

A Comparison of Multicultural Attitudes by Gender, Education Level, and State of Origin

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## Multicultural Attitude Survey

In late February and March of 2005, with the assistance of several colleagues, the author administered a *Multicultural Attitude Survey* (Appendix) to a sample of Alabama high school students and students of the School of Education of a local university. The purpose of the study was to determine if there were perceived differences in attitudes towards people from other cultures according to the gender, age, education, state of origin, or ethnicity of the respondent. The survey was prompted by the influx of a number of international students who were studying English at the university. The research questions of interest were:

1. Is there a difference in the scores of respondents on the *Multicultural Attitude Survey* by gender of the respondent?
2. Is there a difference in respondents' scores on the *Multicultural Attitude Survey* by education level of the respondent?
3. Is there is a difference in respondents' scores on the *Multicultural Attitude Survey* by respondent's race/ethnicity?
4. Is there is a difference in respondents' scores on the *Multicultural Attitude Survey* by state of origin of the respondent?

The survey questions were drawn from a larger study of middle school students conducted by the Office of Educational Accountability of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools (Rothfarb et al., 1990), with modifications to reflect the differences in population. For example, a question in the original survey designed for Miami students that stated, "I enjoy living in a city where there are many people from different cultures" was rephrased to "I enjoy visiting cities where there are many people from different cultures." I also added several questions that were of interest pertaining to language skills such as, "I have studied a language other than English," "I speak and read a language other than English," "I have traveled to at least one other country outside the United States," and "I have lived in at least one country outside the United States." The present instrument retained several questions from the Rothfarb survey instrument, including "It is important for Americans to learn foreign languages" (Lehman & Jones, 1987; Rothfarb et al.) as an indication of the influence of learning a foreign language on cultural awareness and openness toward other cultures. The instrument developed by the Miami-Dade County Schools had a reliability of .78 (Rothfarb, 1992).

The sample consisted of data for 122 respondents. These were disaggregated by gender as 43 males and 77 females, and by age as 86 respondents aged 14–17, 13 respondents aged 18–23, and 22 respondents aged 24 and older. The totals do not necessarily add to 100% due to missing values for some respondents. Ninety-four respondents were natives of Alabama, 26 respondents were natives of another state, and 2 were born in a country other than the United States. Only 7 of the 122 respondents indicated that they were of an ethnicity other than White, non-Hispanic. Given the small number of respondents of race/ethnicity other than White, non-Hispanic, analyses for Question 3 were not conducted.

With the exception of question 13, "Students in this school are afraid of students who have different cultural backgrounds from theirs," positive responses to the questions were scored as reflecting a positive attitude toward people of different cultures. A KR<sub>20</sub> reliability coefficient was computed as .78 for a 24 item assessment based on the responses of the 122 students who

were surveyed, with the deletion of questions such as “I have traveled to at least one country outside the United States,” “I have lived in at least one country outside the United States,” and several others that were not part of the original survey. There was no significant correlation between a positive response for “It is important for Americans to learn foreign languages” and a positive response for “I have studied a language other than English” or “I speak and read a language other than English.” However, there was a significant correlation between a positive response for “I have studied a language other than English” and “I speak and read a language other than English” ( $r = .43, p = .000$ ). Although 62% of older respondents reported that they had studied a language other than English, only 5% of respondents in the 24 and older age group gave a positive response to “I read and speak a language other than English,” compared to 44% of students aged 14 to 17. Table 1 provides percentage of responses by gender and age for selected questions of the survey. Mean total scores for females (74%) were significantly higher than for males (66%) with  $t = 2.40, df = 84, p = .019$ . There were no significant differences in mean nor median total score by age of respondent. There was no significant difference in total response scores for respondents who were natives of Alabama (67%) compared to total score for respondents who were natives of states other than Alabama (72%).

The results of the survey were significant for several reasons. Females were significantly more likely to know about and participate in the activities of multicultural organizations than were males (Table 1). Females and older respondents were more likely to have traveled outside the United States than were males and younger respondents. Older university students were more likely to respect the cultural differences of other students than were students in the 14-17 and 18-23 age groups, but students in the 18-23 year age group were more likely to have worked on a project with students of another cultural group than were age 14-17 or 24 and older students. The 18-23 year group was also more likely to know about multicultural organizations and events than any of the other groups and were more likely to have studied a foreign language than older or younger students (Table 1). However, because of the small number of the group of 18-23 year-old students ( $n = 13$ ), these results should be viewed with caution and may not be generalizable to a larger population. Several of the respondents who responded negatively to “Would you be willing to help a member of another cultural group with homework or tutoring?” provided written comments indicating that they would not be willing to do this for members of their own cultural group. Thus, a negative response for this question was not necessarily indicative of a negative attitude toward members of a different cultural group.

Research has shown that attitude surveys are not as a rule as reliable as achievement tests, which may have reliability coefficients in the .90+ range. However, the .78 reliability of this instrument was higher than expected, given the relatively small number of questions and respondents. Because this instrument was not originally intended for administration to older populations of students, reliability was computed with the deletion of scores of the university students which resulted in a smaller sample size (94 participants), but improved reliability to .80.

## Discussion

The results of this survey indicated that scores on the Multicultural Attitude Survey were significantly different for male and female respondents. There was not a significant difference on the total score according to the age, education level, or state of origin of the respondent. However, the university students were more likely to have worked on a project with members of another cultural group, were more likely to know about events sponsored by multicultural

organizations, and were more likely to have studied a language other than English than were members of other groups.

## References

- Lehman, W., & Jones, R. (1987). The humanities bases of second language learning. *American Annals of Political and Social Science*, 49, 186-193.
- Rothfarb, S. (1992). *Perceptions of intergroup relations in secondary schools of Miami Dade County Public Schools: Results of the Student Multicultural Relations Survey*. Office of Educational Accountability, Miami-Dade County Public Schools. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED408373)
- Rothfarb, S., Carey, B., James, G., Jenkins, Y., Metellus, G, Sanchez, N., & Validio, T. (1990). *The Student Survey on Multicultural Relations*. Office of Educational Accountability. Miami: Miami Dade County Public Schools.

Table 1

*Multicultural Attitude Survey: Percent “Yes” Responses by Gender and Age Group (N = 122)*

	Gender		Age		
	Male	Female	14-17	18-23	24+
I enjoy having friends from other cultural groups.	86	83	80	92	95
It is important for Americans to learn foreign languages	53	76	66	69	77
Students in this school usually “hang out” with students of the same cultural background.	81	78	79	92	73
In this school, discipline is enforced fairly among students regardless of their cultural group.	81	91	83	92	100
In this school, teachers deal with any racial or ethnic insults immediately.	71	76	72	75	85
The students in this school respect the cultural differences of other students.	58	77	66	69	86
Teachers in this school respect cultural differences among students.	86	96	93	92	91
Administrators in this school respect cultural differences among students	88	95	92	92	95
In the past 12 months, have you worked on a school, church, or community project with students of another cultural group?	40	51	45	69	43
Different cultural groups are represented in a fair and equitable way in my textbooks.	79	79	80	77	76
I know about multicultural organizations and events that this school sponsors.	30	55	41	69	48
I participate in multicultural organizations and events that are sponsored by school, church, or community organizations.	23	43	40	31	19
I have traveled to at least one country outside the United States.	33	39	31	39	57
I have studied a language other than English.	72	68	68	92	62
I speak and read a language other than English.	37	33	44	23	5



## APPENDIX

### Multicultural Attitude Survey

## Multicultural Attitude Survey<sup>1</sup>

Before beginning this survey, please provide some information about yourself by placing an “X” in the blank that best describes you.

Group Surveyed      \_\_\_\_\_ Middle School (indicate school and grade) \_\_\_\_\_  
    \_\_\_\_\_ High School (indicate school and grade) \_\_\_\_\_  
    \_\_\_\_\_ University (indicate school or department) \_\_\_\_\_  
    \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_ (location)

1. My gender is      \_\_\_\_\_ Male      \_\_\_\_\_ Female  
 2. My age is      \_\_\_\_\_ 14-17      \_\_\_\_\_ 18-23      \_\_\_\_\_ 24 and over  
 3. My ethnicity is \_\_\_\_\_ White, non-Hispanic  
    \_\_\_\_\_ Black  
    \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic  
    \_\_\_\_\_ Asian  
 4. My place of birth is      \_\_\_\_\_ Alabama      \_\_\_\_\_ other USA state      \_\_\_\_\_ other country (not USA)

Indicate by placing an “X” in the box if you AGREE or DISAGREE with the following statements

	AGREE	DISAGREE
5. Sometimes I like to be with people who have a different cultural background from mine.		
6. I enjoy having friends from other cultural groups.		
7. I enjoy visiting cities where there are many people from different cultures.		
8. My friends like visiting cities where there are many people from different cultures.		
9. My parents encourage me to have friends from other cultural backgrounds.		
10. It is important for Americans to learn foreign languages		
11. Students in this school usually “hang out” with students of the same cultural background.		
12. In this school, students mix easily with students who have different cultural backgrounds.		
13. Students in this school are afraid of students who have different cultural backgrounds from theirs.		
14. In this school, discipline is enforced fairly among students regardless of their cultural group.		
15. In this school, teachers deal with any racial or ethnic insults immediately.		
16. The students in this school respect the cultural differences of other students.		
17. Teachers in this school respect cultural differences among students.		
18. Administrators in this school respect cultural differences among students		

(continued other side)

CIRCLE THE ANSWER THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR OPINION OR FEELING ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:      example:      Often/Sometimes      Never

19 – 21. How often do you talk or mix with students of other cultural groups ...

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<sup>1</sup>Used with permission of Miami-Dade Public Schools

- |   |                 |       |
|---|-----------------|-------|
| 19. in your daily classes?  | Often/Sometimes | Never |
| 20. before or after school in extra-curricular activities?  | Often/Sometimes | Never |
| 21. socially (movies, parties, etc.)  | Often/Sometimes | Never |
| 22. In the past 12 months, have you had friends of a different culture in your home?  |                 |       |
| Yes   | No              |       |
| 23. In the past 12 months, have you worked on a school, church, or community project with students of another cultural group? |                 |       |
| Yes   | No              |       |
| 24. Would you be willing to help a member of a different cultural group with homework or tutoring?                            |                 |       |
| Yes   | No              |       |
| 25. Different cultural groups are represented in a fair and equitable way in my textbooks.                                    |                 |       |
| Yes   | No              |       |
| 26. I know about multicultural organizations and events that this school sponsors.  |                 |       |
| Yes   | No              |       |
| 27. I participate in multicultural organizations and events that are sponsored by school, church, or community organizations. |                 |       |
| Yes   | No              |       |
| 28. I have traveled to at least one country outside the United States.  |                 |       |
| Yes   | No              |       |
| 29. I have lived in at least one country outside the United States.   |                 |       |
| Yes   | No              |       |
| 30. I have studied a language other than English.   |                 |       |
| Yes   | No              |       |
| 31. I speak and read a language other than English.   |                 |       |
| Yes   | No              |       |

## APPENDIX

### Raw Data Multicultural Attitude Survey



Raw Data Multicultural Attitude Survey

lo c	gen	age	eth	pob	q5	q6	q7	q8	q9	q10	q11	q12	q13	q14	q15	q16	q17	q18	q19	q20	q21	q22	q23	q24	q25	q26	q27	q28	q29	q30	q31		
3	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1															
3	0	3	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0		
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2	0	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
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2	1	2	1	2	1	1			0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1		1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
2	0	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0
2	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
2	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1