

The Role of Faculty in Designing Multicultural Curricula to Support International Student Adaptation

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Abstract

Canada's higher education institutions have become a global hub for international students, fostering cultural diversity while presenting unique challenges related to adaptation and inclusion. This paper explores the pivotal role of faculty in designing multicultural curricula to address these challenges, enhance international student adaptation, and promote inclusivity. A multicultural curriculum integrates diverse cultural perspectives into academic content, enabling international students to feel validated and engaged while equipping domestic students with critical intercultural competencies. Faculty efforts to incorporate global viewpoints, adopt inclusive pedagogies, provide academic support, and foster intercultural competence are essential in creating supportive learning environments. The benefits of such curricula extend beyond individual student success, contributing to institutional reputation, fostering social cohesion, and preparing all students for success in an interconnected global society. By prioritizing multicultural curriculum design, Canadian universities can strengthen their leadership in equity, diversity, and global education. This paper underscores the importance of faculty initiatives in shaping inclusive educational practices that benefit both international and domestic students, ensuring a more equitable and globally conscious academic environment.

Keywords: multicultural curriculum, inclusive education, higher education

1. Introduction

Canada has become a leading destination for international students, attracting individuals from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Its reputation for quality education, multicultural ethos, and global career opportunities has made Canadian universities a preferred choice for learners worldwide. This growing diversity enriches the academic environment by fostering cross-cultural interactions, expanding global perspectives, and cultivating innovation within the classroom. However, the transition for international students is not without its challenges. Many grapple with significant hurdles, including language barriers, cultural dissonance, unfamiliar academic expectations, and feelings of isolation. These challenges can impact not only their academic performance but also their overall well-being and social integration into Canadian society.

In this context, the role of faculty becomes paramount. As the primary designers and facilitators of educational experiences, faculty members hold the key to shaping a learning environment that meets the diverse needs of their students. By embedding multiculturalism into the curriculum, educators can create inclusive spaces that validate diverse identities, foster a sense of belonging, and promote academic success for all learners. Furthermore, the thoughtful integration of cultural diversity into teaching practices equips all students—domestic and international—with the skills to navigate an increasingly interconnected world. The faculty's efforts in this regard are vital to ensuring that Canadian universities remain at the forefront of global education.

2. The Value of Multicultural Curricula

A multicultural curriculum plays a transformative role in fostering an inclusive and dynamic academic environment by embedding diverse cultural perspectives, experiences, and histories into the learning process. Unlike traditional curricula, which often prioritize a single cultural narrative, multicultural curricula aim to reflect the plurality of global societies. For international students, this approach affirms their identities and validates their experiences, reducing feelings of marginalization and promoting a sense of belonging within the academic community. By seeing their cultures represented, students feel more engaged, motivated, and connected to the learning process, which directly contributes to their academic success. For all students, multicultural curricula provide invaluable opportunities to develop intercultural competencies—skills that are increasingly critical in today's interconnected global economy. Exposure to diverse viewpoints helps students challenge stereotypes, broaden their perspectives, and cultivate empathy. These skills are not only essential for fostering a harmonious campus environment but also for preparing students to navigate and succeed in multicultural workplaces and societies. Multicultural curricula enhance critical thinking by encouraging students to analyze issues from multiple perspectives. By addressing global challenges through a variety of cultural lenses, students gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of complex topics. Ultimately, such curricula enrich the educational experience, ensuring that institutions remain vibrant, inclusive, and globally relevant.

3. Challenges Faced by International Students

International students face a complex array of challenges that stem from linguistic, cultural, academic, and social differences, which can affect their ability to adapt and succeed in Canadian institutions. Language barriers are among the most significant obstacles. For many international students, English or French is not their first language, and the rigorous demands of academic communication, including writing, reading, and speaking, can be daunting. Limited proficiency often hampers participation in discussions, hinders comprehension of lectures and assignments, and isolates students from social interactions, thereby affecting both their academic and personal lives. Cultural differences further complicate the transition. Many students encounter academic norms in Canada that differ starkly from those in their home countries. Instructors often emphasize critical thinking, originality, and active participation, which may feel unfamiliar or intimidating to students accustomed to more hierarchical or exam-focused educational systems. Cultural expectations around classroom behavior, such as openly questioning instructors or collaborating with peers, can lead to misunderstandings and anxiety. These experiences are compounded by the cultural dissonance international students may experience outside the classroom, where societal norms, values, and social practices can feel foreign or alienating. Social isolation is another significant challenge. Being far from their home countries, family, and familiar cultural contexts, international students often struggle to establish meaningful social networks. This isolation can lead to feelings of loneliness, homesickness, and even depression, further exacerbated by a lack of understanding or support from peers who may not fully grasp the depth of their experiences. Financial stress also weighs heavily on many international students, who must navigate the high costs of tuition, housing, and living expenses while often being restricted in their ability to work due to visa limitations. Addressing these challenges requires resilience and adaptability, but the burden should not fall solely on students. Institutions and faculty must recognize these multifaceted difficulties and provide proactive support systems. Addressing these challenges holistically can create an environment where international students feel valued, included, and empowered to thrive. Through culturally responsive pedagogy, tailored academic resources, and opportunities for meaningful interaction, Canadian universities can help international students overcome these barriers, ensuring their academic success and emotional well-being.

4. Faculty's Role in Multicultural Curriculum Design

Faculty play a pivotal role in shaping educational experiences that are inclusive, supportive, and reflective of the diverse cultural backgrounds of international students. By proactively engaging with multicultural curriculum design, faculty can address the challenges faced by international students and create academic spaces where all learners feel valued and empowered. Incorporating diverse perspectives is essential in a multicultural curriculum. Faculty can achieve this by integrating content from various cultural, social, and historical contexts across disciplines. For instance, a literature course might include works from non-Western authors, while a business curriculum could explore case studies from economies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Such integration not only ensures that students from diverse cultural backgrounds see their identities reflected in the curriculum but also provides all learners with a broader understanding of global issues. These practices validate the cultural experiences of international students, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging their active participation in academic discussions. Using inclusive pedagogies is another critical strategy for faculty. Teaching methods that prioritize collaboration and engagement can help bridge cultural divides and ensure that all students, regardless of their background, feel included in the learning process. Strategies such as group projects, peer-to-peer teaching, and interactive class discussions can encourage international and domestic students to work together, breaking down cultural silos and fostering mutual understanding. Faculty must be sensitive to cultural norms that might influence students' comfort levels with participation, providing multiple avenues for engagement, such as

online discussion boards or one-on-one consultations, to accommodate diverse learning preferences.

Providing language and academic support within the curriculum is crucial to helping international students overcome linguistic and cultural barriers. Faculty can integrate language workshops, scaffolded assignments, and opportunities for peer feedback into their courses to support students who may struggle with academic English or unfamiliar academic practices. Assignments could also include reflective components, allowing students to connect their personal experiences to the course material, enhancing both their comprehension and their confidence. By offering structured support, faculty can alleviate the stress that international students often feel when adapting to a new academic environment. Building intercultural competence among faculty is foundational to effective multicultural curriculum design. Faculty need to recognize and challenge their own biases while developing the skills to engage respectfully with diverse cultural perspectives. Professional development opportunities, such as workshops on cultural sensitivity and inclusive teaching practices, can equip educators with the tools they need to foster an inclusive classroom. Faculty who model cultural humility create a learning environment that values diversity and encourages students to share their unique perspectives.

Establishing supportive learning environments is essential for creating spaces where all students feel safe to express themselves. Faculty can achieve this by setting clear expectations for respectful interaction, addressing instances of bias or discrimination promptly, and creating opportunities for students to share their experiences. A welcoming classroom atmosphere not only enhances academic engagement but also promotes emotional well-being, especially for international students who may feel isolated or misunderstood. Through these efforts, faculty play a transformative role in shaping multicultural curricula that not only address the needs of international students but also enrich the educational experience for all learners. By fostering inclusivity, cultural awareness, and academic success, faculty contribute to a more equitable and globally-oriented educational environment.

5. Benefits of a Multicultural Approach

A multicultural curriculum serves as a cornerstone of an inclusive academic environment, fostering respect, engagement, and success for students from all cultural backgrounds. For international students, it offers validation and empowerment by acknowledging and incorporating their cultural perspectives into the academic experience. This recognition reduces the sense of isolation that many international students face, fostering a sense of belonging and encouraging them to participate more actively in their education. By creating spaces where their voices are valued, a multicultural approach enables international students to thrive both academically and socially.

For domestic students, a multicultural curriculum enriches their educational experience by exposing them to diverse viewpoints and fostering critical thinking. In today's interconnected world, employers increasingly value cultural competence—the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively across cultural boundaries. By engaging with global perspectives and learning to navigate cultural differences, domestic students develop essential skills that prepare them for multicultural workplaces and societies. This exposure also challenges stereotypes, encourages empathy, and cultivates a mindset of inclusivity, equipping students to become responsible global citizens. One of the most significant academic benefits of a multicultural curriculum lies in its capacity to deepen critical thinking and problem-solving. When students are exposed to multiple cultural frameworks, they are encouraged to approach issues from diverse angles, leading to more nuanced analyses and innovative solutions. For instance, discussions that incorporate global case studies or historical contexts from multiple regions enable students to appreciate the complexity of issues, fostering intellectual rigor and adaptability. Such an approach encourages all learners to view knowledge as dynamic and multifaceted, rather than static and one-dimensional.

From an institutional perspective, adopting a multicultural curriculum enhances the reputation of Canadian universities on the global stage. Institutions that actively promote inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices are more likely to attract a diverse student body, faculty, and research collaborations. This, in turn, fosters a vibrant campus community enriched by the perspectives and contributions of individuals from around the world. A strong commitment to multiculturalism aligns seamlessly with Canada's broader values of equity, diversity, and inclusion, reinforcing the country's position as a global leader in education. Beyond academics, a multicultural curriculum promotes social cohesion within campus communities. By encouraging students to collaborate across cultural boundaries, it fosters mutual respect and reduces the potential for misunderstandings or conflicts. These interactions build bridges among students, laying the foundation for lifelong cross-cultural relationships. For international students, such connections alleviate feelings of homesickness and isolation, enhancing their emotional well-being and overall adaptation to life in Canada.

The benefits of a multicultural approach extend far beyond individual classrooms or campuses. It prepares students—both international and domestic—to engage thoughtfully with a world increasingly defined by cultural interconnectedness. By embracing diversity as a strength, Canadian universities can cultivate not only academic

excellence but also a more just, inclusive, and globally aware society. This transformative impact underscores the critical importance of integrating multiculturalism into every facet of education, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive and contribute meaningfully in a diverse world.

6. Conclusion

Faculty play a foundational role in shaping educational experiences that promote the adaptation, inclusion, and success of international students in Canada. Their efforts in designing multicultural curricula serve as a bridge between diverse cultural perspectives and academic success, addressing the challenges international students face while fostering a broader culture of inclusivity. By incorporating global viewpoints, employing inclusive pedagogies, and creating supportive classroom environments, educators enable students from all backgrounds to feel valued and engaged. These practices not only validate the identities and experiences of international students but also equip domestic students with essential intercultural competencies, preparing them to thrive in a globally interconnected world. The impact of such efforts extends far beyond individual classrooms or campuses. Institutions that prioritize multiculturalism through faculty-driven initiatives enhance their reputation as global leaders in education. They attract diverse talent, promote innovation, and cultivate graduates who are equipped to navigate the complexities of multicultural societies and workplaces. Furthermore, these actions align with Canada's broader commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, reinforcing its status as a model for global collaboration. By leveraging their unique position as educators and mentors, faculty members help shape the future of international education. Their contributions ensure that Canadian universities remain vibrant spaces of learning, cultural exchange, and global impact, benefiting students and society alike.

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