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Impact of Anti-Discrimination Laws on University Campuses: Student and Faculty Views

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The implementation of anti-discrimination laws on university campuses is crucial for fostering an inclusive academic environment. However, the effectiveness and impact of these laws are often debated. This study aimed to explore the perceptions of students and faculty regarding the influence of anti-discrimination laws on university culture and individual experiences, aiming to understand how these laws shape the campus climate and interpersonal relationships. This qualitative study utilized semi-structured interviews with a total of 22 participants, comprising 12 students and 10 faculty members from a university. The interviews were designed to achieve theoretical saturation and were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo software to identify recurring themes and patterns under two primary themes: "Students' View" and "Faculty View." The analysis revealed several key categories under each main theme. For students, the categories included Awareness and Understanding, Experiences of Discrimination, Campus Climate, Impact on Social Relations, Administrative Support, and Legal Literacy. Faculty categories encompassed Perception of Laws, Teaching and Curriculum Impact, Professional Responsibilities, and Research Implications. Each category provided insights into the complex interactions between policy implementation and campus experiences, highlighting both successes and areas needing enhancement. The study concludes that while anti-discrimination laws have facilitated some positive changes in campus culture, significant challenges remain in fully realizing their potential. The effectiveness of these laws is intricately linked to the administration's proactive engagement and the community's overall commitment to fostering an inclusive environment. Recommendations are made for universities to enhance policy transparency, increase legal literacy, and improve administrative responsiveness to discrimination reports.

Keywords: *Anti-discrimination laws, university campuses, qualitative research, campus climate, student perceptions, faculty perceptions*

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1. Introduction

Universities serve as microcosms of wider society, encapsulating complex interplays of cultures, identities, and legal frameworks. The implementation of anti-discrimination laws on university campuses is a pivotal aspect of creating an inclusive educational environment, but its impact is multifaceted and nuanced (ASharifi et al., 2018; Campbell & Bräuer, 2021; Hajkhozeymh et al., 2014).

Historically, universities have been battlegrounds for social change, often ahead of broader societal shifts. The influence of anti-discrimination laws, whether

pertaining to race, gender, disability, or other protected statuses, ostensibly contributes to a more equitable campus environment (Gualtieri, 2020). However, as noted by Gualtieri (2020), the practical enforcement of these laws sometimes results in what he terms "symbolic compliance," where institutions appear to adhere to legal standards without fostering substantial changes in campus culture. This phenomenon raises critical questions about the effectiveness of legal frameworks in altering underlying attitudes and behaviors (Gualtieri, 2020).

Research by Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000) underscores the significance of perceived campus cultural climate by different racial groups, highlighting disparities that suggest a complex interrelation between policy implementation and individual experiences of inclusivity. Similarly, Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) have explored the correlation between race and general campus climate, revealing persistent challenges that suggest formal policies alone may not suffice to transform institutional cultures (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). Adding to the complexity, studies such as those by Park, Kim, Salazar, and Eagan (2022) specifically address the interactions between racial discrimination and student-faculty engagement in STEM fields, pointing to systemic mechanisms that perpetuate inequality, even in environments governed by anti-discrimination statutes. These interactions between policy and practice in specialized academic settings highlight the nuanced barriers that different student demographics may face (Park et al., 2022).

Furthermore, international students, as discussed by Poyrazlı and López (2007), often experience unique forms of discrimination and homesickness, which are only partly mitigated by anti-discrimination policies. This points to the need for a more tailored approach in policy application, ensuring that laws are sensitive to the diverse needs of all student groups (Poyrazlı & López, 2007).

The evolving discourse around disability rights, as explored by Harpur and Szucs (2023), introduces a new paradigm in human rights that advocates for greater leadership opportunities for individuals with disabilities within higher education. This shift not only addresses accessibility but also emphasizes the role of educational institutions in leading societal change toward inclusivity (Harpur & Szucs, 2023).

Campbell and Bräuer (2021) challenge assumptions about the prevalence and impact of bias on university campuses through experimental psychology, suggesting that while discrimination may be less overt, subtle biases continue to influence student experiences significantly. This body of work calls for a deeper understanding of how discrimination manifests in modern educational settings, urging a reevaluation of both policy effectiveness and the strategies for its implementation (Campbell & Bräuer, 2021). Grier-Reed et al. (2021) contribute to this discussion by examining tipping points in perceptions of diversity, particularly among Black and White students, underscoring the critical moments when university policies and practices can significantly influence student perceptions and experiences of diversity (Grier-Reed et al., 2021).

By synthesizing these perspectives, this study employs a qualitative approach to comprehensively understand the layered impacts of anti-discrimination laws through the lenses of those directly engaged in the university environment—students and faculty. This approach not only aims to assess the efficacy of such laws but also to capture the subtleties of how legal frameworks interact with the social and cultural fabric of university life, potentially offering insights that could guide more effective policy formulations and implementations in the future.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews to explore the impact of anti-discrimination laws on university campuses, focusing on the perspectives of students and faculty members. The primary goal was to understand the various ways these laws influence campus culture and individual behaviors. To achieve theoretical saturation, the study continued to collect data until no new information was observed in the interview responses.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of experiences and viewpoints regarding anti-discrimination laws. The sample included both undergraduate and graduate students, as well as faculty members from various departments and colleges within the university. Efforts were made to include individuals from different genders,

races, ethnicities, and academic standings to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and opinions.

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Measures were also taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' responses.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Semi-Structured Interview

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, allowing for in-depth discussions while providing the flexibility to explore emergent themes. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was conducted by trained researchers familiar with the nuances of anti-discrimination policies and their impacts. The interview protocol included a set of core questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the participants' experiences with and attitudes towards anti-discrimination laws on campus. Follow-up questions varied depending on the participants' responses to allow for deeper exploration of specific issues.

Interviews were conducted in quiet, private settings to ensure confidentiality and encourage open communication. With the consent of the participants, all sessions were audio-recorded to accurately capture the discussions for subsequent analysis.

2.3. Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using NVivo software, a leading qualitative data analysis tool. This software facilitated the organization of data and the identification of recurring themes and patterns. Initial coding was carried out by two independent researchers to enhance the reliability of the analysis. Codes were compared and discrepancies were discussed until consensus was reached.

Thematic analysis was the primary method used to interpret the data. This involved an iterative process where data were coded, categorized, and re-categorized, leading to the identification of key themes related to the impact of anti-discrimination laws. Special attention was given to variations in the data that might reflect differing impacts on various demographic groups within the university.

3. Findings and Results

In this qualitative study, a total of 22 participants were interviewed to understand the impact of anti-discrimination laws on university campuses. The demographic breakdown of the participants included 12 students and 10 faculty members. Among the students, there were 7 undergraduates and 5 graduate students. The student group comprised 6 females and 6 males, reflecting a gender-balanced sample. The faculty participants included 6 males and 4 females, representing a range of departments including Humanities, Sciences, and Social Sciences. The age range of students was between 19 and 28 years, while faculty members ranged from 35 to 60 years.

Table 1

The Results of Qualitative Analysis

Categories	Subcategories	Concepts (Open Codes)
Students' View	Awareness and Understanding	- Knowledge of laws- Misunderstandings- Sources of information- Impact of orientation sessions
	Experiences of Discrimination	- Personal experiences- Witnessed incidents- Reporting behavior- Response satisfaction
	Campus Climate	- General atmosphere- Sense of safety- Interactions between groups
	Impact on Social Relations	- Friendships- Classroom dynamics- Club participation
	Administrative Support	- Trust in administration- Effectiveness of policies- Accessibility of resources
	Legal Literacy	- Understanding rights- Awareness of recourse- Confidence in legal support
Faculty View	Perception of Laws	- Support for laws- Criticisms- Perceived efficacy- Necessary changes
	Teaching and Curriculum Impact	- Inclusion in coursework- Classroom discussions- Handling sensitive topics
	Professional Responsibilities	- Duty to report- Support duties- Confidentiality concerns
	Research Implications	- Topics of interest- Funding considerations- Ethical considerations

3.1. Students' View

1. Awareness and Understanding: Students expressed varied levels of knowledge about anti-discrimination laws, often citing orientation sessions and official communications as primary sources of information. One student noted, "I only really understood what the laws meant after attending the orientation seminar."

2. Experiences of Discrimination: Many students reported either personal or observed experiences of discrimination on campus. The process and outcomes of reporting such incidents were frequently discussed, with one student saying, "I reported an incident last semester, but I felt like nothing significant was done about it."

3. Campus Climate: The general atmosphere and sense of safety on campus were highlighted, with students often commenting on the interactions between different groups. "There's a definite tension in some areas... you can feel it," mentioned one interviewee.

4. Impact on Social Relations: Students discussed how anti-discrimination laws influenced their social interactions, affecting everything from friendships to classroom dynamics. "It's tricky, you want to be open but also cautious not to overstep," a student reflected.

5. Administrative Support: Trust and satisfaction with administrative support were significant concerns. Students evaluated the effectiveness and accessibility of resources. "The policies are there, but sometimes it feels like the admins aren't really enforcing them as strongly as they could," a participant observed.

6. Legal Literacy: This subtheme encompassed students' understanding of their rights and available legal resources. "I know we have rights, but I'm not sure where to go or who to talk to if I need help," stated another student.

3.2. Faculty View

1. Perception of Laws: Faculty members shared their support for, and criticisms of, the current anti-discrimination policies. One faculty member expressed, "The laws are good on paper, but the application and actual effectiveness are where it falls short."

2. Teaching and Curriculum Impact: How anti-discrimination laws affect teaching methods and curriculum content was frequently discussed. "I've had

to rethink how I approach certain topics... making sure it's inclusive yet still critical," a professor mentioned.

3. Professional Responsibilities: Faculty discussed their responsibilities, including the duty to report and provide support, while also managing confidentiality. "As a faculty member, I feel it's part of my job to not only teach but also protect my students," explained one interviewee.

4. Research Implications: The impact of anti-discrimination laws on research topics, funding, and ethical considerations was also a point of discussion. "These laws have made us more aware of the ethical dimensions of our research topics," noted a faculty researcher.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This qualitative study identified two main themes from the semi-structured interviews with students and faculty on the impacts of anti-discrimination laws at a university. The main themes were "Students' View" and "Faculty View." Each theme encompassed multiple categories with distinct subthemes: "Students' View" included Awareness and Understanding, Experiences of Discrimination, Campus Climate, Impact on Social Relations, Administrative Support, and Legal Literacy; "Faculty View" consisted of Perception of Laws, Teaching and Curriculum Impact, Professional Responsibilities, and Research Implications.

Perceptions of Campus Climate and Discrimination Experiences: The experiences of discrimination reported by students in this study align with those found by Ancis, Sedlacek, and Mohr (2000), who noted significant variations in the perceptions of campus cultural climate by race (Ancis et al., 2000). Similarly, Reid and Radhakrishnan (2003) highlighted the complex relationship between race and the general campus climate, suggesting that legal frameworks alone might not suffice to mitigate discrimination effectively (Reid & Radhakrishnan, 2003). This study's findings underscore the persistence of these issues, suggesting that despite the presence of anti-discrimination laws, certain groups continue to feel marginalized or discriminated against.

Impact on Social Relations and Academic Engagement: Faculty and students noted changes in classroom dynamics and social interactions, a finding that resonates with the work of Santos, Guitart, Morales, and Rosales (2007), who discussed how ethnic identity and

campus diversity impact college adjustment (Santos et al., 2007). In our study, both students and faculty reported a cautiousness in interactions, which, while promoting a respectful environment, also sometimes led to a stifling of open dialogue. This echoes the findings of Park, Kim, Salazar, and Eagan (2022), who investigated the mechanisms influencing inequality in STEM education and highlighted the subtle yet profound impact of discrimination on student-faculty interactions (Park et al., 2022).

Legal Literacy and Administrative Support: The gaps in legal literacy among students, coupled with mixed perceptions about administrative support, align with Gualtieri's (2020) concept of "symbolic compliance," where institutions appear to adhere to legal standards without effectively changing the campus culture (Gualtieri, 2020). This gap underscores the need for enhanced communication and education about students' rights and available resources, as also suggested by Harpur and Szucs (2023), who advocate for a more inclusive leadership paradigm in higher education (Harpur & Szucs, 2023).

The findings also point to several theoretical and practical implications. The persistence of discrimination and the varied efficacy of anti-discrimination laws suggest a need for a more robust theoretical framework that encompasses the diverse experiences of all campus members. This framework should not only address overt discrimination but also tackle the subtler forms of biases that Campbell and Bräuer (2021) identified as being widespread but often underestimated in their impact (Campbell & Bräuer, 2021).

Practically, universities might need to consider more dynamic and responsive approaches to policy implementation, ensuring that anti-discrimination policies are lived experiences rather than mere statutory compliances. The insights provided by Grier-Reed et al. (2021) about the "tipping points" in perceptions of diversity can be instrumental in identifying critical moments when interventions are most needed and likely to be effective (Grier-Reed et al., 2021).

This study explored the impact of anti-discrimination laws on university campuses, with a specific focus on the perceptions of students and faculty. Key findings indicate that while these laws have contributed to increased awareness and legal literacy, challenges remain in terms of their actual effectiveness in altering discriminatory

practices and campus culture. Both students and faculty reported mixed experiences with administrative support and policy enforcement, which often fell short of expectations. The study also revealed nuanced insights into the social dynamics of campuses, showing that anti-discrimination laws influence not only formal interactions but also informal social relations and classroom dynamics.

The findings from this study underscore the complexity of implementing anti-discrimination laws within university settings. While these laws are crucial for promoting fairness and equality, their success is contingent upon the depth of their integration into campus life. It is evident that simply having laws in place is not sufficient; a cultural shift towards genuine inclusivity and respect for diversity is imperative. The role of university administrations in actively fostering this environment cannot be overstated, as their actions and attitudes significantly influence the effectiveness of these laws.

This study is subject to several limitations that must be acknowledged. The research was conducted within a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other institutions with different demographic or cultural characteristics. Additionally, the qualitative nature of the study, while providing in-depth insights, means that the conclusions drawn are based on perceptions and may not quantitatively represent broader student and faculty experiences across various contexts.

Future research should aim to expand the scope of this study by including a more diverse array of institutions, possibly comparing the impacts of anti-discrimination laws across different types of universities (e.g., public vs. private, large vs. small, urban vs. rural). Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how the perceptions and impacts of these laws evolve over time, particularly as universities continue to develop and refine their policies and cultural practices.

The findings of this study suggest several practical implications for university administrators and policymakers. It is crucial for universities to not only implement comprehensive training programs regarding anti-discrimination laws but also to ensure that these programs are accessible and engaging for all members of the university community. Enhancing the visibility and accessibility of resources for reporting discrimination

and receiving support is also paramount. Furthermore, universities should consider establishing regular reviews of policy effectiveness, including community feedback mechanisms that allow students and faculty to voice their experiences and suggestions for improvements in a structured manner. These actions are vital for moving beyond compliance towards creating a genuinely inclusive educational environment.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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