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An interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed publication dedicated to sharing knowledge about the progress of minority and underrepresented communities in and across different social and national contexts, the *Journal of Underrepresented and Minority Progress* (JUMP) aims to advance knowledge about the progress of marginalized communities through theoretical and empirically-based research articles, book reviews, narrative essays, and reflective writing about positive changes and challenges, emerging policies and practices.

The journal is international in scope and includes work by scholars in a wide range of academic fields including psychology, religion, sociology, business, social work, anthropology, and philosophy. The journal's audiences include scholars and researchers of social sciences focusing their work on issues such as ethnicity and race, caste and class, religion and spirituality, gender sexual orientation, power and privilege, wealth and income, health and wellbeing, beliefs and value systems, and intersections of these issues.

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## **Relevance of the Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU) and Land Grant Model for Inclusive Transformation in Federal Nepal**

Purna Bahadur Nepali, *Kathmandu University, Nepal*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The institutionalization of federalism has created a space for Nepal with an opportunity to transform into a more inclusive and equitable society with a vibrant economy. Towards this transformation, adoption of the elements of Land Grant model in higher education system of Nepal can be a key to break the long-stagnant agrarian economy characterized by persistent inequality, structural poverty and stunted economic growth. This paper attempts to present a perspective analysis of US-based Land Grant Universities/Institutions (LGUs/LGIs) and Historically Black Colleges and University (HBCU) mission and its possible implications in the agrarian landscape with priority laid on the inclusive agrarian transformation of Nepal through consideration of these models in the spirit of social inclusion and agrarian justice as envisaged in the constitutional provisions, policies and the structural features of country's stagnant economy.*

*The grand design of American higher education in the context of the initiatives of LGUs and HBCUs could be the eye-opening lesson for the academic institutions, especially, the new provincial universities of Nepal for engaging the community beyond academic function, building a strong university-community partnership, relationship and aligning their educational endeavors toward optimizing the use of available natural and human resources in society. A community based inclusive transformation could be coordinated and aligned with the local, provincial and national governments and leaders in line with their political and social aspirations so that the local resources could be leveraged to catalyze local initiatives and promote indigenous innovation while consolidating the commitment to social diversity and inclusion for overall societal transformation of federal states of Nepal through concerted higher education reforms in lines of LGU and HBCUs.*

**Keywords:** Land Grant University, Inclusive transformation, Provincial University, Social Diversity and Inclusion

## **1. COBTEXT & BACKGROUND**

With the promulgation of Constitution of Nepal in 2015 and the completion of first round of all levels (Federal, Provincial and Local levels) of elections, Nepal has finally institutionalized the federalization process. This has opened the opportunity to formulate policies and initiate developmental efforts from grass-root level with shared and self-rule principles. These mechanisms will need to be geared to achieve the national goals and visions of prosperity, political stability, economic growth and gradual transformation of the nation to middle-income nation by 2030 (NPC, 2016).

The historical struggle and a decade long-armed conflict on the part of people that experience long-standing denial of rights has created a radical political change in the country. This change has been significant for restoration of people's rights and has resulted in high aspirations among people for overall inclusive socio-economic and cultural transformation. As a reflection of popular aspirations, the constitution has embodied provisions for inclusion and devolution of power and authority to province and local governments focusing on two main underlying principles: Principle of subsidiarity and Principle of equity and inclusion. While the principle of subsidiarity advocates for the service delivery through the lowest possible tier

of government close to the target group, the principle of equity and inclusion focuses on uplifting the status and livelihood of the underserved backward communities, marginalized, and disadvantaged people through specialized through targeted programs of governments, so that no-one would be devoid of the benefits of development and the federalization process (Council of Ontario Directors of Education, 2014). Based on these principles, it is a significant challenge for new central and federal state governments to sketch the road map for overall state and societal restructuring, reorientation of the existing government apparatus to address the concerns of poor and marginalized communities in a rural landscape and streamline the overall process of socio-political and economic transformation. It is essential to cultivate the sense of responsibility among multi-stakeholders including civil society and people to manage and engage them in the federalization process for addressing the issues of social justice and prosperity, and overall agrarian transformation in each of the seven newly formed federal states.

Specifically, Articles 25, 36, 40 and 51 of the Constitution guarantee the people's rights over land, natural resources, and the right to food and to engage in agriculture in alignment with the public interest. The Constitution directs the States to protect the people's rights through legislation. The provisions stipulated in the constitution reflect the principle of a mixed economy with a socialist orientation, which aims for overall socio-political and economic transformation. Prof. John Dewey, in his seminal work 'Education for social transformation', had advocated the role of education and educational institutions in enabling individuals to grasp the complexity and broader implications of social issues and empower and engage them for developing real solutions for those issues, thus highlighting the necessity of education for overall transformation process. In this context, Article 57 (Distribution of state power) Schedule 6 of the constitution has mentioned the concept of State universities, higher education, and libraries for educating and empowering the people for their engagement in overall social transformation and ever-lasting sustainable peace.

Land-Grant Model is not a new concept in agricultural education institutions, which are the diverse group of college and universities, mandated and supported federally for providing practical education and programs of teaching, extension and research, while maintaining a close relationship with neighboring communities to assess and solve their real field problems for fostering the agricultural development and hence, pave a pathway for inclusive rural transformation. In this regard, this paper attempts to address specific questions regarding the agricultural education institutions in Nepalese context, such as:

- What aspect(s) of the LGU/HBCU models could be appropriate and relevant to Nepal's condition?
- What could be a new direction for the provincial universities and agricultural institutions in Nepal for inclusive agrarian and rural transformation?
- What could be the role of the provincial and local governments for strengthening the LGUs and LGIs at local levels?

To narrow the scope from the comprehensive federalization process to a specific sector of change, this paper illustrates the general methods of inclusive rural transformation through the application of the lessons of Land Grant University models from the US and other parts of the world at federal, provincial and local levels.

## **2. Lessons learnt from Global and Local Level Practices**

### **2.1 Land-Grant University and HBCU Models and their relevance to the Nepalese context**

Established via Morrill Act (1862) by President Abraham Lincoln, the *Land Grant University System* provides the grant of federal land to any state willing to establish a public university to serve the community with experiential learning beyond classical teaching and research, and fosters academic excellence, diversity, and inclusion. Similarly, *HBCUs* were established through second Morrill Act in 1890 to educate and empower the enslaved African Americans and to address their historical social and racial injustice (disfranchisement and segregation). These HBCUs served as islands of hope for the overall empowerment of black communities and social emancipation (separate but equal schools for black communities). Furthermore, in 1994, yet another set of institutions were added to advance social justice through higher education: Native American Tribal colleges and Hispanic serving institutions.

Consolidating the efforts of all of these institutions towards greater social justice, the *International Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)*, a voluntary association of public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems, and other affiliated organizations in the US, Canada, and Mexico, is committed in advancing the federal policies to strengthen public universities for community development and promote diversity and inclusion by exercising the principles of equal access and equal opportunity in education and employment through the development of corresponding policies and initiatives.

Undergirding the fundamental principles of these institutions, the extraordinary contributions of global icons *Martin Luther King* and *W.E.B. Du Bois* for civil and political rights are given their due considerations to address historical racial injustice and inequality as well as their subsequent socio-political and economic empowerment issues. Also, the Cooperative *extensions* with LGU via National Food Security Institute are technically designed for black farmers' empowerment, workers' rights, and economic justice (e.g. organizing black farmers and the cooperative movement in Mississippi and Georgia State).

Hence, LGU has contributed a plethora of initiatives and works from established universities. Beyond classical teaching/academic excellence, it contributes community-college relations, research outreach, and cooperative functions to serve African-American farmers and their social and racial justice, recently addressing the land and agricultural concerns of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in contemporary food and economic crisis, considering tenure security, property rights and importance of smallholders. Moreover, HBCUs have provided an atmosphere for social change, social movement/emancipation, and community development vis-à-vis the establishment of academic institutions for teaching and community service. In the last 16 decades, the LGU model had a transformative effect and brought about remarkable changes towards overall rural US, Mexico, and Canada, and beyond. The US government celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the LGU model in 2012.

One of the major strengths of the LGU model is its focus on the integration of education with research and extension. Particularly because Nepal's weak linkage between research, extension and education has been well documented (Jaishi et. al, 2020), adoption of the LGU model in the Nepalese context could address the systemic "bottlenecks" in national agricultural technology systems limiting their effectiveness to agricultural development. Various evidences in the US, Mexico and Canada have already shown that a strong linkage among these three components play significant role in empowering the backwards and marginalized and fostering the community level participation for overall transformation process, there is a need of such formal linkage mechanism to connect these components in Nepal. Adapting LGU model educational institutions could address this linkage gap and foster the inclusive agrarian and social transformation through participation and inclusion of diversified communities including the disadvantaged and marginalized groups at local levels.

## **2.2 Some Exemplary Interventions at Local Levels relevant to Nepalese context**

Out of the many concrete examples of local level interventions in the US, we illustrate a few below in order to illustrate the contributions of LGUs to community development and inclusive transformation models:

Fort Valley State University (FVSU) is one of the HBCUs in line with the 1890s' land grant institutions devoted to serving enslaved African American farmers and minority people in 30 counties of Georgia State and boasts a number of programs demonstrating academic excellence.

FVSU is charged with a mission to provide an educational opportunity for all through innovative scientific research and Cooperative Extension programs that are stakeholder-driven and respond to emerging issues related to food, agriculture, and livestock sciences. Among the various programs, Land Owners Initiatives for Forestry Education (LIFE) is one of the key projects implemented in Fort Valley.

*“LIFE project addresses the needs of unserved farmers and landowners through enabling farmers with distinct estate planning in the federal cost-share program. It attempts to increase outreach, awareness, and technical assistance for minority and limited resources forest landowners about land management and its value. Key components are GIS-based map and database, forest management and protection strategies, and estate planning approaches. Its target groups are minority/unserved African American farmers and smallholders. As of now, it served 1300 landowners and 10 estate planning, clients. Out of the total, more than 92 African American farmers, 6 % white, and 2 % others benefited from the project. Among them, 35 % were female farmers” (FVSU, 2012).*

University of Georgia, one of the very first Land Grant Academic Institutions established in 1862, aims at extending the lifelong learning to Georgia's citizens through unbiased, research-based education in agriculture, the environment, communities, youth, and families, as well as tackling some of the state's and world's grand challenges from combating diseases and securing a safe food supply to strengthening families, communities and economic growth through its Cooperative Extension service. It is responsible for delivering diverse ranges of community-based extension service to all counties of Georgia and making education work/fit to all Georgians. The main three program areas comprise [Agriculture and Natural Resources](#), [Family and Consumer Sciences](#), and [4-H Youth Development](#). The Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources and Related Sciences Club under the university empowers individuals of under-represented and diverse backgrounds by providing continuing education, peer and professional

mentor networks and advocacy to access rewarding economic avenues, accomplishment and advancement. It provides them a platform to identify prospective employees who are well-qualified, highly educated, and represent a growing population that hails from various communities, cultures, and backgrounds (MANRSS, 2018).

University of San Diego's [Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies](#) is another such program that engages the whole faculty and students in developing innovations that help communities address poverty and social injustices, thereby contributing to change in contemporary world. It exposes the wide ranges of issues and promotes experiential learning to create tangible alleviation of poverty, inequality, human rights abuses, humanitarian crises etc. It also believes in innovative vision and critical thinking at the roots of social challenges and injustice, and then seeks to create real change through bold new responses to poverty, inequality, human rights. As a learning outcome, it focuses on knowledge, diverse perspective, critical inquiry, applied learning, communication, and ethical reasoning (University of San Diego, 2018).

University of Massachusetts (UMASS)'s Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment's cooperative extension is another initiative that provides extension education and community services to all Massachusetts residents. However, they are focused on a common goal, which is to educate and inform individuals, communities and businesses on topics of interest and concern, utilizing the academic resources of UMASS Amherst and other sources. Their intention is to fulfill unmet educational needs of recognized public priority in the linked set of research and outreach interest, including research and integrated-research-and-extension. In addition, UMASS also contributes to various civic society initiatives such as Greater Boston: Food Bank, Healthy Waltham, Community support farm, Urban and Peri-urban agriculture, Community based Land Initiatives, Waltham Land Trust with educational activities (UMASS, 2018).

Brandeis University's [International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life](#) provides a platform and an opportunity for faculty, staff, and students for their active and meaningful engagement in state and local level development processes. The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation (ENACT) is a national program engaging undergraduates at colleges and universities in state-level legislative change by learning to work with legislators, staffers, and community organizations to advance policy. It is becoming a major voice in addressing challenges to American democracy by engaging young people around the country in civic activism built on knowledge, cooperation, justice, and integrity. Students learn through direct

engagement in this work, traveling to the state capital, meeting with and lobbying legislators, strategizing with advocacy organizations, and creating outreach materials to advance their chosen issues (Brandies, 2018).

University of New Hampshire leads a Consortium of Universities known as the Sustainability Institute, which has collaboratively introduced *New England Food Visions*. The collaborative food visions are championed by Food Solutions New England, a network serving as a convener and cultivator of their regional food system. Looking ahead to 2060, *the New England Food Vision* considers a future in which food nourishes a social, economic, and environmental landscape that supports a high quality of life for everyone, including generations to come and sees farming and fishing as important regional economic forces, forests and waterways cared for sustainably, healthy diets as norms, and access to food valued as a basic human right: progressive realization of policies and practices that promote equitable access to food to all (Anderson et al., 2014).

In addition to the initiatives listed above there are many others advancing similar causes. For example, Rhode Island's Food Policy Council attempts to promote "*a more accessible, more equitable, and more sustainable food system in Rhode Island*" and advocates for improvements to the local food system to increase and expand its capacity, viability, and sustainability.

In a broader scale, the Black Lives Matter Global Network talks about structural and systemic racism, racial equity and justice as well as about farmers of color and women and military veteran farmers and aims to connect the local struggles of Brandeis students and other scholarly-activists in the Boston area to broader national and global issues that have animated the Black Lives Matter movement.

These exemplary efforts/models have pivotal role in improving equity and equality by taking the education from within boundaries of universities and education institutions to the surrounding communities especially the oppressed and disadvantaged ones through outreach programs and community based inclusive approaches with main motto of "working with them" to address their felt needs and problems related to agriculture, food and rural development and to strengthen their livelihoods, thus overall attempting to promote the agrarian and community development in their territories. Their advocacy for the quality of life for all, especially the oppressed and disadvantaged, their power, freedom, justice, equity and empowerment along with the agrarian and social justice have paved pathway for social emancipation and inclusive transformation. Their focus on the real-life problem solving and preparing the individuals to solve those situations for



sustainable livelihood helps in building of a prosperous and peaceful society through education. These efforts could be a well-deliberated model for an underdeveloped country like Nepal where, caste, ethnicity, and gender-based discrepancies have weakened social, economic, political, and cultural inclusion. Moreover, higher education is becoming more insensitive towards concurrent social issues and concerns of certain Nepalese communities and societies (Regmi, 2019). Women are receiving inadequate education as compared to men and Dalit women are the most disadvantaged (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Disparities in education are still rampant today as the chances of Dalits and Muslims are most prone to complete basic education. The literacy of Terai Dalit (23.1 percent) compared with that of Terai Brahmin (80 percent) gives an idea of the gaping fault lines of existing discriminatory system.

To sum it up, the conventional education system is not addressing vital issues properly and yielding strategy for tackling structural and cultural concerns of Nepalese societies and communities and calls for an innovative educational system, that could foster the social inclusion and sense of equality and belongingness among the diversified groups and communities (caste, class, gender based) to dismantle the chain of discrimination, vulnerability and marginalization and support national peace and cohesion (Ibid), through agrarian and rural development and transformation, leaving no-one behind. The adaptation of the LGU models could play important role in resolving the caste, gender and class-based disparities in Nepal.

### **3. Efforts so far in Nepal**

Following the concept of the land-grant university model from US and global experiences, there are some scattered efforts and initiatives in Nepal. Some of them are briefly illustrated below:

- Initiation of Community-based Land Grant Model College under *Agriculture and Forestry University in Puranchaur, Kaski*

After the grand religious function called ‘Mahayagya’ organized by Puranchaur Community (“Krishi College Sthapanartha Tadartha Committee Puranchaur, Kaski”), voluntarily donated 50 *ropanies* (2.5 ha) land (equivalent to Nepalese Rupees 4 crores and 22 lakhs in value) for establishing the technical community college dedicated to vocational, agricultural and livestock subjects. Later on, after several rounds of community-level discussions and negotiations, they were able to approach Agriculture and Forestry University (AFU) authority for establishing as one of the branch college, the *College of Natural Resources Management (CNRM)*. Indeed, the community has a dire need, great-spirit, and high

expectation to contribute to community development and agrarian transformation. Accordingly, campus administration is trying its best to do so. In the long run, there is a great possibility to be established as a newly evolved land grant-community college model.

Similarly, the *AFU senate*, the highest governing council has decided to establish such branch colleges in different geographical areas and it is in the inception process. This is the time to reality check and monitor their additional obligations towards community and diversity. Additionally, it should be properly monitored to provide its services to communities as an outreach and extension program.

- *Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science, Tribhuwan University*  
Institute of Agriculture and Animal Science (IAAS) has a *Directorate of Extension* and newly established *Research and Community Development Center* under *Lamjung Agriculture Campus* to provide services to local communities. The campus has been organizing different workshops and programs to bring together the academician, community and the local bodies for enhancing the community sentiment of the campus and make it more responsible towards the community that sustains it.

- *Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training*  
The concept of *Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT)* seems to have envisioned the idea of community outreach. Conceptually, the *CTEVT* has established technical and vocational institutes in different geographic areas based on feasibility and potentialities of each geographical area like Humla, Jumla, Mustang, Dang, Seti, Jiri, Lahan, Dhankuta technical institutes. Each institute has its community relations and services to different forms.

- *Kathmandu University Technical Training Center, Kathmandu university*  
Kathmandu University Technical Training Center (KU TTC) is providing services to the community on electric engineering, organic farming, and agriculture. It focuses on mid-level human resources management required for community development.

- *High-level Commission for Education of Nepal*  
A recent commission called High-level Commission for Education of Nepal-established in 2017 and led by the Ministry of Education (MOE) raises the issues of productive use of the educational system in surroundings (community, society, and state/nation) and transformative education. It also attempts to adopt some key features of the Land-Grant Institutions 1862 and the Land Grant Institutions 1890 (also known as HBCUs) like donating public lands for government schools and colleges, providing funds for improving

their academic, research and experimental bases etc. in order to bring innovation in various sectors and thus reorienting the education system of Nepal such that the students, professors, researchers of each university and college/campus will research peoples' concerns and their livelihood. Thus, the colleges and universities would transform as the change agents who would learn from the community, teach the community, support the community, enjoy in conjunction with the community and celebrate with the community.

Taking all these together, efforts and services are being provided by existing universities and academic institutions. In the newly evolved federalized context, at least one technical university with technically specialized colleges should be devised to provide their services for the overall development of territory and community by linking education with research and extension for broader transformation process of the society.

#### **4. Relevancy and Roles of LG and HBC/U-based Provincial Universities and Institutions for Inclusive Agrarian and Rural Transformation in Nepal**

Different academia and political leaders have expressed their views on the relevancy and applicability of Land Grant Institutions and Universities for inclusive agrarian transformation in Nepal.

A short briefing with the former Vice-chancellor of AFU, Dr. Ishwari Prasad Dhakal brought in limelight the role of the universities under land-grant model in policy making and science-based evidence/inquiry to inform decision makers about the contemporary needs at community and national levels and evaluate and disseminate information to general public. He stated that there are weak horizontal functional linkages between the responsible bodies for agricultural research, extension and education services i.e. National Agricultural Research Council (NARC), Department of Agriculture (DoA) and Department of Livestock Services (DLS) under Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MOALD) and AFU and other agricultural institutions under Ministry of Education. The weak linkages between these responsible bodies has resulted in the inter-institutional conflicts over resources, funding, priorities and relationships. Land Grant model re-strengthens this linkage by having direct connection at federal level and establishing the significant interrelation among research, extension and educational institutions at different levels (federal, province and local).

Prof. Kailash Nath Pyakurel, the first Vice-Chancellor of the AFU, mentioned that LGU model seems to be different than as understood in Nepalese context in a sense that it is demand based from farmer i.e. farmers

donated land to university for exchanges of technical expertise and services to people, keeping the routine works of teaching, research and extension regular. The model is purely community based as seen in the case of Agriculture and Forest University's constituent College of Natural Resource Management (CRNM), Puranchaur where people voluntarily donated the land to the university to establish the agriculture college. In turn, the college provides services to the local people beyond the teaching and research. He said that Nepal and especially AFU can learn from the instances of Land Grant Model as seen in India, the United States and Netherlands. The successful restructuring of LG model is seen in India, where the responsibilities for higher agricultural education, research, extension and the entire field of agricultural and veterinary sciences were transferred to Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR). Also, the state agriculture universities are autonomous organizations and have wide responsibility for agricultural research, education and extension. The US model calls for the collaborative funding relationship between the provinces, districts and the federal government which requires the involvement of decision-making and oversight authorities including the federal and provincial governments. The teaching and research model employed at Wageningen University in the Netherlands has also been widely successful. He called for the development of an integrated model for Land Grant System in Nepalese context combining the lessons from all these successful cases for high quality and education.

He further stressed that the AFU has not been able to perform its role as pre-eminent as in LGU, due to its current mandate of research, teaching and extension mandate and its current funding mechanisms, structures, policies and relationships that come in conflict with other actors conducting similar activities- particularly NARC, DoA and DLS. He suggested that the provincial universities should overcome these constraints and embrace the integrated model of LG system suitable to our own context. The long-term national objectives of prosperity, sustainable and equitable economic growth and food security could only be achieved when these provincial universities could act as platform to connect research, teaching and extension services from community to federal level through policy and institutional support. The clarification of roles and responsibilities of different actors at different levels, needs and aspiration-based programs of the university and the restructuring of the institutional arrangements and collaboration of provincial university with other actors would ultimately allow it to be an active actor for the inclusive transformation of province and overall nation.

In an interview with the former Chief Minister Prithivi Subba Gurung of Gandaki Province regarding the prospects and modality of the Provincial

University to be established pursuant to Article 57 (Schedule 6) of Constitution of Nepal 2072, he highlighted major challenges of the existing educational institutions as the inability to address the community issues and poor linkage with the key stakeholders and actors of rural transformation. He highlighted the fact that there is a need for a university that would meet the need for quality academics and compete internationally to establish itself as a leading university amidst these challenges.

As the university is in the inception phase, Mr. Gurung said that the modality of the university would be finalized by a team of experts to meet the need of state's academic requirements. The university, prioritizing more in applied technical science, is supposed to work closely with the community addressing their problems and envisaging solutions thereby maintaining a healthy relationship between them through education, research, and extension. He assured the university to be free from political influence, though political supervision might be given to ensure its effective function. The provincial government would act as a guardian or patron rather than having a direct influence on the university. The curriculum would be such to address the catchment community needs and contemporary issues of the state and quality recruitment of professionals will be done to maintain its competence to the international level.

Regarding the role of the university in rural transformation, Chancellor Ganesh Man Gurung of Gandaki University said that the university would focus on an equitable approach to include backward and marginalized groups to create maximum opportunities for them and ensure the investment and support from key stakeholders. Upon questioning about the relevancy of tribal colleges and Universities like HBC/Us in the context of Nepal, he said that, though typical tribal colleges focusing on certain tribes and groups are out of context at present, he assured that these groups would get equal opportunities to participate in the university through rewards and scholarship programs. He also prioritized that the university would have a community-based educational system and recognition of wider role beyond increasing production and productivity in agriculture, also addressing formal and informal learning needs of actors in the entire chain of development by linking the agriculture with other disciplines and sciences. The students will be motivated to develop a close relationship with these communities and help them solve their local needs and problems through research and extension functions. New academic area and technologies are to be enhanced as an upgrade to conventional disciplines that delivers the need for rural transformation through academic excellence, as measured through innovations they bring to the societies. Finally, an important consideration is

a political and social commitment by communities, societies, political parties, and countries that are in the catchment of the university. These actors will be encouraged to provide the necessary investment, support, leadership, and policies in the transformation of the university to take up new roles in transforming agricultural systems that benefit their development and pursue academic excellence.

The educationist and former registrar of Far-Western University Prof. Dr. Hemraj Pant opined that for visible development and transformation, the extension sector of the university must be strong and include an exhibition, technology transfer, and reciprocal relationship. It should earn the trustworthiness of the community/society towards academic institutions, however, the educational institutions are lagging behind in community relations and thus are no longer concerned for community service. This has shifted the students' attitude towards education focused on certification rather than developing insights on social issues, which is limiting learning processes (Pant, 2018). Also, the Former VC of Far Western University Prof. Jai Raj Awasthi stressed that there is need of decentralizing the authority of the University at different locations for participating and working in real societal issues upon which they very exist. The decentralization would strengthen their public relations with the community and they could design the strategic plan of the university based on the societal issues of natural and cultural heritage conservation and promotion, medicine processing and marketing facilities, labor mobility, migration issues and other feasible areas for transformation.

In the discussion on how local government can work with agriculture institutions for agrarian transformation, the representatives from Province 7 said that the local level could take benefit from this type of agriculture institution. Local-level registered farmers group can take training and other knowledge help and functions from it. As the farmers in the province are devoid of the improved knowledge and technologies on agriculture practices, the university in cooperation with the local level can do their research on how to improve the agriculture practices of particular communities. The local government, through collaboration with community committee, has donated the grant equivalent to NPR 650,000 to start Intermediate Science (I. Sc.) in Agriculture in the province for the same. It is believed that through donation, communities have shown ownership towards the academic program, and it is the turn of the Agriculture College to fulfill their accountability towards the community. In line with this, the political leaders in province 7 are very interested in the establishment and development of such institutions but their ideas on how to establish such effective institutions and develop the existing

ones into the efficient ones are lacking. Karnali Province assembly member Jiban Bahadur Sashi shared the province's vision of establishing a university in the provision which would comprise the applied and technical sciences and extend the programs beyond the confinement of formal university education to community through trainings, exhibition and fairs, seminars etc. The university would also work for documentation of the Indigenous Technical Knowledge; combining and refining them through scientific perspectives and help local people solve their problems through local means and resources through such reformed and locally available resources and knowledge.

Kakkad (2017) highlights the need of combining the curricular offerings and extra-curricular activities by the universities and educational institutions (as in the University of San Diego) which provides students with the solid understandings of the complexities of global challenges. It provides them opportunities to dive deeper into the specific challenge of their choice, thus allowing them (students from different academic disciplines) to come together and engage with the community welfare as active contributors rather than being passive observers and develop insights about the societal issues regarding the inequalities, discrimination, poverty and other constraints for inclusive development in students and motivate them to be active contributor in addressing those societal issues coming together with the very society they work on.

There are five major concerns in inclusive agrarian and rural transformation: i) poverty reduction, ii) management of high social inequality, iii) limited capacities of government, iv) broad based growth, and v) well protected social security schemes (National Planning Commission, 2016). However, the existing universities and academic institutions have rarely focused on these concerns; rather they focus on theoretical and academic excellence with limited knowledge far from the practical life, thus students are not being able to utilize their knowledge in practice (Raika, 2018).

The need of agrarian transformation in line of these concerns, along with the advocacy of the LGS system for such transformation by different academia and politicians as described above pinpoints the wide prospectus for provincial universities to provide applicable and practice-based knowledge that would allow students to face real-life social issues and enable them to provide effective solutions feasible and sustainable from community level by adapting the LGS model localizing in Nepalese context. As such, they could focus on establishing community as its responsible stakeholders, thereby allowing close interaction between students and farmers, where students could learn from experience of farmers and identify their real problems and farmers would be able to solve their problems from technical assistance from

students, thus re-establishing the broken relationship of the community with educational institutions as well as develop breakthrough on the limited learning process.

The education institutions maintaining close relationship with the public are more effective in the teaching process (Pant, 2018). However, local people come under secondary priority for identification and prioritization of real issues and problems of the community with university and other professionals often consulted and primarily prioritized for identifying problems (Reyes, 2016). This is the most common mistake. Any approach by university needs to engage a give-and-take relationship with its surrounding community. It is all about truly respecting the community's processes and long term relationship being true to oneself and the community itself, and emphasizing '*with the community*' rather than '*for the community*'. So, the issues of communities become the study area of an institution and this would ultimately increase the sense of ownership of communities towards the universities, while the immediate issues and concerns of the communities could efficiently be resolved by the universities.

An exemplary illustration in community-institution relationship is seen in the plan of Siddhartha College of Agriculture where the marketing function is integrated along with teaching and extension functions being extended in community level, thus developing entrepreneurship in students and making them a competent human resource who can contribute for rural transformation and agricultural development of their respective communities (Singh, 2018). This model of Siddhartha College is in line with the LG system where both the community and institution act as complement and feel ownership towards each other, and such cooperation will lead to the true practice of LGUs. Furthermore, the agriculture system of Nepal is not pocket/location-specific, thus it leaves small and marginal farmers out of service. The LG institutions and universities could act as platform to learn their issues and uplift their conditions by generating innovative means to address their issues through proper research and extension activities taking in consideration the context of the communities they exist.

Thus, the proposed provincial universities should go side by side to address the social issues like poverty, inequality, disparities, dispossessions etc. and contribute towards societal transformation by making the university responsible towards community development.

Also, in the present inability to create political and social opportunities for the marginalized segments of society to improve their conditions, Martin and Osberg (2015) stated that it is important for the educational institutions and universities to be financially sustainable so that



their benefits do not solely rely on the constant flow of the subsidies. They suggest that this challenge could be solved if two key features of the existing socio-economic system i.e. the involved actors and the enabling technologies could be changed in accordance with socio-economic equilibrium for targeted beneficiaries permanently. The strong commitment and motivation towards the establishment of university directly engaged with community can lead the institutions to achieve sustainable education and socio-economic equilibrium. But Pant (2018) draws attention to strong management and implementing the body of university including public thinkers/intellectuals to run the institutions on land grant models effectively and stable.

If we put together these scattered initiatives, intentions, and concepts, we see a bigger picture which comes close to the LGU model of the US, which shows a new direction for the provincial universities and existing agricultural academic institutions to make them the active stakeholders for agrarian and inclusive transformation. For this, reforms should be initiated from the school level, building the good coordination among agricultural research, education and extension institutions and the local level, and implementing the joint program at the local level with the local communities in order to sensitize them with respect to their responsibilities on transformational issues and initiatives, thus making them active stakeholders. This would allow their needs, concerns and issues to be resolved technically and efficiently through joint and collaborative efforts of university and community. That way, the university could have a prospect of real contribution for inclusive social transformation.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on political mandate, commitment, constitutional provisions as well as the aspirations and expectations of the people, political decisions should take into consideration the key aspects of inclusive agrarian transformation. After big political changes, it is the right time to take new political course and decisions for state restructuring based on political mandates and constitutional provisions. As pioneered by Abraham Lincoln, the new state assembly should take initiative to develop their own provincial/state universities for their own inclusive transformation and development.

A Provincial/State university and community based academic institutions can be established as public university accountable to defined territories and communities, building a strong university-community relationship in an agrarian landscape. Provincial/State university should undertake additional responsibilities of research and extension besides teaching and learning functions. Through inclusive constitutional provisions,

inclusive agrarian transformation, pro-poor agrarian reform, and agricultural resources, governance can be designed based on regional planning and commitment to social diversity and inclusion. Moreover, historical inequity, injustice, social diversity, and inclusion are the key factors to be considered for inclusive democratic participation and agrarian transformation. US Land Grant model will be unique in terms of social inclusion which can be expanded in Nepal's future federal state education system as per constitutional provisions of Nepal.

US land justice best practices such as progressive land tax, land trust, farm land access, sustainable farm protection via state legislative proposals, farm cooperative federation, African American farmers' organization etc. are exemplary illustrations. Based on well demonstrated and validated models, community based inclusive transformation models can be designed and implemented under the leadership of academic institutions in collaboration with local, state and federal government. The models that focus on available natural and human resources, resource governance, indigenous knowledge systems, local initiatives and innovation, and commitment to diversity and culture are known to have a positive effect. The combination of these practices will yield sustainable results.

Following the global best practices and national level initiatives, newly elected political leaders, educationists and social activists have an opportunity to fulfil their political and social desire to transform the society and community via land-grant academic institutions. Such models would be province/state specific (regional/location) and innovative for overall socio-political and economic transformation in new federal Nepal.

## **6. Suggestion for Provincial (State) Government and Provincial Assemblies**

Efforts made so far are also needed towards integrating education with research and extension for rural transformation as the conventional university education system of Nepal lacks research and extension functions that are important for inclusive rural and agrarian transformation.

Possibilities of Inclusive Agrarian Transformations via the concept of State Land-Grant University should be well-devised and designed for addressing the concerns of inclusive agrarian transformation based on:

i) The needs and aspirations of people and region/geography and constitutional provisions, a state university should be established for regional and community development beyond classical teaching functions. All seven states from No. 1 to 7 should have different specific plans based on the feasibility,

ii) Bottom-up consultation with political parties and CSOs and community along with the key stakeholders are needed for robust planning for overall territorial development and agrarian transformation,

iii) The concept of regional planning and natural resources, land use planning and defined tenure security and local resource governance are better analyzed based on local needs and interests,

iv) Commitment to diversity and social inclusion: Historical Denial of rights in various dimensions such as social, political, economic, cultural, geography should be at the center of the discussion,

v) Local livelihood and employment opportunities focusing on youth should be emphasized, and

vi) Champions diversity, educational equity and the preparation of individuals who can live and work effectively in an increasingly multicultural and interdependent world should be the priority.

In the newly initiated federalization processes in Nepal, following the *Land Grant University* model and the concept of *Historically Black Colleges* from the US and others, there is the potential for establishing a state university that should have additional responsibilities of research and extension besides teaching and learning functions. Also, state universities and community colleges can be better linked with central and state research and extension organs of the government for developing holistic learning and technology transfer for overall inclusive agrarian transformation. It will open new avenues for engagement of academic institutions to better devise the inclusive agrarian transformation model considering diversely marginalized and local communities.

## **7. Suggestions for Local Government and College/Campus for Community-Based Transformation**

Based upon review, reflection and learning from global practices of Land Grant Institutions, certain initiatives could be suggested regarding Inclusive Rural Transformation Model for overall community development at local levels in Nepalese context.

The rural extension and community development can be developed as a three-way partnership. The three partners are: i) the land-grant university/college in each state or defined location including rural municipalities or urban municipalities, ii) the federal and state government (through the Ministry and department), and iii) local government (through the rural or urban municipalities and Agriculture Service Centers).

True to this model, extension or community development programs in state or defined part of state can be operated in collaboration with local

government and aligning with state. Local government can develop the larger framework for community development intervention models in which various non-state actors (e.g. Non-Government Organization, Community based Organizations, Community Forest Users Groups, Water Uses Groups, Mothers Group, Youth Club) can work together following the one-door policies.

Similarly, at local levels in Nepal, various initiatives such as establishing community-based library, educational programs, local food councils, local community land trust for conservation of public land, promotion of peri-urban/urban agriculture, local human right watch, media watch, youth-council and employment initiative, land and food-based justice, anti-corruption monitoring watch etc. can be initiated by colleges and the local government.

To illustrate, given that agriculture is a mainstay of Nepalese rural society, Vision for Local Agriculture for Land and Food Systems can be crafted for overall local development through promoting equitable access to resources, opportunities and services to local communities. This work can be coordinated by diverse, committed and engaged stakeholders from all sectors of the land and food systems. Consideration of local level issues and challenges, institutional support for local agriculture, food, land and associated issues can be done. Farmer land access issues such as regulatory blocks, difficulty accessing wholesale markets, various barriers to entry for young and beginning farmers— which are exacerbated in marginalized communities— require broad and deep response, and strategies in marketing, policy change, incentivizing local purchasing, and opening pathways to agricultural transformation (who have been dispossessed of land or have had unequal access to other resources and opportunities) will alleviate these issues.

Upon an examination of various political parties manifestoes for last local election held in 2017, the major political parties have focused on local land use plans, community-based cooperatives, employment security at the household level, income security, local food security and vision, and healthy and nutritional food for all. Continued political commitments in local election manifestoes can support and speed up the rural agricultural transformation processes at the local level.

For sustainability of the proposed local level plan and institutionalized interventions, provincial assemblies and legislative bodies of rural municipalities can initiate and regulate the local policy-making process via various community-based policies, laws, by-laws (e.g. Land use plan, Natural Resource Management policy, local food vision, etc.) Timely and

participatory intervention on the part of every entity will be critical to achieving sustainable change. After all, the policies are meant to better the life conditions of general public therefore, active participation of beneficiaries in policy development processes could foster the inclusive transformation processes.

## **8. Development of Resources for Sustainability of LG-Type Universities in Nepal**

Finally, the most crucial consideration of establishing LG-type Universities targeted for traditionally oppressed (Dalit), backward and underserved segments of people in Nepal is how these institutions are going to be funded and build in full capacity sustainably. A Nepalese scholar Dr. Drona Rasali<sup>1</sup> who has first-hand experience of LG Universities of India, Philippines, Canada and the US, over a stretch of over four decades, opines that the triad functions- education, research and extension of these universities are very cost-intensive; especially, the research for generating technologies using capital intensive infrastructure and operational capacity (modern farms, farm mechanization, laboratories including biotechnology) needed for advanced research on optimizing crop and livestock production can be very expensive even in those developed countries and can be cost-prohibitive for the resource poor country like Nepal. This is one of the reasons why AFU has not been able to generate substantive technologies to boost agriculture production, despite its more than five decades of its central campus in operations and has been limited largely to teaching. Though federal and state governments in the US contributed to 100% of LGU funding through various Acts (e.g. Hatch Act, 1862 for research funding) in the US (Allen and Esters, 2018), the subsidies and grants from the public sector alone would not be adequate for sustainable operations of these Universities in the US in the present day costs and LGU R&D needs, while large research grants are provided by charities of multi-billion corporate giants like Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation. In addition to major charity grants, other private corporations that need their technologies to be generated through R&D in the LG Universities can fund directly to the research teams generating technologies. The non-governmental sector funding of agriculture and food

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Rasali was educated in Land Grant type Agricultural Universities in India, the Philippines and Canada for his undergraduate, master's and doctoral degrees respectively, served as professional and senior scientist for little over two decades, and is currently an advisor to the Association of Nepalese Agricultural Professionals in Americas (NAPA).

research in the US was 52% in 2013 (CRS, 2019). Nepal is currently far from this situation now. However, the federal government that has constitutional obligation (see Nepal Constitution 2015) for providing free higher education especially to Dalits, can seek bilateral and multilateral funding from international communities for building initial infrastructure of LG Universities targeting Dalits and other disadvantaged population as their beneficiaries. The provincial governments can create initial stimulus operational funds along with the research mandate given to these Universities to initiate R&D. Universities in turn must develop their own sustainability plan to develop private sector that can progressively finance the research in the Universities. Considering that Nepalese agriculture largely is comprised of a smallholder farming system with extreme limitation of land space for farming in large scale, Provincial LG Universities should be given the mandate of organizing Cooperative Extension pooling together smallholder farmers such that they develop a province-wide farmers' Cooperatives. These cooperatives in turn progressively develop their capacity for receiving extensions services and operationalize marketing of small farmers' produces to make a scale of economy. The cooperatives eventually will need generation of new technologies to optimize agricultural production in the united front of the small producers and will develop capacity to fund the research as well in the long term for sustainability of their agriculture.

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## **Examining the Relationship Between HBCU Faculty Online Education, Innovativeness and Attitudes Toward Computers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are the most popular institutions of higher education for minority students in the United States (Bracey, 2017). Online education has drawn attention to HBCUs because of demographic and social shifts, student needs and global conversations in academia. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has pressured faculty to move their courses to online or remote teaching formats. This article examines whether significant relationships exist among the variables: levels of innovativeness, attitudes toward online education, attitudes toward computers, and various demographic characteristics of full-time and part time faculty members employed at one HBCU. Based on 110 participants in this study, results indicated a significant relationship between Rogers' (2003) innovation of online teaching and faculty attitude toward computers.*

**Keywords:** attitudes towards computer, higher education, HBCU, online teaching, teaching and learning

## INTRODUCTION

Throughout the past decade many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) continued to encounter financial issues as a result of varying governmental policies, falling enrollment, low recruitment and retention efforts, as well as inadequate technology infrastructures and support (Nealy, 2009). The continuous development of online education courses is one way in which HBCUs can work toward increasing revenue, resulting in access to a larger market share of students, improved retention and staying competitive with PWIs. Beasley (2014) found there were 33 HBCUs offering online programs in 2014, which was an increase from the 24 programs available in 2012 (Stuart and Yep, 2012). Lack of continuous published research has spurred grassroots efforts by HBCUs to document progress. One such effort was made by Roy Beasley, founder and former director of Howard University's Digital Learning Lab. works to publish research and track HBCU digital progress (Beasley, 2014). In 2014, 33 HBCUs offered online programs; 26 were at public HBCUs and seven were at private HBCUs totaling 33% out of 106 HBCUs. Since then, four universities have closed and there are currently 102 HBCUs in existence (Beasley, 2014).

Past studies indicate—that HBCUs are not participating in the development of online education courses and programs at the same rate as Predominately White Institutions (PWIs) Nealy, 2009; Stuart & Yep, 2012). This lack of participation in this important technology trend could financially threaten HBCUs' survival in the future (Stuart & Yep, 2012; The National Center for Education Statistics, 2017; Snipes, Ellis, & Thomas, 2006). HBCU administrators may wonder why the development of these offerings is so low and inconsistent among HBCU institutions. Although institutional missions play a key role in initiatives for development, ultimately, faculty members are the driving force in the creation of courses.

This research study examined the relationships between: (a) attitudes toward online education and attitudes toward computers and (b) levels of innovativeness and attitudes toward online education. The research also explored whether gender, race, age and discipline, academic rank, experience teaching online and years of teaching have stronger or weaker relationships with the aforementioned variables. This study answered the following research questions:

1. What are HBCU faculty members' level of innovativeness in online education?
2. What are HBCU faculty members' attitudes toward online education?

3. What is the relationship between HBCU faculty members' levels of innovativeness and attitudes toward online education?
4. What is the relationship between HBCU faculty members' attitudes toward computers and attitudes toward online education?

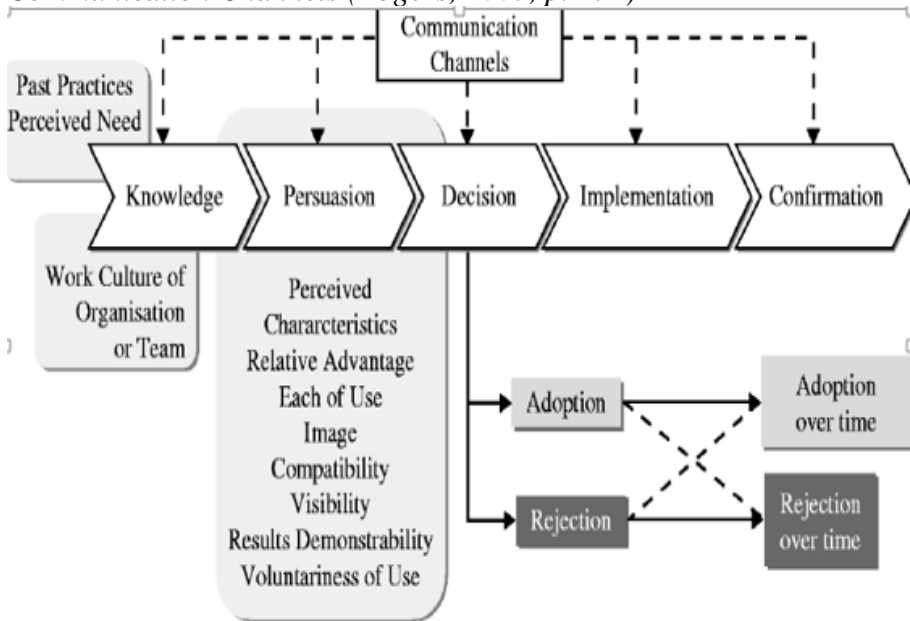
## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Diffusion of Innovation Theory

This study used “Diffusion of Innovation” theory to frame the speed in which participants adopt a new technology (Rogers, 2003). This theory presents the idea that innovations, such as technology, are more accepted based on the type of innovation, communication channels, time and the social system. Figure 1 summarizes the communication channels that new ideas or technology move through as organizations or individuals determine whether to adopt or reject.

**Figure 1**

*Communication Channels (Rogers, 2003, p. 171)*



The first concept from Rogers (2003) provides background how an innovation such as online education may move through communication channels and be accepted by faculty members. This theory informs this project in several ways. Rogers (2003) explains the step of persuasion in his

Diffusion of Innovation theory and found that during this step, people develop positive or negative attitudes toward innovations. Rogers (2003) found it is important to explore the attitudes that exist on the innovation and why some are persuaded at a faster rate than others. For this paper, the innovation is online education.

The second concept from Rogers' (2003) Diffusion Theory involves five categories of innovativeness faculty members may fall into as they begin to consider adopting a new technology. This is particularly important because one can presume as faculty members move through their experiences with new technology, they will eventually reach the next category and consequently the technology adaptation, resulting in the continuous move through the communication channel. Rogers (2003) described the first and highest category as *Innovator*. *Innovators* are people who want to be the first to try out the innovation. The second category is *Early Adopter*. *Early Adopters* are people who are usually in leadership and are open to changing ideas. The third category is the *Early Majority*. *The Early Majority* are usually not leaders, but they will adapt to new ideas before the average person adapts to the same idea. The fourth category is the *Late Majority*. This category of people are skeptical of change and tend to be slow with adopting an innovation. The fifth and lowest category is *Laggards*. *Laggards* are very traditional and conservative. They are skeptical of change in general and it is very hard to win them over to trying an innovation (Rogers, 2003).

### **Online Teaching at HBCUs**

Decreased enrollment and attrition, competitive technology, equitable access, reliance on government funding, completion rates, and conservative cultures have been identified as threats to the survival of HBCUs. Several of these threats could be reduced by the continued development of online programming (Nealy, 2009). Consequently, exploring the threat of keeping abreast of innovative technology is relevant to this research study because it is important to understand the impact of current struggles HBCUs have with advancing technology, infrastructure and support in faculty members' development of online courses (Nealy, 2009; Hodge-Clark and Daniel, 2014; and Association of Governing Boards of Universities, 2014).

Studies have shown that positive attitudes of faculty toward technology have contributed to higher levels of computer skills, to the ability to teach online, the openness to accept university training and feeling more freedom of personal expression (Johnson, 2015; Pereira & Wahi, 2017; Glass 2017; Broussard & Wilson, 2018). Similar findings were reported and suggest

that faculty members with high levels of computer skills were more likely to teach online (Johnson, 2015; Pereira & Wahi, 2017; Glass 2017; Broussard & Wilson, 2018).

Recent research explores levels of innovativeness and its relationship to the use of online learning technologies as well as attitudes toward computers. To date, most of this research has been conducted at PWIs. Only a few studies were conducted at HBCUs (Lawrence, 2008; Keesee & Shepard, 2011; Johnson, 2008). As discussed by Nealy (2009), lack of participation in online education could financially threaten HBCUs' survival in the future (Stuart & Yep, 2012; The National Center for Education Statistics, 2017; Snipes, Ellis, & Thomas, 2006; Nealy, 2009). Surendra (2001) used Rogers' (2003) framework to predict adaptation of web technology by faculty members and administrators at a university. It was found level of technology access and the amount of professional development were strong predictors of how members will adopt innovations. Consequently, it is necessary to continue researching the ways in which HBCUs participate in online technology in order to determine best practices for the future.

### **Online Course Development at HBCUs**

Several ideas have been discussed that contribute to understanding the lack of development of online courses and programs within HBCU institutions. Flowers, White, Raynor and Bhattacharya (2012) found much of the issue was the result of institution size, cost of programming and the scope of development of online programs. Arroyo (2014) reported that university faculty members and university presidents thought HBCU distinctiveness or tradition could be upset with increased development of online courses which could negatively impact the face to face faculty and student relationships, robust on-campus life, and traditional pomp and circumstance for which HBCUs are known (Harkness, 2015). Lorenzetti (2009) discussed the digital divide and how its impact may affect the ways in which HBCUs and their faculty members participate in online teaching and learning.

HBCUs have also encouraged faculty researchers to explore other models of online education such as open access courses that can help universities expand their offerings and accept more non-traditional students (Samayoa et al., 2016). Concerns remain about collaborating with third party vendors, financial impact and student-teacher interactions (Harkness, 2015). HBCUs that offer online programs are experiencing success and continued program development when accepted by the institution and faculty members who are developing and teaching the courses (Harkness, 2015). Consequently, the question becomes, whether correlating factors contribute to faculty

members at some HBCU institutions being more accepting of online programs and as a result, spurring program development at a faster.

### **Current Online Education Needs**

The literature reflects much discussion and many calls for HBCUs to make every effort to compete in the online education market and to embrace the opportunity (Smith, 2011; Sturgis, 2012). The discussions show a disdain toward the increasing traditional HBCU market share being absorbed by for profit institutions and PWIs that have online competitive offerings. In one instance, it was discussed that large for profit entity, University of Phoenix spent \$222 million on marketing their online offerings. In general, HBCUs do not have the financial revenue to counter such marketing. The recent COVID19 pandemic shed further light on the struggles that HBCUs were encountering as learning formats changed quickly from traditional in person to online learning (Galvin, 2021). Nonetheless, tradition and support of HBCUs remain strong and the opportunity exists to maintain, regain and stay competitive (Beasley, 2014).

Pre-pandemic, HBCU administrators were beginning to consider the need and opportunity for institutions to enter into online learning (Sturgis, 2012; Samayoa et al., 2016; Waymer, & Street, 2016). Minority serving institutions reviewed online learning and considered it an option as more and more students turned toward enrollment in online schools and programs. Several HBCUs turned toward non-traditional students and are focused on strengthening their enrollment through online offerings. Hampton University Online has had success with online enrollment and had about 400 students in 2012. They were the first HBCU to offer online degrees (Sturgis, 2012). In addition, there are several online initiatives sponsored by powerful HBCU alumni, such as national radio personality Tom Joyner, who have jumped on the trend of supporting the development of online programs at minority institutions. Although several institutions have joined in the trend in the development, there is still hesitancy about its success and the economic, political and social impacts of such a drastic change in this aspect of learning (Sturgis, 2012).

The sudden academic operational shifts during the COVID 19 pandemic unveiled the technology struggles that many HBCUs experienced. Institutions who were previously hesitant or debating on whether and how to allocate technology funds towards online education immediately had no other options. This also shed light on the inequities that continued to exist within minority serving institutions (Galvin, 2021).

### **Faculty Attitudes toward Online Education and Technology**

The literature shows both negative and positive attitudes toward online learning. Negative attitudes may have resulted from the lack of computer skills, workload and lack of university support (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009; Chen, 2009; Grossman & Johnson, 2015; Pereira & Wahi, 2017; Glass, 2017)

In addition to experience and computer skills, negative attitudes toward online education were often associated with department affiliation. Pereira and Wahi (2017) found faculty in nursing, business administration, English, industrial technology and other interdisciplinary studies departments were likely to have less positive attitudes toward online education and consequently would need more support from their administrators and universities. Further, Pereira & Wahi (2017) found, there was variance in attitude toward online education with less positive attitudes from faculty members who were tenured, had higher rank or infrequently used online education technology. It was also reported they were more likely to have less than positive attitudes and self-efficacy toward technology and computers (Pereira & Wahi, 2017).

### **Faculty Attitudes toward Computers and Technology**

Several studies have measured faculty members' attitudes toward the adoption of online education (Al-alak & Alnawas, 2011; Bourrie & Sankar, 2016) It is found that computer experience and positive attitudes toward computers were the strongest indicators of behavioral intentions. Bourrie and Sankar (2016) found attitudes toward computer related technology was impacted positively by how easy the technology innovations were to use. The determination by faculty members of ease of use was directly related to the intention to adopt the computer technology. They also found that faculty members who cared about their student learning outcomes were more likely to use new computer technologies. Poor attitudes toward computer technologies were found to be the result of the faculty member having a lack of time, proper training, intrinsic motivation and lack of technical skills. It is concluded that easy to use computer technologies contribute to more positive attitudes toward computers. Padmavathi (2016) performed a correlational study of 110 student teachers' readiness to use computers in teaching. The findings from this research suggest attitude in conjunction with training and experience in using computers leads to the use of computers. It was found teachers who had years of computer experience were more likely to have a positive attitude toward computers.



Previous research at Primary White Institutions have shown that faculty attitudes towards computers and technology were related to technology use. HBCUs have lagged behind with innovations such as teaching online. Not much research is available that explores this phenomenon. Likewise, there is a growing call from HBCUs to understand these various relationships. This research study has goals to examine whether relationships exist between HBCU faculty and their: (a) attitudes toward online education and attitudes toward computers and (b) levels of innovativeness and attitudes toward online education. The research also explores whether demographic variables at HBCUs have an impact on attitudes towards computers, technology and innovations such as teaching online.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This correlational research study used cross sectional survey method to collect quantitative data from the participants in order to determine whether a relationship existed across categories.

A convenience sample of 110 participants was obtained from two HBCU institutions. The categories used in the data analysis study were: Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Faculty rank, experience teaching online and length of teaching. The only participant eligibility requirement was that they taught at an HBCU.

Data was collected from an online survey. The survey included questions related to: (a) Faculty Attitudes Toward E-Learning, (Mishra & Panda, 2007) (b) the Teacher Attitudes Toward Computers Scale (TCAS) to collect data for attitudes toward computers and (c) the Measurement of Innovativeness (Hurt, Joseph & Cook, 1977). Out of a total of 554 participants who received the questionnaire electronically, 110 participants completed it (20% response rate). In order to determine whether significant relationships existed, a oneway test of variance (ANOVA) and T test were used to analyze the data collected.

### **RESULTS**

#### **Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

One hundred and ten faculty members responded to an emailed survey for this research. Sixty Seven (59%) faculty members were from Arts, Education, Humanities, Social Sciences and other departments. Forty three (40%) faculty members responded from Business, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) departments. Data on whether a faculty member had ever taught a fully online or partially online (hybrid) course using a Learning Management System revealed 67 (60.9%) faculty members had taught online.

There were fifteen (13.6%) faculty members who have had rank of Professor. Twenty-five (22.7%) faculty members held the rank of Associate Professor. Thirty-four (30.9%) held the rank of Assistant Professor, and 36 (32.7%) held the rank of Lecturer or Adjunct. There were more Lecturer or Adjunct faculty members in the sample. Participants' age ranged from 26-62+. Approximately 70% of the respondents were between the age of 38-61.

Similarly, 31 out of 110 (28.2%) were White or Caucasian, 64 (58.2%) were Black or African American and 15 (13.6%) identified as another race. There were 43 (39.1%) males and 67 (60.9%) females. Among the participants, 14 (12.7%) faculty members were teaching for 0-5 years, 19 (17.3%) faculty members for 6-11 years and 72 (70%) of faculty members were teaching for 12 years or more.

### **HBCU faculty members' levels of innovativeness**

This study used Rogers' (2003) five categories of levels of innovativeness to classify the data. Table 1 shows 66.4% or 73 of the 110 faculty members were classified as Early Majority and 33.6% or 37 faculty members were Early Adopters. None of the respondents were identified as Innovators, Late Majority or Laggards. It is important to note more than one-third of the respondents in this study consisted of adjunct faculty or lecturers, which are at the lowest level of academic rank. Limitations to the study may be the composition of the sample influenced the outcome of the study related to the first research question, which explored faculty levels of innovativeness in online education. The results may indicate lower rank faculty members are more willing to be exploratory, and varying factors could contribute to this. Lower ranked faculty members may be younger and may be just starting their careers. They may have varying educational pursuits, which may include completing their next degree. They also may have different employment goals, which could range from working part time or pursuing a higher rank position at their university. These descriptors may allow them to have more time or increased motivations to perform, leading them to being more open to online learning.

The demographics of faculty members in this study were categorized by discipline, online teaching experience, rank, age, race, gender and overall years of teaching. Faculty member disciplines were reported in five categories. Data show faculty members fell into either Early Adopter or Early Majority categories. The majority of faculty reported as Early Majority across all disciplines. This is significant because an assumption may be that if there is low participation in teaching online that this may be related to lower levels

of innovation. In this case, faculty members at this university were more likely to adapt to innovations.

Faculty members identified whether they had ever taught on line in two categories. Data showed 67 out of the 110-faculty surveyed had taught online. Twenty five percent (25%) of those faculty were Early Adopters while seventy five percent (75%) were Early Majority. Forty three out of the 110 faculty members surveyed had not taught online. Forty six percent (46%) of those faculty were Early Adopters and fifty three percent (53%) were Early Majority (See Table 1). Data on this demographic show most faculty member respondents had taught online and were Early Majority.

Faculty with the rank of Professor reported largely as Early Majority and then Early Adopters. Faculty with the rank of Associate Professor reported higher as Early Majority and then Early Adopters. Faculty with the rank of Assistant Professor reported higher as Early Majority and Early adopters. Lecturers/Adjuncts also reported higher as Early Majority and then Early Adopters. Of all faculty ranks, most identified as Early Majority.

Of the faculty in the age range of 26-37, thirty-six (36%) were Early Adopters and sixty four percent (64%) were Early Majority. Of the faculty members in the age range of 38-49, twenty two percent (22%) were Early Adopters and seventy-eight (78%) faculty were Early Majority. Of the faculty members in the age range of 50-61 age range reported forty percent (40%) were Early Adopters and sixty four percent (64%) were Early Majority. Of the faculty members who were 62 and over thirty six percent (36%) were Early Adopters while sixty three percent (63%) were Early Majority (See Table 1). The highest number of respondents were between by age were 50-61 and the highest number of respondents by level of innovativeness were Early Majority.

Faculty members' race was reported in three categories. Thirty nine percent (39%) of Caucasian faculty reported as Early Adopters, and sixty one percent (61%) were Early Majority. Twenty seven percent (27%) of Black or African American faculty reported as Early Adopters while seventy three percent (73%) were Early Majority. Faculty members from other races reported that fifty three percent (53%) were Early Adopters and forty seven percent (47%) were Early Majority. Findings on faculty members race and innovativeness show the majority of respondents were Black or African American. White or Caucasian and Black or African American faculty members were mostly Early Majority. In contrast, other races reported being mostly Early Adopters.

Faculty members reported in two categories of gender. 37% of males were Early Adopters and 63% were Early Majority. Data on female faculty

reported that 31% were Early Adopters and 69% were Early Majority. Findings on faculty members' gender show more females were respondents. However, percentages of female and male respondents were similar where more than 60% reported being Early Majority and an average of 30% or more reported being Early Adopter. Therefore, innovation levels were similar between genders.

Faculty members reported their years of teaching in three categories. Faculty that had been teaching for 0-5 years reported that 36% were Early Adopters and 64% were Early Majority. Faculty that had been teaching for 6-11 years reported that 37% were Early Adopter and 63% were Early Majority. The majority of faculty reported they had been teaching 12 years or more of which 35% were Early Adopters and 72% were Early Majority (see Table 1). These findings show most respondents were seasoned teachers with more than 12 years of experience.

The majority of participants were from the arts, humanities and social science disciplines, where the majority were Early Majority. Most early majority faculty members had taught online. Assistant professors and adjunct/lecturers were the most frequent rank with the majority of those being Early Majority. The most frequent age range for faculty members was 50-61. Black or African American race faculty members were the largest number of respondents as well as females. In general, the population from this university is Early Majority. Rogers (2003) theory of innovation finds that Early Majority users, although not usually leaders, are more likely to adapt to new innovations. The findings from this research reflect that the faculty at this institution could be more likely to adapt new innovations such as teaching online.

### **HBCU faculty members' attitudes toward online education**

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on attitudes toward online education by faculty members' rank tested for significance among-groups. This test was used to compare means between variables with more than two groups. There was a significant effect of rank on attitude toward online education question number four at the  $p < .05$  level for the three conditions [ $F(3,106) = 2.893, p = 0.039$ ]. Results indicated faculty (professors, associate professors and assistant professors) reported higher scores on online than the scores of lecturer/adjuncts.

**Table 1:**

*Faculty Demographic Information (Innovativeness Category Distribution by Discipline, Ever taught online, Faculty Rank, Age, Race, Gender and Years of Teaching) Discipline, Ever taught online, Faculty Rank, Age, Race,*

		Faculty Discipline				Total
Discipline		Early Adopters	Percentage	Early Majority	Percentage	Total
	ARTS, HUMN, SS	17	45%	21	55%	38
	STEM	8	30%	19	70%	27
	Business	4	25%	12	75%	16
	Education	5	26%	14	74%	19
	Other -Not listed	3	30%	7	70%	10
Total		37	100%	73	100%	110

		Ever Taught Online				Total
EVER taught online?		Early Adopters	Percentage	Early Majority	Percentage	Total
Yes		17	25%	50	75%	67
No		20	46%	23	53%	43
Total		37	100%	73	100%	110

		Faculty Rank				Total
Faculty Rank		Early Adopters	Percentage	Early Majority	Percentage	Total
	Professor	3	20%	12	80%	15
	Associate Professor	8	32%	17	68%	25
	Assistant Professor	13	38%	21	62%	34
	Lecturer/Adjunct	13	36%	23	64%	36
Total		37	100%	73	100%	110

		Age				Total
Age		Early Adopters	Percentage	Early Majority	Percentage	Total
	26-37	4	36%	7	64%	11
	38-49	7	22%	25	78%	32
	50-61	18	40%	27	64%	45
	62+	8	36%	14	63%	22
Total		37	100%	73	100%	110

		Race				Total
Race		Early Adopters	Percentage	Early Majority	Percentage	Total
	White or Caucasian	12	39%	19	61%	31
	Black or African American	17	27%	7	73%	64
	Another race	8	53%	7	47%	15
Total		37	100%	73	100%	110

		Gender				Total
Gender		Early Adopters	Percentage	Early Majority	Percentage	Total
	Male	16	37%	27	63%	43
	Female	21	31%	46	69%	67
Total		37	100%	73	100%	110

		Years Teaching				Total
Years of teaching		Early Adopters	Percentage	Early Majority	Percentage	Total
	0-5 years.	5	36%	9	64%	14
	6-11 years.	7	37%	12	63%	19
	12 years or more	25	35%	52	72%	77
Total		37	100%	73	100%	110

T test analysis indicated that there was a significant difference between male (M=2.97, SD=1.29) and female (M=3.55, SD=1.20) regarding their opinions of online teaching;  $t(108) = -2.36, p = 0.020$ . The question asked whether online learning saves time and effort for teachers. Male responses were reported a mean score of 2.97, and based on the Likert scale where 2=Agree, males were on the lowest end of agree. In contrast, female responses scored a mean score of 3.55, and based on the Likert Scale where 3=Does Not Apply, females selected on the lower end of this option.

Consequently, males reported more positive scores than females, indicating online learning saved them time. There was a significant difference in scores from question seven for male (M=2.25, SD=1.09) and female (M=1.73, SD=0.86) conditions;  $t(74.720) = 2.65, p = 0.010$ . The question asked whether the participant felt intimidated by online learning. Male responses based on the Likert scale were 2=Agree. In contrast, female responses based on the Likert scale were 1=Strongly Agree. Consequently, females reported more positive scores indicating they were more intimidated than males by online learning.

There was a significant difference in the statement referring to whether the participant got a sinking feeling when they thought about using online courses. Question eight scores for male (M=2.62, SD=1.23) and female (M=1.91, SD=1.055) conditions;  $t(79.469) = 3.14, p = 0.002$ . Male responses based on the Likert scale were on the higher end of 2=Agree, approaching disagree. Female responses based on the Likert scale were on the higher end of 1=Strongly Agree, approaching Agree. Consequently, females had more negative feelings about using online courses than males. There was a significant difference in the question nine scores for male (M=2.76, SD=1.28) and female (M=2.19, SD=1.15) conditions;  $t(108) = 2.42, p = 0.017$ . The question asked participants to decide whether online learning was effective for student learning. Consequently, females had more positive responses than males that online learning was effective for student learning.

The question asked whether online learning enhanced the pedagogic value of the course. Faculty members who had taught online majorly agreed based on Likert scale responses of 2=Agree. Faculty members who had not taught online selected Does Not Apply based on the Likert scale responses of 3. Their responses were on the higher end, approaching 4=Disagree. Consequently, faculty members who had taught online felt more positively than those who had not taught, that online learning enhanced their teaching.

A significant difference was found in the question seven scores for Yes (M=4.32, SD=0.87) and No (M=3.65, SD=1.02) conditions;  $t(108) = -$

3.70  $p=0.000$ . The question asked whether online learning was intimidating. Faculty members who had taught online scored high with Likert scale responses of 4= Strongly disagree. Faculty members who had not taught online scored slightly lower and majorly selected Likert scale response of 3=Neutral. Faculty members who had taught online felt more strongly that online learning was not intimidating.

There was a significant difference in the question eight scores for Yes ( $M=4.01$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ) and No ( $M=3.48$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ) conditions;  $t(108)=-2.33$ ,  $p=0.021$  (See Table 16 and Table 17) The question asked whether they got a sinking feeling when teaching online or thinking about it. Faculty members who had taught online mostly agreed based on Likert scale responses of 2=Agree. Faculty members who had not taught online did not have sinking feelings. Consequently, faculty members who had taught online felt more negatively and had sinking feelings about teaching online or thinking about teaching online.

### **HBCU faculty members' levels of innovativeness and attitudes toward online education**

The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between two identified levels of innovation of HBCU faculty members: Early Adopters and Early Majority and their attitudes toward online education. There was a weak positive relationship between the two variables ( $r=.284$ ,  $p=.05$ ). There is a significant relationship between Early Majority faculty members' levels of innovativeness and their attitudes toward online education. As level of innovativeness increases, so do attitudes toward online education. In another words, Early Adaptors were likely to have positive attitudes toward online education.

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between attitudes toward computers and attitudes toward online education. There was a weak positive relationship between attitudes toward online education and computers ( $r= .380$ ,  $p< .001$ ) This means as attitudes toward computers increase so do positive attitudes toward online education. No relationship was observed between other demographic characteristics and attitudes toward computers.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

In this study, 37 participants (33.6%) were self-identified as Early Adopters and 73 (66.4%) or 73 were Early Majority, who according to Rogers are people who are usually in leadership positions and are open to changing ideas. Of the 110 participants, 61% had never taught online. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the total number of respondents who had taught online were Early Majority who according to Rogers usually not leaders, but they will adapt to new ideas before the average person adapts to the same idea. Assistant professors had the highest level of Early Adopter innovation level (38%) among all faculty members. Assistant professorship is the entry level position for tenure track faculty members and consequently these faculty members may be more open to new technology in order to support their goal of tenure (Poster, 2017).

In addition to tenure track motivations, age may also be a factor. In this research races were categorized as African American, Caucasian and Other Races. Faculty race and level of innovation showed those from Other Races are mostly Early Adopters. African American and Caucasian are mostly Early Majority. However, Caucasian reported with higher levels of innovation than African Americans. Findings on gender reflected that males and female were equally categorized as Early Majority. Length of years teaching increased level of innovation. Faculty members who taught for over 12 years were found to be in the Early Majority. Age is most likely a contributor to this as it can be assumed as length of employment increases so does age. Regardless, this is also positive news for HBCUs that most faculty members report at the Early Majority level of innovativeness. Faculty members with Early Majority levels of innovativeness are more likely to adapt to new innovations. HBCUs can use this knowledge to explore best practices on making innovations such as teaching online more available to faculty members.

As results indicated, more than 50% of faculty members disagreed that online learning saved time, increased efficiency in teaching, improved communication, or enhanced pedagogy. In contrast, most agreed that online learning increased access to education and training, increased flexibility, was not intimidating or made them feel uncomfortable and was effective for student learning. These results show faculty members do see some merit in this teaching modality; however, they do see a conflict with how to incorporate teaching online based on time and pedagogical implementation.

Survey results also showed significant variations in the attitudes of faculty rank, gender and whether the participants had ever taught online. It was reported that lecturers/adjuncts disagreed that online teaching increased



flexibility, while all other faculty ranks agreed it did. Literature reports that negative attitudes were attributed to lack of computer skills, workload and lack of university support, and consequently supports the findings of this research study (Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009; Chen, 2009; Grossman & Johnson, 2015; Pereira & Wahi, 2017; Glass, 2017). The findings from this research are similar to the literature in that faculty members with negative attitudes toward online learning do not know how to implement the technology required in online teaching, feel it is time consuming, and feel intimidated.

Gender was found to be related to attitudes toward online education. Data showed that females scored higher negative feelings about online learning than males. Females scored higher responses than males and found that online learning did not save time intimidated them. They also scored higher in response to negative feelings about using online technology and stating they were uncomfortable because of lack of understanding of online learning. Male responses scored lower for all questions. Consequently, females had more attitudes towards online education.

Faculty members who had taught online reported higher scores than those who had not taught online when asked about whether online learning saved time, enhanced their teaching and increased their efficiency. This is in line with the presumption that if a faculty member had taught online, he or she would be more positive toward online learning. However, faculty members who had taught online reported feeling more intimidated about online learning than the scores reported for faculty members who had never taught online. This finding may suggest that universities that training for online course development and its associated technology is an important necessity. The literature references positive attitudes toward online learning were related to higher levels of computer skill, previous experience teaching online, university training and the ability to maintain personal expression (Johnson, 2015; Pereira et al,2017; Glass 2017; Broussard et al., 2018). This research reports Early Adopter and Early Majority participants reported positive attitudes toward online learning, with some hesitation about time saving, efficiency and being intimidated.

Results indicated that levels of innovativeness are related to a faculty member's attitude toward online learning. The literature review reflected that attitudes toward online learning were related to computer skill, training and university support (Mitchell et al., 2009; Chen, 2009; Grossman & Johnson, 2015; Pereira & Wahi, 2017; Glass, 2017; Broussard & Wilson, 2018). The findings suggested that Early Adopters would be less likely to be concerned with these issues and Early Majority participants would be more likely to be

concerned. Faculty members' attitudes toward computers relates to their attitudes toward online education. This finding is consistent with the existing literature (Jiang et al., 2016). As faculty members' attitudes toward computers increase, so do their attitudes toward online education. No correlation was observed between other demographic characteristics and attitudes toward computers. Faculty members indicated that online learning was very time consuming and they did not know how to implement this practice. These findings may have been more positive if the computer skills of faculty members were increased. HBCUs can work toward continuous implementation of new training of computer software and online systems. This would assist faculty members with developing the skills necessary to reduce time to develop online courses because there would be a higher level of comfortability with the tools. Further, increasing computer skills may lead to a more positive attitude toward computers as well as more positive attitudes toward online learning.

The implication of this study should be examined in the context of its limitations. As a result of COVID-19 pandemic, the majority of faculty members at HBCUs and Primary White Institutions were required to teach online or remote classes. Although the findings are interesting and offer some directions towards online teaching, data were collected before the pandemic from a small sample from one HBCU. Many participating faculty members never taught online classes or there was no need to teach online classes in their departments. Future studies should explore faculty attitudes towards innovation after the COVID 19 pandemic. Other studies should also explore continued inequities within technology access that exist within Minority Serving Institutions.

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## **The Struggle of Ethno-Religious Minorities in Iraq: The case of Kaka'is**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Kakaism, a minority religion primarily found in Kurdish regions of western Iran, and eastern and northern Iraq, is a case of ethno-religious struggle. Kaka'is practice is an ancient faith, deeply rooted in the Metric religion, which can be traced back to 5,000 years B.C.E. Followers of the faith have been exposed to violence, armed conflicts, and atrocities, and deprivation from the four pillars of the minority rights: the right to exist, the right to non-discrimination, the right to protection of identity, and the right to civic participation. Although the focus of this paper is on the struggle of Kaka'is in Iraq, the comments and conclusions might be relevant for similar contexts in which ethno-religious minorities are oppressed.*

**Keywords:** ethnicity, human rights, Iraq, Kaka'is, religious minorities, Yarsan.

## INTRODUCTION

Iraq has been the birthplace and, for millennia, the home of many religions and faiths such as the Abrahamic religions and Baha'ism, Kakatism, Sabians, Yazidism, and Zoroastrianism. In addition, the region is a homeland for many ethnic groups such as Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens, and other minorities (Al-Harzany, 2007).

Kaka'is, a Kurdish ethnic group, follow Kakatism, which is a syncretic religion with about 5,000,000 members found primarily in western Iran and eastern and north Iraq. The International Minority Groups Right estimated the number of Kaka'is at 200,000 inhabitants in Iraq (Minority Rights Group International, 2018; Hosseini, 2017). Despite the decades-long existence of this ethno-religious group, not much is known about them due to the scarcity of literature on Kaka'is. Available information about their beliefs, rituals, and religious identity are inaccurate because it was written mainly by scholars not affiliated with the group, as many members of the group do not share their faith freely. This minority in Iraq has never been formally recognized as an independent religion in the Iraqi constitution and they are registered as Muslims on their national identity cards.

According to Henrard (2000), a minority population is “a group with ethnic, religious, and linguistic characteristics differing from the rest of the population, which is non-dominant, numerically smaller than the rest of the population and has the wish to hold on to its separate identity” (p. 48). Article 27 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) set out minority rights, which was developed further in the Declaration on the Rights of National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (UNDM) and afterward was adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 1992 (Chapman, 2008). Minority rights are presented in the form of four pillars: (1) the right to exist, (2) the right to non-discrimination, (3) the right to protection of identity, and (4) the right to participate in public affairs.

Despite the fact that most ethnic, religious and sectarian minorities are recognized in the constitution, these minorities cannot have or practice their basic rights (UNPO, 2003). Unfortunately, minorities, such as Kaka'is, which suffered severe discrimination and atrocities throughout Iraq's modern history do not receive political protection like other minorities such as Yazidies and Christian despite the creation of a democratic constitution in Iraq in 2005 (Iraq Const. art. IV). Their vulnerability and suffering have become extreme during the political upheavals of the last decades, especially due to their exclusion in the formation of countries and the



drawing of borders in modern history in the Middle East after the World War I. (Lamani, 2009).

For the reasons above, the group is understudied and not understood well. By addressing the case of Kaka'is, this article aims to underline the struggles of ethno-religious minorities in Iraq.

### **WHO ARE THE KAKA'IS?**

Members of the Kurdish ethnic group follow several religions. Kakai'is are a Kurdish ethnic community with a religion that is distinct from other religions and minorities in Iraq. Kaka'i is known as Yarsan, God beloved, or Ahl-e Haqq, People of Truth in Iran and as Kaka'i brotherhood in Iraq (In Arabic "Kaka'i" or "Kaki"). Kaka'is have their own holy book called Saranjam, speak Gorani dialect of Kurdish, and believe in Reincarnation, which is a philosophical concept that holds as a main idea of living being starts a new life in a different physical body or other physical forms following their biological death (Gross, 1993; Laumakis, 2008; Anwar, 2018; Fahmi Kakai, 2018). Music is an important part of their religion; it is involved in their religious practices (Hawramy, 2011). The emergence of the Kakai religion dates back to more than 5,000 years. According to historical and scholarly sources, the roots of this religion extend to the Metric religion, which emerged within Kurdish populations (Amin, 2015; Falak al Din Kakai, 2013; Kreyenbroek, 2015).

Kaka'is, Yazidis, Muzidiks, Druze (in Lebanon and Syria), Alawite, and Shabaks are the remnants of Yazdan religion, which was one of the main pre-Islamic religions of the Kurds (Foltz, 2013). The ancestors of the Macedonian Kurds were adherent to the Yazdani religion, the official religion of the Median Empire more than 3,500 years ago. This indicates that Kakai religion is much older than the Zoroastrian religion (Wang Haoyu, 2012). The Median Empire (708-550 BC) is the first empire to appear in the history of ancient Persia, which are now the northern and northwestern areas of Iran. The Medians appeared at a time when the ancient Near East region was a battlefield between the powerful Empires of the Assyrians, the Hittites, the Egyptians, and the Kingdom of Urartu (Armenia). Scholars suggest that the Medias were the ethnic origin of Kurds today (Özoğlu, 2004). The history of the Median Empire can be divided into the era of evolution, prosperity, force and expansion, and fall and dependency (Ali, 2011).

Kakaism is an ancient religion deeply rooted in history. Most references report that the religion was founded in the late 14th century in western Iran by Sultan Sahak, but its history is older. According to Kaka'i

holy book (*Saranjam*), God had planned this religion even before creating earth and the sun. The history of Kakaism is composed of four main epochs: First Epoch, or Shari'at, also known as the Prophet period, is the period from Adam and Eve until Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad and the last Caliph of Islam (Juergensmeyer & Roof, 2011). The Second Epoch, or Tariqat, also known as the Doctrine period, is from from Ali ibn Abi Talib until Shah Khoshin, or Mubarak Shah. The Third Epoch, or Marefat, also known as the Mystical period, includes the period from Shah Khoshin until Baba Nawis (Shawais, 2011). The Fourth Epoch, or Haqiqat, also known as the Truth period, includes the period from Baba Nawis until Sultan Sahak, who is the youngest son of Sheikh Esa Barzanji. As per Kaka's holy book *Saranjam*, Sultan Sahak (or San Sahak) lived from 675 to 798 of the Hijri Islamic calendar and was born to a virgin mother (Diarak or Ramzbar) in Barzanja village in Halabja governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) (Anwar, 2013).

In present day Iraq and KRI, Kaka's mainly inhabit Kirkuk; but also live in Diyala, Erbil, Sulaimaniyah, and Mosul (Salloum, 2013, 2015, 2017). Kaka's holy places are located in Iraq and Iran. Kakaism have four major pillars to their beliefs, which are purity, honesty, humility and tolerance. Purity means to be pure and clean inside and outside. Honesty is to follow right path as God orders. Humility is to be modest, control one's own desires, and avoid arrogance. Tolerance means to be patient and ready to sacrifice for others, and endure difficulties.

It is considered a religious duty to keep their religion secret due to the fear of social environment and other ethnic groups' reactions, which has clearly underpinned such secrecy and reticence. Kaka'i men are easily distinguishable due to their characteristic mustaches. Kaka's holy book *Saranjam* states shaving is a sin, which also renders them more exposed to harassment and discrimination.

### **IMPROPER PERCEPTIONS AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT KAKA'IS**

There are many misconceptions about Kakaism and Kaka's among other religious groups in Iraq. These misconceptions are primarily due to the secrecy of its followers about their faith. This resulted in false beliefs held by the population, with many unsound perceptions and fabricated stories being circulated. The ambiguity has also remained an obstacle for scholars trying to explore and document the religion, its rituals, and beliefs.

The most common misconception about Kaka'i is its affiliation with Islam (Al Khoai, 2017) and being a part of Shia'ahism. Kaka'i is an

independent religious group (Lalani, 2010). It is also misbelieved that Kaka'is fast in the last three days of the month of Ramadan; the twenty seventh, twenty eighth, and twenty ninth, and celebrate Eid Al-Fitr festival like Muslims on the thirtieth day (Robins & Tremewan, 2004). However, in practice, Kaka'is fast is only three days in the middle of winter and their ritual has no relation with Ramadan.

Another misconception is that the faith group is accused of being devil worshippers, although in reality the followers believe in God. The fact that they do not share a lot about their faith makes people from other faiths to share false assumptions and conclusions based on personal false explanations (Robins and Tremewan, 2004).

The third source of misconceptions is regarding the religious rituals of Kaka'i followers, especially during the period of their annual fasting. Usually, Kaka'i followers gather collectively to practice their religious ceremonies and rituals, but some people from other faiths believe or think they are practicing group sex (Al-Ezawy, 1949).

Certain misconceptions have emerged in scholarly work as well. Van Bruinessen (1995) mentioned that Sultan Sahak disappeared or died and re-appeared or reborn in the form of Haji Bektash by reincarnation. It is important to clarify that Haji Baktash was not Sultan Sahak but the prophet of Baktashi belief—a Sufi and mystical teaching based on tolerance, esoteric interpretation and on the love of Ali ibn Abi Talib, a caliph, cousin, son-in-law and companion of the Islamic prophet Muhammad. Rostam (2006) has also exaggerated the role of Ali ibn Abi Talib in Kaka'i religion. For instance, the author has mentioned that Adam was made the same as Ali ibn Abi Talib and that after Ali ibn Abi Talib died, his soul entered the sun, therefore Kaka'is respect and prostrate themselves to the sun. In Kaka'is belief, Ali ibn Abi Talib did not exist yet when Adam was created. His soul did not enter the sun, but the sun is one of God's angels called Kala Zarda (i.e., yellow ox) (Hawary, 2021). Robins and Tremewan (2004) have mentioned misleading information about Kaka'is such as describing Ali ibn Abi Talib as their prophet. To further clarify, Kaka'is have more than one prophet according to each epoch, as we mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, it is falsely believed that Kaka'is exist in Karbala. It is very rare to find Kaka'i families living there. The Kaka'is made their pilgrimage to Sultan Prdeawer /prdeawær/ in the north of Iran (Kreyenbroek et al, 2017).

Divorce is as mutually agreed upon as marriage in Kaka'i religion. Some other Kaka'i traditions are also taken from the community and the culture they have lived in for centuries. These traditions might lead to dissolving

their original religious identity because most of the customs and cultural practices that they have gotten from the cultures they live with are completely against their religious rules such as polygamy, female genital mutilation, honor killing or gender inequality (Sadoon, 2018).

### **KAKA'I DURING MODERN MIDDLE EAST HISTORY**

After the establishment of the Persian Empire, also known as the Achaemenid Empire (550-336 B.C.E.), the Persian rulers succeeded in forcing a small percentage of the Yazdani Kurds to embrace Zoroastrianism, the official religion of Persian Empire (Jackson, 2003). The majority of the Kurds, however, remained with the remnants of the Yazdani religion (Mahdi Kakei, 2017; Mohammed, 2018). After the emergence of Islam and the invasion of the region by Muslim conquerors, the Yazidian religion struggled to oppose the Persian political Zoroastrianism and the Islamic doctrine (Fahmi Kaki, 2018). In the second half of the 16th century, the majority of the Kurds, including people practicing the branches of the Yazdani religion (Kakaism, Yazidis, Muzidiks, and Druze), were forced to become Muslims, adopt various Islamic symbols then adding them to their beliefs and to their holy books to protect themselves from murder, captivity, injustice and humiliation. The branches of the Yazdaniyah religion stood strongly and resisted all the pressures and oppressions. It was a source of a valuable consolidation in Kurdish society and important aspects of the culture, language, heritage, and history of the Kurdish people were maintained by the followers of these religions. Similarly, the holy books are in Kurdish and they are considered as an ancient Kurdish religion (Mohammed, 2018).

In modern history of Iraq, there were lots of attempts to report the Kaka'is (Yarsani) as Muslims because scholars and authors who wrote about them were from outside the religion (Rostam, 2006). On the other hand, Kaka'is are also very protective of sharing their own beliefs and details about their religion. According to historian Mahdi Kakei, most of the Middle Eastern history is written by rulers or by biased people, who have changed and misled the religious and ethnic principles of the community for their own purposes (Mahdi Kakei, 2017). In the Iraqi census in 1957, for example, practitioners of many religions and ethnicities were forced to change their religious identities to Islam.

Kaka'is have never been formally mentioned as an independent religion in the Iraqi constitution mainly because the majority of this group wants to keep their faith secret. They are registered as Muslims on their national identity cards. Therefore, some Kaka'i members started a campaign

to be acknowledged as Kaka'is in the Iraqi constitution of 2005, and recognized as an independent religious group on the national identity cards. Another group disagreed with the campaign, as they believed that it would expose Kaka'is to greater risks. However, others within the faith group know that Kaka'is are already persecuted, and if they do not protect their identity, their religious beliefs, religion, and traditions might disappear and fade away over time (Svirsky, 2016).

During Saddam Hussain's presidency, the Kaka'is suffered systematic violence, discrimination, and subjugation because of their Kurdish ethnicity. They were forced to identify with the Arab ethnicity instead of insisting on maintaining their Kurdish ethnicity. Most of their communities were expelled to the desert in the west and south of Iraq. Furthermore, thousands were expelled to Iran (1.3 million refugees) and Turkey (400,000 refugees) (CDC, 1991). They were deprived of their cultural, linguistic, and religious rights (Daraj, 2018; Ibrahim, 2015). Because of the regime's Arabization policies, many Kaka'is were forced off their lands and villages, forcibly evicted from Kurdish regions and expelled to southern Iraq. In the provinces of Kirkuk and Diyala, Kurdish villages (Muslim and Kaka'is villages) were evicted forcefully. The residents of 26 Kakai villages in Khanaqin district in Diyala governate (see Figure 1), and were evicted to Iran and other parts of Iraq (Al-Ezawy, 1949; Qaytuli, 2008).

**Figure 1.**

*Remnants of a Kaka'i Village in Khanaqin, which all families were evicted during the 1980s (Abas, 2019).*



The government destroyed and erased Kaka'i villages along the Iranian border in Diyala governorate in order to create a security zone for the eight years during the Iran-Iraq war (Qaytuli, 2008). Hundreds of Kaka'is living in Kirkuk were forcibly exiled to Iran because of their Kurdish ethnicity, losing their nationality in the process (Minority Rights Group International, 2017). The Iraqi government transferred the ownership of their agriculture lands to Iraqi Arabs. Kurds lost ownership of their own lands and houses solely because of their Kurdish ethnicity. The only choice given to them by the Iraqi government was to change their ethnicity from Kurdish to Arabic in order to have their belongings and ownerships back (Assi, 2014).

### **KAKA'I AFTER 2003**

In 2003, after the fall of the regime and the political changes in Iraq, minorities, especially the members of Kakaism, have continued to struggle. They became direct targets of political, economic, and religious violence. Kaka'is, like other minorities, have been targeted because of their ethnic or religious identity and have been forced to leave their homes (Lamani, 2009). Kaka'is' discreet beliefs and the falsified narratives about them have made them alienated from their social surroundings. Some Muslim religious leaders in Iraq deliver continuous sentiments against Kakaism by asking their followers not to interact with them or buy goods from their shops, describing them as devil followers. Despite the gravity of such hatred practices, the Iraqi government has never taken any steps to address these serious issues.

Discrimination against Kaka'is is mainly due to two compounded reasons. First, they are a religious minority, which the majority of Muslims consider as blasphemous. Second, because of their Kurdish ethnicity (Saadun, 2016).

Despite the existence of watchdog entities, such as the Institute for International Law and Human Rights (IILHR) in Iraq since 2005, Kaka'is have been subjected to threats, kidnapping and assassinations, mainly in Mosul, Kirkuk, and Diyala. Another difficulty that still exists today is due to the fact that some of Kaka'i families returned to Iraq after being deported to Iran by the Saddam Hussein regime. These families have various challenges obtaining Iraqi civil documents. In September 2007, four members of a Kaka'i family were forcibly arrested by armed groups near Baquba, center of Diyala governorate, where they were humiliated, severely tortured, and killed because of their faith and Kurdish ethnicity (Yari-Yarsan, 2013). In October 2009, a Kaka'i village (Tobzawa) south of Kirkuk was targeted with a

suicide car bomb early in the morning which destroyed over 15 houses and caused about 30 individual injuries (Assi, 2014). Also, in Kirkuk city, Kaka'is faced much discrimination. Between 2003 and 2007, more than 150 Kaka'i families in the Uroba area were forced to move to other areas in or outside Kirkuk because of mistreatment, threats, and disputes by Muslims in the area. In 2006, many Kaka'is were assassinated in different areas of Kirkuk. Two Kaka'i college students were murdered. At their funerals, two suicide terrorists exploded themselves, which caused four more deaths and nineteen injuries (Assi, 2016). According to a media report, more than 250 Kaka'is have been killed since 2003 (Jamal, 2019).

#### **KAKA'I AFTER THE EMERGENCE OF ISIS IN 2014**

During the invasion of Mosul in 2014 by ISIS, about 1,038 Kaka'i families fled their homes in Mosul toward the Kurdistan Region of Iraq to avoid genocide. ISIS destroyed three religious' shrines of Kaka'is in Mosul and five villages were completely destroyed in the area during ISIS attacks. Several weeks after those attacks, and the Yazidi genocide by ISIS, a group of thirty religious Kaka'i men in Kirkuk declared themselves Muslims (Hosseini, 2018). The denial of the Kaka'is' religious identity was a clear sign of their fear of facing the same fate of the Yazidi people, since Kirkuk was under attack.

When ISIS attacked the disputed areas after taking control of Mosul, Kurdish Peshmarga and Iraqi forces shared safeguarding duties of the area, and the group was relatively protected. However, after the referendum for independence from Iraq by the Kurdish authorities in September 2017, and the withdrawal of Kurdish forces from Kirkuk and Diyala in October the same year, a big security vacuum in the region was created. Since early 2018, Kaka'is have been under systematic brutal attacks by different armed groups in the disputed areas, including the remnants of ISIS, especially in the villages south of Kirkuk.

While the intensity and frequency of these attacks are on the rise, the Iraqi military has left the area, increasingly putting this minority population in danger of being persecuted on daily basis. Kidnapping, murdering, explosions, threatening and destroying shrines is the new normal for the group in Iraq. These incidents have led most Kaka'is to leave their homes and villages. From 14 villages, only three Kaka'i villages are left in the area (Rudaw, 2020). In most cases, the perpetrators are not held accountable for their crimes and could escape justice. The Kaka'is are not able to fight radical armed groups with their personal weapons against their advanced weapons. Though they may be able to resist for a short time in

case of any attack, previous attacks showed that the Iraqi Government forces arrived to the inflicted area after 8-10 hours during which much damage has already been caused (Almas, 2020a). This creates stress and panic among the Kaka'is in the area about the next attacks, as ISIS fighters are well trained, have advanced weapons, and attack in large numbers. While these atrocities are taking place regularly and have made many of Kakis to leave their villages, not much has been mentioned in the international media (Anwar & Abdulla, 2021). The Kaka'is suffered from 15 different attacks in the first half of 2020, in Kirkuk, Nineveh, and Diyala. More than 10 Kaka'is were killed when a nationwide lockdown was in place. The Iraqi security forces are yet to ensure the safety of the Kaka'is as they have not been providing enough security for their villages that share border with territories where ISIS affiliated groups are active. Also, Iraqi authorities are preventing this population from having their own weapons to protect themselves and their families from these regular attacks (Almas, 2020b). This dangerous situation has affected the normal daily life for the Kaka'is in the area. The fears and stress from of being attacked at any moment make them mentally exhausted, especially the women and children.

Unfortunately, local authorities are ignoring calls for help and support from minorities. No one has yet been held accountable for these brutal acts that have been committed against the Kaka'is resulting in insult and injury. The Kaka'is believe that it is another attempt to Arabize their villages and is done in preparation to control more fertile lands rich with oil and other natural resources. Lately, many obstacles were created by the Iraqi government for Kurdish families in order to prevent them from returning to Kirkuk. Nevertheless, Iraqi Government facilitates the movement of Kurdish families out from Kirkuk. These recent developments led a group of Kaka'i organization leaders to ask for help and support for their people from the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to take serious steps in asking the Iraqi Government to protect Kaka'is and their villages from these armed groups in southern Kirkuk (Kirkuknow, 2020). However, some Kaka'is have expressed that after asking for help from UNAMI, the Iraqi Government sent some of its soldiers to the area before the UNAMI team arrived, and the severity of the situation was thus downplayed.

## **DISCUSSION AND WAYS FORWARD**

It is clear that Kakaism has an ancient history and unique characteristics different from other religious groups in the region. Kaka'is are still not recognized in the Iraqi constitution and only little is known about them in Iraq. This is a serious gap in the legal framework for the protection of



minorities in Iraq. According to an analysis by Gurr (1993), ignoring cultural identity, inequalities, and historical loss of autonomy all contribute substantially to grievances of minorities.

In view of the ongoing and worsening discrimination, there are now debates among Kaka'i religious figures about whether secrecy is helping or harming their ability to gain political rights and legal protections. Since the Iraqi constitution asserts that religious minorities have the right to protection, some are arguing that the Kaka'is would benefit from claiming their heritage and seeking recognition as a distinct religion with the right to protection and also to gain political-legal rights. Kaka'is are already exposed to violence and harassment without being formally declared as a religious minority. It is a primary and fundamental right of Kaka'i followers to have their religious identity recognized in Iraq and globally. Kaka'is should not face any threat or fear by telling the truth about their faith. Living in fear of disclosing identities has psychological consequences on their members, particularly children and young adults (Brown, 2015; Pascoe & Richman, 2009; Schmitt et al., 2014).

Kaka'is have long been secretive about their religion, both as a religious obligation and also as a strategy for the community's self-protection from being attacked. A group within the faith still defends the secrecy and disagrees about talking publicly about the faith for two reasons. First, their religion is considered a secret and declaring it counts a sin. Second, as most of the Iraqi population considers them infidels, this population is subject to lack of protection by the Iraqi authorities, and the group fears constantly for their safety from more violence and even genocide. They believe that in a country with a long history of battles and violations like Iraq, there is no guarantee that they would be safe and protected, even if they were formally reported as an independent religious minority. Yazidis, for example, are recognized as a religious minority in the Iraqi constitution, and yet they suffered an unforgettable tragedy by ISIS (Lamani, 2009). Some of the Kaka'i followers declare themselves to be Muslims to protect their community from persecution.

According to Minority Right Group International, Iraq ranks number four globally after Syria, Somalia and South Sudan for allowing minorities to witness and face genocide and mass killings (MRG, 2018). This makes their struggle to be recognized as an ethno-religious group more difficult. Furthermore, this leads local authorities and communities to associate the group with other religions and sects, such as the Shiite sect. Lamani (2009) has found that minorities in the Middle East are forced to indicate an affiliation that does not reflect their real identities because

governments do not recognize their religion or ethnicity. Despite the existence of many organizations and institutions for human rights in Iraq, especially after 2003, they have not done their duty to protect Kaka'is and denounce various forms of human rights violations against them (UNAMI, 2019).

Minorities' political representation strengthens representational links with the government, creates positive attitudes toward government, and encourages the political participation of the community (Banducci et al., 2004). The absence of political representation of Kaka'is has led to a chasm between them and local authorities, made their voices unheard, and made it hard to address their needs. Iraq's minorities are on the verge of disappearance. Although Kaka'is have not declared their faith formally, they have long been exposed to violence and harassment throughout their history. The neglect of the Iraq government, the hatred and violently charged religious speeches against Kaka'is, the ignorance and intolerance of most of the population, and the lack of action by the Iraqi government, the international community, and organizations of human rights and minorities' rights groups have allowed the violence to continue against different groups and minorities in Iraq, including Kaka'is. Therefore, Kaka'is in Iraq feel ignored, insecure, and unprotected by the government. During the ISIS invasion of Mosul, the Iraqi government took no steps toward fighting the armed group or helping the hundreds of families who fled their homes toward the Kurdistan region. After September 2017, when Kaka'i villages in Kirkuk were left with no military protection and later were attacked, the Iraq Government turned deaf ears to the calls for help by the Kaka'is. When Kaka'is had their own soldiers to protect their own villages, the government did not support them financially.

This article demonstrates that all four pillars of minority rights have been violated for Kaka'is in Iraq. Kaka'is are still struggling to gain the right to be considered as an Iraqi ethno-religious minority group with a long history. The group has been discriminated against throughout the history by all subsequent governments since the foundation of Iraq. An example of the violation of Kaka'is' most primary rights is the missing religious identity. Kaka'is are reported as Muslims against their will. Furthermore, they have no role in political and public affairs in a democratic government and are completely neglected, denied their rights, and marginalized. The need for actions to restore the rights of Kaka'is and to enhance their protection has never been greater. Table 1 below summaries strategies and actions to be taken at national and community levels based on the findings of this paper and indicates the current gaps and challenges. We believe that protection of

the group could be increased and achieved through the implementation of these recommendations.

**Table 1.**

*Strategies/actions for Kaka'is to restore their rights and enhance their protection at national and community level:*

<b>At national level</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize Kakaism as a formal religion in Iraqi constitution therefore to be protected as a minority.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create diverse educational programs at all levels and include religious minorities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop new laws and regulations to guarantees the rights of minorities in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region and protect them from harm and harassment.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocate parliamentary seats for Kaka'is to represent themselves in the Iraqi and the Kurdish parliament as other minorities and groups do.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring to justice criminals and terrorists who committed atrocities against minorities in Iraq should bring to justice and hold accountable for their crimes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human Right organizations in Iraq need to take serious steps toward protecting Kaka'is and other minorities' rights.</li> </ul>
<b>At community level</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct scholarly studies, increase mass media coverage and publications about Kaka'is, especially by Kaka'is themselves.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a committee of Kaka'i members to review and revise publications about Kaka'is to prevent spreading of incorrect information by non-Kaka'i writers.</li> </ul>

### CONCLUSION

Kakaism is a marginalized religious minority group in Iraq. Kaka'is have unique religious practices and rituals that give them a unique identity. They have experienced discrimination, atrocities, and have been ignored throughout history until today. Lack of scholarship about Kaka'is has made

research and study of this group challenging. While other minorities in Iraq are demanding protection and rights, Kaka'is are still struggling for their right of religious identity to be recognized in the Iraqi constitution. The privacy about their religion and the fear of genocide and extinction have made this religion marginalized, overlooked, and forgotten. Kaka'is themselves are responsible for not declaring and claiming for their religious identity publicly. The Iraqi governments throughout modern history are responsible for not ensuring the welfare, and protection of this minority population. It is never too late for Kaka'is to demand their rights. Native Kaka'is and local scholars must study, document, and advocate for the group's identity to be recognized and its religious and cultural heritage to be protected and preserved.

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## **Addressing the Stigma: The Unvoiced Barriers to Muslim Arab Families' Engagement in Their Children's Education**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The present phenomenological study examined the engagement experiences of five Muslim Arab parents in their children's education and uncovered the current stigma against Muslim families, which negatively impacts their engagement in their children's education. Identifying these needs and satisfying them will improve the educational experience for students of this minority and will ultimately lead to effective engagement with their families. Five emerging themes support this finding: neglecting to accommodate for religious sacraments, unmet hygienic jurisprudence needs, unsatisfied dietary needs, feeling unequal, and failed preparation for academic success. Based on these findings, this research calls for action agendas for reform and change by training school personnel to understand diverse students; adopting anti-bullying policies to counteract stereotyping; allowing students to perform their individual religious duties, which are well within their constitutional rights; and making dietary considerations and personal hygienic accommodations for Muslim children as a matter of social justice before we can even address their families' engagement.*

**Keywords:** Muslim Arab families, engagement, stereotyping, stigma

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## INTRODUCTION

Research suggests that Arabs living in the United States continue to experience negative stereotypes and racism (Meymand, 2018; Shaheen, 2001), with American high school students' perceptions of Arabs and the Middle East as "overwhelmingly negative" (Kamalipour, 2000, p. 58). According to Suleiman (1996), "Given the alarming impact of cultural conditioning in the American Society, the invisible Arab Americans and their children have become more visible in a negative way" (p. 8).

Although most teachers reported having had numerous experiences with Arab students, many appeared to lack relevant religious and cultural information about communication styles necessary for effective interaction with Arab families (Moosa et al., 2001). The perceptions and needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families matter and should be considered when planning and implementing engagement approaches. In other words, Muslim Arab families' feelings and needs must be addressed to ensure appropriate implementation of plans intended to increase their participation in the education of their children.

A useful conceptual framework for examining such aspects of society is critical race theory (CRT) in education, which Yosso (2005) defines as, "a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses" (p. 74). CRT emphasizes the fact that race is a social construct that is not exclusively the result of the bias of people, but embedded in and likely stemming from legal systems and regulations. Educators and other school personnel can leverage CRT to create an educational environment of equity for all students by avoiding the often unconscious segregation of minority students and English Learners, ensuring that they are represented in the content and material presented in the classroom, and counteracting stereotypes against them.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Matuszny et al., (2007), changing student demographics continue to create challenges to the current education system. The difference in demographics between student and teacher populations mean that educational professionals "may not be familiar with culturally embedded student behaviors, may not speak a student's or parent's language and, as a result, may not fully interpret all students' needs" (Matuszny et al., 2007, p. 24). Teachers will need guidance and additional resources to meet the unique needs of students and parents with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Delpit, 1995; Turnbull et al., 2006). Teacher preparation programs must produce culturally competent teachers (McHatton, 2007), who

are able to work effectively and collaboratively with culturally and linguistically diverse families and their children.

Specific needs, cultural characteristics, and social characteristics differentiate the Arab American population from other ethnic minority groups in the United States (Goforth, 2011). There is a distinct lack of published literature on this minority group (Al Khateeb et al., 2015; Goforth, 2011; Haboush, 2007), which requires the need for school districts to research and increase their cultural knowledge and competency as it pertains to Arab Americans. Recent demographics reports show an approximate population of 3.7 million Arab Americans (Arab American Institute, 2017), most of whom reside in one of ten states: California, Michigan, New York, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.

### **Islamophobia in Education**

For the past two decades, the term “Islamophobia” has been used to describe an irrational fear of the Islamic faith that leads to prejudiced, targeted attacks against people and expressions perceived to be Muslim (Mir et al., 2019). It materializes as vandalism, violence, hate speech, surveillance, and scrutiny against Muslims (Rowe, 2019), particularly post the September 11 attacks and supercharged by the rise of radical groups, immigration crises from Muslim-majority countries to the West, and the demonization of Muslims by Western media outlets (Hankir et al., 2017). This gives Muslims “a hyper visibility whilst simultaneously suppressing them” (Akel, 2021, p. 15) and perpetuates their marginalization from academic life in the West.

A recent poll showed that 54 percent of Americans do not want to accept refugees from countries such as Syria due to concerns about potential terrorists (Mir et al., 2019). As Mir & Sarroub (2019) explain, an ignorant politics that topples democracy and pluralism inevitably emanates into school classrooms. Roughly half of the Syrian refugees who have relocated to the United States since 2012 are under 14 years old and enrolled in school (Mir & Sarroub, 2019). These students continue to be discriminated against and targeted; in fact, Muslim students are at least twice as likely to be bullied at school, with verbal harassment, including bomb and terrorism references, being the most common (CAIR, 2019). As a result, students experience depression, anxiety, and paranoia, among other issues (Irshad, 2015). Still, U.S. public schools are generally neither aware of Islamophobia nor how to appropriately respond to it (Mir et al., 2019). Mir and Sarroub (2019) call on schools to bring attention to and stop Islamophobia by fundamentally reforming the texts and conversations that shape the thoughts and actions of

students, teachers, and administrators while countering any pervasive actions taken against them.

### **Educators' Bias**

Historically, the teaching profession has been predominantly populated by white, middle class teachers (Goldring et al., 2013; Sleeter, 2001). Accordingly, there is a history of cultural and linguistic misperceptions that have created hurdles to effective communication and successful collaboration between culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families and U.S. schools (Brooks et al., 2010; Good et al., 2010; Steeley & Lukacs, 2015). This history includes a cultural divide in which educators hold deficit views and generally set lower expectations for CLD students (Castro, 2010; Sleeter et al., 2011). In their study, Lin & Bates (2014) conclude that “there is a long way to go for many teachers to become culturally responsive” (p. 38) and that teachers “may not be fully prepared to handle the diverse classrooms that they are currently or soon will be facing” (p. 37). School personnel often misinterpret CLD families’ lack of partnership with their children’s schools (Steeley et al., 2015) and attribute it to indifference, low levels of education, and lack of support (Good et al., 2010; Banks et al., 2007; Mapp, 2003; Valenzuela, 2004). Teacher preparation programs need to immerse the fundamentals of diversity and inclusion in all capacities (Lin et al., 2014).

Research on predispositions of teacher candidates indicates that they often “seem to enter teacher preparation programs with negative or deficit attitudes and beliefs about those different from themselves” (Hollins et al., 2005, p. 511). As explained by McHatton (2007),

Unaware of their own power and privilege, and lacking first-hand experiences with discrimination, teacher candidates through their own unexamined biases and beliefs, may unknowingly respond to parents from diverse backgrounds in such a way that furthers the schism that may already exist in the parent-school relationship. (p. 238)

To avoid these unintentional reactions, McHatton (2007) suggests that educators actively explore the experiences of diverse families and understand how these experiences may affect their involvement and interactions with school professionals.

### **The Impact of Culturally Responsive Services**

Common themes in the literature highlight the positive correlation associated with student outcomes, school culture, community-school partnerships, and strong parent-school relationships (Conroy, 2012; Jeynes,

2011). In this support, Jones et al., (1997) reported better academic achievement for children whose parents are highly involved in their education. West (2000) concluded that the higher the parental involvement was, the higher the level of children's motivation in their education. A growing body of research (Henderson et al., 1994; Griffith, 1999; Mattingly et al., 2002) indicates a positive correlation between parental involvement and student success.

### **RESEARCH PURPOSE**

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to voice the barriers to Muslim Arab parents' engagement in their children's education. This was accomplished through the perspectives of five Muslim Arab parents at the Ally School District (pseudonym), focusing on their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The study was aimed at recording and analyzing *what* Muslim Arab families experienced with regard to their engagement in their children's education and *how* these experiences developed and impacted future ones (Moustakas, 1994).

### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study will help identify the unvoiced barriers to Muslim Arab families' engagement in their children education. The study will also recognize the strategic approaches needed for their successful engagement. It is hoped that these suggestions will be a resource for decision-makers in implementing and evaluating engagement strategies as they pertain to parents of this minority. It is also important to regard the overcoming of the obstacles these parents will raise as a matter of social justice.

The study aims to create a school environment where all children are valued and given equitable opportunities to develop a cohesive future generation and build effective family-school partnerships.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION**

Through the experiences of five culturally and linguistically diverse Muslim parents, this study explores the following research question: What are the unvoiced barriers to Muslim Arab parents' engagement in their children's education?

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study follows a qualitative phenomenological approach. Phenomenology allows us to understand an experience at a deeper level of consciousness, while also helping us explore our own nature and reflect at a

personal level (Qutoshi, 2018). It is a “way of thinking about knowledge – a philosophical and theoretical viewpoint – how do we know what we know” (Bozzi, 1990; Mortari et al., n.d., p. 5). The researcher selected this approach for the present study in order to clearly present the participants and effectively describe their realities and wisdom, for which phenomenology is best suited (Plummer 1983; Stanley et al., 1993; Husserl, 1977).

As defined by Teherani et al. (2015), phenomenology describes the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it. This requires the researcher to suspend her own attitudes, beliefs, and suppositions in order to focus on the participants’ experience of the phenomenon and identify the essences of the phenomenon through epoche, also called the process of bracketing, to ensure that the researcher’s individual subjectivity does not bias data analysis and interpretations (Creswell, 2007).

### **Data collection**

The researcher collected the data through (a) a questionnaire with Muslim Arab parents and (b) an interview with the parents who responded to the questionnaire and agreed to be interviewed. This allows parents to engage in conversations, discussions, and give the researcher windows for questioning (Creswell, 2013; Newton, 2010). Rivano et al., (2017) recommend the use of qualitative questionnaires to generate informative data on the respondents’ everyday life. This triangulation helped the researcher validate findings and enrich the trustworthiness of the qualitative inquiry (Hays et al., 2012). To assess the accuracy of the findings, several internal validation strategies, including member checking, peer debriefing, and triangulation, were used to authenticate the findings (Gibbs, 2007).

### **Data analysis**

Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen’s modified method for analysis of phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994) was applied to analyze the collected information from participants. Meaningful statements taken from transcribed interviews were clustered into larger emerging themes. Further analysis of the data included generating a textural description (i.e., “what” they experienced) and included structural description (i.e., “how” they experienced) from the transcripts, and includes verbatim examples.

### **Participants**

The researcher partnered with the Ally School District, a Midwestern and urban school district, to conduct this study. To participate in the study,

the participants had to be Muslim Arab parents with children enrolled at a school within the Ally District. Table 1 lists participants’ demographic information and their relationship to their child. It should be noted that the participants were all, coincidentally, mothers of elementary, middle, and high school students. All names used are pseudonyms.

Table 1  
*Participant Characteristics*

Parent	Relationship to child	Country of origin
Eman	Mother	Syria
Sabah	Mother	Sudan
Donia	Mother	Syria
Asmaa	Mother	Sudan
Razan	Mother	Sudan

**RESEARCH ETHICS**

Prior to the initiation of any research activities, the researcher obtained approval for human subject research from the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). This required the submission of a complete protocol to accompany any application for review.

To ensure participants’ confidentiality, invitations were sent and collected by the school. No identifying information about participants, including names, addresses, and phone numbers, was shared with the researcher. During the data collection portion, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to the participants and referred to them as such throughout the entire process to guarantee their anonymity (Sieber, 1998).

**FINDINGS**

An analysis of the questionnaire and interview portions revealed primary descriptions and major themes encompassing the barriers to Muslim Arab parents’ engagement in their children’s education. The following sections explain the development of each theme from participants’ responses through horizontalization, a phenomenological approach in which the researcher gives equal value to all the participants’ statements (Moustakas, 1994).

**First theme: Neglecting to accommodate for religious sacraments.** Two of the three parents with high school daughters reported

significant prejudice towards their daughters' hijabs (headscarf) and a general lack of acceptance towards their culture and religion, as stated by Eman and Asmaa. Both parents had experienced incidents during which their daughters' hijabs were mocked or removed by force with little to no reaction or reprimand from their schools. Asmaa added that when she informed the school that her children would be absent for a religious celebration, her children's absences were marked as unexcused. Asmaa believes that if the teachers and administration were more aware of other cultures and religions, they would have been more accommodating. In a similar manner, Sabah and Donia stated that their children "aren't even given five minutes to perform the required noon prayer." Sabah added that respecting their children's religion by educating staff and students on Islamic practices, marking absences due to religious celebrations, and designating a space for Muslim students to perform their noon prayer would be a tremendous step in making parents feel respected and more engaged at their children's schools.

**Second theme: Unmet hygienic jurisprudence needs.** Several participants reported the lack of school consideration towards their religious and cultural customs. Sabah added that the school did not make any effort to understand or accommodate for Islamic toilet etiquette, which mandates the use of a handheld water sprayer after urination/defecation. When Asmaa and Razan requested a small watering cup to be placed in their children's schools, they were met with refusal and ridicule; one administrator responded to Razan with, "We usually take a shower at the end of the day. Don't you?" Sabah added, "When these tools are not available, it makes it difficult for us to stay at the school longer" because basic hygienic needs are not met.

**Third theme: Unsatisfied dietary needs.** Parents reported an evident lack of consideration towards their children's dietary needs despite initiating conversation about it. Razan specifically stated that she did not find that her children's schools were concerned about her children's dietary restrictions even after she explained its significance. Asmaa explains that her heart aches for her children who have little to no non-meat options during school lunch, particularly her youngest son, who is often turned away from the lunch line without a lunch on *Pizza Fridays* because the cheese pizza is the first to run out. Eman also recalls when her child unknowingly ate pork during lunch, which is not religiously permissible to eat, and got very ill from the food. Eman and Asmaa explain that this could be avoided if the school were more cautious of Muslim students' dietary needs. The choices for meat- and gelatin-free cafeteria foods are often limited to fruits, vegetables, and dairy, which do not constitute healthy, well-balanced meals for children and deprives them from their needed nutrients.



**Fourth theme: Feeling unequal.** Responses echoed parents' feeling that their children are treated unequally compared to their non-Muslim peers. Razan, Asmaa, and Donia all stated that their children were at a disadvantage due to their cultural and religious obligations that were unaccommodated for, which discouraged their engagement as they felt unwelcome and misunderstood at their children's schools.

The mothers, who are all wearing Hijabs, reported their uncomfortable feelings when school staff and administration treat them differently especially when they cannot help staring at them for wearing Hijabs and modest clothing. This attitude creates barrier to their engagement as it constantly remind them of their differences. Asmaa posed, "Why do my children have to eat apples for lunch while their peers ate chicken?" This speaks to another inequality between Muslim students and their peers when it comes to their diet.

**Fifth theme: Failed preparation.** Participants' responses revealed a failure to appropriately prepare staff, teachers, and the existing students to understand a new culture and how this failure is a primary obstacle to parents' full engagement in their children's education. As explained by Asmaa, "A lack of knowledge about [a group's] cultures and religion can lead to serious problems." Razan, Eman, and Asmaa all emphasize the importance of schools preparing personnel and students to accept a new culture, respect different traditions and religions, and encourage them to sympathize with this minority. Parents explain that these are the most significant steps in ensuring their children's psychological well-being in their new environment. Asmaa adds that this kind of preparation can be part of a social skills or social studies class. Similarly, Razan suggests engaging parents and their children by having them participate in "class/school events, especially to present cultural occasions, cloth, folkloric dance, or religious traditions such as Ramadan, that would to bridge the cultural gap between children and make parents feel engaged and valued."

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

We now have a better understanding of the barriers to the engagement experiences of Muslim Arab parents in their children's education. This validation allowed the researcher to delve into the "how" and "why" as they relate to the participants' engagement experiences (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

**What comes first?** Although this study's intent was to investigate Muslim Arab families' perceptions on their engagement in their children's education, it was discovered that their physiological needs take precedence and must be addressed first, as explained by Maslow (1943), and are likely a

barrier to their engagement in their children's education. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that only when one's physical and emotional needs are satisfied can they be concerned with their needs for influence and personal development (Maslow, 1943). Aligning with this structure, this study brought these resilient experiences to focus: noting Sabah's discomfort about staying in the school with inaccessible hygienic toilets based on her beliefs; understanding Asmaa's worries about her child's hunger at lunch as he waits in line for the only type of pizza he can eat and ending up with nothing when it runs out just because he follows religious practices that are not accommodated for; seeing Eman and Asmaa's grievance about the lack of acceptance toward their daughters' religious customs; and catching the voice of bothersome when Eman explains that her son ate pork unintentionally as he was left to battle the right choice based on his beliefs. These observations, in addition to participants' feelings of being unequally treated and that their children being at disadvantage compared to their non-Muslim peers, contributed to the researcher's confidence in determining that *satisfying Muslim Arab parents' religious and cultural needs are key components to engaging them as learning partners in children's education*. The data analysis revealed how much the cultural barrier that emerged from the collected data informed the researcher's choice and guided to the needs of minority parents for their successful engagement in their children's education. Based on the emerged themes, an underlying analysis is discussed to shed light on immigrants' lives in the United States. The following is an elaboration on the main hardships that Muslim Arab families experience and some insights on how to breakdown such barriers.

**Cultural barriers.** As the number of Arab students in U.S. public schools increases, so do the approaches that are available for their successful integration; however, Suleiman (1996) predicts that schools will continue to lack the acknowledgement of Arab culture and history or even attempt to counteract Arab stereotyping, as previously discussed, and this was indeed confirmed almost 25 years later by Rowe (2019) and Mir and Sarroub (2019). Vincent and Marie (2005) found that a 'one size fits all' approach is still prevalent in various educational establishments. CLD parents in particular are disadvantaged by the assumption that every parent has the same needs, which leads schools to marginalize parents of ethnic backgrounds. It is important to understand these perceptions when building a relationship with minority families, as they may be cautious when engaging with formal service delivery systems because of previous experiences with discrimination (Magaña, 2000). Accordingly, providing culturally sensitive services to Muslim Arab parents in addition to making efforts to counteract Arab stereotyping, would

make them feel more appreciated and lead them to become more engaged in their children's education.

**Addressing the stigma.** As discussed in the literature review, Arabs living in the United States regularly experience negative stereotypes (Shaheen, 2001), especially at school (Kamalipour, 2000). McHatton (2007) found that the majority of CLD families are exposed to discrimination while obtaining educational services. Studies have found that Muslims experience racist incidents and marginalization as a result of their religious beliefs (Edge, Newbold, & McKeary, 2014; Berns-McGown, 2013; Hanniman, 2008) and that these racist incidents have a negative effect on the mental health of young refugees (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). In this study, Eman shared, "There was a clear lack of acceptance towards us. There had been several altercations in which other students mocked my daughter for her limited English and for wearing a hijab (headscarf)." Asmaa also shared that a student on the bus pulled her daughter's Hijab from the back and showed her hair; she then added, "Students' lack of knowledge about our cultures and religion can lead to serious problems." Reflecting back on the conceptual framework of this study, which is based on the Critical Race Theory, should we hold school personnel responsible for meeting the basic needs of this population or are they unknowingly perpetuating the bias and prejudice embedded in the educational system? Many minority students are bullied by their peers due to their race or peripheral status in their new country (Closs et al., 2001). Hek (2005) recommends that schools adopt anti-bullying programs to promote a healthy environment of inclusive education that respects all students and does not eliminate a specific group.

**The right to pray at school.** Sabah stated, "My children aren't even given five minutes to perform our required noon prayer... I believe that respecting our children's religion will really help with making parents feel respected and more engaged with the school." The relationship between religion and public schools in the United States is mainly governed by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which states in part: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..." (U.S. Constitution, Amendment I). A public school's standing as a secular establishment does not mean that it is anti-religious; rather, public schools are typically filled with students and teachers with a variety of religious beliefs (Moore, 2007). In this study, many parents indicated that if efforts were made for their children to practice their religious beliefs, then this would help in removing the barriers to engagement in their children's schools. Students have the right to pray individually, read religious texts, and discuss religion in their free time as long as it is neither disruptive

nor coercive (Wallace v. Jaffree, 1985). It is important for schools to comply with these freedoms so that Muslim students and families do not feel the need to be invisible in order to conform or exist within a U.S. educational institution.

**Toilet etiquette.** Razan also explained that although the school did not show much tolerance or understanding towards her children's religious and cultural practices. For example, when Razan requested a small watering cup next to the toilets at the school to comply with her religion's toilet etiquette, an administrator at the school responded with, "We usually take a shower at the end of the day, don't you?" These types of insensitive responses appear to neglect the individualized needs of Muslim students and families. How can we ask engagement of parents whose basic hygienic needs are unfulfilled at schools? What about their children who are spending 7+ hour days at school?

**Dietary needs.** Asmaa emphasized the deficiency in the nutrition that her children receive compared to their peers. She also referred to her children's disappointment on Fridays when the cheese pizza would run out, leaving them with no other dietary options. Research discusses the need to provide Halal meals or alternatives at schools with escalating Muslim student populations rather than limiting these children's access to equitable meals and putting their minds and bodies at a disadvantage simply because of their religion. "Schools with large populations of Muslim and Jewish children have placed halal and kosher items on their daily lunch menus, thereby supporting the contention that if Ethical Veganism is protected under freedom of religion, perhaps vegan lunches will become more accessible as well." (Sabry & Bruna, 2007, p. 31). Per Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act,

No individual, on the basis of race, sex, color, national origin, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, or status as a parent, shall be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination in, a Federally conducted education or training program or activity.

Yet, Muslim students are not provided with appropriate food options during school lunches. This malnutrition should not be the price that young Muslims have to pay for wanting to follow the rules of their religion simply because it does not conform to the dominant culture.

In diverse classrooms, Hossain (2013) recommends creating teachable moments that start the conversation around questions students may have about the Islamic faith (while also respecting the needs and privacy of all students). Implementing this practice can help remove many of the obstacles that Muslim families experience in the American education system.

The findings of this study agree with those of Matuszny et al. (2007), who stated that educators can develop collaborative partnerships with CLD parents and families by breaking down the barriers preventing their engagement. In order to do so, these barriers must first be identified and addressed. This research uncovered the culturally insensitive practices at schools serving Muslim Arab families that create barriers to their engagement.

### **CONCLUSION**

The five themes that emerged answered the research question, concluding that there is an evident cultural gap that needs to be bridged before Muslim Arab families are fully engaged in their children's education. Schools can help accommodate families by training school personnel to become culturally literate in order to effectively handle diverse classrooms; benefiting from teachable moments in the classroom; and preparing existing students to accept a new culture while rewarding those who provide help and support, creating a model for others to follow. Schools should also learn to recognize Islamophobic and anti-Arab sentiments and adopt effective anti-bullying policies that counteract Muslim and Arab stereotyping while making an active effort to foster students' successful adaptation and accommodate them in their environment. School systems should put on a CRT-inspired lens as they problematize objectivity and interrogate the systemic and institutionalized racism permeating into U.S. schools. One way to start is to thoroughly revise the texts and conversations being brought into the classroom and ensure that they are not perpetuating a monolithic culture of ignorance and bigotry. It is also important to consider students' religious needs and required religious practices that fall within their school day. It is within students' constitutional right to pray individually, discuss religion, and read religious texts in their free time as long as they are not disruptive or forcing others to participate.

Satisfying Muslim Arab parents' religious and cultural needs are key components to engaging them as learning partners. Applying a theoretical lens, this research calls for action agendas for reform and change by allowing Muslim students their legal rights of free exercise of their religion as long as it is not interruptive nor coercive, as well as making dietary considerations and personal hygienic accommodations for Muslim children as a matter of social justice before we can even address their families' engagement.

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## **Contrasting Challenges of Urban, Suburban, and Rural First-Generation College Students to Improve Retention Programs**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The success of first-generation college students (FGCS) is critical to higher education's role in promoting equity and social mobility among underrepresented populations. Although research on FGCS exists, a comprehensive literature review demonstrates an overgeneralization of FGCS characteristics in the presentation of the data. This study reviewed literature from 2000 through 2020 to identify barriers to academic success reported by FGCS in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Findings show varying challenges across settings in three themes: issues arising from academic preparation, issues in persistence, and non-academic influences. The implications of this study guide postsecondary institutions in creating more effective retention programs to address the challenges FGCS faces in a given setting. By illuminating differences in FGCS challenges, this study combats overgeneralizations of a diverse and geographically dispersed population of students.*

**Keywords:** academic success, first-generation college students, literature review, persistence, retention

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## INTRODUCTION

Teaching and advising students successfully in U.S. higher education is difficult, made more so by complicating factors like family, lack of academic preparedness, non-academic responsibilities, mental illness or distress, and diminished personal confidence, among others (Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Clark, 2006; Coffman, 2011; Warburton et al., 2001). Approximately forty percent of United States college students are first-generation (Parks-Yancy & Cooley, 2018), and research has shown that first-generation college students (FGCS) are disproportionately affected by these barriers that may impede their academic progress and overall success (Coffman, 2011; Pascarella et al., 2004; Pratt et al., 2019; Radford et al., 2015; Radunzel, 2018; Ryan & Glenn, 2004). Focused attention on available data should help guide educators' attempts to teach and advise FGCS, lest misguided efforts leave this vulnerable student population without the resources it needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated preexisting stressors and has created new challenges such as decreased study time, delayed graduation, loss of employment (and employment opportunities), internships, or job offers, among others (Aucejo et al., 2020). These new challenges affect students from different communities inequitably. Therefore, if student support efforts are to effectively address current student challenges, educators must be aware and devise support programs to address the inequitable impacts of the pandemic (Weissman, 2020). Simplistic reliance on general student research will lead to ineffective strategies, insofar as it implies a one-sized fits all approach to student support.

A large body of research exists concerning FGCS in the United States; the abundance of research riches can make it easy to neglect nuanced findings. Without consideration of specific FGCS challenges in urban, suburban, or rural settings, aggregate data may perpetuate misguided programming by not addressing challenges relevant to students in each setting. Such programming, informed by generalized findings and not addressing the challenges students face in a given setting, could result in misuse of institutions' financial and human resources, lacking adequate support for FGCS, and continued struggle for underrepresented students. Equity demands better.

By reviewing aggregate data in light of significant nuances, our study seeks to draw greater attention to the unique challenges of FGCS in various settings to develop relevant and effective support programming. FGCS are entering the academy with various negative pre-entry attributes making them less likely to succeed (Heinisch, 2017; Pratt et al., 2019; Radunzel, 2018;

Tieken, 2016). Often these attributes are correlated with background settings, for example rural students may face longer commute times (Peterson et al., 2015) or lower educational aspirations (Tieken, 2016) compared to suburban peers. Colleges and universities unaware of challenges *their* students face, and relevant responsive support mechanisms, could face decreased retention rates (Tinto, 1988), lower total enrollment, and corresponding revenue issues (O’Keeffe, 2013). Further, universities that seek to fulfill missions centered on access, equity, and community development may struggle to reach strategic goals if FGCS are neglected.

While colleges and universities may face strategic and financial challenges by not supporting FGCS, individual students may face long-term hardships due to lacking support to mitigate challenges associated with FGCS status. Academically unsuccessful FGCS may face increased debt without increased employability in addition to wages lost while attending class (Bowen et al., 2011). Further, the failure of these students may continue to diminish the self-confidence and academic expectations of FGCS by justifying the opinion of unsupportive family and peers (Bradbury & Mather, 2009). The result of these potential outcomes of each FGCS, when considering the size of this population, could have significant effects on our nation’s economic health and do much to demarcate further social classes (Bowen et al., 2005).

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to advance the higher education community’s cognizance of setting-specific attributes of FGCS toward the end of improving the efficacy of student support programs and retention as they relate to this vulnerable population. First, this review provides a delineation of the general attributes of FGCS in the United States as reported by studies published between 2000 and 2020. Next, the review of selected literature highlights findings providing evidence of differing characteristics and challenges of FGCS in urban, suburban, and rural settings. In so doing, this study illuminates the importance of setting-specific research to more effectively support FGCS with applicable retention and support programs. The literature was reviewed and synthesized under three primary topics: academic preparation, persistence, and non-academic influences.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

The formation of this review was guided by Cooper’s (1985) Taxonomy of Literature Reviews. The goal of this inductive review was to report, synthesize, and critique research on the study of FGCS. Cooper sought to

better index and evaluate literature reviews, and his taxonomy served as a valuable framework in developing the design and scope of this review. Specifically, Cooper’s framework allows critical characteristics of the review to be determined and the scope and aim to be bounded. Table 1 shows key characteristics as guided by Cooper’s work.

**Table 1**  
*Framework of Literature Review as Guided by Cooper’s Taxonomy (1985)*

Characteristic	Categories
Focus	Research Outcomes
Coverage	Central/Pivotal and Representative
Goal(s)	Integration and Identification of Central Issues
Organization	Conceptual
Perspective	Espousing appreciation setting-specific research
Audience(s)	Scholars, Practitioners, Higher Education Stakeholders

Identifying central findings of FGCS literature that trend throughout the literature was significant in presenting themes, highlighting information gaps, and suggesting future research for setting-specific support of this group of students. This review was not exhaustive but focused on crucial publications that were assumed to present the depth and breadth of quantitative and qualitative research required to thoroughly understand challenges faced by FGCS in aggregate and specific settings. The findings are presented in a conceptual model that delineates macro trends provided by literature. The value of this review of FGCS research is seen in the evaluation and presentation of research, identification of a significant gap in the literature, and recommendation for future work to better inform retention efforts aimed at this population.

Literature published between 2000 and 2020 was sought to correlate research findings with the current makeup of this population. Research before

2000 and since 2020 certainly improved the understanding and support of FGCS. However, the coverage of this study was non-exhaustive and sought to review literature representative of core works central to the goal of illuminating varying challenges of FGCS across settings in the United States.

The authors of this literature represented many universities and government agencies across the United States. The literature included works published in books, academic journals, government briefs, and dissertations. Many works were augmented with influences from psychosocial development and not only emphasized common FGCS issues but continued to offer remedies to support this group. Direct quotes from FGCS brought aggregate data and quantitative findings into concrete reality and assisted in validating trends through data triangulation. The terms urban, suburban, and rural were not defined as part of this study. The aim of the reviewed literature's original authors was used to stratify FGCS scholarship as studying experiences of FGCS from urban, suburban, and rural settings.

The literature was analyzed for aggregate characteristics and with critical consideration of over-extended generalizability concerning student needs in specific settings. Three key themes became salient when analyzing literature as described above: academic preparation, persistence, and non-academic influences.

This study examined literature employing many research methods to explore attributes, characteristics, and challenges of FGCS. To fully synthesize the findings, we sought to coalesce results of varying methodologies to appreciate the true depth of the body of literature. Quantitative research provided insights into what positive or negative attributes correlated with FGCS status, and how FGCS performed academically compared to their later-generation peers. Authors of qualitative research focused on discovering root causes of barriers to academic success rather than the quantification of outcomes. Qualitative publications provided narratives of external influences, perceived challenges, financial difficulties, and similar obstacles, often providing a voice for the student through direct quotes. Research of a qualitative nature did much to "tell the story" behind the important outcomes examined in more quantitative studies. The aforementioned three key themes were consistently presented throughout the literature reviewed and guided the analysis of literature below.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Although steps were taken to ensure this literature review analyzed a robust body of literature and key works in the research of FGCS, it is not without limitations. Two key limitations are worthy of specific discussion.

One important yet necessary limitation is that this non-exhaustive literature review is bound to a predefined geographical space and only includes literature published between 2000 and 2020. Additionally, the works analyzed as part of this study focused only on the experiences of FGCS in the United States. The exclusion of research outside of the time and location under study limits the global generalization of the findings but was required to ensure the findings inform administrators, researchers, and other stakeholders currently working in colleges and universities across the United States. Further, although studies of the experiences of FGCS in other countries were not part of this review, the findings of this review may inform the design and use of global studies aimed to support FGCS success.

The second key limitation of this study centers on the danger of labeling FGCS as urban, suburban, or rural based on the location of their post-secondary institution and assuming they will neatly fit the characteristics of other FGCS in a given location. For example, suburban post-secondary institutions may have large populations of FGCS from nearby urban and rural settings with vastly different demographic attributes, familial environments, and secondary education experiences. Such generalization is the antithesis of this study's aim. Researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders should be careful to appreciate the different FGCS in a given location and not to overgeneralize based on an institution's setting.

### **CHALLENGES OF FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS**

Given general findings in FGCS research, three thematic challenges are central. First, academic preparation, fostered by secondary curriculum rigor and teacher expectations. Second, persistence, as measured through retention and degree completion rates. Third, non-academic social and familial responsibilities, such as having children or financial responsibilities. Details of thematic challenges surrounding academic preparation, persistence, and non-academic issues are explored below to provide higher education stakeholders with a deeper understanding of how challenges faced by FGCS may vary between settings.

#### **Lacking Academic Preparation**

A recurrent finding in FGCS research is that this population of students is disproportionately likely to be academically underprepared. Universities not sensitive to this heightened need for remediation may experience increased attrition of FGCS, thus affecting retention and revenue (Tinto, 1988); may perpetuate imposter phenomenon (Langford & Clance, 1993) and disengagement; and may further widen the measured gaps between



FGCS and economic success. Literature that examines differences in academic preparedness between first-generation and non-first-generation students have focused on metrics such as standardized test scores, grade point average, and type of course work completed in high school (Atherton, 2014). A review of selected literature on FGCS academic preparation is provided below.

In their study of the FGCS success, Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) posited that academic preparation at the secondary level is correlated with academic success at post-secondary institutions. Correspondingly, Warburton et al. (2001) found that FGCS were less likely to take a rigorous high-school curriculum, and few took courses transcending basic high-school requirements. Rigorous core courses can provide students with the cognitive strategies necessary for college success (Woods et al., 2018). First-generation college students were reported to be more likely than non-FGCS to take geometry or algebra II as their highest math and less likely to take calculus (Warburton et al., 2001). Woods et al. (2018) argued that a disconnect between the K-12 sector and higher education creates issues defining college readiness. High schools that are not providing necessary rigor, though ostensibly boosting their own graduation rates, place their students at a disadvantage with regards to postsecondary success. Rural K-12 programs, among others, often lack rigorous coursework due inter alia to smaller student populations that make running selective classes financially burdensome (Handwerk et al., 2008; Peterson et al., 2015), among other disparities in access to elements positively correlated with post-secondary success (Byun et al., 2012).

Not all FGCS come from neighborhoods with low performing schools, but typically FGCS are overrepresented in lower-income communities and have made their way through failed educational systems. Students with the FGCS status were less than half as likely as their peers to take college admissions tests, and those that completed these tests were more likely to receive markedly lower scores (Warburton et al., 2001). Additionally, Warburton et al. reported that FGCS commonly need remedial courses, especially when compared to populations whose secondary curricula exceeded the basic high-school requirements. This 2001 study posited that having the status of FGCS was negatively correlated with academic rigor, and the latter was positively correlated with success after matriculation. Warburton et al. (2001) provided great insight into aggregate trends in the academic preparation of FGCS; however, first-person accounts of academic challenges provided valuable depth in understanding individual situations of FGCS.

In an interview-based study sponsored by the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, Engle, Bermeo, and O'Brien (2006) illustrated concrete examples of lacking academic preparation that Warburton et al. (2001) correlated with diminished academic outcomes. The qualitative format allowed the discussion to move the focus from correlated outcomes to narrated causes. This perspective potentially deepens our understanding of appropriate remedies for FGCS. For example, Warburton et al. (2001) correlated academic struggles with non-rigorous high school coursework completed by FGCS. Engle et al. (2006), through interviews and dialogue, found that opportunities to learn beyond the standard secondary curriculum may be limited for FGCS. Further, the 2006 study posited that lack of encouragement (especially by parents) to enroll in more rigorous secondary curricula may have a causal relationship with a failure to enroll in such curricula. This novel insight suggests that FGCS may have desired, or were at least willing, to be academically prepared for college-level work in their secondary curriculum but may not have had a socially-accepted opportunity to do so. A lack of encouragement to enroll in rigorous secondary curricula also functions to undermine a FGCS's self-perceived academic ability, another recurrent finding in FGCS research and borne out by the qualitative work of Engle et al. (2006). Understanding such insights is paramount to faculty teaching and advising FGCS and to academic support functions' efforts to increase FGCS success in the academy. For FGCS have often been indirectly taught that advanced academic performance is not necessary, expected, or even desirable.

Despite their differing methods, both studies find similar trends of FGCS entering the academy. Similar to Warburton et al. (2001), Engle et al. (2006) and Woods et al. (2018) cited lacking academic rigor as a correlate to FGCS attrition. Engle et al. (2006) discuss detrimental effects low teacher expectations and limited resources in secondary schools have on preparation of FGCS. The pre-attrition nature of the study allowed for gaps between the secondary and post-secondary curricula to be narrated as opposed to simply correlated. Like Warburton et al., Engle et al. reported the importance of rigorous coursework, especially in math, but went further in noting the limited availability of rigorous courses in many secondary districts. This paradoxical relationship perfectly highlights an opportunity to support FGCS through counseling and expanded curricula at the secondary level or planned remediation and counseling at the post-secondary level.

Reid and Moore (2008) further validated many challenges faced by academically underprepared FGCS through their qualitative research, summarizing key findings in keeping with those just mentioned. Reid and

Moore (2008) reported that students faced challenges in academic coursework and understanding the university culture. For example, one student highlighted that she was not prepared for the freedom of college coursework. The student's comments noted the importance of daily homework, one-on-one time with the teacher, regular papers and quizzes, and other regularly assigned learning exercises that are not present in many college courses. Concerning academic preparation, students were not ready for the pedagogical changes that take place when matriculating. These students felt that they lacked preparation in working with laboratories (e.g., dissections) and educational technology. They continued to cite time-management, and study skills as major barriers. While some conversations centered on subject matter preparation (typically in writing and advanced math), the most salient themes in this study were not subject-specific.

Azmitia et al. (2018) provides more evidence of the challenges and resources faced by FGCS as they navigate college and assess the role of educational resiliency. Lacking academic preparedness contributed to feelings of not belonging to the campus atmosphere. This feeling may be amplified by the trend of FGCS to live and work off campus and to take post-secondary coursework merely part rather than full time (Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Engle et al., 2006). When assessing motivation to continue in college despite not being academically prepared, students' responses illustrate how a college degree has become essential for upward mobility in the United States (Azmitia et al., 2018). Peterson et al.'s (2015) study of rural students in Washington state suggests that educators can develop effective strategies based on this recognized benefit, by promoting potentially lucrative careers in the STEM fields.

Warburton et al. (2001), Engle et al. (2006), Reid and Moore (2008), and Azmitia et al. (2018) did much to deepen the literature on FGCS; however, some limitations in generalizability across urban, suburban, and rural settings are highlighted in a synthesis of some of their findings. For example, although Warburton et al. provided a wealth of general information on FGCS outcomes, the study's applicability to, and correlation with, any given campus will vary since the characteristics of FGCS at a particular campus deviate from national trends. Engle et al. focused on FGCS in Texas. While some findings aligned with the Warburton et al. study, educators should realize that FGCS in urban Houston institutions will have significantly different needs than those in rural west Texas farming communities, for example.

The findings of Reid and Moore (2008) further highlighted contrasting characteristics of FGCS between specific settings. Urban students

in Reid and Moore cited non-subject matter issues as major challenges. Many FGCS in the study took at least one AP course, and had access to college preparation coursework in their secondary curriculum. This finding varies from the less localized studies reviewed above that cited the absence of opportunities for advanced secondary coursework as a barrier to FGCS success. These examples of differing needs and availability of resources illuminate the need for setting-specific research to inform FGCS retention and success efforts, as well as future research to identify further predictive variables. Academically supporting FGCS cannot stop with remedial coursework and efforts to supplement lacking academic preparation upon enrollment. Once students are more academically prepared and instilled with confidence, continued programming must foster persistence throughout the curriculum.

The findings of Azmitia et al. (2018), although helpful in understanding the motivations for FGCS to persist, focused on the transition to and through college of FGCS at a state university in California. This study did make references to the differences in demographics of FGCS and how that may play a part in the type of support services required but failed to include setting-specific suggestions to the list of recommendations.

### **Issues in Persistence**

In the United States, 30–50% of all FGCS leave after their first year (Azmitia et al., 2018). Insufficient academic preparation is not often remediated by well-intended developmental courses and freshman seminars. Deficient understanding of subject matter, poor time-management skills, and underdeveloped study habits of FGCS prove burdensome and are consequently correlated with attrition (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Clark & Cundiff, 2011; Ryan & Glenn, 2004). In addition to the previously mentioned issues, executive functioning skills are underdeveloped in many FGCS (Garriott & Nisle, 2017). As such, faculty, administrators, and staff are compelled to identify potential barriers faced by FGCS on their campuses and develop applicable, effective programming to improve FGCS persistence. At least in urban settings, effective, localized programs have been correlated with hedging high attrition rates of this group (Roe Clark, 2006). Improving the retention of such a large population will reduce financial losses resulting from decreased tuition revenue and costly yet ineffective retention programs. In the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic, colleges are crunched for enrollment like never before. Retaining FGCS now more than ever will significantly impact many colleges' and universities' bottom lines. Three informative studies are synthesized below to provide insight into challenges

surrounding persistence and illustrate varying levels of generalization and scope of FGCS literature. In addition to the three core studies synthesized, more recent studies support the findings presented and more insight into the challenges in persistence for FGCS.

In 2005, Chen and Carroll completed a study for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to identify common barriers FGCS face in meeting their educational goals. In a culminating statement, Chen and Carroll (2005) stated that 43 percent of the FGCS in the cohort studied left without attaining a bachelor's degree. In contrast, only 20 percent of non-FGCS in the same cohort left without earning the same degree (Chen & Carroll, 2005). Chen and Carroll indicated that FGCS who completed higher-level math courses at the high school level were still not as successful in college as their non-FGCS counterparts. Further, Chen and Carroll reported that even high-math FGCS were more likely than non-FGCS to leave without obtaining a degree and less likely to obtain a bachelor's degree. Their report correlated long-term academic success with credit production and strong academic performance in the first year, both negatively correlated with FGCS status. Further, Chen and Carroll provided that the low first-year GPAs of FGCS are not readily shed at the end of their freshman coursework. By comparison, FGCS reported an overall GPA of 2.6 and non-FGCS reported an overall GPA of 2.9 (Chen & Carroll, 2005).

Chen and Carroll provide a significant body of aggregate data that sets an appropriate context for further discussion of generally reported issues affecting FGCS persistence. In 2018, Cataldi et al. updated previous research with a closer look at college access, persistence and post-bachelor's outcomes of FGCS. Their updated findings argue that three years after first enrolling, comparatively more FGCS had left post-secondary education without earning a post-secondary credential. While Chen and Carroll (2005) noted key correlations in an outcomes-based study, Darling and Smith (2007) described challenges faced by FGCS concerning factors that are not readily quantified. Darling and Smith noted that challenges faced by students with high-risk factors, including low SES, identifying as a minority, and lacking experience in the academy negatively impact many FGCS. They indicated that minority status, often correlated with FGCS status (Engle et al., 2006), is in turn negatively correlated with success in the academy (Darling & Scandlyn Smith, 2007). Similarly, low SES is negatively correlated with attendance and success. Darling and Smith posited that the SES of many FGCS may affect academic success by way of financial need. This finding aligns with findings of Bradbury and Mather (2009) showing FGCS' need to work off-campus can be correlated with disengagement (Bradbury & Mather, 2009), which is

correlated with attrition (Tinto, 1988). These are ominous correlations as many FGCS reported a low SES, and identified as a minority (Darling & Smith, 2007; Engle et al., 2006).

Darling and Smith (2007) provided a valuable perspective in discussing psychosocial factors associated with objective measurements provided by Chen and Carroll (2005). The potential overgeneralization of aggregate studies calls into question the applicability of the data in all settings. Chen and Carroll's, and Darling and Smith's review, given its limited scope, stand out in this regard. To provide more detail on the correlation of FGCS status and academic success, we revisited Warburton et al.'s 2001 report published by the NCES.

Pratt et al. (2019) provided an expanded view of potential challenges in persistence for FGCS. FGCS often suffer from a lack of confidence regarding their academic preparation for college and their ability to succeed in the college environment (Pratt et al., 2019). Financial security concerns are especially salient for this group because students tend to come from lower-income families (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). As a result, FGCS are more likely than their peers to work full or part-time jobs while in college (Bradbury & Mather, 2009; Engle et al., 2006; Pratt et al., 2019), as previously mentioned. The study by Pratt et al. (2019) noted that a lack of finances could force withdrawal from class or college for more than 50% of FGCS. The burdens of a commitment to both work and school may be borne disproportionately by rural students, whose geographical isolation predicts lengthy commutes to physical campuses (Peterson et al., 2015) or else preference for remote educational opportunities in order to avoid a lengthy commute. Remote educational opportunities are likely to be of interest to FGCS of varied, and not just rural, backgrounds given time-management concerns of this population (Garriott & Nisle, 2018). Yet Smith (2010), for instance, finds 40–80% of online students drop out of online courses, and Herbert (2006) finds that online courses have a 10–20% higher failed retention rate (Bawa, 2016), potentially exacerbating problems of persistence.

When comparing FGCS to non-FGCS, Warburton et al. (2001) found that FGCS are more likely to attend part-time while working full-time, stop out or downward transfer, and are more likely to leave their institutions and never return. While the likelihood of these events was reduced in cases where FGCS took a more rigorous high-school curriculum, correlations were present in most situations, even when controlling for additional variables. In addition to a positive correlation with academic difficulties, FGCS status correlated with many other attributes that may decrease the likelihood of success. Such attributes include an increased need for remedial courses and lower grade

point averages. First-generation college students also tend to enroll in less prestigious, two-year institutions and four-year comprehensive universities as opposed to private and research institutions (Warburton et al., 2001). Additionally, FGCS tend to choose less specific majors than their non-FGCS counterparts (Warburton et al., 2001).

Warburton et al. (2001) delivered insights into challenges faced by FGCS in the academy but further discussion of applicability is merited. Warburton et al. as well as Chen and Carroll (2005) provided useful aggregate data that correlates FGCS status to risk factors and academic outcomes. Darling and Smith (2007) provided a humanistic view of barriers to academic success by considering non-academic characteristics of FGCS, and the effects of multiple high-risk indicators. While the works provided much detail for faculty, advisors, and administrators, little is done to identify high-risk correlations insofar as they may be more relevant to urban, suburban, or rural settings. The level of generalizability implied by suggesting that campus programming should respond to aggregated data is questionable. Much like Darling and Smith (2007), Pratt et al. (2019) provided a personal view of the challenges encountered by some FGCS by bringing to the light the financial barriers faced by some along with the confidence factor that correlates with lack of academic preparedness.

Below, a review of literature exploring non-academic influences on FGCS adds much detail to the discussion of psychosocial attributes reported by Darling and Smith (2007). It is important that FGCS research transcend measurable objectives and quantitative correlations to provide actual illustrations and first-person accounts that give higher education educators and administrators clear examples of potential issues, especially those outside the academy. Stress and other emotional factors are rarely examined; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the importance of addressing these issues to the fore. Educators and administrators will also find insights into root causes of attrition and poor academic performance valuable when designing programs to help FGCS meet their educational goals and supporting FGCS in these uncertain times.

### **Non-Academic Influences**

One of the most salient themes of the FGCS research reviewed is that that FGCS are more vulnerable than other groups to experience non-academic hardships that inhibit success in the academy. Bradbury and Mather (2009), and Coffman (2011) provided insights into supporting FGCS by publishing needs, issues, and challenges captured in the students' own words. Coffman (2011) posited that challenges all students may face were exacerbated among

FGCS by the addition of low educational aspirations, low familial support, a utilitarian view of college education, and a relatively higher need for strong social support. Coffman (2011) found many instances in which previous research was solidified through interviews and dialog. Bradbury and Mather (2009) highlighted similar obstacles faced by FGCS in Appalachian Ohio.

In their localized study of FGCS, Bradbury and Mather (2009) described a “pull from home” (2009, p. 264) that distracted FGCS from their academic studies and integration into campus life. Participants shared concerns of successfully making an “academic adjustment” (Bradbury & Mather, 2009, p. 268), noting that academic engagement, relationships with faculty, and motivation to attend college all played critical roles in persisting. The students interviewed also shared a needed sense of “belonging” in addition to purely academic relationships (Bradbury & Mather, 2009, p. 270). Tinto (1988) also noted the importance of integration when discussing factors influencing persistence. Lastly, the FGCS interviewed by Bradbury and Mather shared the ominous concern of “financial realities” (2009, p. 272) that served as a constant stressor concerning future debt, college funding, and the intimidating process of using financial aid.

Coffman (2011) described key influences that can serve as focal points for administrators and faculty supporting FGCS. A thorough understanding of these social factors allows for more effective pedagogy and applicable programming. The seven social influences described by Coffman span race, educational aspirations, poor choices, social class, academic preparation, strong social network, and upward social mobility and meaningful work (social mobility and meaningful work are condensed to a single influence). Walpole (as cited in Coffman, 2011) provided insights that highlighted the inability of race to be independently studied as FGCS represent many high-risk populations. Knowledge of this phenomenon is critical in that, while race may play a significant role in constructing views about higher education, assigning influential characteristics based solely on race (as opposed to race and an FGCS status) could lead to misguided programing and ineffective interventions. Take for example, the data that demonstrates that FGCS are more likely to be minority, low-income and women with children (Ward et al., 2012). The harm with conflating these groups comes when the disadvantages of FGCS appear to be disadvantages experienced by all groups. Overgeneralizing ignores how FGCS experience additional or differing challenges. Davis (2010), argued that this approach had not served these students very well.

It is important to remain cognizant that FGCS are by many definitions the first person in their family to attend any form of higher education.



Imagine, then, the role family background plays in constructing a FGCS's view of the college experience. Previous research (Davis, 2010; Peteet et al., 2015; Ward et al., 2012) suggests that FGCS have a particularly difficult time finding confidence in their identity as college students, and that exacerbates the difficulties that they face as students.

Imposter phenomenon has been tied to FGCS both theoretically (Davis, 2010) and empirically (Peteet et al., 2015). Coffman (2011) provided that the immediate family's lack of education may perpetuate a decreased appreciation for higher education, thus contributing to lower educational aspiration. The lack of social capital transmitted from family and friends contributes to a lack of awareness of the extent to which lower standardized scores and GPA might affect their academic outcomes (Vargas, 2004). As discussed, Bradbury and Mather (2009) and Coffman (2011) did much to describe non-academic challenges faced by FGCS through narratives and first-person accounts. However, further insights can be obtained by reviewing findings correlating similar FGCS attributes with barriers to academic success.

Garriott and Nisle (2018) presented a study that examined stress, coping and perceived academic goal progression among FGCS. Stress was significantly related to institutional support. Stresses included living away from home for the first time, adjusting to the rigor of college-level classes, developing friendships, and time management. Garriott and Nisle (2018) acknowledged that FGCS face unique challenges specific to their socioeconomic status. The study suggests that FGCS may experience greater stressors compared to their peers. In an age of global crises, faculty, staff, and administrators must craft more efficient outreach to their FGCS to ensure better support given their trying circumstances.

Pascarella, Peirson, Wolniak, and Terenzini (2004) did much to further educators' knowledge of this high-risk group in a landmark study quantifying effects of academic and non-academic challenges of FGCS in 18 US universities. In a statement recapitulating a review of FGCS data, Pascarella et al. suggested that FGCS face heightened barriers compared to non-FGCS in socioeconomic status, diminished familial support, lower educational aspirations, and deficient knowledge of university functions. This report also stated that FGCS often have "substantial cultural as well as social and academic transitions" in addition to the "anxieties, dislocations, and difficulties" (2004, p. 250) many college students encounter. Pascarella et al. correlated challenges above with the inability to live on campus, participate in extra- and co-curricular activities, engage academically, and otherwise fully participate in educational pursuits. This finding is notable, as these

activities were found to increase satisfaction, educational aspirations, and academic confidence. Students attending a post-secondary institution different from settings they are used to, e.g., rural students in an urban university setting, may experience this detachment more noticeably (Heinisch, 2017). Identifying and ameliorating the academic and psychosocial challenges that inhibit FGCS from engaging in activities that are most beneficial to their success should be a target of programs to support retaining this growing group.

Bradbury and Mather (2006), Coffman (2011), and Pascarella et al. (2004) provided qualitative data that illuminates the statistics reported in outcomes-based studies. The literature covering non-academic inhibitors of FGCS success allows faculty and administrators to regain an appreciation for each individual behind the outcomes aggregated and studied en masse. Statistical figures, culminating outcomes, and numerical data are well augmented by individual stories and first-person accounts that allow educators to refocus on individual FGCS success through empathy and personalized efforts. However, faculty, administrators, and support staff must appreciate varying challenges students in certain settings are more likely to face and build support and retention programming addresses those challenges. One must still be careful to appreciate specific challenges of each FGCS, but scalable programming will be more effective if informed by more accurate, setting-specific studies.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The aforementioned data suggests FGCS are challenged particularly by academic preparation, low levels of persistence, and non-academic barriers. Although useful for some purposes, the ability of aggregate data on FGCS to provide effective guidance in particular, concrete settings is questionable. Research has shown that urban, suburban, and rural students often have setting-specific academic inhibitors and psychosocial concerns that do not align with national trends. Aggregate data may include information from urban, suburban, and rural settings, but does not necessarily provide an accurate depiction of FGCS in any single environment. Chen and Carroll (2005), for example, noted that his study conflicted with previous research on FGCS. Large, wide-scale studies have diminished applicability to any single setting to the extent of the study's geographical breadth.

Several studies reviewed took steps to ameliorate overgeneralization and increase applicability with region-specific studies. Engle et al. (2006), for example, furthered the applicability of FGCS data by restricting their study to FGCS in the state of Texas. However, this localization to the state level is not

without limitations. Consider the varying environmental settings encompassed by the second largest state in the U.S., and the potentially misleading implications of pooling focus group responses from, for example, the highly rural Kingsville, TX or the border town of Edinburg, TX, alongside responses from urban centers like Houston or Dallas, TX. As previously mentioned, would it be advisable for a community college in urban Fort Worth, Texas, to implement the same responsive programming in support of FGCS as a comprehensive university that enrolls a large percentage of affluent students from suburban populations? How should these interventions differ from the supporting efforts of educators in rural settings, or settings where a large population of students speaks English as a second language? Can the accuracy and applicability of supportive efforts be increased by further appreciating the differing backgrounds, needs, and recourses of students from varying settings? Future research must appreciate the known differences in the attributes, experiences, and outcomes of FGCS in varying settings to more accurately inform efforts aimed at supporting this group.

What appears to be needed in FGCS research is a common denominator that will provide educators with characteristics and challenges correlated with FGCS in the setting in which their institution resides. For instance, Chen and Carroll's (2005) findings suggest that secondary curricula rigor alone is insufficient to promote post-secondary success. Research on what additional factor(s) make secondary rigor have predictive value for post-secondary success is needed. Additionally, setting-specific stratification would serve to refine challenges and trends highlighted in aggregate findings. Refining data to urban, suburban, and rural settings would increase the transferability of findings by allowing institutions in similar settings to study programs successfully supporting FGCS in the academy, alongside cognizance of aggregate trends.

Setting-specific studies would benefit faculty and administrators by providing details of relevant, particular student concerns that may be lost in aggregate research. In addition, research contrasting urban, suburban, and rural FGCS characteristics would not only provide details of setting-specific barriers to academic success, but increase transferability in that multiple urban, suburban, and rural settings would benefit from knowledge of setting-specific issues. This level of detail and transferability is not often found in FGCS research and could serve to improve the efficacy of educators in every setting in supporting FGCS as disadvantaged individuals navigating the academic and social landscapes of urban, suburban, and rural institutions.

## CONCLUSION

We, as educators, have a responsibility to understand the potential challenges faced by FGCS and create reciprocal supportive programs for our students. Failure to effectively support FGCS could result not only in economic issues for colleges and universities, but economic hardships and mental duress for unsuccessful FGCS as individuals. Our study highlights three central findings in FGCS research, namely the presence of unique difficulties in degree of academic preparation, persistence, and non-academic barriers. We pay careful attention to setting-specific variables insofar as the limited data allow, and consider more careful attention to urban, suburban, and rural to be a primary locus of future FGCS research.

This is a critical time in U.S. higher education as institutions face tough budget decisions while juggling the more prominent needs of FGCS. Greater cognizance of aggregate FGCS trends, and attention to setting-specific variables, will help educators discharge their responsibilities to this vulnerable population and help promote equity within their institutions and in society more broadly. Failure to support FGCS not only deprives this population of an effective means for upward social mobility, it also furthers hardships at the national level in the form of increased default rates on student loans (Perna et al., 2017), particularly dangerous given the present \$1.5 trillion in outstanding loans in the US (Friedman, 2019). A failure here also means fewer skilled workers in the workforce (Bowen et al., 2011) and further negative impacts of social classes predicated on socioeconomic status (Bowen et al., 2005). With these potential ramifications in mind, literature must be periodically reviewed to ensure faculty and advisors are provided with research relevant to FGCS's needs to inform effective retention programming in colleges and universities. Although more research into this vulnerable population is merited, this study's comprehensive literature review at least highlights the central trends discernable from 2000–2020, and is likewise an excellent starting point for educators seeking insight into how best to assist first generation college students.

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