

## **Students' attitudes toward diversity in higher education: Findings from a scoping review**

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To inform future research and enhance intercultural learning in higher education, this article presents findings from a scoping review of international evidence on students' attitudes about the importance of diverse people and beliefs in higher education settings. A final sample of 56 studies were analysed for patterns in their methodological approaches, contexts, aims, and results. Findings suggest that students' conceptualisations of diversity are wider than a focus only on culture, race, or ethnicity, and that students across multiple contexts believe that diversity is an inherent, beneficial part of the learning experience. However, there were inconsistent results related to students' beliefs about the efficacy of diversity practices.

### **Introduction**

Student populations have diversified at universities in the Anglosphere in recent decades. In Australia, for example, the number of students from regional or remote areas grew by over 25% between 2011 and 2021, and the number of Indigenous students grew by more than 200% within the same period (Department of Education, 2023). Such growth is expected to continue, especially with the implementation of "deliberate Government policy action" intended to increase the participation of local equity groups (Universities Australia, 2023, para. 3). University-led initiatives are also visible across the Anglosphere. For example, Baker et al. (2022) found that all but two Australian universities included the word "diversity" in their strategic plans, and Phillips (2019) similarly found that most U.S. universities have some mention of "diversity" in their mission statements.

There are multiple documented benefits of such diverse learning environments, including pedagogical, cognitive, and social benefits for university students (Cai & Marangell, 2022). For example, frequent interactions with diverse perspectives may lead to the development of higher order thinking skills and critical thinking (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Nonetheless, challenges persist in the efficacy of such practices and changing political landscapes have complicated this context. For example, in the United States, multiple efforts have been introduced to ban or limit the use of university diversity statements (Zahneis, 2023). As these top-down efforts are introduced and enacted, it is important to also consider bottom-up attitudes and motivations.

As will be discussed, much is known about the drivers of such diversification and of the benefits and challenges of multicultural learning environments. What is less available is a

consolidated understanding of what students themselves think about the role of diverse people and perspectives within the university experience. A fuller understanding of students' perspectives is important for improving practice, guiding future research, and ensuring that intercultural learning experiences benefit rather than hinder each student's university learning experience.

### **Engaging with “diversity” in higher education**

Diversity within the student body can have multiple benefits for students' learning experiences. Intercultural learning opportunities can expose students to different perspectives (Arkoudis et al., 2010; Leask et al., 2008). Social acceptance and a sense of belonging can help students transition to university and complete their studies (Maunder, 2018). Some studies have shown that cross-cultural learning experiences can reduce prejudice, stereotyping, and bias, and increase respect and tolerance (De Vita, 2002; Sweeney et al., 2008). Positive experiences with multicultural groupwork can lead to greater respect for others' perspectives (Sweeney et al., 2008).

However, these outcomes are not guaranteed. The presence of diverse populations does not always result in increased intercultural contact or more positive intercultural interactions (Arkoudis et al., 2010). Intercultural interaction may not occur frequently on university campuses due to a lack of opportunity within or between classes (Marangell, 2020) or the perception that simply being part of a multicultural campus equates to interacting interculturally (Halualani, 2008), for example. Additionally, intercultural interaction does not always lead to intended benefits such as increased understanding, openness, or better communication skills (Burdett, 2014; Tananuraksakul, 2012); nor are the benefits always evenly distributed (Héliot et al., 2020). Instead, the students who benefit are often those already likely to engage multiculturally (Harrison, 2015).

Research also suggests that negative intercultural learning experiences might make students less open to participating in multicultural learning and more likely to associate only with those who are similar to them, a response that Centola and colleagues (2007) term “induced homophily” (p. 905). Similarly, Locks and colleagues (2008) found that “positive interactions with diverse peers result in an increased sense of belonging to campus, while interactions with diverse peers that result in anxiety detract from this sense of belonging” (p. 280). In other words, despite broad recognition that diversity is beneficial, there are persistent challenges in achieving greater interaction among diverse student groups, and, importantly, in ensuring that such interaction is consistently beneficial.

Literature also highlights that how a student approaches their intercultural learning experiences influences the success of diversity efforts and associated graduate outcomes. Spencer-Oatey and Daubner's (2019) recent study at English-speaking universities in the U.K., Belgium, and Germany found that a domestic student's attitude towards diversity and their experiences with it were essential for stimulating that student's intercultural skills. In the U.S., Pettigrew and colleagues (2011) found that positive outcomes of

intercultural interaction are associated with whether a student had a choice to engage in the interaction. Such literature emphasises the importance of students' attitudes in shaping the efficacy of intercultural learning or diversity experiences at university.

### **Lack of synthesised evidence**

Despite the influence of students' attitudes on the efficacy of intercultural learning, there are few reviews that synthesise empirical research about students' attitudes about diversity in higher education. Exceptions focus on the experiences of specific populations, such as reviews about the experiences of students with autism spectrum disorder (Nuske et al., 2019), refugees in higher education (Mangan & Winter, 2017), queer students of colour (Duran, 2019), and students with intellectual or attention difficulties (Alqazlan et al., 2019; Lightfoot et al., 2018). Likewise, a few studies have explored literature relating to students' perceptions of specific populations, such as attitudes about international students (Ward et al., 2009) and influences on perceptions of the transgender population (Read et al., 2020). Missing is consolidated evidence of how students think about the role of diversity more broadly within higher education.

As highlighted above, students' attitudes seem to be key indicators in the success of their experiences of or with diversity in higher education; a consolidated understanding of their attitudes is thus a necessary step in further exploring the future of intercultural and diversity learning practices in higher education. Exploring students' perspectives on diversity can also inform universities and policymakers of the efficacy of future practices, especially practices that will directly affect students' university experiences. We must therefore ask, "What is known about students' attitudes toward and perspectives on the importance of student diversity within their university experience?"

To address this question, this article reports findings from a scoping review of international literature that explored students' attitudes toward and perspectives about diversity in higher education. The specific study aim was to consolidate current understanding about students' attitudes and perspectives to inform future research and, ultimately, enhance intercultural learning in higher education. We acknowledge that "diversity" manifests differently across contexts; we have therefore purposefully avoided adopting a particular definition of "diversity" and have explored instead how students define it.

### **Methods**

This study was conducted in the second half of 2021, utilising a protocol based on Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework with five distinct stages.

#### **Stage 1: Identify the research question**

The guiding research question was, "What is known about university students' perspectives, ideas, and attitudes towards diversity in higher education?"

## **Stage 2: Identify relevant studies**

We identified relevant studies using both primary (Stage 2.1) and secondary searches (Stage 2.2). The primary searches involved four electronic databases: Web of Science (Clarivate); Academic Search Complete (EBSCO); Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC); and PsycINFO (APA and EBSCO). Web of Science was used as the primary, more encompassing database, and the other three were used as complementary databases that were likely to contain social science studies about attitudes and/or education settings. Appendix 1 presents the search terms for these primary searches.

All authors agreed upon the search parameters and limitations. Results from these searches were limited to those published from 1 January 1950, for which the full text was available digitally, and written in the languages understood by at least one member of the research team: English, Spanish, French, Italian, Russian, Korean, and Romanian. In Stage 2.1, we excluded publications that were unlikely to include original empirical data, such as editorials and trade publications. Author 2 identified 5,273 results through the primary searches.

Author 1 conducted secondary searches through additional databases (APA PsycNet, Google Scholar, and the primary researchers' Library catalogue, The University of Melbourne) and through targeted journals, such as the *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*. The secondary searches produced 658 results. As such, 5,931 results from Stage 2 searches were uploaded to the online tool *Covidence*. Of these, 1,180 duplicates were removed, leaving an initial pool of 4,751 studies for screening.

## **Stage 3: Study selection**

The study selection stage comprised two title-and-abstract screenings (together comprising Stage 3.1) and one full-text review (Stage 3.2), all completed using *Covidence*. During the first screening, each study's title and abstract was reviewed in a double-blind mode by a random combination of two members of the research team who each assessed the study's relevance based on four considerations agreed upon by the full team: whether it appeared to include empirical data from students themselves, was set within a higher education context, pertained to students' attitudes towards diversity, and satisfied the limiters from Stage 2. Instances of conflicting votes between the two reviewers were resolved by one of the two principal researchers (Authors 1 and 3) determining the consensus. The initial screen excluded 4,513 studies; 238 studies remained in the review.

The second screening again considered only each study's title and abstract but identified additional reasons for exclusion:

- Wrong population: Participants were not university/higher education students and/or students were a convenience sample.
- Wrong context: The study explored issues/attitudes outside the university context.
- Wrong focus: The focus was not clearly about diversity, was about university outcomes (e.g., achievement) rather than attitudes or perceptions, was about the influence of

diversity on particular outcomes, or was about students' perceptions of their own experiences or competencies.

- Wrong data source: The data came from anything other than students' own responses (e.g., from teachers or from a literature review).

Through another double-blind process with two researchers reviewing each entry, 139 additional studies were excluded. The full texts of the remaining 99 studies were then reviewed using *Covidence's* data extraction tool. More detail was identified in relation to each study's sample, methodology, aims, research question(s), and findings. Those details were extracted to a spreadsheet by Author 2 and reviewed against all criteria from the preceding stages. Authors 1, 2, and 3 reviewed the spreadsheet and agreed that 43 studies did not meet the inclusion criteria. In sum, the five-step Stage 3 process identified 56 relevant studies (see Appendix).

#### **Stage 4: Charting the data**

After the final sample of 56 studies was identified, Author 2 expanded the spreadsheet from Stage 3–Step 5, recording additional detail about each study's sample, aims, methodology, and findings. Particular attention was given to the topics covered in each study, coded in a binary present/not present mode based on the concepts that each addressed.

#### **Stage 5: Collating, summarising, and reporting the results**

This stage included further categorising and summarising of the information provided in the Stage 4 spreadsheet. Authors 2 and 1 identified patterns across the studies, including those regarding conceptualisations of diversity, methodology, or context.

As a note, Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework included a sixth stage, Consultation, which was not utilised in our study but will be incorporated into a follow-up study.

## **Results**

### **Review of methodological approaches**

This section outlines the methodological approaches of the studies to contextualise the range and depth of what is known about students' perspective. It is followed by findings related to students' perspectives on the role of diversity in higher education.

Although the protocol included publications from 1950, the final sample was more recent, with the majority (n=29) published between 2011 and 2021. All were published in English, though sometimes in English and another language (e.g., French). There were notable gaps in the contexts of available studies, including an absence of Asian or South American contexts and limited consideration of African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American contexts. Most studies examined a Continental U.S. context (n=40) (excluding Puerto Rico) and three others collected data in both the United States and one other

context (Canada, Puerto Rico, or the United Kingdom, respectively). Six studies considered countries where English was not the predominant language. The terminology used in the studies to discuss diversity and particular groups of students varied (e.g., “White students”, “Caucasian students”), and findings presented below adopt the terminology used in the respective articles.

More than half of the studies (57%, n=32) utilised an exclusively quantitative, survey-based approach. In contrast, 30% (n=17) employed a qualitative approach using interviews (n=9), focus groups (n=7), or a combination of the two (n=1). Mixed-methods approaches were less common (n=7): five used a survey with some open-ended questions, one employed a combination of surveys and case studies, and one used a survey and desk review.

Most studies (n=32) collected data from a sample said to represent the overall student body of the institution(s) examined. Others involved participants from specific student groups, with many studies focusing purposefully on the experiences or perceptions of one or two specific student groups, such as first-year students. Two studies incorporated faculty perceptions in addition to student responses, but these faculty perspectives were not analysed in our study.

There were consistent patterns in the aims of the included studies. The studies could broadly be categorised as those that explored students' attitudes toward or conceptualisations of diversity generally (n=23), those that considered the experiences or perceptions of specific student groups (n=12), those that explored attitudes *about* specific student groups (n=11), and those that examined beliefs about specific institutional contexts or policies (n=10). The most recurrent specific aims were to examine students' attitudes and experiences related to racial, cultural, or ethnic diversity (n=14), and to explore students' definitions of diversity (n=10), including the way specific student groups conceptualised diversity (n=4). Another recurring aim explored both student and faculty attitudes (n=3). Only three studies explored changes in students' perceptions.

The focus on cultural or racial diversity was predominant and was evident in the language used within the 56 studies' titles, key words, and abstracts. However, eight studies (14%) considered perceptions related to religious diversity, including perceptions about atheists. Other studies considered elements of gender or sexuality (13%, n=7) and socioeconomic status or background (7%, n=4). A few studies focused on the potential relationship between diversity and the teaching and learning experience, such as students' attitudes towards diverse faculty (n=4), a specific student group's attitudes towards diverse staff members (n=1), the impact of racially diverse classrooms (n=3), the impact of multicultural education (n=2), and students' beliefs about working on assignments in mixed groups (n=1).

### **What students think**

This section presents key themes most relevant to expanding our understanding of students' attitudes, ideas, and perceptions of diversity in higher education.

*Conceptualisations of diversity*

Findings from seven studies suggested that students considered a wide range of characteristics in the definition of diversity, including race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender orientation, and, vaguely, some other type of difference. However, common associations were made with culture, race, nationality, and ethnicity. This aligned with the predominance of studies themselves that focused on these aspects of diversity. Other studies found that diversity was hard to define (Brunner, 2006) or that it was comprised of multiple elements, including actions and behaviours (Bresciani, 2003; Brunner, 2006; Dingel & Sage, 2020). Alternatively, the student participants in Mitchell and Vandegrift's (2014) study, business students at a private U.S. university, tended to frame diversity as the presence of international students; participants in both "white student and international student focus groups" (p. 35) considered working and learning with international students to be an example of how the university prepares them to be a part of a diverse workforce.

There was a small selection of students who appeared to conceptualise diversity beyond personal characteristics, such as (a) the environment in which diversity and inclusion are practiced, or (b) attitudes and actions that would support inclusive practice. For example, in Drape et al.'s (2017) study at a mid-Atlantic U.S. university, some students considered acceptance and exposure to be key characteristics of diversity. Similarly, some students in Bresciani's study (2003) in the Midwestern U.S. considered the climate and place to be important elements of diversity. In other words, "diversity" was used as a description of the environment, such as a place in which differences are recognised and respected.

*Importance of diverse learning environments*

Findings from eight studies, all U.S.-based, suggested that students are aware of a range of possible benefits of diversity and that they consider diversity to be an important element of the university environment. For example, students in multiple regions and institutional types believed that it was important to have a diverse student body (Brunner, 2006; Hung et al., 2007), beneficial to make friends from different races or backgrounds (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990; Ervin, 2001), and that exposure to different ideas and perspectives was an important part of the university experience (Maruyama et al., 2000; Ervin, 2001; Whitla et al. 2003).

Many students believed that the inclusion of multicultural content enhanced their learning experience and should be included in the curriculum (Ervin, 2001; Haslerig et al., 2013; Lopez et al., 1995). For example, students included in Maruyama et al.'s (2000) report, which included multiple U.S. campuses, agreed that learning in a multi-racial/multiethnic classroom positively influences students' cognitive and personal development by challenging stereotypes, broadening perspectives, and sharpening critical thinking skills. Students believed that conflict and tension were educational, and that classroom diversity exposed and challenged biases across a range of disciplines, including STEM fields. Participants in Haslerig et al.'s (2013) study from 11 law schools in four U.S. regions implied that teaching staff have a responsibility to activate diversity within their classrooms.

Importantly, however, although many students acknowledged the importance of diversity or multicultural education, many also indicated negative experiences with multicultural courses or with existing policies. For example, a majority of participants in Ervin's (2001) study from the Northwestern U.S. agreed that diversity-oriented courses were an important aspect of one's college education, but a majority also felt that diversity courses were racist against African Americans. Similarly, many students in that study indicated that they did not enjoy classes that challenged their beliefs or made them think critically about different perspectives. Although most students seemed to embrace diversity and diversity practices within the curriculum, they also felt that diversity programs do little to improve race relations.

Notably, perceptions of diversity, the importance of diversity, and the efficacy of diversity and inclusion programs varied across different regions, populations and student groups, even within the same country. In Lopez et al.'s (1995) study at a large Midwestern U.S. university, for example, White students were much less likely to support financial and admissions policies designed to improve racial representation on campus. Likewise, in Hung et al.'s (2007) study in a Pacific Northwestern U.S. context, students from minority cultural groups were more likely than students from the majority culture to feel that the university did not respond adequately to instances of racism. However, the conclusions drawn about the importance of diversity are limited, because all eight studies which included findings related to students' perceptions of the importance of diversity were conducted in the United States.

#### *Hesitation to discuss diversity*

Some studies also suggested a hesitancy among students to discuss issues of diversity, especially race and ethnicity. For example, the focus group participants in Oikonomidou et al.'s (2019) study in the U.S., although speaking clearly and coherently in response to other questions, discussed interactions with diversity with "pauses, mistakes, and lack of clarity" (p. 387). The researchers interpreted this behaviour as insecurity in discussing diversity. Likewise, Mitchell and Vandegrift (2014) found that their participants, also in the U.S., demonstrated a lack of comfort or interest in discussing multiculturalism. Similarly, both studies found that some students exhibited what the researchers called a "colorblind" approach in the sense that they chose not to "see a difference" (Mitchell & Vandegrift, 2014, p. 36). Dingel and Sage (2020) observed a similar response in their study, which was also conducted in the U.S. Mitchell and Vandegrift (2014) elaborated, saying that White students tended to see themselves as "generic" and non-White students as "diverse" (p. 35).

The observed hesitancy was also observed in non-U.S. contexts. For example, in an English study, Roberts et al. (2008) noted the anxiety that White students exhibited and their fears about revealing an ignorance of other cultures, or about being unintentionally offensive. Likewise, the students from ethnic minority backgrounds expressed a discomfort at being seen as different. Students elaborated on the complexities of appropriate discourse, noting that discussion of race in relation to some topics (e.g., medicine) is seen as acceptable but other discourse often becomes inappropriate or problematic.



*The role of context*

Although the institutional contexts varied considerably, findings generally suggested that contextual differences play an important role in students' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of diversity. It was outside the scope of this study to investigate all contextual factors that influence students' perceptions; however, a recurring theme among a few studies was that the homogeneity of the student population may influence students' perceptions of diversity.

Specifically, two studies focused particularly on attitudes across institutions with different proportions of student groups. For example, Meacham et al.'s (2003) U.S.-based study investigated whether the proportion of minority students in the classroom influenced students' perceptions of teaching and learning activities. They found that most student participants believed certain educational outcomes are better facilitated when there is a greater presence of minority students in class. More recently, in Israel, Gross and Maor (2020) found that the attitudes of and relations between Jewish and Arab Israeli students were more positive at one university with a higher Arab student population (20%) than at one with a much lower proportion (<2%).

Abraham and Jacobs' (1990) older study also considered contextual population differences by including majority and minority (White and Black) students at both historically White and historically Black colleges in the Southern U.S. The study found that attitudes differed between those who were the majority and those who were the minority, even though all participating colleges were located within a similar geographic region of the country. For example, recruiting minority students was rated highly important by more Black students at predominantly White colleges than at historically Black colleges. However, being a minority within the university context did not lead to universal attitudes; Black students attending predominantly White colleges differed from White students attending historically Black colleges in the importance they placed on the presence of cultural events and faculty from different racial backgrounds. As this study was published in the 1990s, however, it is possible that outcomes might differ today.

*Changing perceptions over time*

Only three studies examined students' changing perceptions about diversity, all of which were from the U.S. and two were conducted over 25 years ago. Abraham and Jacobs (1990) compared survey responses from 1978 to 1989 and found a stronger belief among students in 1989 than those in 1978 that institutions were obliged to encourage positive racial interactions on campus. Lopez and colleagues' (1995) longitudinal study from 1990 to 1994 found that students in their final year were more supportive of financial and admissions equity programs than they were in their first year.

More recently, Dingel and Sage (2020) compared students' perceptions over two years. They found that the way students define "diversity" and "difference" did not change much over two years, with race and ethnicity remaining the most predominant factors in students' descriptions. It also seemed that students' ideologies remained relatively stable, as did their understanding that students from different backgrounds might experience university differently.

## Discussion

Findings suggest that, although there is much that is known about students' attitudes and perceptions of diversity, the current scholarly understanding is limited in scope and nuance. This review has demonstrated that students across institutions and countries generally believe that diversity is important in higher education but that theoretical support does not always lead to positive perceptions of diversity-related practices. It is particularly notable that the participants in Ervin's (2001) study indicated that they did not enjoy classes that challenged their beliefs or made them think critically about different perspectives, because these strategies are particularly important for the development of many of the perceived benefits of intercultural learning experiences, such as critical thinking and openness to different perspectives. This finding also poses challenges to the efficacy of certain practices, considering that a student's attitude and past experiences have been shown to influence the development of their intercultural skills (Spencer-Oatey & Daubner, 2019) and likelihood of engaging in intercultural learning in the future (Pettigrew et al., 2011).

It is also important that Abraham and Jacobs' (1990) study, which was conducted over three decades ago, showed evidence that theoretical support for diversity does not necessarily equate to belief that actual practices are beneficial. The continuity of the feeling that practice does not always support theory has important implications for universities. What Abraham and Jacobs (1990) noted decades ago still holds: that increasing the diversity of the student population will not alone reduce feelings of bias or prejudice. Instead, "[s]tate, system-level, and institutional policymakers must work to develop programs that raise the multi-cultural sensitivity of all those individuals involved in campus life" (Abraham & Jacobs, 1990, p. 34).

Another goal of our study was to explore how students define diversity. Unsurprisingly, the language around diversity focuses predominantly on culture, race, and ethnicity; yet, students' conceptualisations of diversity are both complex and multifaceted. Not only is there consideration for a wider range of individual variables but also for behaviours and actions, such as tolerance, respect, and inclusion. This supports recent studies that suggest that students' conceptualisations of diversity are expanding (e.g., Baker et al., 2022). However, it is difficult to generalise these conceptualisations due to the differences in the contexts of the included studies. As exemplified in Dogra and Karnik's (2004) study, students may also conceptualise diversity-related concepts differently in two different countries. It is therefore important, as Banks (2009) suggests, that institutional leaders clarify what is meant by "diversity" when designing or promoting a diversity-related initiative. Likewise, one-size-fits-all models of practice are unlikely to be effective (Dogra & Karnik, 2004).

Analysis also highlights that there is limited evidence about the influences of institutional context on students' perceptions of the role and importance of diversity. Some studies (e.g., Gross & Maor, 2020; Meacham et al., 2003) have compared differences of perceptions among minority and majority background students or differences within

universities of different demographic profiles. However, there is a need to further synthesise the factors within learning environments that might influence students' ideas about the importance of diversity. This is difficult to do given the range of years over which the included studies took place.

There is, however, much literature that explores the influence of various environmental factors on specific attitudes, such as racial bias or openness to diversity (e.g., Denson, 2009; Gurin et al., 2004). For example, studies by Pascarella and colleagues (e.g., Pascarella et al., 1996; Whitt et al., 2001) have identified a relationship between changes to openness to diversity and, among others, fraternity membership and the number of mathematics classes taken. They also identified the variation of influence across gender and ethnicity. This literature tells us about the influence that diversity, and diverse learning environments, can have on particular outcomes; however, our study suggests that it remains necessary to explore changes in students' attitudes about the *importance* of diversity more broadly and the institutional variables that might influence such changes.

## Conclusion

Findings highlight a predominant belief among students from many contexts that diversity within the university environment is an important part of students' learning experiences. This finding seems to conflict somewhat with emerging policies aimed at limiting efforts to increase the diversity of student populations. However, it is not possible to generalise about all students' perspectives particularly because there is simultaneously too wide a range of institutional contexts and too small a range of national contexts, making synthesis limited and caution necessary. The heavy emphasis on U.S.-based studies poses large challenges for researchers in other countries and the lack of studies from non-English-speaking countries further limits our understanding of diversity, its practices, or the way it is conceptualised.

There are also limitations that arise from the methodological approach and in scoping reviews, generally. Although every effort was made to devise a search protocol that would capture as wide a range of publications as possible, there are multiple limitations inherent to the search process. Our search would not have uncovered studies published after October 2021, in other databases or journals, written in languages other than those spoken by the research team, or which did not use terms included in Appendix 1. Other databases, for example, might have included more studies from non-English-speaking contexts, including other large, umbrella databases such as Elsevier's Scopus. It is also possible that the screening stages excluded studies that might have provided useful data. We also excluded studies that focused on the experiences of individual student groups even though some of these studies may have included results which, though minor to their respective aims, might have been relevant for this discussion.

Similarly, there is also a growing pool of literature about students' attitudes toward specific elements of diversity, including in non-Anglophone contexts, but these were excluded from our study; for example, Mizel's (2023) recent study about Palestinian students'

attitudes about the hijab and San Pedro Veledo et al.'s (2023) study about Spanish pre-service primary school teachers' attitudes towards refugees. These and similar studies explored the perceptions of certain student groups, but they focused on non-university topics of diversity and were thus excluded in Stage 3 of our study. Future research would benefit from an expanded protocol that considered students' attitudes about diversity considerations more broadly and then perhaps explored differences between university and non-university aspects of diversity. Doing so would also potentially allow for more non-Anglophone contexts to be included as well.

Another methodological limitation derives from the focus on students' perceptions specifically. It is possible, for example, that students' perceptions are influenced by the perceptions of staff, the messaging of the faculty, or the culture of the discipline. Looking in more depth at the studies that consider both student and staff perceptions (e.g., Katchanovski et al., 2015) would expand our understanding not only of students' perceptions but of their origins.

The main purpose of our study was to inform future research given the currently changing social context around diversity policy and practice and the need to understand students' ideas about the role of diversity. Findings suggest that future research would benefit from greater exploration of the influences on the value that students place on diversity and how or those ideas might change over time. Scholarly understanding of students' perceptions of the role of diversity would also benefit from a wider range of contexts studied, including from the global south and from universities where English is not the predominant language of instruction. There is also clear need for research that explores elements of diversity beyond the cultural or racial distinction.

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## Appendix 1: Search terms used in the primary searches

	Search terms	Search location
Concept 1 (student perceptions)	("student perspective*" OR "students' perspective*" OR "student perception*" OR "students' perception*" OR "student attitude*" OR "students' attitude*" OR "student idea*" OR "students' idea*" OR "student belief*" OR "students' belief*" OR "students think" OR "students believe" OR "student* perceive" OR "student values" OR "students value")	Title or abstract
Concept 2 (diversity)	(diversity OR diverse OR "other cultures" OR "linguistically diverse" OR "culturally diverse" OR inclusion OR inclusive practice* OR "inclusive engagement" OR ethnicity OR "ethnic diversity" OR race OR "racial diversity" OR Indigenous OR Indigeneity OR "ideological diversity" OR "ideological spectrum" OR "ideologically diverse" OR "religious diversity" OR "religiously diverse" OR "political diversity" OR "political spectrum" OR "politically diverse" OR minorit* OR identity OR sexual orientation OR sexual identity OR gender diversity OR gender identity OR different OR difference)	Title or abstract
Sample	(undergraduate OR freshman OR sophomore OR junior OR senior OR Bachelor OR Master OR graduate OR postgraduate OR post-graduate OR "post graduate" OR doctora* OR PhD OR coursework OR capstone OR "first year" OR first-year OR student)	Abstract
Setting	("higher education" OR universit* OR college OR postschool OR "post-school" OR "post school" OR postsecondary OR "post-secondary" OR "post secondary" OR postcompulsory OR "post-compulsory" OR post-compulsory OR tertiary)	Abstract
Study type	("case report" OR "case study" OR qualitative OR "action research" OR "grounded theory" OR phenomenolog* OR autobiograph* OR thematic OR synthesis* OR analys?s OR ethnograph* OR "focus groups" OR interview* OR observation OR experiences OR narrative OR "random allocation" OR "comparative study" OR "evaluation" OR "cohort studies" OR risk OR prevalence OR "cross sectional" OR "cross-sectional" OR incidence OR "case series" OR "before and after" OR "mixed method*" OR "mixed-method" OR multimethod* OR "multi method" OR "multi-method" OR quantitative OR "research design" OR experiment OR empirical OR "evidence based" OR "evidence-based" OR "statistical analys*" OR variable OR "effect size" OR correlation OR survey OR determinant OR "risk factors" OR pretest* OR posttest* OR "pre-test" OR "post-test" OR naturalistic)	Abstract

**Appendix 2: Overview of studies in final sample**

Study	Country context(s)	No. institutions	Student sample size	Student focus	Method	Aims
Abraham & Jacobs (1990)	USA	40	1,210	White and BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) students	Mixed method: survey with some open-ended questions	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/cultural/ethnic diversity; campus climate; perceptions about admission policies; perceptions about the institution in general
Ancis et al. (2000)	USA	1	578	African American, Asian American, Latinx, White students	Quantitative: survey	To examine campus climate, comparing different groups
Atabekova et al. (2016)	Russia	1	2,909	First-year students	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' perceptions about the institution in general
Banks (2009)	USA	1	151	White students	Mixed method: Survey with some open-ended questions	To examine a specific group's understanding of diversity; students' definitions of diversity
Bowman & Denson (2014)	Australia	1	607	Racially and culturally diverse students	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/cultural/ethnic diversity; campus climate
Bowman et al. (2016)	USA	52	12,552	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine appreciative attitudes towards a specific religious group
Bresciani (2003)	USA	1	60	Students from different backgrounds, international students; advocates for diversity; students with concerns about diversity programming	Quantitative: survey	To examine campus climate; students' definitions of diversity
Bruch et al. (2007)	USA	1	406	First- and second-year students	Quantitative: survey	To examine the impact of multicultural education
Brunner (2006)	USA	1	48	Students from different backgrounds	Qualitative: Focus groups	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/cultural/ethnic diversity; students' definitions of diversity

Study	Country context(s)	No. institutions	Student sample size	Student focus	Method	Aims
Byars-Winston et al. (2020)	USA & Puerto Rico	16	23	Students from different backgrounds	Qualitative: interviews	To examine students' and faculty's attitudes towards and experiences with racial/cultural/ ethnic diversity
Cokley et al. (2010)	USA	1	433	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/cultural/ethnic diversity
de Oliveira et al. (2009)	USA	1	128	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' attitudes towards diverse faculty
Dingel & Sage (2020)	USA	1	32	Students from different backgrounds	Qualitative: interviews	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial /cultural/ ethnic diversity; changes in perceptions of diversity; students' definitions of diversity
Dinh et al. (2008)	USA	1	315	White students	Quantitative: survey	To examine intercultural contact; students' perceptions about a specific ethnic group
Dogra & Karnik (2004)	USA & UK	2	191	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To compare the differences in perceptions of diversity between two, or more, institutions
Drape et al. (2017)	USA	1	301	Students from different backgrounds	Mixed method: survey with some open-ended questions	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/cultural/ ethnic diversity; students' definitions of diversity
Dunne (2009)	Ireland	1	24	Second-year students	Qualitative: interviews	To examine intercultural contact
Ervin (2001)	USA	1	100	African American students	Quantitative: surveys	To examine a specific group's understanding of diversity
Gross & Maor (2020)	Israel	2	200	Jewish and Arab Israelis	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' perceptions about a specific ethnic group; intercultural contact; to compare the differences in perceptions of diversity between two, or more, institutions
Harrison & Peacock (2010)	UK	2	100	Second- and third-year domestic students	Qualitative: Focus groups and interviews	To examine domestic students' perspective about international students
Haslerig et al. (2013)	USA	11	203	Students from different backgrounds	Qualitative: focus groups	To examine the impact of racially diverse classrooms

Study	Country context(s)	No. institutions	Student sample size	Student focus	Method	Aims
Hikido & Murray (2016)	USA	1	8	White students	Qualitative: focus groups	To examine a specific group's attitudes towards campus diversity
Hung et al. (2007)	USA	1	216	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/ cultural/ ethnic diversity; campus climate; perceptions about admission policies
Izeldeen (2015)	Sudan	1	300	Female students	Mixed method: Desk review and survey	To examine students' perceptions about the institution in general; students' definitions of diversity
Karatekin et al. (2020)	Turkey, Austria, Hungary	Multiple institutions in Ankara, Vienna, Budapest	356	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To compare students' multicultural attitudes between two, or more, institutions
Katchanovski et al. (2015)	USA & Canada	Multiple institutions in USA and Canada	3,141	Students from different backgrounds + faculty	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' and faculty's attitudes towards and experiences with racial/cultural/ethnic diversity; perceptions about admission policies
Khan & Mallette (2019)	USA	1	436	Students from different backgrounds	Mixed method: survey with some open-ended questions	To examine students' attitudes towards diverse faculty
Lee (2010)	USA	1	109	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' attitudes towards diverse faculty
Lopez et al. (1995)	USA	1	1,710	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine changes in students' perceptions of diversity
Maruyama et al. (2000)	USA	Multiple institutions in the USA	4,583	Students from different backgrounds + faculty	Mixed method: surveys and case studies	To examine students' and faculty's attitudes towards and experiences with racial/ cultural/ ethnic diversity
Mayhew et al. (2017)	USA	52	11,432	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine appreciative attitudes towards a specific religious group
Mayhew et al. (2018)	USA	52	13,489	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine appreciative attitudes towards a specific religious group

Study	Country context(s)	No. institutions	Student sample size	Student focus	Method	Aims
Meacham et al. (2003)	USA	1	117	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine the impact of racially diverse classrooms
Mitchell & Vandegrift (2014)	USA	1	211	Students from different backgrounds	Mixed method: survey with some open-ended questions	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/ cultural/ ethnic diversity; definitions of diversity.
Oh et al. (2010)	USA	1	32	Students: White U.S., Colour U.S. Chinese Malay, Indian Malay, non-Malay internat.	Qualitative: focus groups	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/ cultural/ ethnic diversity; definitions of diversity.
Oikonomidou et al. (2019)	USA	1	631	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' perceptions about admission policies
Oregon State System of Higher Education (1997)	USA	1	36	Students from different backgrounds	Qualitative: focus groups	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/ cultural/ ethnic diversity; definitions of diversity.
Parker & Neville (2019)	USA	1	2,296	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine campus climate
Pewewardy & Frey (2002)	USA	1	16	White students	Qualitative: interviews	To examine a specific group's attitudes towards diverse faculty
Quinton (2019)	USA	1	412	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To compare racial attitudes between two different ethnic groups
Roberts et al. (2008)	USA	1	389	Domestic students	Quantitative: survey	To examine domestic students' perspective about international students
Ryder et al. (2016)	UK	2	49	Second-year students	Qualitative: focus groups	To examine a specific group's understanding of diversity
Sax & Arredondo (1999)	USA	52	13,584	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine appreciative attitudes towards a specific religious group
Schwalb & Sedlacek (1989)	USA	15	11,216	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine the impact of multicultural education; students' Openness to Diversity and Challenge
Simmons et al. (2010)	USA	1	113	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine appreciative attitudes towards a specific religious group



Study	Country context(s)	No. institutions	Student sample size	Student focus	Method	Aims
Tebbett et al. (2021)	USA	1	434	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/ cultural/ ethnic diversity; campus climate
Umbach & Milem (2004)	UK	1	185	White and BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic)	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' attitudes towards diverse faculty
Volet & Ang (2012)	Australia	1	1,950	First-year students	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/ cultural/ ethnic diversity; intercultural contact
Ward & Zarate (2015)	Australia	1	40	Domestic and international students	Qualitative : focus groups	To examine the impact of racially diverse classrooms; students' beliefs about mixed groups for the completion of assignments
Warikoo & Deckman (2014)	USA	1	1,052	Domestic and international students	Quantitative: survey	To examine students' beliefs about the benefits of diversity; campus climate.
Wertheim (2014)	USA	2	77	Students from different backgrounds	Qualitative: interviews	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/ cultural/ ethnic diversity; To compare the impact of two, or more, institutions' approaches to diversity on students' feelings about diversity
Whitla et al. (2003)	South Africa	1	10	Students from different backgrounds	Qualitative: interviews	To examine students' attitudes towards and experiences with racial/ cultural/ethnic diversity; intercultural contact
Whitt et al. (2001)	USA	2	639	Students from different backgrounds	Quantitative: survey	To examine intercultural contact; to compare the differences in perceptions of diversity between two, or more, institutions
Will (2016)	USA	3	23	Domestic and international students	Qualitative: interviews	To examine domestic students' perspective about international students and vice versa
Wong et al. (2021)	UK	1	42	White and BAME students	Qualitative: interviews	To compare racial attitudes between two different ethnic groups
Zamani (2000)	USA	73	20,339	1st-year students, White, African-American, Hispanic	Qualitative: interviews	To examine students' perceptions about admission policies

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