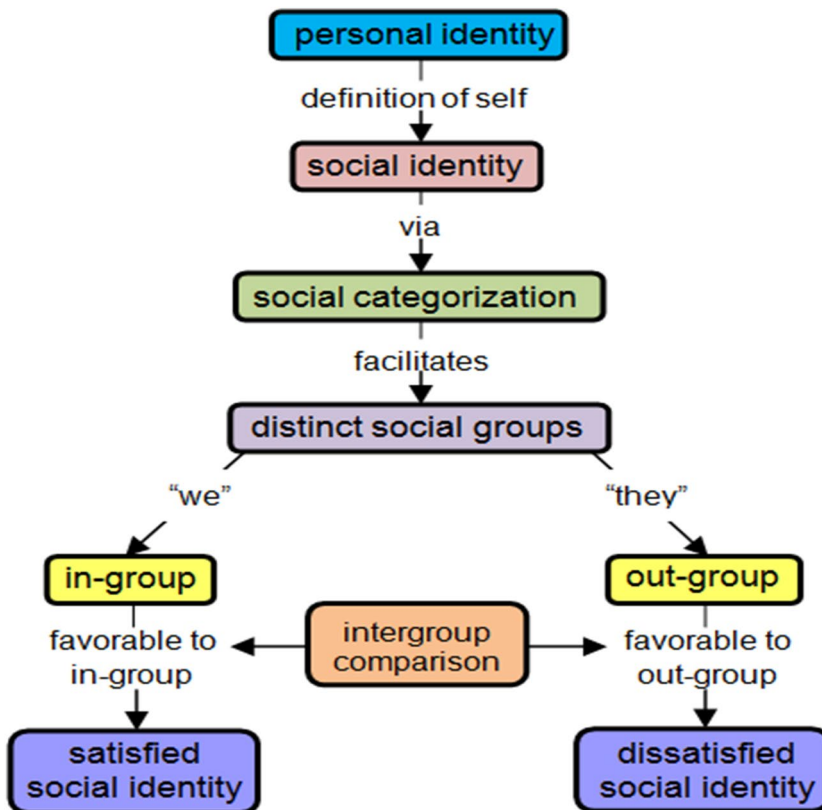
Method

Qualitative research method was applied to learn experiences and challenges faced by Baloch students in pursuit of their academic career, particularly due to cultural diversity. This study's methodology was determined by the interpretive theoretical approach. From this vantage point, the researcher was able to comprehend participant ideas, behaviors, and

interactions. The research was aligned to a theoretical perspective, considering ontological and epistemological stance. The first technique aided in comprehending the nature of the question, while the second assisted in gathering facts (Wolf et al., 2002).

Purposive sampling technique was used to recruit Baloch students, currently studying subjects of the Social Sciences in the private sector university of Lahore. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather data from Baloch students. Inclusion criteria included those Baloch students, who were enrolled in graduate and under graduate programs of Social Sciences. A total of 10Baloch students from the private university included in the research, including 5 graduate students and 5 undergraduate students from the first semester as they were having more trouble in interacting with other fellows. A sample of 10 was considered taking into account the saturation. Saturation is "the most frequently touted guarantee of qualitative rigor offered by authors," (Suri, 2011). Informed consent was obtained from each participant. Data security, confidentiality and anonymity was maintained to protect respondents'' personal identification details.

By following the interview process, data was transcribed and coded for thematic analysis. Emerging themes and sub-themes were highlighted to present key findings.

Results

Several key findings emerged based on thematic analysis, highlighting on the challenges faced by Baloch students in adapting to new cultural and academic environments.

Cultural Identity and Perception

Baloch students expressed a strong connection to their cultural identity, viewing it as an integral part of their personality. However, they highlighted the rigidity of certain cultural norms and the need for flexibility, especially when transitioning to new cultural environments. As quoted by student A: "I grew up in Baloch culture, a solid foundation of ethics. Forme, culture should not be rigid to accept change or innovation".

Another student stated: "Culture is our identity and an important part for our survival as ethnic. However, when we talk about heritage, it is a mixture of customs and values that exist only in society"

Some of the students also highlighted the challenges faced due to cultural variation and communicating with varied cultural individuals. As a student C narrated,

> Most of the time we have to adjust with prevailing cultural norms and face problem in adaptation... Our cultural practices are misinterpreted by others, so we have to justify our point of view". Another student added, "We were surprised at how different views exist for varied individuals with varied cultures about us. Based on our interactions with natives, we feel social isolation and ignorance in the society.

These findings revealed that perceptions from others regarding Baloch culture often led to feelings of isolation and reluctance to interaction with native students. This is mainly attributed to cultural and communication gap with other native students.

Cultural Representation

Results showed that tangible and intangible aspects of culture played significant roles in how Baloch students represented themselves. Their dressing code, food, music, and language were key components to showcase their cultural heritage. However, they also faced challenges in balancing cultural representation with social integration, as their distinct cultural practices. A respondent expressed his feelings on cultural and explained,

Most of the Baloch communities are known for their clothes, our hospitality, and our special cultural dance (Duchapi) with some musical instruments. However, it is sad that most of the local students make fun of our attires and cultural practices. Also if I talk about our food, it's also differentiating us from others… Like among beverages, our herbal drink (Qahva) is a popular product. Inreal sense, we carry our culture along with us.

Challenges to Adapt New Culture

Baloch students opined that they face multiple challenges while adapting to the new culture. As stated by a Student C, "I think that when we come to a new place, we have to adapt to new environment, including food, cultural norms, traditions and practices"

Language emerged as a major barrier for Baloch students in both social and academic contexts. While some were proficient in multiple languages,

others struggled with English and Urdu, which were predominant languages in university settings. Fear of misunderstanding and lack of confidence hindered effective communication and participation in class discussions. We can interpret language barrier through expressions and discussion of respondents. As narrated by a student, "we face problems in communicating with native. When I first entered a big city like Lahore and Karachi, I found difficulty in communicating. Even I didn't utter a single word during my whole flight".

Another Student D commented,

> It's a universal story where local language and linguistic style vary at every 40km..As I am Mekrani Baloch, my speech style is also different from other Baloch students. So, we face challenge in adapting primary, secondary and tertiary languages to deal with diverse audience.

Based on the identified challenges of Baloch students related to social identity, we can conclude from evidences that communication barriers, cultural barrier and social integration are interlinked. And badly impact on academic performance through lagging in confidence and communication with peer groups.

Social Integration

According to analysis, Baloch students experienced difficulties in integrating with native peers due to language barriers and cultural differences. They often felt isolated and struggled to form meaningful relationships outside their own community. Social events and academic activities became daunting tasks; further exacerbating feelings of exclusion and alienation (Mushtaq & Khan, 2012). The same can be related to the verbatim of a participant. As stated by Student E,

> We think that its opportunity for us to deal with cross-cultural students to understand them. Because some time we can't attend class due to illness, emergency and some other reasons. In this scenario, we need assistance of classmates to get resource material of missing lectures. However, when we try to approach other native students they either ignore us or show attitude. Even few of them don't trust us to share their notes or indulge in any discussion with us. These discriminative behaviors cause difficulty for us to socially integrate with native on equal levels.

Hence, a conducive environment and interactive behavior during class can encourage positive attitude of Baloch students.

Academic Understanding

Most significantly, communication barriers and lack of social integration directly impact Baloch students' academic performance and abilities. Many Baloch students expressed frustration over their inability to participate in class discussions and lack of confidence to seek clarification when needed. The impact of cultural diversity on academic understanding can be seen from respondents expressions, as commented by Students F, "It is essential for us to address language barriers for adaptation with new culture and pursue our academic journey. If we won't do so, we will stand still on the same stage as we were on day one"

Another students narrated,

> We are here to seek advance knowledge so that we may serve in our communities in a better way. For the purpose, our performance in class matters a lot to build our association and social networks not only with native students, but also other cultural students and teachers…. In my opinion, this social interaction would help us to improve our academic performance.

The lack of support from peers further enhances these challenges, resulting in lower grades and missed learning opportunities. Some of the students complained about poor grading issues due to less involvement with native students. One student highlighted, "native students have more exposure as they live in advance cities but they don't like to share their experiences with us. So we struggle in our academic journey and yields poor grades"

As we discussed in above paragraphs, integration relate to participation. For peer groups its necessary to accommodate with diverse students.

The findings elaborate the importance of addressing cultural diversity and communication barriers in educational settings. Efforts to promote inclusivity, provide language support, and enhance cross-cultural understanding. That is essential for enhancing the academic performance and integration of Baloch students. Additionally, creating opportunities for meaningful social interactions and peer support can facilitate smoother transitions and improve overall academic outcomes. Respondents' opinions

were clarified with the help of thematic analysis. Each section has a distinct value in connecting the respondents' experiences with the themes. These themes are skillfully combined from theory and literature to tell the participants' stories.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study contributes significantly to the ongoing discourse surrounding the influence of culture on language and communication, with implications in both theoretical and practical domains. It focused on cross-cultural communication and social integration, particularly impacting on the experiences of Baloch students. The findings highlight academic issues such as favoritism in grading, the significance of interactions with peers sharing the same language, and the impact of two-way communication on learning approaches. These findings focused on the importance of intercultural learning and emphasize the necessity for equal participation in learning and communication to foster strong peer relationships, as discussed in social identity theory.

The social relation and social identity theory perspective, which links cultural factors with personality development, confidence, and motivation, further supports the significance of language and perspective in enhancing personal confidence and skill development. The study reveals that language barriers, including accents and pronunciation, hinder interaction, affecting students' experiences. These findings can be helpful for university strategies to address perceptions regarding diverse students' ability to adapt to new environments due to sociocultural barriers, which are crucial for fostering social identity and academic success.

The study also suggests potential changes to university curriculam to better accommodate diverse students and promote social integration. By extending existing theories and examining the data, this research contributes to understanding the importance of interaction with native peers and the academic barriers faced by cross-cultural students. The experiences shared by respondents' shows the power of language in building relationships and academic progress, while also highlighting the stress and anxiety associated with coping with different languages.

Baloch students' experiences of sociocultural adjustment with native peers and their tendencies towards social integration are discussed, with some resistance to interacting with individuals from different language and

cultural backgrounds. Drawing upon Fiske's model of face and favor and the social relation theory, the study supports the importance of creating cultural environments that enrich opportunities for cross-cultural students, thus aligning with the theory of social identity plays key role in mainstreaming such students.

To address communication barriers, the study suggests organizing separate meet-ups with teachers or peers for diverse students and incorporating aspects of their language, literature, or history into the curriculum. These steps aim to foster unity among diverse students and promote interaction, ultimately enhancing their academic and social integration experiences (McNally et al., 2013).

In conclusion, a comprehensive exploration ofvarious concepts that directly and indirectly influence the social andacademic lives of Baloch students. The findings are systematicallyorganized around themes, all of which are interconnected. As literatureelaborates, diversity manifests in various forms, including representation,symbolic, and non-symbolic aspects. In Balochi culture, language and communication are enriched with diversity, necessitating proficiency in primary, secondary, and tertiary languages. This research identifies gaps and issues arising from linguistic diversity among Baloch students and explores the reasons behind the apprehensive attitude of native students towards building relations with them.

Aligned with the research objectives, the findings focused the impacts of diversity on the social and academic lives of migrated students. External factors such as culture, gender, and age influence learning, with culture significantly shaping students' personalities and academic achievements. The social relation theory suggests that individuals with greater linguistic command have enhanced academic understanding and relationship-building opportunities, stemming from enriched cultural norms and values.

However, migrants often struggle to adapt a new environment, facing barriers that impact academic performance. Perception plays a pivotal role, with native students' attitudes crucial for ethnic students' confidence and integration. Communication barriers emerge as significant obstacles, with Baloch students experiencing difficulties due to language disparities and facing discrimination from native peers.

This lagging attitude impacts academic understanding, emphasizing the necessity of involving all Baloch students in mainstream activities for improved performance. Teachers' supportive roles are highlighted and encouraged in addressing students' accent and personality issues, for enhancing academic understanding.

The findings enlighten the importance of addressing language barriers and fostering social integration to enhance academic performance and student well-being. By integrating diverse students into the mainstream without disregarding their cultural backgrounds, unity can be achieved. The impact of native students' and their perceptions for Baloch students' can impact confidence. It is acknowledged, that there is a need for inclusive practices to remove cultural sensitivity in educational environments.

In conclusion, the study aligns with existing literature and theoretical frameworks, focused on the challenges faced by Baloch students and the barriers hindering their academic success. Through a qualitative approach and in- depth interviews, the study depth into the underlying reasons behind these challenges, emphasizing the importance of unity, diversity and the transformative potential of inclusive educational practices.

Certainly, here are the recommendations derived from the findings, themes, and literature provided.

Implementation of Intercultural Learning Activities: Universities should initiate intercultural learning activities that encompass all types of diverse students. Establishing an environment where individuals are acquainted with various cultural norms and traditions can prove beneficial. These activities should encourage interaction and understanding among students from different cultural backgrounds.

Enhancement of Teacher Roles: This study suggests a positive enhancement of the teacher's role in building relationships with cross-cultural students. Within the classroom setting, it is advisable to designate at least one individual to serve as a supportive figure for diverse students. Teachers can adopt the role of facilitators and translators, for a positive attitude towards cultural diversity.

Adoption of Cultural Strategies: Universities should adopt strategies that revolve around cultural activities. The establishment of social clubs within classrooms or departments can facilitate interaction among students from diverse backgrounds. These clubs can serve as platforms for students

to engage with one another and boost their confidence levels. Organizing activities that promote cultural familiarity, such as food sharing, introducing cultural music or literature, and showcasing traditional attire, can further enrich the experience. Such interactions can lead to the establishment of new traditions and enhance deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures.

Incorporating these recommendations into university policies and practices can contribute to creating a more inclusive and harmonious learning environment conducive to the growth and development of all students.

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