



## INTEGRATING CULTURAL EDUCATION INTO TERTIARY CURRICULA: PERSPECTIVES FROM INDIGENOUS STUDENTS

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### Abstract

The present study examines the inclusion of culture into the curriculum of the courses related to Arts and Social Studies from the perspective of Indigenous students using the Taba Curriculum Development Model as a framework. In this study, a qualitative research design was adopted. The participants included 40 university students who engaged in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method. This study aims to explore the extent to which the cultural learning needs of Indigenous students are addressed in higher education programs. It also seeks to determine whether the curriculum aims to include Indigenous culture-related topics and whether the learning outcomes are contributing to cultural preservation. Additionally, it examines the overall assessment of the curriculum content in this context. The findings provide valuable insights into students' perspectives on curriculum design and hold significant importance for cultural preservation, transmission and educational equity.

**Keywords:** inclusion of culture, Hilda Taba Model of Curriculum Development, higher education, Indigenous student, culture preservation

### 1. Introduction

"Culture" is an all-encompassing term. It is a comprehensive representation of every aspect of a society's inhabitants' way of life. Broadly defined, "culture" refers to the entirety of the elements that make a civilization distinct. According to cultural anthropologists, culture is a complex system of material, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual attributes that represent social group dynamics (Yavuz, Carmen, Ionuț, &

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Constantin, 2022). The information, abilities, values, etiquette, and habits that people pick up through social and inherited processes make up their culture.

Bangladesh is a country with diverse cultures and distinct languages. However, historically, the Indigenous cultures across the country have been in a vulnerable situation. The government started a Bengali relocation initiative in the CHT at the beginning of the 1980s. The justification for the settlement program was the fact that CHT makes up just 1% of the nation's population and accounts for 10% of its land area (Huq, 2000). In an attempt to populate the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), 400,000 Bengali settlers—mostly landless laborers—were transported there between 1979 and 1983 (roy, 1997). Opponents contend that by altering the region's demography (Dewan, 1990), the government sought to "colonize" it, alienating and marginalizing the Indigenous people and making them refugees (Mohsin & Islam, 1997). Surely, this immersion through the settlements affected the cultural sphere of the Indigenous community in CHT. Jum agriculture, also known as shifting cultivation, is one of the most popular and appropriate types of cultivation in the CHT. In the past, Jums produced extra food for families in addition to providing enough food to feed them. The CHT, previously a food surplus territory, has now become a food deficit area due to factors such as the decrease of arable land, increasing population pressure, and some limits on jum cultivation (AIPP Printing press co. Ltd; kapaeeng foundation, 2014). Another important cultural aspect that is facing threats of almost extinction is language. Due to its exclusion from the curricula, the populace is losing its native tongue (Alamgir, 2020).

Bangla is the primary and secondary language of teaching in government schools in Bangladesh, which presents difficulties for native-born pupils. Since they must study the alphabet in Bangla and English in addition to arithmetic, Indigenous students find it difficult to make the connection between their everyday language and the language used in the classroom. They will not have much time to learn their mother tongue as a result (Khanam, 2018). These are some examples that pose the threat of extinction of the distinct culture of Indigenous communities.

As the study previously mentioned, culture is the set of norms, values, restrictions, regulations, and beliefs that exist in any community. One must embrace that in order to be a part of society and to ensure its continued existence. Cultures are passed down from one generation to the next, influencing individuals within the community. Culture is transformed and transmitted via education. Education and culture are inseparable and rely on one another. For instance, an optimistic society will translate into an idealistic educational system and curriculum, similar to a materialistic and pragmatic society. However, it might be difficult to use education to conserve culture in a nation with as diverse a culture as Bangladesh. The inclusion of cultural and linguistic sustenance, cultural congruity, and self-determination in educational practices is unambiguously necessary to support the identity formation of the Indigenous people (Marshall, 2018). This will help to ensure that education is both culturally relevant and sustainable. Education should incorporate Native epistemologies and methods of knowing into the curriculum. Teachers may create a more culturally inclusive and relevant learning

environment for Indigenous students by incorporating Indigenous viewpoints and methods of thinking (Marshall, 2018).

By comprehending their cultural frame of reference, educators and educational administrators may help close the cultural divide that exists between Indigenous communities and traditional educational environments. So, it is necessary to evaluate the situation regarding the inclusion of cultural diversity in higher education curriculum design. Therefore, the present research aimed at exploring the culturally inclusive and relevant learning environment in higher education through the perspectives of Indigenous students.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of this study are to:

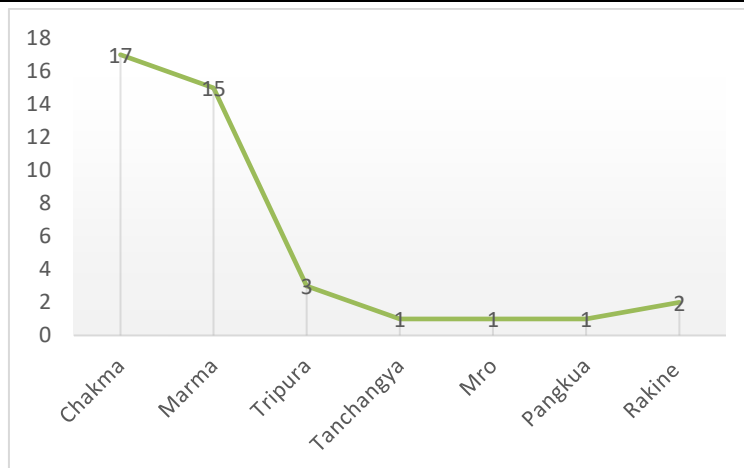
- 1) explore cultural diversity in higher education curriculum design.
- 2) analyze whether the curriculum is meeting the needs of students in preserving their Indigenous culture.

## **3. Research Method**

For this study, a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach was utilized. The focus of the phenomenological method is to investigate the phenomena that an individual has personally experienced. This approach emphasizes the unique aspects and aims to identify a phenomenon as it is perceived by an individual within a particular situation.

### **3.1. Participants**

To obtain enough data to address the research question, forty university students were selected for the research, employing convenient sampling. They were the students of the University of Chittagong. Among 40 Indigenous students, 20 were male students, and 20 were female. Their age ranged from 18 to 25 years, with a mean of 23 years. As for the year of study, 2 students were in their 1st year of study, 3 in their 2nd year, 7 in their 3rd year, and 8 in their 4th year. A total of twenty participants were students in Bachelor's degree programs, and twenty were in Master's degree programs. The students were in different subjects: five students were in Sociology, five were in Political Science, five were in Anthropology, five were in Fine Arts, ten were in Dramatics and Music, and ten were in Education.



**Figure 1:** Respondents ratio of different Indigenous groups from responded data

### 3.2. Data Collection Instrument

A structured interview protocol was developed for this research by the researchers. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews are utilized extensively as an interviewing format, possibly with an individual or sometimes even with a group. These types of interviews are conducted once only, with an individual or with a group (Jamshed, 2014). The instrument had questions about their perspective on higher education curriculum design. It was given to two experts in Social science education for the determination of the validity and clarity of the items. Several probing questions related to the objective of the study were asked to the participants and each interview lasted for 20 to 30 minutes. Interviews were conducted via in-person and Google Forms.

### 3.3. Data Analysis Method

The six steps of the thematic analysis method were followed for data analysis considering the qualitative nature of the study as it is the widely used qualitative research data analysis method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive and deductive approaches were used to identify and specify themes that emerged from the data. Then, the researchers finalized the themes according to the characteristics of the Taba Curriculum Development model.

## 4. Conceptual Framework

### 4.1 The State of Indigenous People in CHT

The Chittagong Hill Tracts, or CHT for short, are a very mountainous region of Bangladesh that is home to several Indigenous tribes. It is located in the southeast of the nation (between 21°25'N and 23°45'N latitude and 91°54'E and 92°50'E longitude). It borders Myanmar to the southeast, the Indian state of Tripura to the north, Mizoram to the east, and the Chittagong district to the west. The Chittagong Hill Tracts cover an area of around 13,184 sq km, or one-tenth of Bangladesh's entire land area.

According to the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, very little is known about the history of the area before the British colonial administration began. It is widely believed that the region's many Indigenous populations were "nomads" who traveled from one place to another before settling there. Among the inhabitants of Chittagong Hill Tracts are Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Tanchangya, Mro, Lusai, Bom, Pankho, Khumi, Chak, Kheang, etc. tribals. According to Population & Housing Census 2022, there are 990860 tribal people living in Chittagong, which makes up 2.99 percent of the overall population. The population of Chakma is the greatest among them in terms of majority. There are around 239417 people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Myths surround the origins of the Chakmas. According to the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission, they were said to have originated from Champaknagar and were descended from Bijoygiri, one of the kingdom's princes. Legends notwithstanding, it is likely that they arrived in the CHT as early as the sixteenth century. A Portuguese cartographer named Joao De Barros depicted a group of people known as "Chakomas" residing in the area during that time, though it is unclear how closely related the Chakamas were to the Chakmas. In terms of population, the Marma community is the second biggest. This corresponds to 142334 (Jamaluddin, Hassan, & Miah, 2010). The economic, social, and religious lives of the tribes of the Chittagong Hill Tracts diverge from Bengali culture. Certain tribal ethnic groups have patriarchal families, while others have matriarchal ones. A neighborhood or village is made up of a few families. To oversee such neighborhoods, there is a head of the community who goes by Headman. The majority of these tribespeople are Buddhists. However, there are two categories of faith: universal religion and sectarian religion. Among the most practiced religions in this area is Buddhism. The majority of these tribal tribes rely on jum farming. In addition, they work in other occupations to support themselves. They eat according to their own schedules.

Furthermore, the "Vaisabi" celebration of the New Year is a well-liked celebration among the Indigenous people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It is the primary tribal social and religious celebration. Sangrai of the Marma, Baisu of the Tripura ethnic group, and Biju festival of the Chakma ethnic group are together known as Vaisabi.

#### **4.2 The Taba Model: Grassroots Rationale**

Three different kinds of curricular models exist. Circular, progressive, and logical. Hilda Taba got supremacy on Tyler's model in 1967 by emphasizing the role of teachers in developing a curriculum. Tyler starts from the top but, unlike Tyler, Taba starts from the bottom as a grassroots approach (Costa & Loveall, 2002). The Hilda Taba model includes both the logical and progressive paradigm of curriculum building. Hilda Taba set out this paradigm for curriculum development in 1962. Its parts are sequentially ordered and rational. Taba argued, in curriculum development: theory and practice (Taba, 1962), that there is a definite order of creating curriculum and teachers should participate in curriculum development; this is called the grassroot approach. The grassroot approach is essentially the foundation of it. The grassroot approach is essentially a paradigm for developing curricula that include all stakeholders in education, including parents,

community members, teachers, and students. It determines the educational requirements of a certain community, highlighting the need for developing curricula while taking such limits into consideration. By combining the demands of other cultures and adhering to decentralization principles in curriculum creation, the model ensures an inclusive curriculum by incorporating the culture of the community into the curriculum. This strategy is conducive to learning. This Taba model is employed in our research studies because it primarily looks at whether the higher education curriculum related to the subjects of Social Science and Liberal Arts is addressing students' cultural demands as well as whether culture is being incorporated from the students' point of view. There are essentially 7 phases in this strategy.

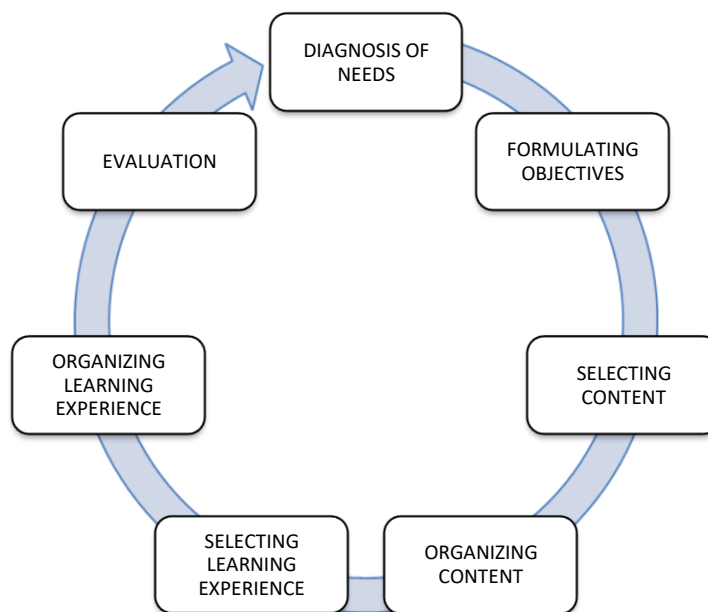


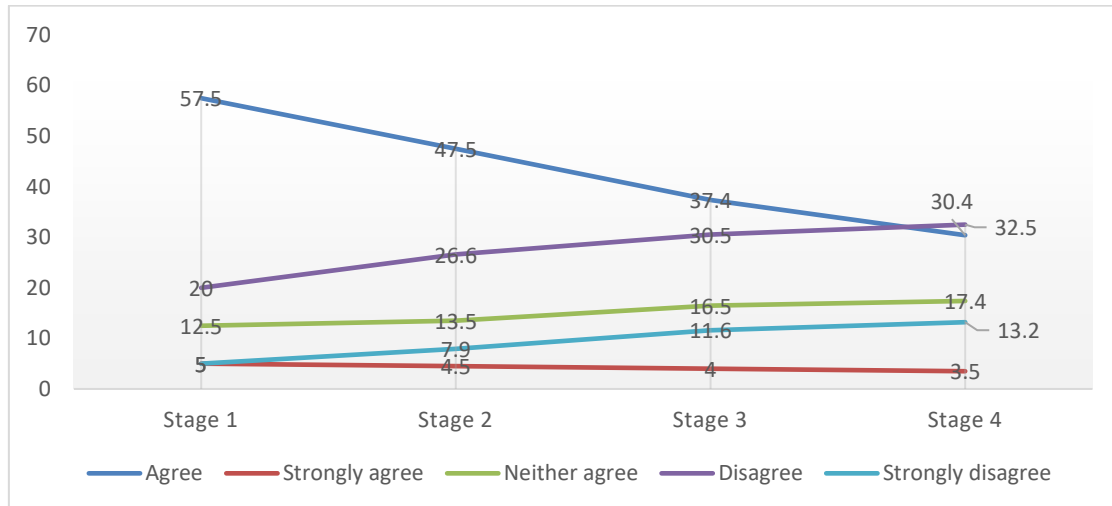
Figure 2: Taba model of curriculum development

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Need for Diagnosis

Mainstream education may not always be compatible with the learning styles and cultural background of Indigenous students (Griffiths, 2011), since the curriculum has four components: objective, learning content, learning experience, and evaluation. The participants were asked from these strata how they could meet the need. The graph illustrates four kinds of separated components that are measured in numerical numbers. Overall, while learning objectives increased, the learning experience declined across the data that was responded to. Learning materials were not up to par with students' demands at the beginning of the term. Concerning the margin, it is approximately (n = 47.5%) and significantly disagrees with (n = 4.5%). Similarly, a small percentage of participants experience evaluation difficulties because there is insufficient reliability in the test. The bar lines represent the points: agree, strongly agree, neither agree, disagree, and strongly disagree, according to the Likert scale from top to bottom, respectively. The

literature on Indigenous students in higher education has emphasized the importance of institutional support to enhance student achievement, persistence, goal attainment, and belonging (see Lopez, 2018, for a review).



**Figure 3:** Characteristics of the respondents' remarks regarding the curricular component they require

## 5.2 Formulating Objective

Across the world, Indigenous languages are dying (Crystal, 2000); (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006) (Harrison, 2007) (Hinton, Vera, & Steele, 2002). But there are many valiant efforts and clear successes in the preservation of Indigenous language and culture (Hinton & Hale, 2001) (White, 2008). Higher education is one of the ways where Indigenous pedagogies were followed, which focus on the development of a human being as a whole person. Academic or cognitive knowledge is valued, but self-awareness, emotional growth, social growth, and cultural preservation are also valued. Indigenous pedagogies focus on the development of a human being as a whole person. Of the respondents, 52.5% were found to be experiencing several learning objectives. They responded that they did feel motivated to study. These approaches are primordialism, essentialism, perennialism, constructivism, modernism, and instrumentalism. Few of them (N = 6) were excited about studying contributions, additive, transformative, and social action approaches, etc. One participant said:

*"Learning should be conducted in an inclusive way; therefore, it should be wholesome for all, such as respect for all backgrounds and integration of cultural transition. There are no sufficient educational institutions and services in remote areas. There are not enough teachers in schools, let alone standard teachers. We are just lagging behind in every sector compared to the mainstream community (Bengali). For instance, when we go to participate in any kind of competitive exams, we cannot cope with Bengalis. Why can't we? It is because we are not getting enough educational services." (P26)*

### 5.3 Learning Content

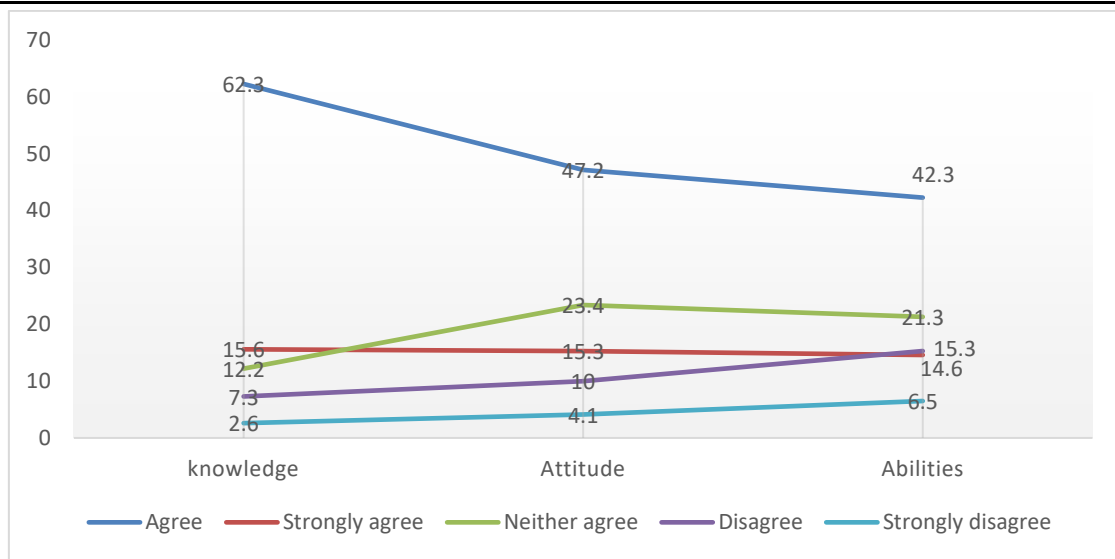
This study mostly collected data from the Arts and Social Science Department. The study focuses on the learning components of the curriculum of these departments, which are merged with the Indigenous pedagogy. In the education stream, there are 4-credit courses that are dedicated to human rights and ethnic education, where students gather knowledge from different aspects of Indigenous life.

This course will focus on ethnic peoples' heritage and identity and a historical examination of colonialism, racism, and prejudice from different periods. Besides this, there is also a 4-credit course where students examine the Indigenous socio-cultural situation from a gender perspective. These courses also include the development of skills in culturally appropriate research and inquiry methods. Apart from this, in the Sociology Department, students also take knowledge from their content on the sociology of ethnicity and minority, social inequalities, and the sociology of poverty. Also, in the Anthropology Department, students are satisfied with their curriculum as they fully dedicate their study to examining the roots of different ethnic groups and cultural transitions. These are human origin and evolution, ecology, culture in the past, theories of culture and society. The data shows an overall rise and fall in three spectrums.

Participants were satisfied with their content knowledge; in contrast, this knowledge only gave them surface knowledge about the Indigenous community; therefore, they did not do synthesis and analysis from this knowledge. The knowledge and abilities spectrum indicates that participants were somewhat unsatisfied with their present content in the 42.4–62.3 percent range. However, compared to other topics, the disagreement ratio is modest on this one. Similar to the bar lines in Figure 2, this Likert scale point is also depicted in this picture. A new approach to education: pupils will have a more favorable attitude toward Indigenous cultures if they learn about them. One of the participants from the STEM discipline said:

*"Offering a course on Indigenous people or cultural studies centered in our nation as an extra subject would allow all students to learn about Indigenous people, different forms of culture, and cultural transition." (P35)*





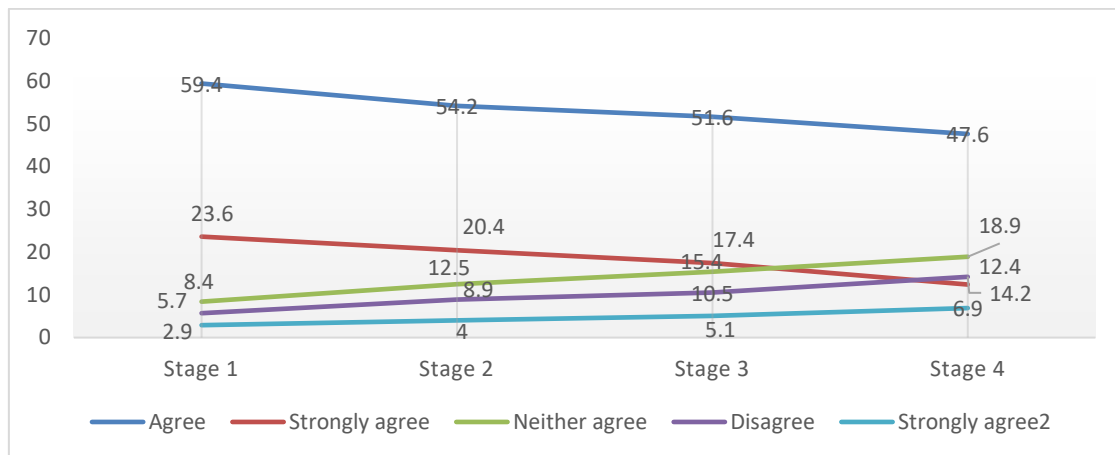
**Figure 4:** Respondent opinions about learning content

#### 5.4 Organizing Learning Experience

According to much literature, learning experiences interweave both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing. For example, Indigenous approaches can be brought to life by providing opportunities for students to reflect on the four dimensions of knowledge (emotional, spiritual, cognitive, and physical) when they engage in learning activities. The study analyzed the responses to Kolb's Experiential Learning, focusing on how participants gathered experience from content by using experiential stages. Most of the participants are satisfied with the concrete experience to abstract conceptualization stages, as they are able to synthesize and analyze the experience from their prior knowledge.

However, it is difficult for them as there are few facilities for the active experiment stage, especially for undergraduate students. All courses are conducted by continuous assessment based on term exams, and there is no service learning where students can express their thoughts towards ethnic groups. However, postgraduate students get facilities in this term as there is a thesis work based on their desired course. The bar line below provides information regarding the use of Kolb's Experiential Learning cycle in various participants. It compares the percentages of active experiment (stage 4) and concrete experience (stage 1) while collecting learning experiences. It is evident that the first three increased considerably from 59.4 to 51.6 (n=40) and that the greatest percentage of participants used stage 1, which is 59.4%. According to a more detailed interpretation of the learning cycle's stages, slightly more than half of all strongly agree between stages one and four (23.6% to 12.4%). The remaining 18.9% of participants encountered difficulties with interpretation and applied Kolb's theory to their knowledge. One participant said:

*“We are only able to learn about the social background through books because none of our courses offer the chance to perform in-depth case studies of social issues or underdeveloped communities. The breadth of information on this topic will grow if we are able to do a case study on any contemporary socioeconomic situation at the field level.” (P8)*

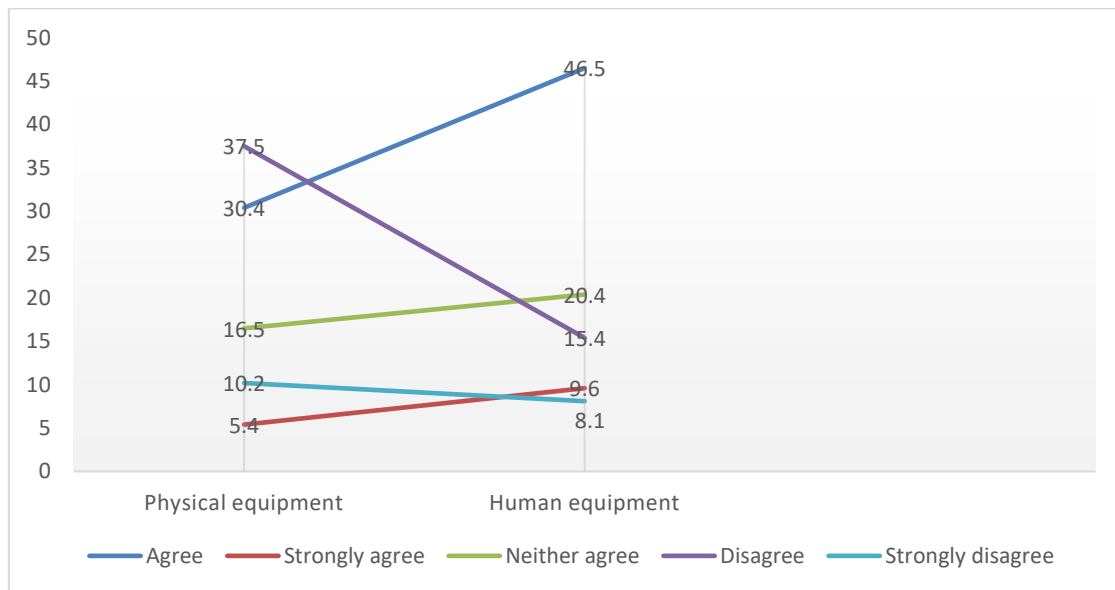


**Figure 5:** Nature of comments on the usage of experiential cycle during the organization of the learning experience

### 5.5 Learning Environment

A culturally sensitive learning environment is a frequently discussed factor for supporting the persistence and postsecondary success of Indigenous students (Mosholder & Goslin, 2013) (Watson, 2009). The importance of cultural identity for Indigenous students is supported by the transculturation theory (Huffman, 2011), which contends that a strong cultural sense of self is beneficial for their academic success. Campuses have opportunities to help students make connections with their culture and community, which in turn enhances the compatibility of students’ own cultural values within the college setting (Lundberg, 2007). Physical equipment and human equipment are the two strata into which the study separated the learning environment. According to the majority of students (n = 37.5%), they disagree with the physical equipment that is currently in use. Physical infrastructure, both in terms of organization and infrastructure, would offer value to the educational institution. Scholars have characterized this continuous improvement as a feedback loop that facilitates ongoing incremental progress. Conversely, instructional technology is associated with human equipment. The majority of students (n = 46.5%) concur that the learning environment should be managed by humans. In contrast, a small percentage of students (n = 20.4%) disagree with this categorization because they are having trouble communicating. The bar lines in Figure 2 are depicted similarly to the Likert scale points in this picture. One of the participants said:

*"One of the biggest obstacles to education for Indigenous pupils is the language barrier. Mainstream educational systems do not support the languages of many Indigenous groups. This resulted in communication, pronunciation, and learner engagement issues. For that reason, their classmates will occasionally bully them as well. As Indigenous children overcome the language barrier, teachers and peers may provide support and patience, fostering a welcoming and inclusive learning atmosphere where students feel appreciated and equipped to achieve."* (P17)



**Figure 6:** Respondent opinions about the learning environment

### 5.6 Sociocultural Adaptation in New Study Environments

Most of the literature originates from Anglophone countries (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the USA), where higher education systems have experienced major cultural changes in the last two decades. There is also an emerging body of literature from Asian (e.g., China, Japan, Korea) and European (e.g., Belgium, France, The Netherlands) countries, where intercultural issues created by international and mobility programs (Volet & Jones, 2012). Nevertheless, in Bangladesh, there have been no significant changes at the tertiary level, and students could not express their thoughts towards solving the socio-economic issue. Out of 40 respondents, 34 have said that the subject matter of their curriculum is not enough in regard to the analysis of the socio-economic and cultural status. So, they have given different comments relating to updating the syllabus. Among them, most of the respondents (87.29%) have given priority to including recent issues in the syllabus. About 74.87 percent emphasized updating the syllabus on a regular basis, and 28.29 percent thought the medium of instruction must be in English, as most of the literature is written down in this medium. On the other hand, most of the respondents think that the curriculum of their syllabus is not enough, and only 24.93 percent think it is okay. They point out that the curricula studied should vary the learning subject according to the changing socio-economic status of ethnic people.

This study analyzes the curriculum and its direct and indirect sources. A continuous dialogue with the respondents and students made it possible to identify the characteristics of the current curriculum, such as the preservation of cultural heritage, identifying its value, and highlighting problems and criticisms. Figures 3-6 show the results of the cognitive and behavioral survey activities, illustrating the curriculum characteristics from students' perspectives and their accessibility. Cultural assets were identified and examined, as well as curriculum components, learning environments, and learning experiences, which constitute the identity of present features, in respect of which have been drawn up proposed for preservation, restoration, and appreciation of their culture.

## 6. Discussion

At the tertiary level, learning experiences and instructional materials should have inclusive, relevant, and flexible features. It is essential that instructional materials represent the many origins of pupils in a multicultural country like Bangladesh. Learners' sense of belonging and engagement are increased by this relevance. For educational resources to appeal to kids from diverse ethnic backgrounds, they must include local histories, languages, and customs (Race forward; HEAL Together; Local Progress Impact Lab; NYU Metro Center, 2024). An interdisciplinary approach is also essential; educational opportunities should promote links between various academic disciplines and ethnic viewpoints. This promotes critical thinking and a more comprehensive comprehension of intricate societal concerns (Aslan & Aybek, 2019).

Furthermore, encouraging student involvement requires the use of active learning techniques. In order for students to share their cultural ideas and learn from one another, educational techniques should prioritize involvement through group projects, conversations, and experiential learning opportunities (Rahman, et al., 2019). Diverse assessment techniques, such as portfolios, presentations, peer evaluations, and conventional tests, are necessary to account for various learning styles and backgrounds (Saha & Reza, 2023). Furthermore, integrating technology can improve all students' access to educational materials, especially those from underserved or rural places (Gottschalk & Weise, Digital Equity and Inclusion in Education: An Overview of Practice and Policy in OECD, 2023). Online resources may help people from diverse ethnic backgrounds work together on projects, which will enhance the educational process even more.

Building strong bonds between students from different ethnic origins is greatly aided by ethnic education. Cultural education fosters empathy in pupils by encouraging awareness of and respect for cultural diversity. By enabling students to comprehend the historical backgrounds and difficulties minority groups confront, educational exposure to other cultures fosters compassion (Sevre, 2024) (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Additionally, cooperative projects that call for cooperation between kids from various ethnic origins can dissolve boundaries and foster friendships founded on respect and common

objectives. Building trust and understanding among peers requires candid conversations about identity, history, and societal challenges, which ethnic education promotes.

Cultural education has an influence that goes beyond personal connections; it plays a key role in enhancing the sociocultural status of Bangladesh's Indigenous populations. Languages, customs, and practices that could otherwise be lost as a result of globalization are preserved when education integrates Indigenous knowledge systems. Institutions benefit Indigenous communities on an economic and social level by giving them access to higher education. Education gives them the tools they need to advocate for their rights and take part in national discussions about them. Furthermore, those with higher levels of education are more likely to participate in community-affecting political activities. Indigenous peoples may successfully advocate for their interests when they are more aware of rights concerns thanks to ethnic education (UNESCO, 2022).

Beyond personal growth, cultural education at the university level is important because it helps solve systemic problems like racial prejudice. Institutions convey that all cultures are equally respected by including ethnic studies in the curriculum. This technique can help offset sentiments of marginalization among minority groups while encouraging diversity within academic institutions. By increasing knowledge of past injustices experienced by different groups, ethnic education cultivates a more sophisticated comprehension of contemporary society dynamics, which can result in more intelligent conversations on racial relations. In a heterogeneous society like Bangladesh, cultivating ethnic understanding via education is crucial for national coherence; it helps build a collective identity that respects variety while unifying individuals under common national ideals.

The Taba model is a methodical way that curriculum architects may use to integrate ethnic education into Bangladesh's university curriculum successfully. Finding out the unique learning requirements of varied student groups in relation to the ethnic material included in their courses is the first step. Clear objectives that specify what students should learn about other cultures and histories as part of their academic programs must be set after these requirements have been evaluated. The choice of content is another important consideration; creators should make sure that the materials represent a wide range of ethnic viewpoints and are pertinent to the lives and social circumstances of the pupils.

It is also crucial to plan educational activities that foster communication between students from various backgrounds; this may be done through group projects, conversations, and community service initiatives that support interethnic cooperation. To ascertain if educational goals are being reached, it is essential to conduct ongoing assessments. Student input on their educational experiences should guide any necessary curricular improvements.

## 7. Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

For the analysis of cultural education, this study looked at Social Science and Arts subjects; a better situation would be observed if STEM subjects were taken into account and contrasted. In future research, we advise taking into account the curricula of various departments and taking into account the opinions of Plain Land Indigenous students regarding cultural education in their curricula. This gap may be filled by future research. Our comprehension of the entire cultural education situation was constrained since we only looked at the pedagogical analysis of cultural education at the postsecondary level, not the andragogical and heutagogical perspectives. Since andragogy and heutagogy are used with all target group students, further research on how these learning models can enhance socioeconomic conditions and quality of life can be conducted.

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, incorporating cultural diversity into the design of higher education curricula is not just an academic exercise; it is an essential step in promoting national unity and fortifying Bangladesh's sense of independence. Educational institutions may foster an inclusive atmosphere that recognizes and celebrates the diverse range of cultures that make up the country by including ethnic education in the tertiary curriculum. This method enhances all students' educational experiences while fostering respect and understanding across all groups. It also empowers Indigenous people by acknowledging their identities and experiences.

Cultural education is important for reasons other than personal empowerment; it is essential for correcting past wrongs and promoting inter-communal harmony. Higher education may foster a feeling of shared history and communal responsibility by teaching students about the challenges and contributions of other ethnic groups, especially those who have been disadvantaged. Fostering a unified national identity that respects the sacrifices made during the fight for freedom requires this knowledge.

Furthermore, a curriculum that values cultural variety equips students to interact critically with a world that is becoming more linked as Bangladesh continues to negotiate the challenges of globalization and cross-cultural interchange. It gives students the vital abilities required for cross-cultural cooperation and communication, which is crucial for creating a peaceful society.

Ultimately, the integration of cultural education into higher education curricula is a powerful tool for shaping a future where all citizens feel valued and included. By prioritizing cultural diversity in educational settings, Bangladesh can pave the way for a more equitable society that embodies the principles of unity and resilience envisioned during its independence movement. In doing so, it will not only honor its past but also inspire future generations to contribute to a vibrant, cohesive national identity.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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## Appendix

The participants were asked the questionnaire below during data collection. The questions from 3 to 20 were asked from participants by using a five-point Likert scale; these points are: a) Agree; b) Strongly Agree; c) Neither Agree; d) Disagree; e) Strongly Disagree.

- 1) Which indigenous group are you from?
- 2) At which department are you currently studying?
- 3) Do you think that your curriculum diagnoses your learning needs?
- 4) Do you think that the objectives of your curriculum are built according to your needs?
- 5) Do you think that the selected contents of your curriculum will help to meet your objectives?
- 6) Do you think the learning outcome of the curriculum will play a role in the preservation of the culture of your group?
- 7) Are you getting the kind of learning outcomes that you want for the development of your group?
- 8) Does your curriculum support your culture?
- 9) Have you heard racist, homophobic, or other negative comments about Indigenous peoples in your curriculum?
- 10) Do you feel you are in a culturally supportive environment considering your curriculum?
- 11) Do you think that your curriculum advocates indigenous culture?
- 12) Do you face any barriers to accessing education?
- 13) Do you believe indigenous languages should be incorporated into the education system?
- 14) Do you feel there is enough cultural sensitivity in the current higher education curriculum for Indigenous learners?
- 15) Do you get any additional support from your curriculum that motivates you?
- 16) Do you think indigenous peoples are provided equal opportunities for education compared to the general population in your curriculum?
- 17) Do you think the demonstration of tribal culture and history in your curriculum is adequate?
- 18) Does your curriculum guide your teachers to be more indigenous culture-friendly?
- 19) Do you think your curriculum should provide any advantage for indigenous students?
- 20) Are you satisfied with your overall experience in your curriculum?
- 21) Please share any additional thoughts, concerns, or suggestions you have regarding the access of Indigenous people to education (Bengali language preferred)

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