

## Article

# Strategies for Attention to Diverse Education in Omani Society: Perceptions of Secondary School Students

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**Abstract:** In a climate of increasing multiculturalism in education, classrooms have become more diverse, offering educators and institutions both opportunities and challenges. In response to changing advancements and trends in education, school administrators claim that classroom diversity can develop students' learning potential when properly harnessed and matched with inclusive pedagogy. This research reflects how diversity within the Omani education system can be enhanced by comparing the beliefs and experiences of students in diverse classrooms. This information provides a better understanding of students' learning needs based on their perception of diversity. A descriptive study was performed with a quantitative approach, whereby a sample of 283 students completed a survey. The results indicate that female students rated more highly on the teaching method scale in comparison to male students. Additional post hoc tests on simple effects confirmed that non-Arab students tend to rate their teachers comparatively more highly in terms of teaching methods, curriculum design, assessment techniques, and practical skills than Omani and Arab pupils across the different subjects. This study offers valuable insights and practical strategies for cultivating diversity and inclusion in diverse settings in Omani schools.

**Keywords:** Internationalization; globalization; migration; diverse classroom; equity; inclusion



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## 1. Introduction

The notion of diversity can be viewed as the noticeable distinctions among members of a group, inclusive of dissimilarities related to particular sections of a population in terms of traditions and social standards as well as organization-related dissimilarities [1]. It includes both scope and heterogeneity, meaning that it suggests a noticeable level of dissimilarity in a collection of qualities among the members of a specific social group. In the context of education, diversity usually refers to an assembly of people with their own differences and random unanticipated likenesses [2]. According to NCATE, The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, diversity indicates dissimilarities of ethnic identity, race, social and economic standing, sex, being distinctively gifted or disabled, language, religious belief, sexuality, and geographic location among individuals or groupings of individuals [3]. In a similar definition proposed by Banks [4], diversity in education is considered as a notion, a progressive development that is essentially directed towards altering the organization of centers of education in order to afford the same opportunities with respect to attaining academic eminence to students of different genders and exceptionalities and from varying racial/ethnic backgrounds, languages, and cultural groups. Diversity as adopted and defined in this study means the “natural and acquired differences among members of the education community resulting from individual differences in gender, age, nationality, language, disability, socio-economic status and geographical region” [5].

Considering that the majority of the world societies are becoming more and more interdependent in terms of their economies, cultures, and population, classrooms have become diversified, and students in modern classes seem far more dissimilar than they did in the past few decades [6]. This difference is evident in a variety of areas, such as racial and cultural concerns, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, learning styles, preparedness, and other characteristics [7]. Serving such a diverse range of pupils has generated a demand for adjustments to be applied in all stages of education, specifically in classes. However, the application of these adjustments by many teaching practitioners has not been productive enough to address the various social and academic demands of diverse pupils and to make sure all students are educated fairly and at high standards [8]. Furthermore, continuous efforts for the inclusivity of pupils displaying diversity in several and interconnecting levels may be burdensome or even overpowering to a large number of educators. Practicing inclusivity in the classroom environment intentionally involves a great deal of effort, and many centers of education are almost clueless about which point to start from or which way to direct their attempts towards this issue [2]. This research study was organized and conducted based on the consideration that the appreciation and management of diversity as a whole and in the school environments as a specifically significant element is now more crucial than at any time in the past.

In the context of education, eliminating prejudice and discrimination towards people of different cultures while promoting social justice and equality among all social groups is a primary goal of diversity [9,10]. In this regard, several policies, practices and programs have been adopted, and a large number of education programs around the world have been designed to educate teaching practitioners about incorporating diversity and multicultural issues into their curricula and instruction [11]. Such programs can provide a comprehensive picture of the mechanism which protects diversity, as diversity is considered to be a consequence of globalization which affects all aspects of people's lives, including styles, types, and stages of education [12]. These programs teach educators to value the unique aspects of what makes each student different, and help them to embrace those differences in the classroom in the face of the striking cultural disparity between teachers and students. The latter has been acknowledged as a serious ongoing issue, and efforts have been made to mitigate its effects [13]. Hence, by nurturing an awareness of students' perceptions, educators can create a multicultural classroom that cultivates learning via cultural diversity activities. Ultimately, such activities can help students from different backgrounds succeed in the classroom environment.

As mentioned above, research aimed at measuring students' views on diversity in the classroom is important in that it provides schools and governing bodies with the means to continue to develop and refine diversity initiatives aimed at improving the success of all students; there is, however, a lack of information on the opinions of students in relation to this topic. Most of the research conducted to date has focused on the perceptions and experiences of pre-service teachers regarding diversity [14,15]. In the current body of academic literature, there is an absence of research on the experiences of diverse students [16,17]. According to Yuan [11], it is imperative to develop an understanding of students' actual learning experiences and challenges in order to assist them with enhancing their academic development as well as minimizing the effects produced by differences in culture and race in the educational settings. However, by planning in advance for diversity in the classroom in all its manifestations and reacting to the learning demands of every single pupil, both inclusiveness and standard of instruction can be enhanced in order to benefit as many learners as possible.

Despite the wealth of literature available on the roles of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status in education, very few studies have examined these factors in the context of student evaluations of teaching methods, practical skills, and curricular design in diverse classrooms across various settings [18]. The present study is aimed at producing deeper insight into these aspects within Omani international schools in order to determine the specific skills and competences needed by teachers and trainers to facilitate students'

individual learning processes. Thus, students' perceptions of diversity are a key factor in constructing a body of knowledge on the part of instructors [19], in order to aid them in approaching the increasing diversity in their classrooms and creating a more socially inclusive educational environment.

This study undertook a descriptive and inferential study in which were set the following research questions:

1. Does gender affect students' ratings across the different subjects (Mathematics, English, Science, ICT, and Arabic) for teaching methods, assessment techniques, curricular design, and practical skills in diverse classrooms?
2. Does ethnic origin affect students' ratings across the different subjects (Mathematics, English, Science, ICT, and Arabic) for teaching methods, assessment techniques, curricular design, and practical skills in diverse classrooms?
3. Does socio-economic status affect students' ratings across the different subjects (Mathematics, English, Science, ICT, and Arabic) for teaching methods, assessment techniques, curricular design, and practical skills in diverse classrooms?

This study provides insights that can help governments and schools to address diversity with the aim of achieving a more equitable and inclusive education system. Furthermore, it reviews the mechanisms in the system of education in schools that could facilitate upgrading the public school structure in order to meet contemporary demands concerning diversity and its accompanying issues, enabling students to reap the advantages of education in schools where diversity is present in classes.

## 2. Diversity

Societies have become progressively more multicultural in nature, and the demographics of students studying in schools today are becoming increasingly diverse [20]. Diversity has garnered widespread attention in the past ten years due to the increase in global migration which has caused the formation of societies characterized by cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity [15]. If such societies are to continue to exist and develop, their diverse members and groups need to be active and included in social interactions [21].

Education plays a key part in societies that are patiently and sustainably moving through the process of development. A system of education that is meant to transform people's perceptions of diversity and which embraces change and difference has a pivotal role in shaping the future [22]. Diversity in education has become an increasingly salient topic of discussion and concern among people involved in education [23]. In educational settings, diversity means recognition of differences among people in terms of their cultural heritage, racial and ethnic identities, gender, and class [24]. Diversity among people may be a factor in higher achievement, greater productivity, creative problem solving, and cognitive growth. In this respect, educators have a duty to help society remain sustainable, change desirably, and develop in terms of social standards of life [15].

The academic sphere is considered a prime location for the coming together of students from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds [25]. Preparing in-service teachers with diverse classrooms exerts pressure on academic institutions to include diversity skills in school curricula and to understand the perspectives of students. It is clear, however, that diversity programming, along with classroom diversity and interaction opportunities, contribute greatly to improving the education of all college and university students [24].

The global migration of students over the past four decades has made institutions worldwide more diverse. Global migration and the growth of the world economy have created an urgent need for diversity in the sphere of education. Growing awareness of the different cultural practices of students in the classroom has led to the need for new strategies for diversity in the education system [26]. Learning about diversity and inclusion can be structured as an exercise whereby students are invited to critically reflect on their own personal beliefs. However, few scholars have paid attention to the ways in which diversity in classrooms can be enhanced by understanding students' needs (often referred to as personalized learning). This learning approach focuses on diverse classroom pedagogies

and educational practices that prioritize diversity [27]. Thus, in order to meet students' needs, it is crucial for instructors to adjust their pedagogical approaches according to the experiences and reflections of students regarding classroom diversity. Through this understanding and appreciation, cross-cultural relationships can be formed and students will become ready to feel that they are responsible members of the global community [28].

As classrooms in Oman become more and more diverse, and teachers encounter students who differ in terms of background, culture, nationality, language, disability, and learning style, and are required to diversify their own perspectives accordingly. Diversity in the classroom can be considered in terms of how much the curriculum reflects the aspects of cultural and human diversity [29]. Everything teachers do in their classroom should be centered upon meeting the needs of diverse student populations [3]. Teachers need to develop their perception of the distinctive characteristics of each student having to do with their education, emotions, and culture in a way that they are able to support the learners in their educational and life journeys. In order to effectively assist in culturally sensitive learning, instructors are required to plan and run sessions of instruction where the different educational needs, learning styles, and levels of intelligence of each single learner are taken into account [3]. According to Jeannin [30], teachers must provide support and adequate activities for students and develop inclusive teaching skills to cope with increasing levels of diversity. This standpoint has had consequences for the development of education.

The modern classrooms of Oman are a fair reflection of the nation's increasing cultural diversity. Al-Ani [12] has indicated that schools in the Sultanate are among those that offer many methods of education due to the presence of a range of cultures, languages, and religious backgrounds. Hence, it is important to shed light on patterns of diversity that exist within these schools. This concept is instrumental in the creation of diversity awareness in order to embrace the uniqueness of all individuals on many levels, race, religious beliefs, ethnicity, age, gender, physical abilities, political beliefs, and socio-economic status among them [31]. In this context, awareness of diversity is integrated within the framework for inclusive education and establishes as its starting point the recognition that multiple requirements exist in relation to the educational process that each student undergoes. Such requirements need to be thoroughly fulfilled in the educational system supported by the presently effective provisions of the legal system in order for all citizens to be provided with equal opportunities [32]. This leaves teachers with the task of addressing learner differences in the regular classroom [33].

When the class is in progress, the teacher is required to be aware of and react to their diverse students' specific cultural needs. Teachers must be prepared to identify diverse students' strengths, weaknesses, aspirations, limitations, and special needs [3]. According to Canrinus, Klette, and Hammerness [19], understanding students' experiences regarding program coherence is crucial. The same authors believe that considering learners' impressions in studies of educational programs is similarly crucial. In terms of self-reported data, learners are considered a reliable source of information [34] compared with other groups. Researchers have emphasized that learners' perceptions of the setting where they are learning tend to produce an effect on their learning performance [19,34]. Other research on secondary schooling has shown students' perceptions of their teachers' behavior and of the ways in which they are instructed exert an effect on their attitude towards their learning experience as well as their study achievements [35,36]. Receiving education in a diverse environment may increase students' learning and develop their critical thinking abilities, one of the major objectives in education [37]. Hence, students' perceptions and reflections on the education provided in diverse classrooms have become highly valued.

### *2.1. The Importance of Diversity in Education*

Cultural diversity in education is on the increase. Learning in a setting where students are from diverse backgrounds creates a richer learning environment as students in such an environment are more likely to learn from peers with dissimilar experiences of life [38]. An educational institution's commitment to bringing diversity to its students and educational

community generates self-reported improvement in awareness of cultures as well as a dedication to developing learners' appreciation of other races [29]. Various research methods and designs for investigating the advantages that diversity brings to education have been proposed, each one being a positive contribution to the body of knowledge in this area that informs practice. It has been identified that in the United States, political leaders, legislators, and lawyers are trying to find scientific evidence approving the advantages of diversity in education [38,39]. However, research on this matter has motivated the centers of higher education to be more dedicated to supporting student populations with racial diversity and educational environments where learning beyond cultural borders is in process [38]. Hence, educational institutions undertaking and making use of studies on the advantages that diversity offers to education are grasping the chance to enhance both the climate on campus with regard to diverse races and ethnic groups and the wider world in which we live [39].

Whitla et al. [40] have studied the educational benefits that diversity brings to schools of medicine through examining what students at Harvard and UCSF think of the educational advantages of diverse bodies of students. Students reported that their interactions within a diverse student population greatly enhanced their educational experiences in medical school. These students strongly supported the maintaining or strengthening of current affirmative action policies relating to admissions at their respective schools. Another study conducted by Kurlaender and Yun [41] discovered that students invariably reveal experiencing substantial levels of convenience when they share their place of living or work with peers belonging to a diverse race or ethnicity, are more than willing to interact with others as functioning adults in groups of diverse members, and declare improvement in their levels of appreciating perspectives dissimilar to those of their own as a result of being educated as a member of a diverse student community.

Educational experiences in diverse settings better prepare students for future interactions in heterogeneous environments, especially in public service sectors (e.g., business and medicine). A study examining the involvement of undergraduate students of business in diversity initiatives found that such involvement brought about an increase in students' personal multicultural abilities, making the students more attractive to hiring organizations [29]. Diversity offers a chance to engender higher levels of learning in students because they stand to learn more when they can sense the security to communicate dissimilar viewpoints and personalities with their peers in their learning environment [2]. According to Wells, Fox, and Cordova-Cobo [38], studying in schools with diverse members provides students with the opportunity to navigate adulthood in an increasingly diverse society, which is a skill valued by employers. Hence, students educated in diverse environments can develop capabilities and skills in a range of areas, and thus be more motivated and well-equipped to participate in the increasingly complex social settings of today's world [42].

The presence of diversity in the classroom serves to enhance the educational experiences and outcomes of individual students. Furthermore, diversity boosts student growth and development in the cognitive, affective, and interpersonal domains [43]. According to Delk [10], a classroom with students from culturally-diverse backgrounds offers a wealth of opportunities for teachers and students to learn distinct viewpoints from one another, acquire understanding, and encourage cross-cultural tolerance. Moreover, diversity brings development to abilities such as thinking critically and solving problems, as well as other qualities connected with success in academic endeavors, namely, student motivation and satisfaction, academic self-reliance, and general knowledge [38]. A shift from dualistic to relativistic thinking has been observed in students participating in diversity activities, implying that these students were more open to respecting and considering different points of view when the right answers were not yet known or clear to them [29]. Similarly, students exposed to diversity, whether in classroom or in less formal interactive situations occurring in environments outside the classroom, gain cognitive advantages through reconstructing the way they perceive and approach the problems.

The findings of Milem [43] suggest that students who attend institutions with higher levels of diversity and report high levels of interaction with diverse people are more likely to live and work in desegregated environments after leaving college. In multicultural institutions, students have access to various involvement opportunities, with a focus on assisting them in exploring their personal characters, principles, passions, and methods of interaction [29]. These types of opportunities help students to understand their own identities, which in turn may influence their career choices [44]. Therefore, a classroom containing students from culturally diverse backgrounds affords many opportunities for both teachers and students to experience a range of different viewpoints, acquire understanding, and develop cross-cultural tolerance [10]. Hence, education at the present time grows more crucial and diverse as a result of changes in demographic diversity imposed by elements such as different cultures, races, and ethnic groups [11].

The positive aspects of diverse and heterogeneous learning environments mentioned above make a significant contribution to societal, individual, and economic development [29]. This type of background is deeply appreciated by employers due to its significance in the work environment, which is another factor that equips students with the capabilities required to live in a globally interconnected society as functional and effective members [45]. Employers expect graduate students from diverse universities to have the ability to perform their duties in the workplace and successfully communicate with diverse members of society, where globalized economy is on the rise on a daily basis [39]. They have acknowledged the importance of diversity among student bodies in higher education, recognizing its importance to the full development of human capital and therefore to the nation's global competitiveness [45]. Hence, if our students are not fully prepared to engage and collaborate with people whose backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives are different from their own, the future of our economy, democracy, and our general status on earth will all suffer [45].

## 2.2. Teaching Strategies for Diverse Schools

Global educational trends at the moment reveal considerable changes in student populations over the past twenty or thirty years [39]. As educational systems have become increasingly diverse, many educators have utilized their pedagogical expertise to develop culturally relevant teaching methods that promote the educational benefits of integration [46]. Internationally, there is growing interest in the use of strategies that place an emphasis on the power of market forces to improve educational equity for students [47]. In this respect, teachers need to become culturally responsive in order to address cultural differences which influence student learning.

In the literature, patterns of inattention to diverse learners are evident. Teachers view difference as problematic, rather than as an inevitable phenomenon that offers possibilities for teachers and students alike [33]. Most of the time, they have preconceptions and misconceptions about their students; they consider their pupils' academic skills to be more limited than they really are, and possess negative attitudes about students and their families [6,48]. This is frequently linked to a lack of training in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse groups, together with a lack of intercultural competence [49,50]. There is growing interest internationally in the use of strategies that address these challenges by placing an emphasis on the power of market forces to improve educational standards [47].

A study conducted by Al-Ani [12] outlined six strategies for educational diversity encompassing the school's vision, mission, and strategic plan while taking into account academic views of the presence of diversity and multiculturalism in order to develop and distribute educational equity among diverse students, recognizing that a degree of patience must be exercised in dealing with diversity in classrooms. The researcher stated that an attitude of tolerance in terms of the acceptance of students' ideas in the classroom leads to the development of creative talents among individuals. Al-Ani further reported that effective communication among school administrators, instructors, and students fosters a high degree of acceptance and understanding of the cultural beliefs of others. Finally, in the

classroom flexibility is critical in terms of working hours, respecting the privacy of students and staff members of many races and backgrounds, and observing all religious holidays.

Another study by Banks [51] highlighted five dimensions of multicultural education, including content integration, whereby teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures and groups in their methods and activities in order to assist learners in forming a clearer picture of cultural differences, perspectives, and prejudices in a field of study. Reducing bias is correlated with learners' attitudes toward different cultures and the various strategies that teachers use to develop these attitudes and democratic values. Teachers who employ equity pedagogy are able to design and use a variety of teaching tools that improve the potential for academic achievement of all students, independent of any matters related to gender, race, ethnicity, or cultural background. Finally, the school becomes a complex social system when it integrates its own culture with the surrounding social structure [9].

As mentioned above, in order to help every student to achieve success, providing an attractive and engaging classroom setting to motivate learners in their personal learning is a requirement [28]. Teachers must create a reliable, inclusive learning atmosphere where learners have a sense of belonging and are ready to take chances on both the personal and academic levels [3]. Moreover, they must become involved in communities with diversity in order to truly acquire and apply the knowledge needed to interact productively with students from diverse backgrounds [52]. Tomlinson, Brighton, Hertberg, Callahan, Moon, Brimijoin, Conover, and Reynolds [33] stated that teachers should modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, and learning activities in order to address the diverse needs of individual students. Additionally, they must put their students at the heart of the educational process, using their unique interests and strength as a chance to attain successful results in their studies [6].

Consequently, as schools recognize the importance of preparing students for an increasingly diversified society, school leaders should prioritize those strategies necessary for promoting significant change in diverse classrooms. Courses directly related to diversity should be incorporated in teacher education programs, and provision should be made for both pre- and in-service teachers to increase their competences in such areas as psychology of education, teaching methodology, and classroom management through the inclusion of relevant activities in the pedagogical courses. Cultural competency is a process that requires assistance and counselling [6]. Spindler and Spindler [53] propose a method called cultural therapy, which is a training procedure for teachers to build cultural competence by combining personal awareness with professional analysis and cultural knowledge with instructional action.

### 3. Oman Context

The Sultanate of Oman, as it is officially named, is a Muslim Arab state located in the Middle East. Based on the 2010 national census, the extent of the country's total land area is 309,500 km<sup>2</sup>, mostly consisting of desert (82%), with geographic variations such as plains, highlands, and mountainous areas [54]. Situated at the south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula, its population totals 5,915,132, as per on the National Centre for Statistics and Information [55]. Omanis form about 63% of the total population, while expatriates form about 37%. Most of the expatriates are from Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan.

Oman is geographically linked to Asia, Africa, and Europe, and controls the world's oldest known water trade corridor—connecting the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf—which means that the location of the state has considerable strategic magnitude [54]. In 2014, a report prepared by Oman's Ministry of Information declared that the crucial geostrategic position taken up by the country "has always been a major factor in determining its politics, options and approach to a wide range of issues and developments" (p.5). In terms of geography, strong relationships have been established between Oman and the five other neighboring Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states; the GCC is considered to be one of the most active regional forums, cooperating on a variety of economic, social, and political issues [54].

Oman has eleven governorates: Musandam, Al Buraimi, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Muscat, A'Dhahirah, A'Sharqiyah North, A'Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta, A'Dakhiliyah, and Dhofar. Each governorate includes several provinces [56]. This research was located in one of the districts of Muscat, as this governorate has, over previous years, witnessed active development in every sector and participates in economic activities at the international level to an extent. According to Al-Azri [57], at present, "Muscat and the coastal areas have a culturally and occupationally diverse population."

#### *Education System in Oman*

The long-term development strategy of Oman Vision 2040 emphasizes "upholding heritage, genuine traditions and the Omani identity built on Islamic values of tolerance, as the basis for Omanis to deal with globalization and its variables and to interact with other societies of diverse cultures and values" (Available online: <https://www.omaninfo.om>, accessed on 14 February 2022) which affect Oman's educational policy. Furthermore, education has been identified as a potential future economic driver, and is a focus of development under this strategy. In Oman, education is the culmination of His Majesty's shared vision and the laws of the Sultanate, both of which are informed by the Islamic creed [58]. It follows that the educational system is extremely important to the Omani government.

The Sultanate of Oman has a rich record of political, cultural, social, and economic achievements [59]. The country was recognized in 2010 as the nation attaining the greatest extent of development in the previous forty years by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) [54]. Within the context of the comprehensive development of the Sultanate, one of the Sultan's first priorities was to address the issue of illiteracy, believing that education, even "under the shade of a tree", was the most effective weapon against ignorance [54]. Hence, the Omani government has sought to provide educational institutions with every required resource in order to create educational environments that are accessible to all learners regardless of their personal, economic, social, cultural, geographical, or ethnic background [60]. In brief, the Omani government sought and seeks to create a diverse education system which is seen to assure high standards, equity, and excellence in addition to being compatible with the conventions of equal opportunity, non-discrimination, and unlimited access [61], because diversity is considered to be a consequence of globalization that affects all aspects of people's lives as well as all styles, types, and stages of education [12].

Education can be considered a venture or investment, as it develops the ability and proficiency of individuals, ultimately leading to gains in productivity and, therefore, increased profits for both organizations and their prospective employees. Oman as a country has undertaken the task of employing various methods in order to generate income and establish diversity in its economic system [62]. In order to achieve this goal, the country's political authorities have embraced the notion that the successful development of communities relies on one of the underlying principles of education, that is, that the overall development of the learner is paramount [61]. However, based on the theory of human capital, education as an investment is expected to produce financial benefit or investment gains in various ways [61]. This investment may generate economic growth and benefits or may result in improved productivity [63]. In this regard, the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Oman has confirmed the need to align education to societal needs, implementing a series of procedures and methods which promote diversity through basic and post-basic education systems, curriculum development, research skills and methodology, technology, and graduation projects [64].

In Oman, school education lasts for twelve years and is divided into three stages, primary, preparatory, and secondary. Basic education takes a ten-year period and is continued for another complementary two years. It falls into two different cycles: the first covers grade 1 to 4, and the second grades 5 to 10. In the first cycle, male and female students are mixed in the same schools, while in the second cycle they are separated into different schools. The post-basic (secondary school) stage then covers grades 11 to 12. At the secondary level, students may develop a core specialization in an area of study, such

as science, while having a choice of electives covering various other subjects of interest. Education in government schools is provided free of charge and equally to both boys and girls; these institutions cater largely to Omani nationals, while international schools accommodate a variety of nationalities and languages. The majority of these schools are based in the capital, Muscat, and generally offer a high standard of education and modern facilities.

#### 4. Theoretical Framework

As attention to diversity has increased, the importance of providing opportunities to develop knowledge regarding the aspects of diversity has become paramount [24]. Although the homogeneity of the past has given place to increasingly widespread diversity, educators in a large number of settings do not seem to have made their practices compatible with these trends. While acquiring diversity skills is widely acknowledged to be a compelling and effective means of reorganizing the traditional classroom to integrate students of diverse abilities, interests, and learning profiles, the theoretical principles around this lack empirical validity [65]. The theoretical principles explaining how learning takes place, what is learned by the learners, and the teaching strategies utilized by the instructor have been the focus of much discussion in educational circles [22]. In this study, the theory of cognitive development proposed by Vygotsky is used as a framework, as it offers several important implications for learning and teaching in present time [66].

Theory provides teachers with many effective strategies for problem solving. For instance, by studying articles about diversity among students, teachers are able to familiarize themselves with many strategies for valuing student diversity in their classrooms. Consequently, teachers should study the theoretical aspects of teaching and develop various strategies, in this way supporting themselves to become flexible in using the most effective approaches to resolve students' issues [37]. In this regard, a number of scholars, researchers, and school principals have considered the social constructivist theory of learning produced and developed by the Russian psychologist Vygotsky (1896–1934) as being central to improvements in instruction, changes in the classroom, and redevelopment [65]. Learning theory addresses the sociocultural factors of integration, especially curricular and pedagogical approaches, as well as discipline policies and procedures that affect the school climate [46].

Sociocultural theory seems to be one of the most influential and dominant theories for dealing with cultural diversity under changing local, national, and global circumstances [22]. Sociocultural theory, drawing on the work of Vygotsky [67], has significant implications for teaching, schooling, and education. This theory is based on the premise that the individual learner must be studied within a particular social and cultural context [65]. Sociocultural theory is an alternative pedagogy, one that in a fast-changing globalized world is sensitive to understanding cultural diversity and its complexities. Furthermore, sociocultural theory places learning in the context of various interrelated historical, cultural, institutional, and communicative processes. In this theory, human beings are considered as cultural and historical entities who establish a matrix of social relationships and processes. What is viewed as learning and development is defined and redefined by the changing nature of these interactions and types of engagement in activities [22].

In sociocultural theory, learning is reframed as an open-ended process in which new and different ways of thinking, feeling, and acting may emerge as individuals change and develop in their interactions, interpersonal relationships, social practices, and collective action [22]. Within the context of contemporary education, social contact, teacher–student engagement, physical space and organization, meaningful instruction, scaffolding, and student aptitude are all considered important and need to be taken into consideration in the practice of teaching. Vygotsky's theory, with its emphasis on social interaction, believes that student–teacher relationship should be collaborative and that learning should be reciprocal [68]. Based on Vygotsky's theory, teachers should design the lessons in such a way that instruction extends the student slightly above his or her current developmental

level, building on the base of existing knowledge while motivating the learner to move ahead into areas that pose greater challenges [69]. In this regard, curricula should be designed to engage students and potentially influence their levels of motivation [65].

It is necessary for the teachers to have the knowledge and skills to address to the growing diversity of contemporary classrooms. Addressing the various differences and interests of students seems to further inspire them to be more involved in the class and invites them to maintain their commitment and optimism towards learning [33]. If these fundamental differences are ignored, individual students may fall behind, lose enthusiasm, and finally fail to succeed [65]. Therefore, in both schools and communities, venues must be created where people of all backgrounds and abilities can express their concerns, share their experiences and ideas in their personal ways and words, participate in exploratory discussions, and negotiate numerous perspectives [22].

## 5. Method

This research draws on data from post-basic level students at Omani international schools across a range of courses. In this section, our findings from the survey data on candidates' experiences of diversity during their time in multiple classes are provided.

### 5.1. Participants

To collect the data, a face-to-face survey was conducted to investigate learners' experiences with diversity. This study used a stratified random sampling method in which certain subgroups—or strata—were selected for the sample in the same proportion as they existed in the population. In October 2021, a questionnaire was distributed to 283 students enrolled in post-basic education at international schools in Muscat, Oman. The purpose of choosing these students, who were in 11th and 12th grade, was that they attended multiple classes, and therefore had sufficient experience of diversity. The questionnaire was the main source of primary data. A paper and pencil procedure was used. Almost every student attending the class at the time the survey was handed out supplied the required data and returned the survey document. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the diverse students.

**Table 1.** Participant Description.

Variable	Level	Frequency	(%)
Gender	Male	157	55.48
	Female	126	44.52
Ethnicity	Omani	97	34.27
	Arab	74	26.15
	Non-Arab	112	39.58
Family Socio-Economic Status	Low-income	56	19.79
	Middle-income	138	48.76
	High-income	89	31.45
	Total		283

### 5.2. Procedure

This study recruited participants at five international schools in Muscat, Oman. All questions were mandatory, and their completion lasted about 20 min. Each participant received a detailed summary of the study's scope and protocol. The confidentiality of the responses was assured. The instructors distributed the questionnaire to their students, who in turn provided their informed consent to participate.

### 5.3. Instruments

A questionnaire was formulated comprising eighteen items, with each item rated according to a 5-point Likert-type scale as follows: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly agree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. The items on this questionnaire were adapted from the CAEP (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation) set of

standards and were used to collect data for this study. The questionnaire was translated from Arabic to English by an English-speaking expert, and respondents could choose whether to answer the Arabic or English version. This study addressed the students' degree of agreement with assertions regarding the teaching methods of instructors in diverse classrooms (nine items), such as: "The teaching methods used by instructors in diverse classrooms provide opportunities to use tools and resources for maximizing my learning in diverse contexts". In the survey, we addressed assessment techniques (two items) and curricular design (three items), for example: "Curricula and courses enable students to learn content from diverse cultural contexts". Finally, we evaluated the practical skills of students in diverse classrooms (four items), such as: "Diverse classrooms have assisted in improving my problem-solving skills". Table 2 illustrates the measures of internal consistency of the scales based on the available sample and number of items. The measures of the internal consistency were solid for every scale, ranging between 0.77 for the scale of "teaching methods" and 0.9 for the scale of "academic achievement". Answers to the questionnaire were anonymous.

**Table 2.** Cronbach's Alpha Internal Consistency Reliability for the Instruments.

Variables	No. of Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Teaching Method (TM)	9	0.86
Curricular Design (CD)	3	0.9
Assessment Technique (AM)	2	0.83
Practical Skills (PS)	4	0.77
Total	18	

#### 5.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed in several ways. Descriptive analysis was used to obtain percentages, frequencies, and means in order to describe and interpret the demographic information. With the purpose of examining the similarities and differences between students' perceptions of diversity, this study employed multivariate and univariate tests using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to obtain applicable outcomes. Additional analysis was performed in the case of interactions being statistically significant by running tests on simple main effects. For effect size, partial eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) was conducted. Partial  $\eta^2$  is the proportion of the total variance from which variations arising from other factors and interactions are eliminated [18].

## 6. Results

A unique data collection comprising 283 post-basic level students from international schools in Oman was used with SPSS to test the model and outcomes of the study. The demographic details are presented in Table 3. The overall percentages of male and female students were 55.48% and 44.52%, respectively. Over a third of students (34.27%) were Omani, a quarter (26.15%) were Arab, and 39.58% were non-Arab. The majority of respondents (48.76%) were from middle-income families, with 31.45% and 19.79% coming from higher-income and lower-income backgrounds, respectively. The majority of fathers of participants (54.41%) had received a moderate level of education, while 38.45% held a higher education degree; only a small number (6.71%) had received lower levels of education. Similarly, 44.88% of participants' mothers held an education degree, 31.09% a higher education qualification, and only a quarter (24.02) a lower level of education.

Q1: Does gender affect students' ratings across the different subjects (Mathematics, English, Science, ICT, and Arabic) for teaching methods, assessment techniques, curricular design, and practical skills in diverse classrooms?

There was a significant multivariate effect observed for subject (Wilks' lambda = 0.698,  $F(4.273) = 38.244$ , level of significance:  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.23$ ). Another significant multivariate effect was obtained for the students' gender (Wilks' lambda = 0.92,  $F(5.273) = 13.743$ ,

$p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.001$ ). Further univariate analysis revealed significant differences for teaching methods ( $F(1,273) = 65.611$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.001$ ). No other significant univariate tests were detected. Table 3 illustrates the mean ratings with standard errors by subject and gender.

**Table 3.** Student ratings of TM, CD, AT, and PS in diverse classrooms by gender across the five subjects.

Scale	Female		Male	
	M	SE	M	SE
Mathematics				
TM	3.087	0.102	2.553	0.079
CD	3.317	0.126	3.087	0.021
AT	2.981	0.198	3.025	0.154
PS	3.375	0.140	3.627	0.019
English				
TM	2.875	0.122	2.437	0.102
CD	2.563	0.151	3.142	0.126
AT	2.875	0.237	2.550	0.198
PS	2.750	0.167	2.803	0.140
Science				
TM	2.548	0.082	2.742	0.107
CD	3.083	0.101	3.221	0.132
AT	4.118	0.158	3.101	0.207
PS	3.240	0.112	3.526	0.146
ICT				
TM	2.765	0.074	2.645	0.107
CD	3.040	0.091	2.645	0.132
AT	3.507	0.143	2.566	0.207
PS	3.183	0.101	3.026	0.091
Arabic				
TM	3.019	0.185	3.062	0.132
CD	3.091	0.229	3.71	0.021
AT	4.966	0.358	2.873	0.129
PS	4.056	0.253	3.454	0.091

Post hoc tests on simple main effects demonstrated that female students were rated higher than male students on the teaching methods scale (with a mean difference of 0.04,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, these effects were qualified by a small, although highly significant, multivariate interaction between the effects of subject and gender (Wilks' lambda = 0.97,  $F(4,273) = 11.433$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.001$ ). There were significant univariate interactions observed for all four aspects, i.e., teaching methods, assessment techniques, curricular design, and practical skills ( $F(4,273) > 14.821$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.001$ ).

Additional post hoc tests demonstrated that on the practical skills and teaching methods scales, female students were graded more highly than male students for English and Mathematics ( $F(1,273) = 23.611$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.000$ ); however, the male students were rated more highly for ICT ( $F(1,273) = 23.272$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.000$ ). On assessment techniques, female students were rated more highly than male students for Science

and Mathematics ( $F(1,273) = 17.926, p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.000$ ), while male students received higher ratings for Arabic and ICT ( $F(1,273) = 11.372, p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.000$ ).

Q2: Does ethnic group affect students' ratings across the different subjects (Mathematics, English, Science, ICT, and Arabic) for teaching methods, assessment techniques, curricular design, and practical skills in diverse classrooms?

The multivariate interaction between the effects of the subjects together with students' ethnicity was found to be statistically significant (Wilks' lambda = 0.645,  $F(1,169) = 4.576, p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.104$ .) Univariate analysis displayed significant differences related to four diversity scales, i.e., teaching methods, assessment techniques, curricular design, and practical skills ( $F(4,332) = 5.127, p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.017$ ). Table 4 illustrates the mean ratings by subject and ethnicity. Post hoc tests on simple main effects confirmed that non-Arab students tend to award comparatively higher grades compared to Omani and Arab students, with  $F(4,332) = 5.970, p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.186$  for teaching methods, assessment methods, curricular design and practical skills in diverse classrooms. Furthermore, post hoc tests indicated that on each of the four diversity scales, non-Arab students awarded higher grades compared to other groups of students in Mathematics, English, and ICT ( $F(4,332) = 3.689, p = 0.18$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.207$ ). The results in Science and Arabic were not significant.

**Table 4.** Student Ratings of TM, CD, AM, and PS in diverse classrooms by ethnicity across the five subjects.

Scale	Omani		Arab		Non-Arab	
	M	SE	M	SE	M	SE
Mathematics						
TM	2.489	0.102	2.731	0.151	3.087	0.143
CD	3.011	0.112	3.299	0.187	3.317	0.118
AT	2.561	0.131	3.025	0.154	2.465	0.076
PS	3.102	0.028	3.627	0.019	4.053	0.123
English						
TM	2.437	0.100	2.111	0.012	2.875	0.109
CD	2.114	0.017	4.230	0.009	4.231	0.112
AT	2.564	0.028	2.116	0.013	2.420	0.232
PS	3.714	0.031	2.341	0.123	3.805	0.143
Science						
TM	2.505	0.195	2.873	0.123	2.548	0.011
CD	2.212	0.148	3.465	0.153	3.083	0.254
AT	4.118	0.158	3.101	0.207	3.042	0.087
PS	3.240	0.112	3.526	0.146	2.278	0.161
ICT						
TM	2.455	0.107	2.409	0.085	2.912	0.241
CD	2.615	0.132	2.750	0.164	3.164	0.180
AT	3.401	0.235	4.118	0.152	2.352	0.094
PS	3.183	0.101	3.026	0.091	4.342	0.153
Arabic						
TM	2.462	0.107	2.574	0.080	3.166	0.024
CD	3.526	0.208	3.911	0.125	3.375	0.130
AT	4.966	0.358	2.873	0.129	3.116	0.261
PS	4.056	0.253	3.454	0.091	2.324	0.192

Q3: Does socio-economic status affect students' ratings across the different subjects (Mathematics, English, Science, ICT, and Arabic) for teaching methods, assessment techniques, curricular design, and practical skills in diverse classrooms?

There was a significant multivariate effect observed for students' socio-economic status (Wilks' lambda = 0.660,  $F(4,315) = 32.317$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.188$ ). Univariate analysis revealed significant differences for teaching methods and assessment methods, with  $F(2,268) = 20.378$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.132$ ; and  $F(2,268) = 38.244$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.222$ , respectively. However, these effects were qualified by highly significant multivariate interaction between the effects of subject and socio-economic status (Wilks' lambda = 0.635,  $F(4,315) = 5.619$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.107$ ). Table 5 illustrates the mean ratings with standard errors by subject and students' socio-economic status. Significant univariate interactions were observed for all four scales of diversity ( $F(4,315) = 7.288$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.000$ ). Post hoc comparisons using Tukey's HSD test indicated that for all four diversity scales, students from middle- and high-income families provided higher ratings than those from low-income families, with  $F(2,268) = 13.371$ ,  $p < 0.05$  and partial  $\eta^2 = 0.001$ ; and  $F(2,268) = 58.119$ ,  $p < 0.05$  and partial  $\eta^2 = 0.001$  for the teaching method scale in English, Science, and ICT. Post hoc tests revealed that for each of the four diversity scales, middle-income students awarded higher grades compared to low- and high-income students in English and Mathematics ( $F(2,268) = 13.304$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = 0.001$ ). No other subject results were found to be significant.

**Table 5.** Student Ratings of TM, CD, AM, and PS in diverse classrooms by socio-economic status across the five subjects.

Scale	Lower Income		Middle Income		Higher Income	
	M	SE	M	SE	M	SE
			Mathematics			
TM	2.488	0.093	2.730	0.106	3.248	0.123
CD	3.030	0.118	3.236	0.135	3.341	0.155
AT	2.561	0.131	3.025	0.154	2.465	0.015
PS	3.102	0.028	3.627	0.019	4.053	0.221
			English			
TM	2.413	0.274	2.441	0.106	2.875	0.119
CD	3.050	0.347	3.156	0.135	2.562	0.150
AT	3.239	0.125	2.575	0.425	2.884	0.347
PS	3.093	0.106	2.290	0.219	3.129	0.155
			Science			
TM	3.725	0.183	2.290	0.621	2.757	0.139
CD	3.465	0.115	2.065	0.126	3.004	0.126
AT	5.643	0.393	3.438	0.022	3.042	0.252
PS	3.089	0.160	3.118	0.140	3.134	0.122
			ICT			
TM	2.466	0.180	2.441	0.090	2.933	0.087
CD	2.615	0.132	2.750	0.164	3.164	0.105
AT	3.401	0.235	4.118	0.152	2.352	0.372
PS	3.183	0.101	3.026	0.091	4.342	0.215
			Arabic			
TM	3.214	0.157	2.142	0.018	4.704	0.102
CD	3.591	0.108	3.981	0.241	3.514	0.176
AT	3.761	0.299	2.345	0.029	3.116	0.082
PS	4.116	0.014	3.652	0.017	2.529	0.010

## 7. Discussion and Conclusions

The world's wealth and future depends upon cultural diversity, and increasing our investment in cultural diversity is an urgent priority [60]. Indeed, diversity is a driving force for economic, social, and human development. It is claimed that diversity affects nearly every aspect of education, including access and equity, teaching methods and student

learning, research priorities, quality, management, social relevance, and finance, among others [70]. In this respect, the role of education is more crucial than ever in bridging cultural divides while maintaining the diversity of cultural expression [71].

There has been a tendency for much of the research on diversity and differentiation to match education to the needs and abilities of individual students [70]. This study examined the differences between gender, ethnicity, and socio-demographic factors in terms of the ratings awarded by Omani international secondary school students for teaching methods, assessment techniques, curricular design, and practical skills in diverse classrooms across five different subjects. The goal of this research was to determine the most effective teaching techniques for providing a higher quality of education for all students, regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, socio-economic class, or any other characteristic. This is encouraging in the sense that greater diversity and intergroup contact is resulting in more inclusive attitudes being adopted in schools [72].

According to Burner, Nodeland, and Aamaas [14], there is a need to include more critical perspectives on diversity in education, especially those concerning socio-economic differences. The research suggests that these differences should not be ignored when discussing diversity in education. This study revealed that, across a range of subjects, students from middle- and high-income families awarded higher ratings for all four scales than students from lower-income backgrounds. This bias in social and economic state observed in the present study shows that policymakers should consider the effects of such bias when implementing diversity initiatives. In order to address this variance, these initiatives should be based on a proactive approach with efficient methodologies and frameworks [18]. We conclude that raising awareness around issues of diversity within the framework of the teaching program can be effective in preparing students to engage with diverse, globalized work environments and breaking down obstacles blocking students' progress in diverse schools.

Our results clearly show a significant difference between male and female students in their ratings for teaching methods, assessment techniques, curricular design, and practical skills across five different subjects. This concurs with the findings of Gupta, Garg, and Kumar [18] on gender and socio-economic differences among students in higher education across a number of disciplines. The study revealed the existence of gender bias in the variability in the ratings for different aspects. In contrast, the results of a study by Fine-Davis and Faas [72] comparing the attitudes of students and teachers across Europe on a variety of aspects relating to diversity while taking into account gender differences among students and teachers showed no significant effects for gender. Furthermore, the same study revealed that the teaching methods adopted were less important in relation to gender.

Consequently, in order to address diversity in schools effectively, students' beliefs and experiences regarding diversity can function as a measurement of the necessity of action. Based on these indicators, teachers and school leaders can establish classroom environments that promote intercultural learning while creating a large number of positive situations for learners to achieve success in their studies. Teachers should be aware of existing aspects of diversity in their classes as well as the way in which student experiences can affect their pedagogical approaches. With a recognition of the numerous aspects of students' similarities and differences present in diverse classrooms, teachers and leaders will be better-equipped to face and ultimately overcome all challenges, making use of a variety of teaching techniques to meet the needs of students in the classroom. This study is an attempt to contribute to the literature on diversity through acknowledging the presence of differences in terms of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status in evaluation ratings provided by students on various aspects relating to diversity.

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