

RESEARCHING PEACE AND DIALOGUE AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY ABU DHABI

Exploring Students' Perceptions Through a Sequential Mixed-Methods Study

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Positioned within the UAE's ecosystem of tolerance and interfaith dialogue, NYUAD, with a student body of over 120 nationalities, many from conflict-affected regions, offers a uniquely rich site to study how peacebuilding values are designed, practiced, and negotiated in higher education.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do peace pedagogies in higher education operate in contexts which are not themselves conflict-affected, yet are geographically and politically proximate to conflict? And in what ways do students engage with, adopt, and translate these pedagogies into their everyday lives and intercultural encounters?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- Critical Peace Education — transformative agency; dismantling structural inequality locally
- Everyday Peace — informal, bottom-up practices of living with difference
- Belonging Theory — connectedness as a prerequisite for student persistence
- Universities as Peace Spaces — campuses as active, non-neutral peacebuilding environments

REFERENCES

Bajaj, M. (2008). Critical peace education. Encyclopedia of Peace Education, 135–146.; Boler, M. (1999). Chapter eight: A Pedagogy of Discomfort. In Feeling Power. Taylor & Francis Group.; Freire, Paulo. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. With Myra Bergman Ramos. Continuum Books. Seabury Press, 1970.; Strayhorn, T. L. (2018). College Students' Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for All Students. Taylor & Francis Group.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- Out of approximately 860 courses offered at NYUAD, 506 of them discuss topics related to topics about: conflict, oppression, peace, reconciliation, dialogue, coexistence, equity, resistance or activism, which makes up about **58% of the courses offered**.
- There are **42 on-campus initiatives** at NYUAD that can be divided onto categories of: trainings, events, student interest groups or programs related to dialogue, student well-being and inclusion.
- Out of 181 respondents to the survey, the prevalent reasons as to why students do not take part in said initiatives is because of **lack of time** (44%), with only 1% affirming they feel **discomfort** with the topics discussed, and 9% showing **skepticism** about the effectiveness of the programs.
- 90 students out of the 181 respondents strongly agreed with the statement **"NYUAD courses and curriculum include diverse and inclusive perspectives"** while 3 strongly disagreed.

LIKERT SCALE STATEMENTS - AGREEMENT

Student perceptions of campus inclusivity and comfort

n=181 - 5-point scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree

"NYUAD courses and curriculum include diverse and inclusive perspectives."



"I feel comfortable expressing my identity on campus."



METHODOLOGY

My work as a research assistant includes conducting literature review, mapping university initiatives, contributing to research design, and supporting data collection, coding and analysis. Using a qualitative methodology, the research examines NYUAD courses, programs, requirements and co-curricular activities related to dialogue and peace on campus.

A survey currently being distributed to current students and alumni (n=181) asks which programs they have participated in, how they experienced them and how they perceive their role in fostering values of dialogue, tolerance, inclusion and peacebuilding on and off campus. From respondents, 25 students will be selected for in-depth interviews organized around six main topics:

Academics	Campus initiatives	Cultural/religious events
Field experiences	Informal encounters	Conflict resolution

This research is ongoing. Survey data collection is complete and preliminary analysis is underway. In-depth semi-structured interviews are currently being scheduled and will be conducted in the coming

