



Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

Analysis of Departmental Climate, Diversity Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

Important elements influencing teacher experiences and student achievement in higher education institutions include departmental atmosphere and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Assessing the current state of diversity, equity, and inclusion in various departments of higher education institutions, examining the unique obstacles faced by staff, faculty, and students from diverse backgrounds in the departmental climate, and examining the impact of departmental leadership on fostering a diverse and inclusive climate were the goals of the study. Descriptive in nature, the study employed a survey to collect data from the faculty and students at Islamia University of Bahawalpur and Cholistan University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences Bahawalpur. The sample comprised 100 male and female teachers and 500 students from the universities in the districts of Bahawalpur. A questionnaire was created based on the study objectives and a review of pertinent literature to gather the perspectives of teachers and students. A questionnaire was provided both in person and via correspondence for data collection from the universities in the study. The responses obtained from the respondents were tallied, analyzed, and interpreted by the objectives using SPSS software. The conclusions were derived from the study's findings, and recommendations were proposed in the form of a novel model to enhance interaction inside the distance system.

Keywords:

Faculty Diversity, Departmental Climate, Higher Education, Equity and Inclusion, Academic Culture, Student Outcomes

1. Introduction:

Higher education seeks to foster critical thinking, comprehension, and tolerance to embrace other viewpoints. The sociocultural idea of education is to disseminate information within the community. A transformative paradigm is emphasized in the quality assurance manual of HEC, which aligns higher education to develop future leaders, create a favorable learning environment, and improve the intellectual and



Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

academic landscape. At the national, regional, and global levels, it thereby drives the engine of economic and social progress. To increase social value, the HECPO project strives for students' holistic development. The main focus is on students' social, moral, and cognitive development so they can make significant contributions to society (Wood, 2009).

Structured interviews with deans, department heads, and senior teachers from various universities reveal a discernible shift in students' priorities, moving from studying to attaining higher marks for professional advancement. This is mostly attributable to internal and external influences. The pupils regard elevated GPA as an achievement for professional advancement. Researchers asserted that pupils prioritize grades and exhibit diminished intrinsic motivation (Story et al., 2008). Students' quest for higher grades creates a moral, cultural, and educational conundrum in higher education that governments must consider (Berger, 2007). More and more, students place more importance on getting better grades than on learning. Higher education policymakers should identify the factors that influence students' motivation to improve their grades. To develop and put into practice intervention strategies to lessen these influences and accomplish the best possible learning outcomes, the study intends to examine the factors impacting students' incentives for achieving higher academic grades at Pakistani higher education institutions. Facilitating learning, expanding knowledge, and fostering tolerance are the main goals of education to enable students to contribute significantly to society (Chamberlain, 2009).

Wood (2009) asserts that higher education places a strong priority on students' social and moral growth in addition to their academic learning. The pupils' fixation on attaining high academic status significantly impedes the development of moral and social values. There has not been a thorough cumulative outcome from this academic experience. Students' love for grades is based on the achievement motivation theory (Schunk, 2007) and its sub-theories, including expectation value theory, social effects, self-worth theory, and familial influences. Achievement theory states that students must do well in order to succeed (Bembenutty, 2010).

In this situation, students assign significant importance to grades as an outcome and exert additional effort to attain them. Researchers associate achievement motivation with two educational theories: functionalism and higher-order thinking. The initial aspect pertains to the ideals and standards essential for societal functioning, including independence, accomplishment, and universalism. In educational institutions, grades serve as the criterion for performance and advancement. Higher-order thinking emphasizes the necessity of cultivating advanced cognitive skills for academic achievement to make meaningful contributions to society (Wood, 2009). Researchers have identified a shift in pupils' priorities, emphasizing greater academic marks over learning outcomes (Thomas, 2011). Students believe that elevated academic grades provide advantageous prospects for future employment and career progression (Chamberlain, 2009).

Parental influence substantially impacts pupils' motivation and conducts regarding exceptional academic achievement and elevated grades. Parents maintain elevated expectations for their children to excel and associate rewards and penalties with pupils' academic performance. Schunk (2007) recognized the impact of social elements on students' academic conduct concerning the attainment of superior grades. He asserted that many aspects of the social environment influence the cognitive processes and motivational attitudes of students. These social impacts encompass cultural characteristics, the behaviors of significant socialization agents in the individual's environment, and previous performance outcomes. Grading is a crucial factor in the



Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

academic success of individuals in a performance-driven culture (Romanowski, 2004).

Romanowski (2004) asserts that “success, achievement, and individuality” are intrinsic to the norms and values of the culture. The impact of family within Pakistani culture is substantial. The family harbors significant expectations and perceives the student's achievement as a guarantee for their future. The increasing expectation of familial contribution considerably influences pupils' performance in achieving higher grades. In collectivist cultures such as Pakistan, students are significantly influenced by familial expectations and aspirations, striving to fulfill family hopes by attaining higher marks and securing a better future to support their families. Researchers contend that parental pressure significantly motivates the enhancement of student self-esteem and academic achievement, influencing students' enthusiasm for grades (Kormarraju & Karau, 2008).

Many people use the terms "diversity," "equity," and "inclusion" to refer to an institutional commitment to social justice and racial justice that is frequently expressed in public. Few organizations provide definitions for these ideas or discuss how they impact their goals, policies, procedures, and objectives (McCleary-Gaddy, 2019). Because DEI is frequently unclear, institutions can handle all related issues as a single unit (Thomas, 2020).

Making a differentiation between these three concepts is essential for individual comprehension and resolution. Changeability According to the European University Association (2018), diversity is the social differences among individuals or groups, including socioeconomic status, age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and identity, physical or mental health, and prior education. "Diversity" in American higher education refers to individual differences that reflect the campus community and society. These attributes might affect university admission as well as administrative or academic success. Promoting diversity in higher education requires developing attitudes that encourage polite behavior towards people who are different from oneself, even if one disagrees with their manners or behaviors, according to Dalton and Crosby's (2013) book *Diversity, Multiculturalism, and Pluralism: Moving from Hospitality and Appreciation to Social Inclusion on Campus and Beyond*.

Unfortunately, a university's campus can nonetheless operate without overtly acknowledging these differences, even if its faculty and students are diverse (Dalton and Crosby, 2013). Equity According to the non-profit organization Equity Education, educational equity is the provision of tailored resources necessary for all individuals to achieve common goals, even though the expectations and goals are the same for all students. The support required to achieve these goals varies depending on the needs of each individual. The Centre for Public Education states that when all students have the resources to finish their education, educational equity is achieved. Sometimes, equity and equality are used interchangeably.

The idea that all students receive the same treatment and have access to the same resources is known as equality in education. The equity perspective places the onus of establishing pathways to success on the institution rather than the student, in contrast to institutions that employ a framework based on a cultural deficit that holds the student exclusively accountable for academic failure (Suarez, Anderson, & Young, 2018). This is evident in the evolving roles and contributions of campus diversity offices and their influence on campus culture. Establishing egalitarian settings that refute the idea that students are mostly to fault for their academic failures is crucial.

Including While inclusion values and assimilates differences, diversity brings them to light. Value-varied backgrounds within a group or institution require an understanding of distinctions and privileges. According to Dalton and Crosby (2013), inclusion is the



Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

process of embracing human diversity via active discussion and social action to improve society for all of its constituents. Instead of isolating kids with impairments, the term "inclusion" originally referred to integrating them into regular schooling for a portion of the day (Friedman, 2021). According to Nirje (1993), this gesture signified 'normalization', implying that disabled people should live like non-disabled people. Goode (1993) believes that people with disabilities should be respected and given equal rights, including the chance to live "normal" lives.

1.1 Objectives of the study

The current study is based on the following objectives

1. To Assess the present condition of diversity, equity, and inclusion within various departments of higher education institutions.
2. To investigate the specific challenges that students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds face within the departmental climate
3. To explore the influence of departmental leadership on the promotion of a diverse and inclusive climate
4. To highlight the role of departmental climate on the maintenance of equity and inclusion in higher education institutions.
5. To recommend suitable suggestions for the better conditions of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher institutions.

1.2 Significance of the study

This study will be beneficial for future researchers since others conducting investigations in the same domain can derive assistance from it moreover the study will assist the institution's administration in identifying teachers' issues and proposing solutions through the recommendations provided. This study will assist educators operating away from their residences in identifying and addressing their challenges for effective instruction. The research recommendations will assist the Ministry of Education and policymakers in formulating and implementing strategies for educators to enhance the learning environment.

2. Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design within a quantitative research framework to investigate the relationship between departmental climate, faculty diversity, equity, inclusion, and student academic performance in higher education institutions. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from students at two public universities in the Bahawalpur district: The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) and The Cholistan University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences (CUVAS). The survey method was selected for its ability to efficiently gather a broad range of responses related to perceptions and institutional experiences.

The target population included all male and female undergraduate students enrolled in these universities. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select a total of 600 students, evenly divided between the two institutions and balanced across gender. Table 2.1 presents the detailed sample distribution:

Table 2.1



Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

Detail of Sample Size

Name of University	Male	Female	Total
Islamia University of Bahawalpur	150	150	300
Cholistan University of Veterinary & Animal Sciences – CUVAS	150	150	300
Total	300	300	600

The research tool was a self-affirmation questionnaire based on the Likert scale with five points correspondence of items labelled Strongly Disagree to highly agree. Questionnaire items were prepared on the basis of the thorough review of available literature and already-validated instruments and extra items elaborating to reflect context-specific variables were also constructed. It consisted of 40 close-ended questions and 5 open-ended questions that attempted to gauge diversity of the faculty, the climate in departments, and perceived student outcomes. Before collecting the data, five scholarly specialists in the fields of education and linguistics were permitted to evaluate the instrument to make sure that it had content and face validity. Facility items could only be retained after they got the consent of at least 80 percent of the reviewers.

To evaluate the clarity of the instrument and reliability, a pilot study on 50 students of the Department of Educational Training at IUB was taken. Responses were coded and item performance analyzed using SPSS, which resulted in changes being made to several items in order to increase the consistency and interpretability of these items. After the piloting, the questionnaire that had been finalized was sent to the appropriate sample face-to-face, as well as by mail. The participants were informed and obtained consent and the responses were kept as confidential.

The data were collected after which they were coded and inputted in SPSS to be analyzed. Responses trends were observed with the help of descriptive statistics, whereas correlation and regression analyses were also performed to determine relations between faculty diversity (independent variable) and student academic performance (dependent variable). Further analysis with the ANOVA assisted in pointing out whether there were any notable variations among the institutions and the demographic/population groups.

3. Results and Analysis

This section presents the analysis of the data collected from students and faculty members in higher education institutions. The aim was to explore perceptions regarding the departmental climate and the effectiveness of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practices. Descriptive statistics and inferential analysis were performed using SPSS Version 25.

3.1 Respondent Demographics

A total of 600 respondents participated in the study, comprising 500 students and 100 faculty members from two public universities.

- **Students:** 60% female, 40% male. 55% from rural backgrounds, 45% urban.
- **Faculty:** 55% male, 45% female. Varied across ethnic backgrounds and professional ranks, with experience ranging from 1 to over 15 years.



Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

3.2 Departmental Climate and DEI Indicators

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with various DEI-related statements grouped into four main categories: departmental policies, leadership and support, inclusive culture, and equality & fairness. Each category was measured using a set of Likert-scale items (1–5 scale), with a focus on positive perception levels.

Table 1: Summary of Departmental Climate and DEI Indicators

Category	Statements/Indicators	Positive Response %
Departmental Policies	Clear policies, open discussion	72%
Leadership & Support	Commitment to DEI, faculty/student support	75%
Inclusive Culture	Sense of team, student input, freedom of expression	70%
Equality & Fairness	Equal opportunities, recognition, non-discriminatory treatment	68%

These results indicate an overall favorable perception of departmental DEI efforts, with **leadership and support** receiving the highest rating. However, **equality and fairness** scored comparatively lower, signaling areas for improvement in fair treatment and recognition.

3.3 Descriptive Statistics of Key DEI Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Departmental Policies	3.98	0.64
Leadership & Support	4.12	0.59
Inclusive Culture	3.85	0.68
Equality & Fairness	3.72	0.73

The mean values show that while all DEI dimensions scored above the midpoint of 3.0, the **highest average was for leadership support**, indicating its perceived strength in fostering DEI. **Equality & fairness** scored the lowest and suggests attention is needed in creating a more equitable academic environment.

3.4 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation was applied to examine the relationships between departmental climate variables

Variables	Leadership	Inclusive Culture	Equality & Fairness
Departmental Policies	0.56**	0.51**	0.48**
Leadership & Support	—	0.63**	0.58**
Inclusive Culture	—	—	0.61**



Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

Note: $p < 0.01$

The correlation matrix reveals significant positive relationships between all dimensions. The strongest correlation was between **leadership and inclusive culture** ($r = 0.63$), indicating that effective leadership contributes to a more inclusive departmental environment.

3.5 Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression was conducted to predict perceptions of overall departmental climate (as a dependent variable) from the four DEI indicators.

Model Summary

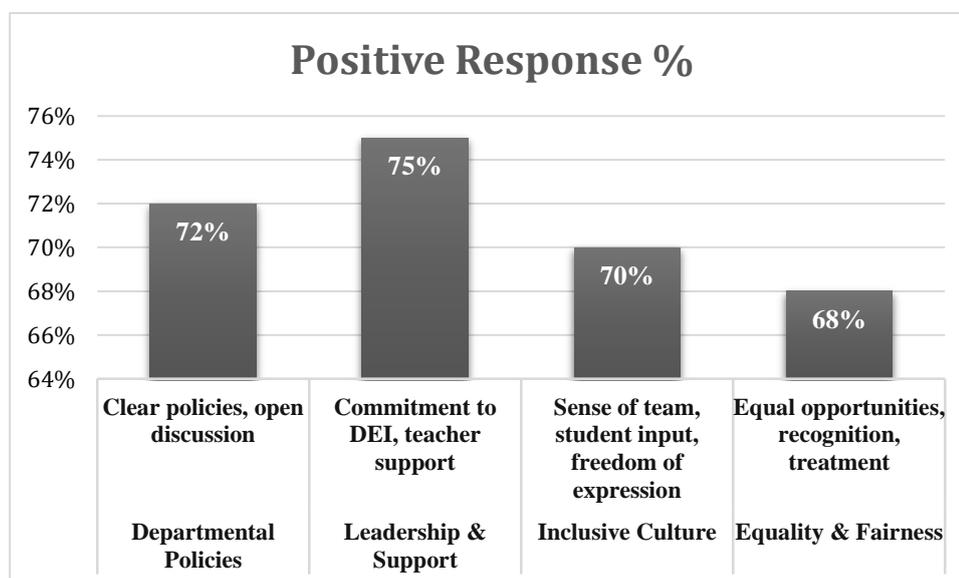
R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	Sig.
0.69	0.48	0.47	110.76	0.000**

The model explains 48% of the variance in perceptions of departmental climate, which is statistically significant.

Coefficients Table

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Departmental Policies	0.22	0.06	0.21	3.67	.000
Leadership & Support	0.27	0.05	0.29	5.40	.000
Inclusive Culture	0.19	0.06	0.18	3.17	.002
Equality & Fairness	0.16	0.06	0.17	2.78	.006

The regression results confirm that **leadership and departmental policies** are the strongest predictors of a positive departmental climate, followed by inclusive culture and fairness.



4. Discussion



Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

The results of the given study are very valuable to examine the role of departmental climate in perceiving and enacting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practices in a higher education institution. On the whole, the respondents have manifested a moderate high satisfaction level in relation to DEI-related practices but the findings also suggest certain gaps that need to be bridged and looked at (Zhao et al., 2024).

The most positively evaluated dimension was the leadership and support, the results of which were answers of most of the participants that leaders in the departments visibly work on the creation of an inclusive and equitable environment. This indicates that due to the active support and clear communication, the leadership plays an immense role in influencing the difference in the overall view of the inclusion in the department. The good leadership scores can also indicate presence of role models, mentorship or supportive structures to show that diversity initiatives are important (Villacres, 2025).

Final policy response by the department was also very high, and this means that the majority of respondents are aware and generally content with the official systems of operations to promote DEI. Transparency and access to dialogue were very often mentioned as a strength. Nevertheless, as much as policies can be written on paper, a major challenge is to effectively implement the policies consistently and in an open way. Policies could not be communicated to every stakeholder well in some departments resulting in the potential gaps between the appeals and the reality (Kasalak et al., 2022).

By contrast, smaller margins were achieved in the spheres of inclusive culture and equality and fairness. Though there seems a relative atmosphere of collaboration and transparency that is prevalent in many of its departments, the opinions of students as well as faculty showed concerns on the continuity of inclusive processes. To illustrate, not every participant believed that he or she could always be empowered to pursue academic spaces by expressing himself or herself or his or her opinion freely. It is an indication that symbolic DEI efforts are not enough and emphasis is to be put on crafting daily activities that depict true inclusion (Shi et al., 2024).

Equality and fairness received the lowest positive grade and this should show that there is still unequal treatment, recognition, and opportunity. They complained about disparity of access to the resources in academia, favoritism and the absence of acknowledgement of underrepresented groups. These results emphasize the value of juggling the departments and working out auditing procedures and interrelations to discover any biases introduced into the organizations, which might restrict equal participation or promotion, particularly in disadvantaged groups (Al-Mansoori & Koç, 2019).

The demographic variations also appeared in the data, where female respondents and those of rural origins instead showed lower satisfaction in some of the DEI measures. The differences between the groups imply that individual background and identity still matter when it comes to the feeling of inclusion, and a universal DEI solution is not enough. The various departments need to design their approaches to suit specific requirements and demands of various categories in the academic fraternity (McFadden, 2024).

Overall, the findings of this research are stressing that although most of the departments have a strong base on the policy and leadership on DEI work, longer-term consistency is needed to bridge the policy-practice gap. Creating a truly inclusive culture within the context of academia takes place over a long period of time, it needs regular feedbacks, and it involves all members of the department. Higher education institutions need to get rid of compliance-driven models in higher education and adopt their own culture of belonging where diversity is welcomed not merely tolerated but instead used as a strength.



Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

5. Conclusion

This paper has discussed the state of departmental climate in the context of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in higher-education institutions based on four concepts: Departmental Policies, Leadership and Support, Inclusive Culture and Equality and Fairness. According to the results, it can be said that although the improvement of DEI activities was ranked as moderate and high in satisfaction, various gaps remain in terms of the development of a comfortable and egalitarian atmosphere at the academic level. A leadership figure is essential in dictating DEI perceptions but policy proper and the daily practice must be repeatedly made to correlate to make a long-lasting effective perception. The reduced level of satisfaction in the inclusive culture and equality implies that the departments require expanding their interactions with underrepresented voices and equal access to opportunities and recognition to everyone.

Moreover, the analysis of the demographic trends within the data shows that specific groups of people (women and individuals with rural backgrounds) consider DEI efforts less effective, which means that their needs are not met through the existing institutional strategies. Thus, it is necessary to focus on specific strategies to create an inclusive departmental environment; not just broad approaches, as they should be contextually aware and continuous until it eliminates inequities and causes a sense of belonging.

6. Recommendations

1. Enhance Leadership Accountability

Institutions must make sure that the leaders of various offerings are trained on DEI principles but additionally assessed on a periodic basis according to their capacity to advance inclusive climates. To remain accountable, DEI measures must be included in the performance reviews.

2. Strengthen Policy Implementation and Communication

The policies exist however the execution needs to be undertaken equally. The DEI policies should be frequently updated and finalized by the departments, but its announcement should also be presented to both students and faculty. The monitoring and adherence can be raised by designing DEI handbooks and conducting orientation activities.

3. Promote an Inclusive and Participatory Culture

Departments should implement open communication, accommodative decision-making as well as forums where everyone can speak up and feel appreciated especially the marginalized groups. These efforts can be aided by such programs as cultural awareness events, anonymous feedback systems and DEI task forces.

4. Conduct Equity Audits

A good audit of departmental processes, recruitment procedures, allocations of funds and the support network to the students can reveal implicit discrimination or institutional bad practices. According to the result of the audit, remedial actions are to be undertaken.

5. Support Targeted Interventions for Underserved Groups

Specific support services, including mentorship programs, scholarships, and professional development workshops, ought to be available to the segments of the population that express lower levels of satisfaction with DEI initiatives. Such



Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

programs will have the capabilities of solving singular problems and enhancing their belongingness.

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Vol. 4 No. 2 (February) (2026)

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