

The Impact of School Leadership on Middle School Teacher's Multicultural Awareness and Inclusivity

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This study investigates the perceptions of multicultural awareness and inclusivity among teachers across various urban middle schools, aiming to understand the impact of school leadership on promoting an educational environment that values diversity. Employing a quantitative analysis of survey data collected from 217 teachers in 16 schools, the research focuses on key areas: the encouragement from school leaders to teach about diverse cultures, teachers' experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnicities, comfort in discussing race, engagement with race-related topics, and the perceived support for speaking out against racism. The findings reveal significant variability in teacher perceptions across schools, with overall scores ranging from a high level of proactive engagement and support to a low level of challenges and reluctance to address race-related topics. Notably, schools with higher scores generally exhibited strong leadership commitment to diversity, suggesting a correlation between leadership practices and promoting an inclusive school culture. The study underscores the critical role of targeted professional development and the need for school policies that support open dialogue about race. It concludes that enhancing teacher comfort and engagement with multicultural topics is essential to fostering inclusive educational environments. This research contributes to the discourse on educational leadership's impact on multicultural awareness in schools, highlighting areas for further investigation and intervention.

Keywords: Multicultural Awareness, Teacher Perceptions, School Inclusivity, Leadership

In the evolving landscape of global education, the imperative for schools to cultivate culturally aware and inclusive environments has never been more critical (Banks, 2009; Minko, et al., 2019). As demographic shifts continue to diversify student populations, the pivotal role of school leadership in fostering an atmosphere of understanding, respect, and open dialogue about race and ethnicity gains prominence (Liou & Hermanns, 2017). This empirical study aims to delve into the nuances of how school leadership influences the development and sustainment of multicultural awareness and inclusivity in educational settings. By examining teacher perceptions across various schools, this research seeks to identify the relationships between leadership practices and the cultivation of a school culture that not only values diversity but also actively encourages and facilitates honest conversations about race and ethnic differences.

Background

Previous research highlights the critical role that educators and school leaders play in embodying and imparting the values of diversity and inclusivity (Bustamante et al., 2009). Schools act as microcosms of society, where societal norms and values are both mirrored and questioned. Within this setting, the attitudes and behaviors of school leaders towards cultural diversity are pivotal, significantly impacting the school's overall atmosphere and the success of its inclusivity initiatives (Brion, 2022). Additionally, the capability of teachers to openly discuss racial and ethnic differences and their sense of support in tackling issues of racism are essential for fostering an educational environment where all students are empowered to succeed (Bristol, 2015; Shields & Edwards, 2005).

Contextual Challenges Public Schools

In addressing multicultural awareness and inclusivity in schools, it is crucial to consider the specific societal and community contexts that shape these educational environments. For instance, public schools in the United States operate within a broader state and community framework that is increasingly influenced by legislative and societal pressures concerning the inclusion of racial and identity-based content in education (Feingold & Weishart, 2023). Recent trends toward discriminatory censorship and restrictive regulations pose significant challenges for educators and administrators aiming to foster an inclusive curriculum. These external pressures can often dictate the scope and nature of what is taught, potentially stifling efforts to discuss and address important social issues within the classroom.

Impact of Censorship in States like Florida and Texas

In states like Florida and Texas, recent legislative measures have introduced significant censorship concerning educational content, particularly around race, gender, and historical narratives. These measures have created a contentious educational environment, where teachers and administrators are frequently constrained in their ability to discuss and teach about certain identity-based issues. This type of legislative censorship impacts the curriculum and influences the overall school culture, potentially hindering efforts to promote diversity and inclusivity. The restrictions can lead to a chilling effect where educators may feel compelled to

avoid certain discussions to align with state mandates, thereby limiting students' educational experiences and understanding of complex societal issues. Recognizing the implications of such censorship is crucial for comprehending the broader challenges faced by schools in these states, shaping how they can navigate and still strive to fulfill their educational missions within these constrained circumstances.

These considerations are crucial for understanding the variability in teacher perceptions and the implementation of multicultural practices within public schools. Recognizing these external constraints is essential for developing strategies that support educators and administrators in effectively promoting inclusivity while navigating the pressures and limitations imposed by broader societal and legislative frameworks.

Purpose of the Study

Educators and school leaders in the Northeast, much like their counterparts in other regions, find themselves navigating a complex terrain where community values and state legislations may sometimes be at odds with the goals of promoting diversity and inclusion within educational settings. Recent legislative actions have increasingly sought to limit discussions on race, gender, and other identity-based topics, compelling schools to carefully balance compliance with state laws against the imperative to maintain an open and inclusive environment. This balancing act places schools in a challenging position where following new regulations may conflict with their broader educational objectives and personal values.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze teacher perceptions across several key aspects of school culture. These include the extent to which the teaching about diverse cultures is encouraged, experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnic backgrounds, comfort levels in discussing race-related topics, and the perceived support for speaking out against racism. By employing a quantitative approach, the study aims to uncover patterns and variations in how the commitment of school leadership to cultural awareness and inclusivity is perceived across different educational settings. This analysis will help identify both strengths and areas needing attention, guiding efforts to enhance inclusivity and effectively address the challenges posed by conflicting societal and legislative pressures.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive exploration of teacher perceptions regarding diversity and inclusion within school cultures, an area that is particularly pertinent given the current societal and legislative challenges impacting educational equity. This research addresses a critical gap by quantitatively measuring aspects of school culture that are often discussed qualitatively and anecdotally. It provides empirical evidence on how these cultural aspects are perceived across different educational settings, highlighting disparities and variances that might not be evident without such a systematic analysis. The study's focus on the perceptions of encouragement for teaching diverse cultures, experiences with colleagues from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, comfort in discussing race-related topics, and perceived support for anti-racism initiatives directly ties into key challenges in educational equity, such as

the need for more inclusive environments and the push against increasing legislative restrictions on curriculum content.

The findings of this study have the potential to impact educational equity significantly, policy, and practice in several key ways. By identifying how perceptions vary by school and district, this research can inform policymakers and educational leaders about the areas where improvements are necessary and possible. For instance, if certain schools show lower comfort levels in discussing race-related topics, targeted professional development programs can be designed to address these specific needs. Moreover, understanding the nuances of teacher perceptions can help shape policies that support more robust and inclusive educational practices, ensuring that diversity and inclusivity are not just aspirational goals but integral parts of the educational process.

Furthermore, this study's outcomes could guide future research directions by highlighting the factors that influence positive perceptions of inclusivity and the barriers that hinder them. Researchers can use these insights to conduct deeper, qualitative studies that explore why these perceptions exist and how they impact student outcomes. This could lead to a richer academic discourse on how to effectively implement and sustain inclusive educational practices amidst a backdrop of changing societal norms and legislative pressures.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on educational leadership and its impact on fostering an inclusive school culture (Niesche & Keddie, 2015). Insights gained from this study could better inform policy recommendations, leadership training programs, and curriculum development to address the challenges and opportunities within multicultural educational environments. Ultimately, by understanding the relationship between school leadership practices and teacher perceptions of cultural inclusivity, stakeholders can better navigate the complexities of creating educational spaces that reflect and are responsive to the diverse societies they serve (Lopez, 2016). Overall, the study offers a critical examination of the intersections between educational practice, policy, and the broader social and legislative context, providing a foundation for more informed decisions that could enhance educational equity across various settings.

Research Questions

Based on the data and the focus of the empirical research study on the impact of school leadership on multicultural awareness and inclusivity within educational settings, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do teachers perceive the level of encouragement from school leaders to teach about diverse cultures, and how does this vary across different urban middle schools?
2. What are the experiences of teachers with colleagues of different races and ethnicities, and how do these experiences reflect the overall inclusivity of the school culture?
3. To what extent do teachers feel comfortable having honest conversations about race with their colleagues, and what factors influence this comfort level?
4. How engaged are teachers with race-related topics in their professional development and classroom discussions, and what challenges do they face in engaging with these topics?

5. How important do teachers believe it is to have conversations about race, even if these conversations are uncomfortable, and how is this importance reflected in school practices?
6. How frequently do teachers discuss current racial news and events in their classrooms or with colleagues, and what impact do these discussions have on the school culture?
7. What level of support do teachers feel they receive from their school in speaking out against racism, and how does this support affect their willingness to address racism?
8. Are there differences in perceptions of multicultural awareness and inclusivity among teachers from various urban middle schools, and what factors contribute to these differences?

Literature Review

Educational Leadership and Multicultural Awareness

Educational leadership plays a crucial role in fostering inclusive and diverse school cultures (Tooms & Boske, 2010). Santamaría and Santamaría (2015) emphasize the significance of culturally responsive practices in educational leadership to counteract educational injustice and promote sustainable change. Additionally, Rodríguez et al. (2015) discuss the positive influence of diverse school leaders on school settings serving diverse student populations, further underlining the pivotal role of leadership in embracing diversity and inclusivity in educational institutions. Leaders who prioritize diversity and inclusivity not only foster positive attitudes towards multiculturalism among teachers but also establish a school-wide ethos that values and supports diversity (Khalifa, et al., 2016). Furthermore, transformative leadership approaches have been linked to more effective integration of multicultural curricula, enhancing students' cultural competence and empathy (Shields, 2010).

Grooms et al. (2024) point out that educational leaders play a pivotal role in fostering culturally diverse educational practices and creating inclusive learning environments to meet the diverse needs of students. The authors draw from Collins-Ayanlaja, Brookins, & Taysum's (2018) insights, which show that leaders can prepare themselves for leadership positions by prioritizing cultural literacy and leveraging it to enhance parental engagement within their districts. Likewise, Baker et al. (2023) explain that leadership preparation programs must shift towards preparing future educational leaders to have a more humanistic approach within their supervisory practices. This shift can create a more inclusive and supportive educational environment catering to the diverse needs of students from various backgrounds.

Teacher Perceptions of Multicultural Education

Teachers' perceptions of multicultural education and inclusivity are pivotal for effectively implementing diversity initiatives within schools. Research indicates that teachers' attitudes towards and comfort with discussing race-related issues play a substantial role in their engagement with multicultural education practices (Abacioglu et al., 2020). Several factors

shape these perceptions, including teachers' personal beliefs and biases, which significantly influence their approach to diversity (Grant & Asimeng-Boahene, 2006; Nieto, 2004).

Professional development opportunities are also critical, as they equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to address and embrace cultural differences effectively (Gay, 2002). School leadership's support is another crucial factor; depending on whether leaders advocate for and prioritize diversity, it can either enable or hinder the implementation of inclusive practices (Portin et al., 2009).

Moreover, the demographic makeup of the teaching staff itself influences multicultural education outcomes. Studies suggest that a more diverse teaching workforce tends to foster a more inclusive school environment, as it brings a variety of perspectives and experiences that enrich the educational setting and promote a broader understanding of multicultural issues (Nevarez, et al., 2019). This diversity among teachers not only enhances the educational experience for students by providing multiple cultural perspectives but also models inclusive behaviors that students can emulate. Thus, fostering a diverse teaching staff and supporting them with appropriate professional development and leadership backing are essential steps towards enhancing multicultural education and inclusivity in schools.

Collectively, these factors underscore the complexity of implementing effective multicultural education initiatives. They highlight the need for comprehensive strategies that address personal, professional, and institutional dimensions to enhance the efficacy of diversity practices within schools.

Impact on School Culture

The impact of multicultural awareness and inclusivity on school culture is profound and transformative. As elucidated by Banks & Banks (2019), the engagement with culture within educational contexts is an ongoing, dynamic process that requires continuous effort and adaptability from educators. They argue that understanding culture is not a static endeavor or a finite goal but rather an evolving journey that necessitates educators' willingness to engage with culture as a complex, emergent, and interactional phenomenon. This perspective challenges the notion of culture as a set of static, individual representations and encourages viewing cultural practices as fluid and constantly developing (Banks & Banks, 2019, p. 35).

The integration of multicultural education into school curricula and practices not only enhances academic outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds (Ridho & Tumin, 2022) but also fosters a more equitable, empathetic, and respectful school environment (Adams & Rodriguez, 2019). Research underscores that schools embracing this approach cultivate a culture characterized by open dialogues about race and ethnicity, equitable opportunities for all students, and a curriculum that mirrors the diversity of the student body (Banks, 2019). However, despite these positive outcomes, significant challenges persist in ensuring that multicultural education is deeply and effectively integrated into school cultures, moving beyond superficial treatment to effect real cultural transformation (Sue, et al., 2022).

A primary obstacle in the path of advancing multicultural education is the resistance from various stakeholders within the educational system, including educators, administrators, and parents. This resistance often stems from what Banks & Banks (2019) describe as a deficit perspective, where there is a prevailing misconception about the aims and benefits of

multicultural education. Some fear that emphasizing multicultural content could detract from traditional academic priorities. Additionally, this resistance is frequently rooted in biases or a reluctance to confront and address issues of privilege and systemic inequalities. Overcoming these barriers is crucial for educators and leaders committed to fostering genuinely inclusive educational environments where multicultural education is embraced as essential to the academic and social development of all students.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for a study on multicultural awareness and inclusivity in urban middle schools, focusing on the influence of educational leadership and teacher perceptions, integrates concepts from transformative leadership theory and multicultural education theory. This framework underpins the investigation into how leadership practices and teacher attitudes towards diversity impact the cultivation of an inclusive school culture.

Transformative Leadership Theory

Transformative leadership theory (Shields, 2018) posits that leaders can instigate significant change within their organizations by focusing on values, ethics, and long-term goals. In the context of this study, transformative leadership involves school leaders adopting practices that not only advocate for but actively implement policies and curricula that embrace multiculturalism and inclusivity. This approach to leadership emphasizes the importance of creating an equitable educational environment that supports all students' cultural, racial, and ethnic identities. Transformative leadership in education challenges inequities and encourages critical dialogue around social justice issues (Freire, 2018), making it a pivotal aspect of fostering multicultural awareness in schools.

Multicultural Education Theory

Multicultural education theory provides a framework for understanding how education can be used to promote diversity and equity within schools. Banks and Banks (2019) identify multicultural education as a process that incorporates the diverse cultural experiences of students into the curriculum and teaching practices, aiming to empower students from all backgrounds. This theory underscores the necessity of integrating diverse perspectives into educational content and pedagogy, thus preparing students to thrive in a pluralistic society (Gay 2004). Within this study, multicultural education theory informs the examination of curricular content (Sleeter & Carmona, 2016), teacher training (Gay, 2023), and classroom practices (Tonbuloglu, et al., 2016) as they relate to promoting an inclusive school culture (Banks & Banks, 2019).

Integration of Theories

Few studies have integrated educational leadership and multicultural education (Vassallo, 2022). Integrating transformative leadership and multicultural education theories creates a comprehensive theoretical framework for exploring the dynamics of multicultural awareness and inclusivity in urban middle schools. This framework suggests that the effectiveness of multicultural education initiatives is significantly influenced by the extent to which school leaders exhibit transformative qualities, such as the promotion of equity, the encouragement of open dialogue on race and ethnicity, and the implementation of inclusive policies.

Furthermore, this framework posits that teacher perceptions of multicultural education—shaped by their experiences, professional development, and the school leadership's stance on diversity—play a crucial role in the successful integration of multicultural content and practices into the school curriculum (Banks & Banks, 2019). Teachers' willingness to engage in and facilitate conversations about race, as well as their ability to implement inclusive pedagogical strategies, are seen as key factors in promoting a school culture that values diversity and inclusivity (Shields, 2018).

Implications for Research

This theoretical framework guides the investigation into how school leadership and teacher perceptions influence the development of multicultural awareness and inclusivity within urban middle schools. It informs the research design, including the selection of variables for study (e.g., leadership practices, teacher attitudes, curricular content), and provides a basis for interpreting findings within the broader discourse on educational equity and reform. Through this lens, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the mechanisms by which schools can become more inclusive and welcoming environments for all students.

Method

Participants

The study utilized archived public data consisting of responses from teachers across a diverse range of urban middle schools within an urban school district in the Northeast Region of the United States. This study's participants were teachers from 16 middle schools within the large urban school district. The district was selected due to its diverse student population and ongoing efforts to enhance multicultural education and inclusivity. A sample of 217 teachers from an archived pool of participants was used in this study, representing various educational disciplines, including mathematics, science, language arts, and social studies.

While specific demographic details such as race and gender were not retrieved from the archived data and survey responses, the participant group was diverse regarding years of teaching experience. This range provided a broad perspective on the educational environment within urban middle schools. Approximately 70% of the teachers had more than five years of teaching experience, indicating a predominance of experienced educators familiar with the dynamics of teaching in a diverse setting. The remaining 30% were newer to the profession, having less than five years of experience, and contributed fresh insights into the evolving challenges and opportunities of fostering inclusivity in education.

This mix of seasoned and relatively new teachers offers a valuable lens through which to explore how school leadership impacts the development and maintenance of a culture that values diversity and supports open discussions on multicultural issues.

Instrumentation

The data were derived from a structured survey originally designed by Panorama Education (2019). The Panorama Equity and Inclusion Survey demonstrates robust reliability and validity, underpinned by thorough methodological processes, including literature reviews, expert consultations, and pilot testing. Its reliability is confirmed through coefficient alpha scores indicating "good" reliability, while structural validity is established via confirmatory factor analysis. This ensures the survey accurately measures constructs related to student experiences and perceptions of equity and inclusion, making it a reliable tool for capturing meaningful insights in educational settings to assess teacher perceptions of school culture in relation to multicultural awareness and inclusivity. Responses were captured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) across eight key domains:

1. Encouragement by school leaders to teach about diverse cultures.
2. Experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnicities.
3. Comfort in having honest conversations about race.
4. Engagement with race-related topics.
5. Comfort discussing race topics with colleagues.
6. Perceived importance of conversations about race, even if uncomfortable.
7. Frequency of discussions about racial news and events.
8. Perceived support for staff to speak out against racism.

Data Source and Procedure

This study is based on the analysis of archived public data provided by a local school district. The dataset forms part of a public collection aimed at evaluating aspects of school culture, focusing on multicultural awareness and inclusivity. The use of archived data ensures the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, aligning with ethical research standards by minimizing participant risk.

Given the archival nature of the data, the procedure for the original data collection included online survey administration, where teachers were invited via email. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with assurances of confidentiality to encourage candidness.

The dataset is publicly available for research and educational purposes, accessible through the school district's public records or educational research databases. This availability supports the study's reproducibility and provides a foundation for further research into the influence of school leadership on creating inclusive and culturally aware environments.

The selection of this dataset is highly relevant to the study's goals. It offers valuable insights into teacher perceptions within the northeast region of the United States, known for its significant cultural and racial diversity. Such diversity makes the dataset an ideal resource for exploring the complexities of cultural awareness and inclusivity in schools.

The archived data were meticulously reviewed, with specific survey items pertinent to cultural awareness and inclusivity extracted for analysis. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of teacher perceptions across various dimensions of school culture, offering nuanced insights into the conducive factors for an inclusive educational environment.

Limitations of the Study

While extensive in its scope and analysis, this study presents several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, the quantitative nature of the research may not fully capture the intricate nuances and context-specific details that are crucial for understanding the varied teacher perceptions and responses. Quantitative data often provide broad overviews but can overlook the subtleties of individual experiences and the unique cultural, socio-economic, and institutional contexts of different schools. Such nuances are vital for a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the variability in teacher perceptions and engagement with multicultural and inclusivity issues.

Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data from teachers could introduce biases such as social desirability bias, where respondents might provide answers they believe are expected rather than reflecting their true feelings or practices. This aspect could affect the authenticity and reliability of the data regarding teachers' actual experiences and attitudes.

Additionally, the study's design might not account for external factors that influence teacher perceptions, such as recent community events or changes in school policy, which could have significant but unmeasured impacts on the findings. Thus, while the study offers valuable insights into multicultural awareness and inclusivity in urban middle schools, these limitations suggest that the conclusions drawn represent a generalized snapshot rather than an exhaustive exploration of individual teacher experiences. Likewise, these findings serve as a preliminary snapshot, offering useful insights while highlighting the need for further research to explore the complex, nuanced realities within each educational setting.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the teacher perceptions reflected in the dataset. Mean scores, standard deviations, and ranges for each domain were calculated to identify trends and variations in views on multicultural awareness and inclusivity. Comparative analyses were also conducted to highlight potential differences in perceptions among teachers from diverse school settings.

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics summarizing teacher perceptions on various aspects of school culture, provides a nuanced understanding of how educators perceive the role and impact of school leadership on promoting multicultural awareness and inclusivity. Table 1 offers a comprehensive overview of the mean scores and standard deviations, for teacher perceptions across eight key aspects of school culture. These aspects include the encouragement by school leaders to teach about diverse cultures, experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnic backgrounds, comfort in having honest conversations about race, engagement with race-related topics, comfort discussing race topics with colleagues, the perceived importance of

conversations about race even if uncomfortable, the frequency of discussions about racial news and events, and the perceived support for staff to speak out against racism.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics Summary of Teacher Perceptions on School Culture Aspects

School Culture Aspects	Mean	SD
1. School Leaders Encouraging Teaching About Diverse Cultures	3.39	1.09
2. Thinking of Experiences with Colleagues of Different Races/Ethnic Backgrounds	3.70	0.93
3. Honest Conversations About Race	3.14	1.03
4. Thinking Deeply About Race-Related Topics	3.03	1.13
5. Comfort Discussing Race Topics with Colleagues	3.52	0.94
6. Importance of Conversations About Race Even if Uncomfortable	2.55	1.02
7. Talking About Racial News and Events	2.84	1.07
8. School Help Staff Speak Out Against Racism	3.05	1.12

Encouragement by School Leaders. The average score of 3.39 for encouragement by school leaders to teach about diverse cultures indicates a moderate level of perceived support among teachers. However, the standard deviation of 1.09 suggests variability in this perception, indicating that while some educators feel strongly supported, others do not.

Interpersonal Experiences and Conversations About Race. Teachers reported generally positive experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnic backgrounds, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.70. This suggests an inclusive environment within staff communities. However, comfort levels in having honest conversations about race (mean = 3.14) and engagement with race-related topics (mean = 3.03) were lower, with standard deviations over 1.00, indicating a notable spread in responses.

Comfort and Importance of Race-Related Discussions. The relatively higher comfort level in discussing race topics with colleagues (mean = 3.52) contrasts with the lower perceived importance of having uncomfortable conversations about race (mean = 2.55).

Discussions on Racial News and Support Against Racism. Teachers' moderate frequency of discussions about racial news and events (mean = 2.84) alongside moderate support for speaking out against racism (mean = 3.05) underscores a cautious approach to addressing current events and systemic issues within educational settings.

Findings

Table 2 provides a detailed look at how teachers across various urban middle schools perceive the level of encouragement they receive from school leaders to teach about diverse cultures. The metrics include the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum scores for each school where data is available.

Table 2
Teacher Perceptions of Encouragement from School Leaders to Teach About Diverse Cultures

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School A	3.63	1.02	1.0	5.0
School B	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
School C	3.47	0.74	2.0	4.0
School D	3.29	0.76	2.0	4.0
School E	3.20	1.08	1.0	5.0
School F	4.00	0.72	2.0	5.0
School G	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
School H	2.67	1.00	2.0	4.0
School I	2.50	1.20	1.0	5.0
School J	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
School K	3.59	1.21	1.0	5.0
School L	3.25	1.11	1.0	5.0
School M	3.80	0.84	3.0	5.0
School N	3.50	0.84	3.0	5.0
School P	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
School Q	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

The mean scores across schools range from 2.50 (School I) to 4.00 (School F), indicating a wide spectrum of perceptions regarding leadership encouragement. This suggests varying commitment levels and diversity-focused curricula implementation across these institutions. Standard deviations range from 0.72 (School F) to 1.21 (School K), highlighting differing levels of consensus among teachers within schools. Lower standard deviations suggest more uniform perceptions among teachers, whereas higher values indicate a broader range of views. The minimum and maximum scores reveal that, within some schools, teacher perceptions of leadership encouragement for teaching about diverse cultures vary widely (e.g., School I's scores range from 1 to 5). Notable highlights include the following: School F stands out with the highest mean score, suggesting it is a model of effective leadership encouragement in diversity education, and School I shows both the lowest mean score and a wide range of perceptions, indicating areas where leadership may need to enhance their support and visibility in promoting cultural diversity.

Table 3 provides a summary of how teachers across various urban middle schools perceive their experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnicities. The metrics include the mean score, standard deviation, minimum score, and maximum score for each school.

Table 3*Teacher Experiences with Colleagues of Different Races and Ethnicities*

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School A	3.69	0.95	1.0	5.0
School B	3.50	0.76	2.0	4.0
School C	4.07	0.59	3.0	5.0
School D	3.86	0.38	3.0	4.0
School E	4.13	0.81	3.0	5.0
School F	3.83	0.56	3.0	5.0
School G	3.73	0.79	2.0	5.0
School H	3.89	0.78	3.0	5.0
School I	3.72	1.13	1.0	5.0
School J	2.00	1.22	1.0	4.0
School K	3.65	1.03	1.0	5.0
School L	3.38	0.97	1.0	5.0
School M	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
School N	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
School P	3.45	1.04	1.0	5.0
School Q	4.25	0.71	3.0	5.0

There are positive experiences overall. Most schools reported mean scores above 3.0, suggesting generally positive experiences among teachers interacting with colleagues of different races and ethnicities. Schools C, E, and Q, particularly, show the highest mean scores, indicating a notably inclusive environment. However, there was variability in experiences. The standard deviation values indicate the level of consensus among teachers' experiences within their schools. For example, School D shows a low standard deviation (0.38), suggesting uniform positive experiences among its teachers. Conversely, School I and School K have higher standard deviations, indicating a wider range of experiences and perceptions among staff. Likewise, there were areas of concern. School J stands out with a notably low mean score (2.00) and a relatively high standard deviation, reflecting negative experiences and a lack of consensus among teachers. On the other hand, School Q, with a high mean score (4.25) and a low standard deviation, exemplifies an environment where teachers consistently report positive experiences with diverse colleagues, highlighting it as a model for inclusivity.

Table 4 displays the aggregated responses of teachers regarding their comfort level in having honest conversations about race with their colleagues, categorized by school. Table 4 sheds light on teachers' comfort levels in engaging in honest conversations about race with their colleagues across various urban middle schools. The metrics provided include each school's mean score, standard deviation, minimum score, and maximum score.

Table 4*Teacher Comfort with Honest Conversations About Race*

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School A	3.50	1.26	1.0	5.0
School B	3.13	0.64	2.0	4.0
School C	3.13	0.83	1.0	4.0
School D	3.00	1.15	1.0	4.0
School E	3.00	1.15	1.0	5.0
School F	3.21	0.93	2.0	5.0
School G	3.00	1.00	1.0	5.0
School H	3.11	1.05	2.0	5.0
School I	3.25	1.18	1.0	5.0
School J	2.80	1.10	1.0	4.0
School K	3.16	1.21	1.0	5.0
School L	2.96	0.86	1.0	4.0
School M	2.75	0.50	2.0	3.0
School N	2.83	0.75	2.0	4.0
School P	3.27	1.27	1.0	5.0
School Q	3.63	0.74	3.0	5.0

Key observations in Table 4 indicate general comfort levels. Mean scores across schools suggest a moderate level of comfort among teachers, with the highest comfort level reported at School Q (mean = 3.63) and the lowest at School M (mean = 2.75). This indicates that while some teachers feel relatively comfortable discussing race, a notable portion of the educator population still does not. Table 4 displays a variability in comfort levels. The standard deviation values reflect the degree of consensus among teacher responses within schools. Schools with lower standard deviations (e.g., School M, School N) show more uniformity in teacher responses.

In contrast, higher standard deviations (e.g., School A, School P) indicate a broader diversity of comfort levels among teachers. Likewise, there was a range of experiences. The range between minimum and maximum scores highlights the disparity in individual teacher experiences within schools. For example, School E shows scores ranging from 1 to 5, suggesting that experiences vary widely among its teachers, from feeling very uncomfortable to very comfortable with race conversations.

The data in Table 5 provides insights into how engaged teachers are with race-related topics in their professional development and classroom discussions across various urban middle schools measured by mean scores, standard deviations, minimum scores, and maximum scores.

Table 5
Teacher Engagement with Race-Related Topics

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School A	3.38	1.20	1.0	5.0
School B	2.43	1.13	1.0	4.0
School C	2.93	0.88	1.0	4.0

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School D	2.71	0.95	1.0	4.0
School E	2.73	0.88	1.0	5.0
School F	3.38	0.77	2.0	5.0
School G	3.09	1.04	2.0	5.0
School H	2.78	1.20	1.0	4.0
School I	2.83	1.25	1.0	4.0
School J	2.00	0.71	1.0	3.0
School K	2.81	1.29	1.0	5.0
School L	2.92	1.10	1.0	5.0
School M	3.20	0.45	3.0	4.0
School N	3.17	1.33	1.0	5.0
School P	3.36	1.03	2.0	5.0
School Q	4.75	0.71	3.0	5.0

Table 5 provides an overview of overall teacher engagement with race-related topics. Mean scores range from 2.00 (School J) to 4.75 (School Q), indicating a significant variation in teacher engagement with race-related topics across schools. School Q stands out with exceptionally high engagement. Teacher engagement exhibited variability. The standard deviation values, which indicate the spread of responses within each school, vary widely, suggesting differing levels of consensus among teachers about their engagement. Schools with lower standard deviations (e.g., School M) have more uniform responses, whereas higher standard deviations (e.g., School K and School N) indicate a broader range of teacher experiences. Teacher engagement displayed several challenges. The minimum scores show that in several schools (e.g., Schools A, B, C, D, E, and H), at least one teacher reported the lowest possible level of engagement (1.0), highlighting challenges some educators face in engaging with these topics.

Alternatively, Table 5 indicates exemplary practices with School Q. With the highest mean score and a relatively low standard deviation, School Q exemplifies successful strategies for engaging teachers with race-related topics, indicating high engagement and consistency in experiences among its teachers.

The data in Table 6 provides insights into how engaged teachers are with race-related topics in their professional development and classroom discussions across urban middle schools measured by mean scores, standard deviations, minimum scores, and maximum scores.

Table 6
Importance of Conversations About Race Among Teachers

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School A	3.13	1.09	1.0	5.0
School B	1.57	0.79	1.0	3.0
School C	2.33	1.05	1.0	4.0
School D	3.00	1.10	1.0	4.0

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School E	2.06	0.85	1.0	3.0
School F	2.75	0.85	1.0	4.0
School G	2.64	0.92	2.0	5.0
School H	2.22	0.97	1.0	4.0
School I	2.83	1.04	1.0	4.0
School J	2.20	0.84	1.0	3.0
School K	2.35	1.06	1.0	5.0
School L	2.38	0.92	1.0	4.0
School M	2.40	0.89	1.0	3.0
School N	2.33	0.52	2.0	3.0
School P	2.82	0.87	1.0	4.0
School Q	3.88	0.83	3.0	5.0

Table 6 displays aggregated scores reflecting teachers' importance of having conversations about race across various urban middle schools, even if these conversations are uncomfortable. Mean scores range significantly across schools, from as low as 1.57 (School B) to as high as 3.88 (School Q), indicating varied perceptions among teachers about the importance of discussing race. School Q's higher mean score suggests a more pronounced recognition of the value of these discussions within its teacher community.

The standard deviation values offer insights into the level of consensus among school teachers. Lower standard deviations, such as those observed at School N, suggest a more uniform view among teachers. In comparison, higher standard deviations, seen in schools like School A and School K, reflect a broader range of opinions regarding the importance of conversations about race. Table 6 indicates challenges in engagement. The minimum scores reveal that in several schools, at least one teacher rated the importance of having conversations about race as low (1.0), highlighting challenges or reluctance to engage with these topics within certain school contexts.

Table 7 displays aggregated scores reflecting how frequently teachers discuss current racial news and events in their classrooms or with colleagues, categorized by school. The metrics include mean scores, standard deviations, and each school's range of scores (minimum to maximum).

Table 7
Frequency of Discussions About Racial News and Events

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School A	3.31	1.01	1.0	5.0
School B	2.00	1.15	1.0	4.0
School C	2.73	1.16	1.0	4.0
School D	2.71	0.95	1.0	4.0
School E	2.38	0.89	1.0	4.0

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School F	2.92	0.97	1.0	5.0
School G	2.64	1.03	1.0	4.0
School H	2.67	1.12	1.0	4.0
School I	2.94	1.16	1.0	5.0
School J	2.40	1.34	1.0	4.0
School K	2.81	1.13	1.0	5.0
School L	2.92	0.83	1.0	4.0
School M	2.60	0.89	1.0	3.0
School N	2.33	0.82	1.0	3.0
School P	2.91	0.94	1.0	4.0
School Q	4.50	0.76	3.0	5.0

Table 7 indicates variability in engagement regarding discussions about racial news and events. There's a wide range in the frequency of these discussions across schools, with School Q reporting the highest mean score (4.50), indicating very frequent discussions. In contrast, School B has the lowest mean score (2.00), suggesting these discussions are less frequent or less emphasized. The standard deviation values indicate varying levels of agreement among teachers within schools about the frequency of these discussions. Higher standard deviations (e.g., School J [1.34], School I [1.16]) suggest a wider range of opinions and experiences among teachers. In comparison, lower standard deviations (e.g., School N [0.82], School M [0.89]) indicate more response consistency. The minimum and maximum range of scores highlights the diversity in teacher engagement with racial news and events. Some schools have a wide range (e.g., School Q, School K), indicating that while some teachers frequently engage with these topics, others do not.

Table 8 outlines the level of support teachers perceive they receive from their school in speaking out against racism, indicated by mean scores, standard deviations, and ranges of scores. Table 8 provides a summary of how supported teachers feel by their schools in speaking out against racism, a key factor affecting their willingness to address racial issues openly.

Table 8
Support for Teachers Speaking Out Against Racism

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School A	3.31	1.14	1.0	5.0
School B	2.71	1.11	1.0	4.0
School C	2.93	1.22	1.0	5.0
School D	2.57	1.27	1.0	4.0
School E	2.87	1.30	1.0	5.0
School F	3.17	0.96	1.0	5.0
School G	3.64	1.03	2.0	5.0
School H	2.67	1.22	1.0	4.0

School	M	SD	Min Score	Max Score
School I	3.11	1.18	1.0	5.0
School J	3.67	0.58	3.0	4.0
School K	2.89	1.20	1.0	5.0
School L	3.00	0.90	1.0	4.0
School M	3.00	0.71	2.0	4.0
School N	2.17	0.98	1.0	3.0
School P	3.36	1.29	1.0	5.0
School Q	3.88	0.83	3.0	5.0

The mean scores in Table 8 suggest varying levels of perceived support across schools, with School Q showing the highest level of support (mean = 3.88) and School N the lowest (mean = 2.17). The standard deviation values highlight the consensus or disparity among teachers' perceptions within schools. For example, School J has a lower standard deviation (0.58), suggesting more uniform perceptions of support among its teachers. In contrast, School P shows a higher standard deviation (1.29), indicating a wide range of feelings about the support received. Table 8 showcases extremes in perceptions: The minimum and maximum scores reveal the breadth of opinions within schools. Some schools, like School G and School Q, have a minimum score higher than 2, suggesting a baseline level of support felt by all respondents. Conversely, schools with a minimum score of 1 (e.g., School A, School B) have at least some teachers feeling a lack of support.

The analysis in Table 9 examines the variations in perceptions of multicultural awareness and inclusivity among teachers from different urban middle schools. The overall scores are derived from averaging teachers' responses to aspects such as encouragement to teach about diverse cultures, experiences with colleagues of different races, comfort in discussing race, engagement with race-related topics, and perceived support for speaking out against racism.

Table 9
Overall Multicultural Awareness and Inclusivity Scores by School

School	M
School A	3.47
School B	2.67
School C	3.14
School D	3.05
School E	2.99
School F	3.34
School G	3.14
School H	3.00
School I	3.08
School J	2.55
School K	3.10

School	<i>M</i>
School L	3.00
School M	3.08
School N	2.88
School P	3.29
School Q	4.09

Table 9 showcases variability across schools. The overall scores vary significantly across schools, with School Q showing the highest level of multicultural awareness and inclusivity (4.09) and School B the lowest (2.67). This variability suggests differences in how schools approach and prioritize multicultural education and inclusivity within their environments. Schools with higher scores (e.g., School Q [4.09], School F [3.34]) may have more robust policies, practices, and cultures that support multicultural awareness and inclusivity. Conversely, schools with lower scores (e.g., School B, School J) may face challenges in these areas, indicating areas for improvement.

Discussion

The analysis in Table 1 of the study reveals a complex landscape of teacher perceptions regarding multicultural awareness and inclusivity in school culture. While there are areas of relative strength, such as experiences with colleagues and comfort in discussing race topics, areas also require targeted attention and improvement, particularly in enhancing open dialogue about race and providing consistent support for educators to address racism in professional development and curriculum. The variability in perceptions across different aspects suggests the need for a more unified and proactive approach from school leadership to cultivate an environment where multicultural awareness and inclusivity are encouraged and actively practiced, suggesting that while some schools may actively promote these discussions, others may lack the necessary support or framework to do so effectively. The findings also reflect a cultural or systemic hesitancy to engage in discussions that could be perceived as contentious or uncomfortable despite a general openness among staff.

The analysis in Table 2 reveals a nuanced picture of teacher perceptions regarding the encouragement from school leaders to teach about diverse cultures. Schools such as Urban Middle School A and Urban Middle School E are perceived more positively by their teachers, indicating a potentially more consistent and comprehensive approach to diversity in their curriculum and school culture. In contrast, the wider range of scores and higher standard deviations at schools like Urban Middle School D suggest that not all teachers feel equally supported, pointing to a need for targeted efforts to enhance leadership support and consistency in promoting cultural diversity across all urban middle schools. This could reflect differing personal experiences, awareness levels, or interpretations of school leadership actions. These findings stress the importance of school leadership in actively supporting and promoting an educational environment that values diversity. Addressing the variability in teacher perceptions requires a commitment from school leaders to advocate for and implement inclusive teaching practices and curriculum content that reflects a wide range of cultural perspectives.

The findings in Table 3 emphasize the importance of school culture in shaping teachers' experiences with colleagues of different races and ethnicities. Schools with higher mean scores and lower standard deviations may have more effective policies and practices in place to promote inclusivity and diversity. This suggests significant room for improvement in fostering an inclusive culture within this school. In contrast, schools with lower mean scores or higher standard deviations may need to examine their school culture more closely and implement strategies to improve inclusivity. This analysis underscores that while many urban middle schools create environments conducive to positive interactions among diverse staff, there is variability that warrants attention. Understanding and addressing the factors contributing to these varying experiences can enhance the overall inclusivity of the school culture, benefiting not only the teachers but also the students they serve.

The variation in comfort levels for having honest conversations about race in Table 4 underpins the need for targeted professional development and support systems within schools. Creating a supportive environment that fosters open and honest dialogue about race can contribute significantly to the overall inclusivity of the school culture. The analysis indicates that while there is a foundation of moderate comfort among teachers in discussing race, significant work remains to ensure all educators feel fully supported in these conversations. Enhancing teacher comfort with discussing race not only benefits the educators themselves but also has the potential to positively impact the students they teach, fostering a more inclusive and understanding school environment.

The variability in teacher engagement with race-related topics in Table 5 underlines the need for tailored professional development programs that address teachers' specific challenges and needs in different schools. This suggests a robust integration of race-related topics into professional development and classroom discussions. Schools with lower engagement levels might benefit from targeted support, including training on race and equity, resources to facilitate discussions, and strategies to integrate race-related topics into the curriculum effectively.

This analysis highlights the diverse levels of engagement among teachers with race-related topics in their professional development and classroom discussions. While some schools demonstrate strong engagement, indicating a proactive approach to addressing race and equity, others face challenges that may hinder effective engagement. Addressing these challenges through targeted professional development and support can enhance teachers' ability to engage with these critical topics, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and reflective educational environment.

The findings in Table 6 highlight the necessity for schools to foster an environment where conversations about race and ethnicity are valued and supported. Schools with lower mean scores may need to investigate the factors influencing these perceptions and work towards creating a more conducive atmosphere for open discussions about race. This might include professional development, resources for teachers, and institutional support to ensure these critical conversations can occur in a supportive and constructive manner. Additionally, the variation in scores, particularly in the schools with lower mean scores and higher variability, suggests a need for reflection on school practices related to diversity and inclusivity. It further points to potential areas where schools could improve support for teachers in facilitating conversations about race.

The analysis reveals a broad spectrum of teacher perceptions regarding the importance of conversations about race in their schools. It highlights the need for targeted interventions to enhance the capacity of teachers to engage in these conversations confidently and constructively. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the strengths within each school's context, educational leaders can foster a more inclusive and aware school culture that embraces the importance of discussing race openly and honestly.

The variability in teacher engagement with race-related topics found in Table 7 emphasizes the need for tailored professional development programs that address teachers' specific challenges and needs. Schools with lower engagement levels might benefit from targeted support, including training on race and equity, resources to facilitate discussions, and strategies to integrate race-related topics into the curriculum effectively. Likewise, Table 7 suggests teachers had diverse opinions about racial news and events.

This analysis highlights the diverse levels of engagement among teachers with race-related topics in their professional development and classroom discussions. While some schools demonstrate strong engagement, indicating a proactive approach to addressing race and equity, others face challenges that may hinder effective engagement. Addressing these challenges through targeted professional development and support can enhance teachers' ability to engage with these critical topics, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and reflective educational environment.

The findings in Table 8 emphasize the necessity for schools to foster an environment where conversations about race and ethnicity are valued and supported. Schools with lower mean scores may need to investigate the factors influencing these perceptions and work towards creating a more conducive atmosphere for open discussions about race. This might include professional development, resources for teachers, and institutional support to ensure these critical conversations can occur in a supportive and constructive manner. The findings indicate that teachers' perceptions of support for addressing racism can significantly differ depending on the school.

The analysis reveals a broad spectrum of teacher perceptions regarding the importance of conversations about race in their schools. It highlights the need for targeted interventions to enhance the capacity of teachers to engage in these conversations confidently and constructively. By addressing the challenges and leveraging the strengths within each school's context, educational leaders can foster a more inclusive and aware school culture that embraces the importance of discussing race openly and honestly.

The frequency with which teachers discuss current racial news and events can significantly impact school culture, potentially enhancing students' awareness and understanding of racial issues. Schools in Table 9 with higher frequencies of such discussions may foster a more inclusive and aware environment, while those with lower frequencies may need to explore strategies to encourage more frequent and meaningful engagement with racial topics.

The analysis accentuates the importance of discussing current racial news and events as part of fostering an inclusive and educated school community. It reveals significant variability in how these discussions are integrated into school practices, suggesting opportunities for some schools to enhance their efforts in this area. Encouraging teachers to engage more frequently and deeply with racial topics can contribute to a school culture that is not only more inclusive but also more reflective of the complex world students are being prepared to navigate.

The perceived level of support for speaking out against racism in Table 10 impacts teachers' willingness to address these issues, influencing the school's overall culture regarding racial awareness and inclusivity. Schools with higher mean scores may foster a more open environment where teachers feel empowered to discuss and address racism. In contrast, schools with lower scores may need to explore ways to enhance support, such as through professional development, policy changes, or creating more platforms for dialogue.

Overall, this discussion spotlights the critical role of perceived support in empowering teachers to speak out against racism within their schools. Enhancing this support can encourage a more proactive stance against racism, contributing to a school culture that not only addresses but actively opposes racial injustices. Identifying and addressing the factors that contribute to the variability in perceived support can help schools become safer, more inclusive environments for both students and staff (Banks & Banks, 2019).

Implications of the Study

The analysis of teacher perceptions and school culture presented in Tables 1 through 10 highlights significant variability in how multicultural education and inclusivity are approached and experienced within urban middle schools. This variability underscores the critical role of educational leadership in shaping an educational environment that values and promotes diversity.

Educational leadership, as discussed by Tooms & Boske (2010), plays a pivotal role in fostering inclusive and diverse school cultures. This is further supported by Santamaría and Santamaría (2015), who emphasize the significance of culturally responsive practices in leadership to counteract educational injustice and promote sustainable change. The positive influence of diverse school leaders, as noted by Rodríguez et al. (2015), on settings serving diverse student populations underscores the importance of leadership in embracing diversity and inclusivity.

The analysis reveals that schools like Urban Middle School A and Urban Middle School E, which are perceived more positively by their teachers, may benefit from the type of leadership that prioritizes diversity and inclusivity, as advocated by Khalifa et al. (2016). These leaders not only foster positive attitudes towards multiculturalism among teachers but also establish a school-wide ethos that values and supports diversity. This aligns with the findings from Table 2, suggesting that leadership practices significantly influence teacher perceptions regarding the encouragement to teach about diverse cultures.

Teacher perceptions of multicultural education and inclusivity, critical to the successful implementation of diversity initiatives within schools, are influenced by a range of factors including personal beliefs, professional development opportunities, and the level of support from school leadership (Abacioglu, et al., 2020; Grant & Asimeng-Boahene, 2006; Nieto, 2004). This complexity is mirrored in the varied engagement levels with race-related topics and the need for targeted professional development programs, as evidenced in the findings from Tables 4, 5, and 7. The diversity of the teacher workforce itself, associated with more positive outcomes (Nevarez, et al., 2019), further emphasizes the need for a diverse teaching staff to enhance perceptions and practices related to multicultural education.

The profound impact of multicultural awareness and inclusivity on school culture, highlighted by Banks & Banks (2019), is evident in the necessity for schools to foster

environments where conversations about race and ethnicity are valued and supported, as indicated in the findings from Tables 6 and 8. The literature suggests that inclusive school cultures are characterized by open dialogue, equitable opportunities, and a curriculum that reflects the diversity of the student body. However, challenges in overcoming resistance and ensuring that multicultural education transcends superficial treatment remain significant, as noted by Sue et al. (2022).

An integral component of fostering an inclusive school environment is preparing school leaders. Effective leadership is pivotal in translating multicultural awareness into practice. Thus, training programs for school administrators should emphasize not only the theoretical understanding of diversity and inclusion but also practical skills in implementing these concepts within their schools. Leadership preparation should include strategies for facilitating open discussions on race, managing diverse classrooms, and integrating inclusivity into the curriculum. Moreover, leaders must be equipped to handle resistance and foster a supportive culture that embraces diversity. This approach ensures that leaders are aware of the importance of these discussions and are prepared to support and advocate for them in their schools actively, leading by example and setting the tone for an open and inclusive educational environment (Grooms, et al., 2024; Baker et al., 2023).

Based on the insights gathered from the discussion, it is recommended that educational leadership programs integrate specific modules that focus on cultural competence and inclusion strategies. These programs should include comprehensive training on understanding and addressing implicit biases, developing effective communication skills for discussing sensitive topics such as race and ethnicity, and implementing equitable practices across all school operations. Additionally, prospective leaders should be taught how to assess their school's culture critically and develop targeted interventions that address identified gaps in multicultural awareness and inclusivity. Workshops and simulation exercises that allow future leaders to practice these skills in real-time scenarios would be particularly beneficial. To ensure these initiatives are sustained, leadership programs should also incorporate methods for ongoing evaluation and adjustment of school policies and practices, empowering leaders to adapt to changing demographics and societal norms.

Finally, the implications of this study extend significantly into policy-making and the broader social and legislative context, underscoring the urgent need for informed decisions that could advance educational equity across diverse educational settings. The findings reveal crucial insights into the varying levels of teacher comfort and engagement with race-related discussions and the perceived support for addressing racism, pointing to a broader systemic issue within educational environments (Waite & Arar, 2020). Policymakers and educational leaders are encouraged to consider these findings as a call to action to develop more nuanced policies that not only encourage but actively support inclusive practices and open dialogues about race and identity within schools. Such policies must navigate the delicate balance between complying with state laws and fostering an educational culture that values diversity and inclusivity. Additionally, by acknowledging the external pressures that schools face due to legislative restrictions, this study provides a compelling argument for advocating at the state or national level for legislation that supports educational practices inclusive of all races and identities. Ultimately, these insights could help pave the way for a more equitable educational system where discussions about race

and inclusivity are not just permissible but are a foundational aspect of the educational experience.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the dynamics of multicultural awareness and inclusivity within urban middle schools, focusing on the critical roles of educational leadership and teacher perceptions. Through the analysis of teacher surveys, alongside a comprehensive review of existing literature, the study has illuminated the complex interplay between leadership practices, teacher attitudes towards diversity, and the resultant school culture.

The comprehensive analysis presented across multiple tables reveals significant insights into teacher perceptions of multicultural awareness and inclusivity in school culture. While there are areas of relative strength such as comfort in discussing race topics and positive experiences with colleagues, there is a clear need for improvement in fostering open dialogues about race and providing consistent support for educators in professional development and curriculum integration. The variability in perceptions across different schools indicates a pressing need for a unified and proactive approach from school leadership.

The findings underscore the pivotal role of educational leadership in fostering inclusive and diverse school cultures. Leaders who prioritize and actively promote diversity and inclusivity not only influence teacher perceptions positively but also catalyze the development of a school-wide ethos that values and supports diversity. This leadership approach, characterized by culturally responsive practices, is essential for counteracting educational injustices and promoting sustainable change. The positive influence of diverse school leaders further highlights the necessity of leadership that is reflective of the student population's diversity, as such representation can significantly impact the inclusivity and effectiveness of school settings.

Teacher perceptions of multicultural education and inclusivity emerged as a vital element in the successful implementation of diversity initiatives within schools. These perceptions are influenced by a myriad of factors, including personal beliefs, professional development opportunities, and the level of support from school leadership. The diversity of the teaching workforce itself plays a crucial role, with more diverse staff associated with more positive outcomes in terms of multicultural education practices. It is evident that teachers' willingness to engage in multicultural education and their comfort with discussing race-related issues are significant determinants of their effectiveness in fostering an inclusive classroom environment.

The study also highlighted the profound impact of multicultural awareness and inclusivity on school culture. Schools that effectively integrate multicultural education into their curricula and practices not only improve academic outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds but also promote equity, empathy, and respect among all students. This is in line with the understanding that culture is dynamic, and engaging with it is an ongoing, evolving journey that requires continuous effort, openness, and adaptability from educators.

However, challenges remain. The resistance from various stakeholders within the educational system, stemming from misconceptions about the goals and benefits of multicultural education, biases, or reluctance to confront issues of privilege and systemic inequality, poses a significant barrier to advancing multicultural education. Overcoming this resistance and ensuring

that multicultural education transcends superficial treatment to effect genuine cultural change within schools is imperative.

In conclusion, this study reaffirms the critical importance of educational leadership and teacher perceptions in shaping inclusive and diverse school cultures. It calls for a concerted effort from all stakeholders to embrace transformative leadership and culturally responsive practices. By doing so, schools can become more inclusive environments that celebrate diversity and equip students with the cultural competence and empathy needed to thrive in a multicultural world. The journey towards genuine cultural change in education is ongoing, and this goal can be achieved through persistent and collective efforts.

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