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## **Cultivating Multicultural Dispositions: Assessing the Impact of a Multicultural Education Course on Preservice Teachers at an HBCU**

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**Abstract:** This research examined the impact of a multicultural education course on the cultivation of critical dispositions and cultural competence among future educators at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). The purpose of this study was to understand how this course affected students' self-awareness, recognition of personal biases, and broadening of worldviews. Using a mixed-methods approach, post-only quantitative data from the Multicultural Teacher Dispositions Scale (MTDS) and qualitative reflections from 23 preservice teachers selected through convenience sampling were combined in the study. The MTDS evaluates three dispositions of multiculturalism in preservice teachers: meekness, social awareness, and advocacy. The results revealed from moderate to strong endorsement of the meekness disposition, which means openness to diverse perspectives and self-reflection. The social awareness was moderately endorsed, with students recognising systemic inequities and valuing diverse viewpoints in education. The advocacy disposition showed mixed results, highlighting areas for growth in challenging institutional biases and promoting inclusivity. The qualitative analysis identified three key themes in students' reflections: embracing discomfort, self-

awareness and bias recognition, effective communication as well as cultural sensitivity. Participants reported broadened worldviews, greater appreciation for cultural diversity, and increased confidence in engaging with diverse backgrounds. The study provided empirical evidence for the effectiveness of structured multicultural education courses in enhancing critical dispositions and cultural competence among preservice teachers. It emphasises the importance of incorporating opportunities for self-reflection, exploration of diverse perspectives, and addressing personal biases and discomfort within teacher preparation programs. These findings are crucial for teacher education programs at HBCUs preparing culturally competent educators for increasingly diverse classrooms. The study also suggests a need for on-going research on strategies to cultivate multicultural dispositions and to study the long-term impact of multicultural education courses on teaching practices.

**Keywords:** Multicultural education, teacher dispositions, cultural competence, preservice teachers, HBCU, teacher preparation.

## Introduction

As the overall racial and ethnic diversity of the United States grows, the student population in schools also increases. School districts face the need to create more inclusive and equitable learning environments for students from all backgrounds. Educational researchers have highlighted this challenge by reporting on the necessity and difficulties of preparing teachers for multicultural settings (Cochran-Smith, 2023; Gay, 2018). The field of education has developed theoretical frameworks for multicultural education (Banks, 1993; Gorski, 2016), but a significant gap remains. How can we transform these concepts into successful teacher training, particularly in distinctive environments such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)?

This study examined the impact a multicultural education course had on preservice teachers' multicultural dispositions at an HBCU. Jensen et al.'s (2023) Multicultural Teacher Dispositions Scale (MTDS) was employed in conjunction with Banks' (1993) multicultural education framework to acquire fresh perspectives on how purposefully crafted coursework can cultivate essential multicultural teaching traits. By utilising a mixed-methods approach, we investigated the transformation of preservice teachers' self-awareness, acknowledgment of personal biases, and perspectives as they interacted with multicultural education curricula at an HBCU.

Multicultural education in the United States began during the civil rights movement, driven by the quest for equal educational opportunities for marginalised communities. It is rooted in American democratic principles and mid-20th century civil rights efforts to combat discrimination and racism (Gorski, 1999). Scholars like James Banks in the 1980s emphasised educational equality, viewing schools as social systems needing transformation in policies, curricula, and teaching methods. In the 1980s and 1990s, scholars like Christine Sleeter, Carl Grant, and Sonia Nieto (Grant & Sleeter, 2011; Nieto, 1992) expanded on Banks' ideas. They critiqued structural inequities such as tracking, testing, and hiring practices, advocating for systemic changes beyond mere curricular additions to address educational inequities and prepare students for a diverse society (Gorski, 1999).

By the late 20th century, critical theorists like Giroux and McLaren (1992) examined multicultural education through the lenses of power, privilege, and socioeconomics. They emphasised the need for transformation in both schools and society to eliminate injustice. This period saw the development of comprehensive models and frameworks advocating for educational and societal reforms. The 21st century has seen a continued emphasis on multicultural education in response to increasing racial and ethnic diversity. This underscores the need for multicultural education to prepare all students for

participation in a pluralistic society (Banks, 2013). The focus has shifted to developing intercultural competence, critical thinking, and global awareness, framing multicultural education as essential for democracy and for equipping students to thrive in an interconnected world (Banks, 2013).

HBCUs have played a unique role in Multicultural education in the United States. Traditionally, HBCUs have focused on African American-centred multiculturalism, reflecting their historical role in providing educational opportunities for Black students.

According to Dwyer (2006), over 50% of HBCU faculty define multiculturalism primarily in terms of African American experiences. HBCUs tend to integrate multicultural perspectives into the core curriculum. Faculty members promote student sharing of experiences, utilisation of diverse sources, and questioning of conventional ideas, with 45% emphasizing diversity through their teaching methods rather than formal curriculum structures (Dwyer, 2006).

While HBCUs initially focused on African American students, they have seen increasing racial and ethnic diversity. As of 2018, approximately 25% of students at HBCUs were from non-Black racial backgrounds, according to data from the National Centre for Education Statistics. This shift reflects a contentious strategic effort by many HBCUs to enhance racial diversity to attract increased financial support (Stewart, 2021). While multicultural education at HBCUs has its foundation in African American experiences, it currently incorporates a variety of perspectives through faculty pedagogy. This evolution reflects an increasing recognition of the need to serve the growing racial and ethnic diversity on campuses, preparing students for an increasingly diverse society.

### ***Research Problem, Aim, and Research Questions***

College students, including those at HBCUs, often face challenges in developing cultural competence, for example recognising and addressing their own biases. Given the diverse and evolving demographics of HBCU campuses, there is a need for innovative educational approaches to effectively enhance self-awareness and cultural understanding among future educators (Gay, 2018; Nieto, 2000).

The aim of this study was to address persistent challenges in teacher preparation, including implicit biases (Kumar et al., 2022), limited exposure to diverse perspectives (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017), and inadequate development of critical consciousness (Howard, 2016). Through a targeted examination of these themes within the HBCU framework, the aim is to provide meaningful contributions to the ongoing discourse surrounding the efficacy of multicultural education.

This research delved into the effects of a multicultural education course at an HBCU on students' self-awareness, identification of personal biases, and expansion of worldviews. The specific inquiries guiding this study were:

1. How does a multicultural education course at an HBCU enhance students' self-awareness and recognition of personal biases?
2. In what ways do students report changes in their understanding and management of their own biases after completing the course?
3. How do students at an HBCU describe broadening their worldviews and understanding of various cultures through a multicultural education course?

In this article, the focus was on three key dispositions: meekness, social awareness, and advocacy. These concepts, drawn from Jensen et al.'s (2023) framework for multicultural teacher dispositions, align closely with Banks & McGee Banks's (2004) influential work on multicultural education.

## Literature Review

Educators and researchers have long recognised the importance of competence in the classroom. Several studies have demonstrated that teachers with competency are more effective in engaging their students (Comstock et al., 2023; Villegas & Lukas, 2002). This has sparked several recent studies on the attitudes of future teachers in different settings (Hu et al., 2020). A central message that resonates from this research is that teacher training programs need to go beyond merely recognising the diversity – they must actively encourage and embrace diverse experiences (Harrison & Brown, 2022; Ladson-Billings, 2014). This shift is noticeable across all areas of teacher preparation, from early childhood education (Lash et al., 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2023) to teaching English as a foreign language (Koubek & Wasta, 2023) and secondary education (Colwell et al., 2021; Register et al., 2022).

The widespread interest in studying preservice teachers' dispositions serves two purposes. Thus, the aim is to understand how these dispositions impact the future educators' readiness to teach in diverse classrooms. And two, an interest in evaluating the quality and of effectiveness of teacher education programs in cultivating these multicultural dispositions. At the core of this matter is what Cochran-Smith (2023) calls the "equity problem" in teacher education. Despite numerous multicultural initiatives over the past twenty years, humanity continue to grapple with deep rooted issues like racism, language bias, and discrimination against LGBTQ+ individuals that contribute to educational disparities. These challenges also pose obstacles to involve marginalised communities in shaping our values and objectives.

Cochran-Smith and Keefe (2022) argue that preparing future educators for diverse student populations requires confronting on-going racial injustice, income inequality, political and racial divides, and persistent disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes. In response to this "equity problem," several promising initiatives emerge.

These include advocating for equity-focused teacher education policies (National Council, 2022), developing programs that centre community knowledge and values (Cipollone et al., 2022; Lees et al., 2021), and critically examining the white-centric cultures embedded in many teacher education curricula (Cochran-Smith & Reagan, 2021, 2022). Other approaches focus on incorporating racial literacy through digital activism (Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz, 2021), analysing the discriminatory effects of teacher education exams (Fenwick, 2021), and emphasising the strengths of teacher candidates of colour and Indigenous teacher candidates (Gist & Bristol, 2022; Keane et al., 2022).

The central question persists: how can teacher training programs adequately prepare educators to engage with students from diverse cultures or backgrounds? The research suggests that the key elements, described below, include acknowledging personal biases, fostering critical thinking dispositions and democratic values, and expanding preservice teachers' worldviews. These factors play an important role in shaping preservice teachers multicultural self-efficacy and, ultimately, their ability to create inclusive and equitable classrooms.

### ***Personal Biases***

The significance of self-awareness, in teaching has been highlighted by research emphasising that educators need to go beyond knowing their subject matter. It involves recognising their identities and the biases they bring into the classroom, which greatly influence how they teach and engage with students. These factors can profoundly shape how educators teach and interact with their students (Lampert & Browne; 2022; Schussler & Bercaw, 2021; Wilcoxon et al., 2021).

Staats (2016) shed light on the impact of biases on actions and decisions in educational settings. Jacoby-Senghor et al. (2016) further revealed a concerning link between educators' implicit biases and student performance showing that instructors with levels of bias may experience increased anxiety and deliver lower quality instruction leading to poorer outcomes for Black students. Adams III et al.'s (2014) study underscored the complexities of addressing these biases noting that while tools, like the Implicit Association Test (IAT) can raise awareness they may not necessarily drive individuals to confront and overcome their biases effectively in a context.

Starck et al. (2020) broadened our comprehension by examining how teachers' racial biases correspond with those of non-teachers who have similar demographics. Surprisingly they discovered White biases in both groups with only slight distinctions between them. This indicates that the biases held by teachers largely mirror the biases rather than being exclusive to the teaching profession. Recent studies have looked into the impact of biases among teachers on their teaching methods. Kumar et al. (2022) investigated how these biases significantly influence culturally responsive teaching techniques. In contrast Wilcoxon et al. (2021) underscored the importance of exposure and dialogue in aiding teachers to recognize and address their biases.

### ***Reflective Practices***

The incorporation of reflexive practices plays an important role in fostering multicultural perspectives among aspiring educators (Bukko & Liu 2021; Jacobs, 2023; Schussler & Bercaw 2021). Schussler and Bercaw (2021) utilised case responses to explore the assumptions of teacher candidates and enhance their awareness of their dispositions. Jacobs (2023) emphasised the importance of consciousness-raising and practical applications in doctoral programs for developing teacher educators focused in equity. A study by Chang (2019) demonstrated the positive impact of reflection on learning in online environments by including reflective practices into assignments, which in turn led to increased depth of knowledge, identification of deficiencies, and personalisation of knowledge, comparative learning references, and enhanced structural and social connections among learners. Similarly, Leberman and Martin (2004) discovered that structured post course reflection activities enhanced reflection processes and aided in applying concepts by guiding participants to derive meaning from their experiences. Furthermore Sandell and Bersh (2022) demonstrated how a Multi-Layered Autobiography Project positively impacted preservice teachers' intercultural competence. These studies collectively underscore the importance of reflective activities in both, enhancing learning and applying knowledge.

### ***Broadening the Worldview of Preservice Teachers***

Various approaches focus on expanding preservice teachers' worldviews through intercultural experiences to enhance their cultural competence (Lash et al. 2022; Martin-Beltrán et al., 2023; Ruales et al., 2021). Ruales et al. (2021) showed that online courses based on Transformative Learning Theory can enhance preservice teachers' awareness of multicultural sensitivity. Additionally Lash et al. (2022) noted that international field experiences significantly improve preservice teachers' intercultural competence. Jaramillo Cherrez and Gleason (2022) demonstrated that virtual exchanges with international peers broaden the preservice teachers' worldviews and their intercultural competence.

Indeed, methods to enhance the multicultural dispositions of prospective educators are extensively studied globally (Lander et al., 2023; Mo et al., 2021; Resch, 2023). For instance Kilicoglu et al. (2023) carried out a research project comparing Turkey, South Korea, and the United States. The study revealed that cultural competence positively affects preservice teachers' social justice and self-efficacy beliefs in all three contexts. Additionally, Lander et al. (2023) explored how well prepared future teachers in the UK and Spain were to teach in multicultural settings. Their study emphasised the

Eurocentric nature of current teacher education programs and the need for better preparation of teachers for diverse classrooms.

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of multicultural education in teacher preparation in the U.S. and around the world, there is still a research gap in the specific examination of the effects of multicultural education courses at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). While many studies have explored the development of multicultural dispositions and cultural competence among preservice teachers in traditional institutions, little attention has been given to HBCUs unique environment – where the student body is predominantly Black and often more attuned to issues of race and equity. This lack of research is significant because HBCUs have a distinct historical and cultural mission that can provide unique insights into how multicultural education can be effectively taught and experienced.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Components of multicultural education frameworks aim to promote educational equity so that students from diverse backgrounds can have the same opportunities. James A. Banks' five dimensions of multicultural education provide a comprehensive approach to how to integrate diverse perspectives and experiences into the curriculum and teachers' instructional practices (Banks, 1993). Banks's five dimensions are as follows:

- *The Content Integration* is the extent to which teachers use examples, data, and information from various cultures to explain key concepts in different subjects.
- *The Knowledge Construction* is the process by which teachers help students understand that the experiences and backgrounds of different groups influence knowledge. It describes how the dominant culture established mainstreamed knowledge and encourages paradigms shifts.
- *The Prejudice Reduction* is the dimension that encourages positive attitudes and beliefs in children about different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.
- *The Equity Pedagogy* is the methods that are relevant and responsive to the diverse learning needs of students from diverse backgrounds.
- *The Empowering School Culture* is the process of restructuring the culture, organisation, and policies of schools in order to promote equity for all, regardless of gender, race, or social group.

The use of Bank's multicultural education five dimensions is tightly related to the content of the course and the research questions of this study. This framework assisted in shaping the conclusions drawn from the study.

### **Materials and Methods**

#### ***Research Design***

A mixed-methods design was used in the study. Quantitative and qualitative approaches together provided a better understanding of the impact of a multicultural education course on HBCU preservice teachers. Specifically, the convergent parallel mixed methods design was used in the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017), where quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analysed separately, and then merged for interpretation.

A mixed-methods approach was chosen to combine the benefits of quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Quantitative data measured changes in students' attitudes, while

qualitative data revealed details about their experiences and learning. By combining these two types of information, this paper sought to provide a comprehensive view of how the course affected students' multicultural dispositions.

### ***Sample and Participants***

In this research study, the sample consisted of 23 students enrolled in a Multicultural Education course in an HBCU University in the Midwest of the U.S. Participants were selected through convenience sampling, based on their enrolment in the course. They had diverse demographic backgrounds (see Table 1). The sample included 19 females, 3 males, and one non-binary individual. Most of the participants were female. There was a significant balance between Black or African American and White students in the sample, but there was no representation of Latinx students. The sample included students from different academic years, ranging from first-year students to seniors, with 40% being first-year students. The participants exhibited balanced levels of religiosity between very religious, religious, somewhat religious, and non-religious individuals.

**Table 1**

*Sample Demographic Information (n=23)*

| <b>Gender identity</b>             | <b>Count</b> |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| Female                             | 19           |
| Male                               | 3            |
| Non-binary                         | 1            |
| <b>Racial and Ethnic Identity</b>  |              |
| Black                              | 11           |
| White                              | 11           |
| Prefer not to say                  | 1            |
| Not Hispanic                       | 25           |
| <b>University Year</b>             |              |
| First-year student                 | 9            |
| Sophomore                          | 5            |
| Junior                             | 5            |
| Senior                             | 4            |
| <b>Mother's Education</b>          |              |
| Less than high school              | 1            |
| High school graduate               | 4            |
| Some college                       | 7            |
| Two-year degree                    | 3            |
| Four-year degree                   | 5            |
| Professional Degree                | 3            |
| <b>Religiosity</b>                 |              |
| Not religious                      | 6            |
| Somewhat religious                 | 6            |
| Religious                          | 6            |
| Very religious                     | 5            |
| <b>Speaker of another language</b> |              |
| No                                 | 22           |

Only one student spoke a language other than English. Finally, the sample included students whose mothers had attained different levels of education, ranging from less than high school to professional degrees. A significant portion of the participants had mothers who had completed some college or obtained a two-year or four-year degree. Overall, the sample demonstrated diversity across multiple demographic factors, including gender, race, academic year, religiosity, and maternal educational attainment.

### ***Instrument and Procedure***

Several instruments have been developed to assess preservice teachers' multicultural dispositions and cultural competence (Cormier, 2021; Karkar Esperat, 2022; Lu et al. 2022). For this study, the Multicultural Teacher Disposition Survey (MTDS) developed by Jensen et al. (2023) was selected. The MTDS was designed to measure students' awareness, empathy, advocacy, and readiness to engage with cultural diversity within educational contexts.

The MTDS underwent rigorous development, including detailed item analyses, such as Rasch modelling and exploratory factor analyses. This process resulted in a concise 15-item instrument organised around three core dispositions: Social Awareness, Meekness, and Advocacy for Students. In this study, a preliminary version of the survey containing 20 items was utilised, each rated on a 6-point agreement scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

To evaluate the students' multicultural dispositions, the MTDS was administered at end of the semester. The survey responses were collected anonymously using paper surveys during class sessions. This only-post design allowed us to obtain a picture of the aspects of multicultural dispositions students had after taking a course in multicultural education.

To complement the quantitative data, qualitative data through open-ended reflective questions were also collected. In the final weeks of the semester, students were asked to respond to two prompts: "Has the class helped you broaden your worldview or understanding of various cultures?" and "What have you learned that you will be able to apply to your life?" These reflections were submitted electronically via the course's discussion boards. The students' reflections provided rich, contextual data about their personal insights and perceived growth throughout the course.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data analysis approach integrated both quantitative and qualitative methods. For the MTDS data descriptive statistics were used in order to examine the students' responses at the end of the semester. This analysis allowed identifying patterns in the students' multicultural dispositions after completing a course in multicultural education at a HBCU.

To analyse the qualitative data from students' reflective responses, thematic analysis as described by Byrne (2022) was utilised. This process involved a systematic review of the reflective entries to identify recurring themes and patterns in students' experiences and perceptions. The coding and categorisation of the responses allowed for the exploration of how the course impacted students' understanding of cultural diversity in education and their personal growth.

This combination of methods offered a thorough perspective on the course's influence, enabling us to corroborate our results and cultivate a more complete understanding of students' experiences and learning outcomes.

## Results

### Survey Results

Jensen et al. (2023) iteratively developed and enhanced the MTDS survey across various stages to assess the three critical dispositions considered essential for educators engaging with culturally diverse students. The three main multicultural teacher dispositions measured by the MTDS are meekness, social awareness, and advocacy.

**Meekness.** The objective of the Meekness construct of the MTDS is to assess preservice teachers' openness, willingness to learn, and ability to appreciate different perspectives.

**Table 2**

#### *Meekness Section Survey Results*

| Item                                                                                                      | StA           | A            | SA           | SD           | D           | StD         |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| Teachers ought to be flexible with students who need extra help (e.g., assignment deadlines).             | 12<br>(46.2%) | 5<br>(19.2%) | 5<br>(19.2%) | 0<br>(0%)    | 0<br>(0%)   | 1<br>(3.8%) |
| Admitting when I am wrong to students improves my relationship with them.                                 | 14<br>(53.8%) | 8<br>(30.8%) | 1<br>(3.8%)  | 0<br>(0%)    | 0<br>(0%)   | 0<br>(0%)   |
| It is my responsibility to discuss social issues like poverty and discrimination with all of my students. | 7<br>(26.9%)  | 7<br>(26.9%) | 5<br>(19.2%) | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 1<br>(3.8%) | 1<br>(3.8%) |
| The past experiences of my life shape how I see others in the world.                                      | 8<br>(30.8%)  | 6<br>(23.1%) | 5<br>(19.2%) | 3<br>(11.5%) | 0<br>(0%)   | 1<br>(3.8%) |
| Teachers should connect classroom learning with students' personal experiences with injustice.            | 5<br>(19.2%)  | 8<br>(30.8%) | 6<br>(23.1%) | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 1<br>(3.8%) | 1<br>(3.8%) |
| Conventional ways of interacting in classrooms privilege some students over others.                       | 5<br>(19.2%)  | 7<br>(26.9%) | 8<br>(30.8%) | 3<br>(11.5%) | 0<br>(0%)   | 0<br>(0%)   |
| I seek to learn from others whose experiences differ from mine.                                           | 10<br>(38.5%) | 9<br>(34.6%) | 3<br>(11.5%) | 0<br>(0%)    | 0<br>(0%)   | 1<br>(3.8%) |

*Note.* Scale: StA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, SA: Somewhat Agree, SD: Somewhat Disagree, D: Disagree, StD: Strongly Disagree.

A significant majority of respondents, 84.6%, either strongly agreed or agreed that "acknowledging my mistakes to students enhances our relationship." These findings demonstrate the preservice teachers' readiness to recognize their shortcomings.'

Similarly, 73.1% strongly agreed or agreed that they "seek to learn from others whose experiences differ from mine," demonstrating an openness to perspectives beyond their own lived realities. As the authors note, meek teachers embrace ambiguity and "seek out opportunities for new, even uncomfortable, experiences to learn from diverse students and their parents" (Jensen et al., 2018, p. 3).

The item "The past experiences of my life shape how I see others in the world" garnered 73.1% strong agreement or agreement, suggesting awareness among respondents of how their backgrounds influence their worldviews. This sentiment aligns with the characterisation of Meekness as involving critical examination of one's core beliefs and upbringing (Schussler, 2006, as cited in Jensen et al., 2018).

However, some items assessing Meekness dispositions yielded more mixed results. While 65.4% strongly agreed or agreed that "teachers ought to be flexible with students who need extra help," 19.2% only somewhat agreed, indicating certain resistance or uncertainty regarding this aspect of Meekness. Similarly, responses were divided on whether "teachers should connect classroom learning with students' personal experiences with injustice," with 50% strongly agreeing or agreeing but 30.8% only somewhat agreeing.

These findings suggest that while the preservice teachers demonstrated strong endorsement of certain Meekness aspects like openness to learning and self-reflection, some faced challenges fully embracing the notion of flexible, responsive teaching that validates students' lived experiences, including those shaped by injustice. This aligns with Jensen et al.'s (2018) recognition that nurturing critical dispositions such as humility is an aspect that requires on-going enhancement in teacher preparation programs.

In general, the survey results offer moderate to strong empirical backing for the humility factor within this group of preservice teachers. While encouraging in many respects, the findings also reveal opportunities for further growth.

**Social Awareness.** The Social Awareness construct of the MTDS assesses teachers' understanding of how social identities, power dynamics, and systemic inequities shape lived experiences and educational opportunities.

**Table 3**

*Social Awareness Section of the Survey*

| Item                                                                                          | StA           | A            | SA           | SD           | D           | StD          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Teachers need to make themselves vulnerable to connect with students and their families.      | 7<br>(26.9%)  | 7<br>(26.9%) | 5<br>(19.2%) | 0<br>(0%)    | 2<br>(7.7%) | 2<br>(7.7%)  |
| Differing perspectives on social issues enrich discussion in the classroom.                   | 11<br>(42.3%) | 9<br>(34.6%) | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 0<br>(0%)    | 0<br>(0%)   | 1<br>(3.8%)  |
| My status and social position (e.g., race, gender) shape how I interact with others.          | 5<br>(19.2%)  | 5<br>(19.2%) | 6<br>(23.1%) | 3<br>(11.5%) | 1<br>(3.8%) | 3<br>(11.5%) |
| Being white is associated with more opportunity in the U.S.                                   | 12<br>(46.2%) | 3<br>(11.5%) | 3<br>(11.5%) | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 2<br>(7.7%) | 1<br>(3.8%)  |
| Schools are structured in ways that reproduce societal privileges.                            | 8<br>(30.8%)  | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 8<br>(30.8%) | 3<br>(11.5%) | 1<br>(3.8%) | 1<br>(3.8%)  |
| Teachers should go out of their way to use culturally-relevant curricula with their students. | 6<br>(23.1%)  | 9<br>(34.6%) | 6<br>(23.1%) | 0<br>(0%)    | 0<br>(0%)   | 2<br>(7.7%)  |
| I am willing to be uncomfortable in order to learn from my students' experiences.             | 9<br>(34.6%)  | 6<br>(23.1%) | 5<br>(19.2%) | 1<br>(3.8%)  | 0<br>(0%)   | 1<br>(3.8%)  |

*Note.* Scale: StA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, SA: Somewhat Agree, SD: Somewhat Disagree, D: Disagree, StD: Strongly Disagree.

Sixty-nine per cent either strongly agreed or agreed that "being white is associated with more opportunity in the U.S.," demonstrating an awareness of racial privilege and its societal impacts. However, 15.4% disagreed with this statement to some degree, suggesting areas for further development in recognising dynamics of racial inequity.

Similarly, 69.2% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that "schools are structured in ways that reproduce societal privileges." This alignment with the notion that educational institutions can perpetuate broader systemic inequities reflects a social awareness highlighted by Jensen et al. (2018) as vital for effective multicultural teaching. Still, 19.2% expressed disagreement, revealing some divergence in perspectives.

Responses were more varied regarding whether "my status and social position (e.g., race, gender) shape how I interact with others." While 42.3% strongly agreed or agreed, highlighting self-awareness, 26.9% somewhat or strongly disagreed – suggesting a lack of recognition about how identities influence social interactions for over a quarter of respondents.

The item "differing perspectives on social issues enrich discussion in the classroom" received strong agreement (76.9% strongly agree or agree), aligning with. Minimal disagreement (3.8%) indicates a strong social awareness of the pedagogical value in exploring diverse viewpoints.

Overall, the survey results suggest moderate endorsement of the Social Awareness disposition. While most preservice teachers demonstrated recognition of racial privilege, intersecting identities, systemic educational inequities, and the importance of exploring diverse perspectives, some responses revealed areas for continued growth.

**Advocacy.** The Advocacy component of the MTDS evaluates teachers' dedication to addressing inequalities, amplifying marginalised voices, and fostering inclusive learning environments.

**Table 4**

*Advocacy Survey Results*

| Item                                                                                                                 | StA          | A             | SA           | SD           | D            | StD          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| I am able to communicate my views without speaking down to those who disagree with me.                               | 13<br>(50%)  | 9<br>(34.6%)  | 1<br>(3.8%)  | 0<br>(0%)    | 0<br>(0%)    | 0<br>(0%)    |
| Teachers should encourage students from marginalized communities to share what they know from their experiences.     | 5<br>(19.2%) | 10<br>(38.5%) | 6<br>(23.1%) | 1<br>(3.8%)  | 0<br>(0%)    | 1<br>(3.8%)  |
| Students who are disruptive engage in classroom learning when their life circumstances are understood and respected. | 8<br>(30.8%) | 4<br>(15.4%)  | 7<br>(26.9%) | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 0<br>(0%)    |
| Teachers should challenge school procedures that privilege some students or their families over others.              | 8<br>(30.8%) | 5<br>(19.2%)  | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 4<br>(15.4%) |
| I am willing to be inconvenienced to make students feel accepted and included.                                       | 8<br>(30.8%) | 9<br>(34.6%)  | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 1<br>(3.8%)  | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 1<br>(3.8%)  |
| I have biases of others even when I am well-intended.                                                                | 3<br>(11.5%) | 4<br>(15.4%)  | 7<br>(26.9%) | 3<br>(11.5%) | 3<br>(11.5%) | 3<br>(11.5%) |
| It is my responsibility to find the resources that underprivileged students need to succeed in school.               | 6<br>(23.1%) | 9<br>(34.6%)  | 3<br>(11.5%) | 2<br>(7.7%)  | 1<br>(3.8%)  | 2<br>(7.7%)  |

*Note.* Scale: StA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, SA: Somewhat Agree, SD: Somewhat Disagree, D: Disagree, StD: Strongly Disagree.

An overwhelming 84.6% either strongly agreed or agreed that they are "able to communicate [their] views without speaking down to those who disagree." This display of respectful dialogue aligns with Jensen et al.'s (2018) characterisation of advocate teachers who engage in "uncomfortable situations and difficult conversations" (p. 5) as learning opportunities.

The item "teachers should encourage students from marginalised communities to share what they know from their experiences" garnered 57.7% strong agreement or agreement. This suggests a moderate commitment among respondents to elevating diverse voices and connecting students' lived experiences to classroom learning. These are important practices associated with effective multicultural education (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Responses were more divided regarding whether "students who are disruptive engage in classroom learning when their life circumstances are understood and respected." While 46.2% strongly agreed or agreed, 15.4% disagreed, revealing some skepticism about the role of empathy and sociocultural awareness in improving engagement.

The statement "teachers should challenge school procedures that favor some students or families over others" showed mixed opinions. 50% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed, while 30.8% disagreed. This highlights differing views on whether advocacy involves addressing institutional biases and discriminatory policies.

Almost two thirds, 65.4%, of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that they were "willing to be inconvenienced to make students feel accepted and included." This aligns with Jensen et al.'s (2018) emphasis on inclusive practices that ensure "all students—across ability, native language, social class, and so on—have equitable access to learning opportunities" (p. 4).

Overall, while the preservice teachers demonstrated strong endorsement of respectful communication and moderate support for amplifying marginalized voices, there were mixed perspectives on employing empathy, challenging institutional inequities, and prioritizing inclusivity over personal convenience. These findings indicate that the Advocacy disposition, which involves "confronting personal vulnerability and discomfort" (Jensen et al., 2018, p. 5), is an area that still requires further development.

**Reflection Questions**

At the end of the course, the students were asked to reflect on aspects related to their learning and its content. The questions were:

- 1. Has the class helped you broaden your worldview or understanding of various cultures?
- 2. What have you learned that you will be able to apply to your life?

Students wrote the reflections as discussion board entries. All entries and comments were analysed. The themes and codes are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Codes by Themes*

| Themes                                 |                                         |                                                      |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Embracing Discomfort                | 2. Self-Awareness and Bias Recognition  | 3. Effective Communication and Cultural Sensitivity  |
| 1.1 Learning from Diversity            | 2.1 Understanding Personal Bias         | 3.1 Navigating Cultural Differences in Communication |
| 1.2 Personal Growth through Discomfort | 2.2 Confronting Prejudices              | 3.2 Respectful Engagement with Diversity             |
| 1.3 Enhanced Communication Skills      | 2.3 Impact on Future Professional Roles | 3.3 Critical Thinking in Communication               |

1.4 Enhanced Communication Skills

1.5 Realising the Value of New Experiences:

1.6 Preparation for Future Professional Interactions

2.4 Personal Growth through Bias Recognition

2.5 Enhancing Interpersonal Relationships

3.4 Awareness of Non-Verbal Cues

3.5 Acknowledging and Overcoming Language Barriers

3.6 Sensitivity to Cultural Nuances

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The reflections of students in the multicultural education course highlight numerous key insights and learnings about their worldviews and how they intend to apply their newfound knowledge in their lives. These insights are categorised into three primary themes: embracing discomfort, self-awareness and bias recognition, and effective communication and cultural sensitivity. The examples below exemplify segments of the reflections coded and assigned to one of the three themes.

**Theme 1. Embracing Discomfort.** Many students highlighted the importance of stepping out of their comfort zones. They learned to interact with diverse groups of people, which enriched their experiences and broadened their perspectives.

**Learning from Diversity.** One student noted, "The most important thing that I have learned that I will use my entire life is getting uncomfortable. As much as we all want to stay with the people we know, it really is a lot of fun to meet new people." From this quote, we understand that students had the realisation that engaging with diverse groups can be both challenging and rewarding.

**Personal Growth through Discomfort.** Another student shared, "I think the most important thing I have learned in this class which is probably not one of the main goals, is to become comfortable in the uncomfortable." This demonstrates an awareness of how venturing outside one's comfort zone can result in personal development.

**Enhanced Communication Skills.** A student mentioned, "I have had to dance, speak, and group in front of or with new people. I have learned that it seems scary but has made me a better student." This reflection piece speaks on how the students embraced discomfort and that helped them improve their ability to communicate in diverse settings.

**Breaking Pre-existing Barriers.** One student described how the course set-up facilitated this learning: "In this class, at times we are forced to sit with other people and learn about different cultures." It seems the course approach encouraged students to interact with peers they might not have engaged with otherwise.

**Realizing the Value of New Experiences.** Reflecting on a specific activity, a student said, "I was worried I would run out of things to talk about but ended up finding a girl in my class who was a lot like me." This quote highlights how students' initial discomfort can lead to unexpected and meaningful connections.

**Preparation for Future Professional Interactions.** A future educator mentioned, "I know when I eventually become an educator I will have to talk to new students and those I work with. Becoming comfortable with branching out is necessary for my career choice." In this example, the student recognised the long-term value of these skills learned in the course.

Based on the reflections, it is evident that embracing discomfort was a transformative experience for many students. It not only challenged their preconceptions and comfort levels but also equipped them with crucial skills for interacting in a diverse and globalised world. The experience appears to have fostered a sense of empathy, adaptability, and openness to different cultures and perspectives.

**Theme 2. Self-Awareness and Bias Recognition.** A second theme was the recognition of personal biases and prejudices. Students noted the importance of being self-aware and understanding their own backgrounds and beliefs as a precursor to understanding others.

***Understanding Personal Bias.*** One student wrote "One thing that stood out to me in class that I will apply to my life is being able to understand myself before understanding others." This reflection segment showed the student's recognition of the need for self-reflection as a foundation for understanding others.

***Confronting Prejudices.*** Another student shared a personal realisation: "I form bias and prejudice when thinking about how people differ from me at times, but the differences between people keep things interesting and fun." This student reflection shows an awareness of innate biases and an appreciation for diversity.

***Impact on Future Professional Roles.*** A student contemplating a career in education stated, "I have learned to realise my own bias and beliefs before applying or assuming something about someone else. This could benefit me in my future and I can be more aware of how different the world can be." This is an example of a student realising biases is seen as integral to their professional and personal development.

***Personal Growth through Bias Recognition.*** A student acknowledged, "I have learned that I have a very biased personality. But now after realizing that, I can change to have a more open perspective of life." This comment displays the student's commitment to personal growth through the recognition of their biases.

***Enhancing Interpersonal Relationships.*** Another student mentioned, "I have learned how to be more conscious of my own bias or assumptions about other people. Through increased self-awareness, I can become even more empathetic and understanding towards others." This quote illustrates how self-awareness apparently led to improved relationships with others.

Thus, the opinion is that the course prompted students to participate in self-reflection, resulting in a heightened awareness of their own biases and prejudices. This self-awareness is seen as crucial for engaging more empathetically and effectively with people from diverse backgrounds. Recognising and addressing personal biases is a key step in becoming more open-minded and respectful of others' perspectives, a lesson that students identified as valuable for both their personal and professional lives.

**Theme 3. Effective Communication and Cultural Sensitivity.** The third and last theme was about the improved communication skills, especially in multicultural settings. Students reported they learned to be more respectful and sensitive to cultural differences, and this enhanced their ability to engage in meaningful dialogues.

***Navigating Cultural Differences in Communication.*** A student explained their growth in communication skills: "I've learned in this course that I will be able to apply in my life is communication. I say this because at first, I didn't know how to communicate with certain people, therefore I wouldn't talk as much, but now I do know how to communicate the correct way." This is an example on how a student went from hesitation to confidence in cross-cultural communication.

***Respectful Engagement with Diversity.*** A reflection on respectful communication was shared: "I've learned other ways to go about things to come off more respectful to the world." This self-reflection demonstrates the student's enhanced comprehension of how to interact respectfully with individuals from various backgrounds.

**Critical Thinking in Communication.** Another student emphasised the importance of thoughtful communication: "What I have learned from this course is the importance of critically analysing and questioning statements... Outlandish phrases or things that people say should and can be dissected so I can see the truth." This segment illustrates the student's development of a more analytical approach to communication, especially in challenging conversations.

**Awareness of Non-Verbal Cues.** One student discussed the importance of being attuned to non-verbal signals: "For example, if I'm having a conversation with an individual and I notice that they have their arms crossed and look irritated, I won't keep talking, instead, I would ask them like hey are you okay or ask them would they like to talk about what's on their mind." The student showed progress towards an awareness of the importance of body language and emotional cues in communication.

**Acknowledging and Overcoming Language Barriers.** A student noted, "I've learned about different cultures and that not everyone speaks English." This example illustrates the initial stage of cultural competence that some students possessed, highlighting the student's growing awareness of language barriers in communication.

**Sensitivity to Cultural Nuances.** A student captured the essence of cultural sensitivity: "I will apply my knowledge from this course by acknowledging the differences in the cultures and when I meet someone from a different culture to not make them feel isolated or alone, but however share some of their traditions and rituals with them so that they do not feel so isolated." This hints toward an understanding of cultural inclusivity again from a very basic level.

These reflections showcase the students' progress in learning how to navigate the intricacies of multicultural communication. They have gained skills in being more observant, respectful, and thoughtful in their interactions, which are crucial for effective communication in diverse settings. The emphasis on cultural sensitivity shows a deeper, if not a deep, understanding of how cultural backgrounds can influence communication styles and the importance of adapting to these differences to foster more meaningful and respectful interactions.

### ***More on Broadened Worldview and Cultural Understanding***

Most students in the multicultural education course felt that the class significantly broadened their worldview and understanding of various cultures. The students reported that learning about different cultures, biases, and perspectives was an eye-opening experience. The students expressed that gaining knowledge about various cultures, biases, and perspectives was enlightening for them. Cultures outside their own were limited. They often focused primarily on their own cultural perspectives and biases without being aware of them.

Through various class activities, lectures, and assignments, students gained exposure to new cultures, traditions, values, and viewpoints. This exposure was described as eye-opening, with students realising the vast diversity of the world and acknowledging how much they still had to learn. Specific examples that students mentioned included learning about different communication styles, family relationships, dress customs, music, and the struggles or accomplishments of various cultures and religions.

As a result of this heightened awareness, many students developed a greater appreciation for and respect towards cultural differences. They felt that they now had a broader perspective on the world and humanity. Some students also mentioned feeling more confident in their ability to understand and connect with people from diverse backgrounds in their future careers.

One student encapsulated this sentiment, saying:

*"This class has helped me broaden my worldview and understanding of various cultures. Like I said earlier, diversity day really helped me learn about a lot of different cultures. Since I want to become an elementary school teacher, it is really important I learn and understand different cultures so that I can be the best teacher I can be for the students. This class has helped me so much and I am very grateful because it will and has benefited me."*

This quote illustrates how the class activities, particularly the diversity day, provided practical knowledge and exposure to various cultures. The student emphasised that understanding diversity is crucial for their future role as a teacher.

### ***A Boost in Confidence Related to Diverse Backgrounds***

Numerous students found that the course boosted their confidence in interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds, a skill they deemed valuable for their future professional endeavours. Two students shared:

- "This class has brought me a lot of confidence so that I am able to be there for every student as much as I can. My worldview has definitely been broadened and I feel so much better."
- "With the help of this class, I feel like I will continue to learn and, most importantly, appreciate various cultures. I also feel that my understanding of myself will help me relate to others and be a better social worker."

These quotes demonstrate that students felt the class equipped them with the skills and perspectives necessary to understand and connect with people from diverse backgrounds. The first student noted an increased confidence in supporting all students as a future teacher, while the second student felt that the class enhanced their ability to appreciate diverse cultures, aiding in their future role as a social worker.

Most students agreed that the multicultural education class was beneficial in making them more open, curious, and appreciative of other cultures and perspectives. It better prepared them to interact positively with diversity in their future careers and personal lives. While a few students did not feel their worldview significantly broadened, they still acknowledged learning valuable lessons about cultural awareness and media stereotypes. Overall, the class succeeded in fostering a greater appreciation for diversity and equipping students with the skills to engage with diverse groups respectfully and effectively.

Regarding the application of their multicultural skills, the reflections of students in the multicultural education course indicate that they have gained valuable insights and skills that they plan to apply to their personal and professional lives. The course's emphasis on embracing discomfort, fostering self-awareness and recognising biases, and promoting effective communication and cultural sensitivity underscores the profound impact it had on their outlooks and capabilities to engage with diverse groups.

### **Discussion**

Our findings align with Banks's (1993) multicultural education dimensions, suggesting that the course, although at times at a basic level, cultivated critical consciousness and an understanding of to promote educational equity for students of all backgrounds. The development of the Meekness disposition, characterized by openness to learning from diverse perspectives and self-reflection, resonates with Gorski's (1999) and Schussler's (2006), as cited in Jensen et al. (2018), emphasis on humility in effective multicultural teaching.

The moderate endorsement of the Social Awareness disposition indicates progress in recognising systemic inequities and that it is important to incorporate multiple perspectives in the classroom. However, responses also revealed areas for potential growth, particularly in understanding intersectionality and institutional perpetuation of inequities. This aligns with Jensen et al.'s (2018) assertion that developing multicultural dispositions is an on-going process in teacher preparation programs.

The mixed perspectives regarding the Advocacy disposition support Mills and Ballantyne's (2016) characterisation of it as an "advanced" multicultural disposition. While students demonstrated strong endorsement of inclusive practices, there was more hesitation in challenging institutional biases and prioritising inclusivity over personal convenience. This emphasises the importance of on-going efforts to nurture this essential perspective through thoughtfully crafted interventions and practical field experiences.

Students' reflections provided rich insights into the course's transformative impact, highlighting broadened worldviews, enhanced appreciation for cultural diversity, and increased confidence in cross-cultural interactions. These outcomes align with research emphasising the importance of self-awareness, empathy, and cultural sensitivity in creating inclusive learning environments (Cherng & Davis, 2019; Staats, 2016).

The acknowledgment of personal biases and dedication to self-reflection shown by students is consistent with research on confronting implicit biases in educational settings (Chin et al., 2020; Jacoby-Senghor et al., 2016; Staats, 2016). This awareness represents a crucial step towards creating equitable learning environments and engaging empathetically with diverse students (Lampert & Browne, 2022; Schussler & Bercaw, 2021; Wilcoxon et al., 2021).

### **Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research**

While this study provided insights related to multicultural education, it is important to recognise limitations. Firstly the research was carried out at a single HBCU institution, which impacts the generalizability of the findings to other higher education institutions. Future research could be enhanced by adopting a multi-institutional approach to evaluate the consistency of outcomes across various settings, including HBCUs and others.

Secondly, the study relied on participants self-reported data, which could be influenced by a desire to appear acceptable especially considering the nature of multicultural subjects. Incorporating data from observations or evaluations by cooperating teachers during experiences could provide further validation of how students' attitudes are developing.

Lastly, while focusing on post-only results allowed us to capture a snapshot of students multicultural perspectives, a before and after study design or even better a longitudinal study tracking future teachers into their early teaching careers would provide valuable insights into how multicultural education courses impact teaching practices in the long run..

Despite these limitations, this unique study provides valuable insights into multicultural teacher education. It highlights the successes and on-going challenges in developing multicultural dispositions among HBCU preservice teachers. Subsequent research can leverage these discoveries to enhance multicultural education programs, fostering more equitable and inclusive educational environments.

### **Conclusion**

This research investigated how a multicultural education course influenced the development of critical dispositions and cultural competence among preservice teachers at HBCUs. These findings, from both quantitative survey data and qualitative reflections, demonstrate the transformative potential of carefully designed coursework in shaping important multicultural teaching dispositions.

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data provided a comprehensive understanding of the course's impact, validating our mixed-methods approach. Survey results revealed moderate to strong endorsement of the Meekness, Social Awareness, and Advocacy dispositions as conceptualized by Jensen et al. (2023). The students' reflective responses provided valuable insights that complemented and enriched the findings, shedding light on their personal growth, expanded worldviews, and increased appreciation for cultural diversity.

This integration of quantitative and qualitative data allowed us to capture the students' dispositions and individual perspectives students had about the course. The alignment between survey responses and reflective comments strengthened our confidence in the course's efficacy in cultivating critical multicultural dispositions.

RQ1. *"How does a multicultural education course at an HBCU enhance students' self-awareness and recognition of personal biases?"* In response to RQ1, the results of the study indicate that the multicultural education course improved students' self-awareness and recognition of personal biases. The data from the MTDS showed moderate to strong endorsement of Meekness and Social Awareness dispositions reflecting a comprehension of students' cultural backgrounds and biases. Additionally qualitative reflections echoed these results as many students shared their increased self-reflection and recognised their own prejudices and assumptions.

RQ2. *"In what ways do students report changes in their understanding and management of their own biases after completing the course?"* In response to this research question, students noted transformations in how they perceive and handle personal biases after completing the course. As the findings of the qualitative data analysis showed, one found evidence that students had learned to evaluate their beliefs and assumptions with many expressing a dedication to personal growth by recognising biases. Students also reported feeling better equipped to manage these biases in their future professional roles, particularly in educational settings.

RQ3. *"How do students at an HBCU describe broadening their worldviews and understanding of various cultures through a multicultural education course?"* Finally, regarding the third research question, students at the HBCU reported an expansion in their worldviews and appreciation of diverse cultures following participation in the course. Many students expressed that the class was enlightening, as it exposed them to perspectives, customs, and values that were previously unfamiliar to them. The hands on activities involving interactions, with cultures were highlighted as particularly influential in broadening students' cultural perspectives.

Teacher preparation programs can enhance multicultural dispositions and cultural competence by providing structured opportunities for self-reflection, exploring diverse perspectives, and confronting personal biases. This study underscores the critical role of multicultural education in addressing systemic inequities and preparing students for diverse communities and schools, whether through programs at HBCUs or other institutions. Future teachers can create transformative learning experiences that celebrate diversity, challenge injustice, and empower all students by embracing discomfort, recognizing biases, and fostering inclusive communication.

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None.

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