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DEVELOPING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND TRAUMA -INFORMED
CARE PRACTICES AT SAMK: A STRATEGY TO ENHANCE STAFF
AWARENESS AND INTERVENTION FOR STUDENTS FROM DIVERSE
CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS

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ABSTRACT

Oyindamola Oke, Takwa Herman, Mengwe Mba-Atanga: Developing Psychological Safety and Trauma-Informed Care Practices at SAMK: A Strategy to Enhance Staff Awareness and Intervention for Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds.

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Psychological safety, cultural sensitivity, and trauma-informed care are cornerstones in providing an inclusive academic environment, especially within higher education institutions with a diverse student population. Satakunta University of Applied Sciences hosts over 1,000 international students representing different cultural backgrounds, which has presented challenges on cultural adaptation, mental well-being, and academic success. The thesis explores how enhancing staff awareness and intervention strategies can improve the psychological safety and well-being of these students.

A qualitative approach was applied using thematic content analysis. Data collection methods used semi-structured questionnaires targeting specifically Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK) staff. From 27th November 2024 to 1st December 2024, the semi-structured questionnaire was administered to SAMK staff in order to gain a diversified degree of feedback from the staff who are directly engaged in the support of international students. The data were coded, classified, and analyzed systematically to come up with meaningful themes. The research discovered that staff placed high importance on the need to create a psychologically safe and inclusive environment for international students. They identified a variety of concerns, including language difficulties, cultural bewilderment, and the need for stronger institutional support structures to foster inclusivity.

Keywords: Psychological safety, trauma-informed care, cultural diversity, mental health, staff awareness, international students, inclusivity, student well-being.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Globally, institutions of higher education are recognized as centers of diversity, where students from various cultural, linguistic, and academic backgrounds converge. Universities foster active debates, innovative thinking, and active classroom discussions. But beneath this active environment, many students from various backgrounds face hidden challenges. Adapting to a new culture, language, and academic environment may be challenging, and for others, past traumatic experiences may further complicate their adaptation (Bachrach & Read, 2012).

The project thesis, "Developing Psychological Safety and Trauma-Informed Care Practices at SAMK: A Strategy to Increase Staff Awareness and Intervention for Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds," aims to address these challenges by raising awareness among SAMK staff. By creating a trauma-informed and culturally responsive learning environment, this project aims to bridge the gap in support and enhance the well-being and academic success of international students at SAMK.

Establishing a safe space is imperative to promoting student success, especially for students who come from multicultural backgrounds and may have had traumatic experiences. A psychologically safe space enables students to be themselves without inhibitions, learn without apprehension, and access help when necessary (Maynard et al., 2019). Trauma can influence cognitive function, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships, making it difficult for students to thrive in a learning setting (Day et al., 2015). Through the implementation of trauma-informed care practices, schools can help students become resilient, improve academic performance, and develop a sense of belonging (Frieze, 2015). When school personnel are equipped with the knowledge and skills to recognize and respond to trauma-related problems, they can create a more supportive and inclusive school climate, which ultimately translates into better educational and psychological outcomes for students (Bachrach & Read, 2012). The study aims to improve the psychological safety and well-being of international students at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK) by implementing trauma-informed care techniques.

2 THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE PROJECT

Psychological safety and trauma-informed practices in schools are significant mechanisms in fostering students of various cultural backgrounds. The practices give the students assurance that they are safe, valued, and can communicate without fear of prejudice or judgment. Through such inclusive and supportive practices, schools can enhance students' participation, academic performance, and overall well-being. The project steps into the application of psychological safety and trauma-informed care in schools. It provides care to students from different cultural backgrounds. For an environment to be considered safe, individuals ought to be able to take risks, speak their minds and not worry about any backlash. In education, psychological safety has a critical influence on students' participation, knowledge acquisition, and overall welfare (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). Once a student is satisfied that his or her workplace is psychologically safe, he or she will actively participate and collaborate with other people (Newman et al., 2017).

In order to be capable of creating a psychologically safe environment, trust, respect and communication between students and staff must be maintained (Frazier et al., 2017). If individuals understand and appreciate cultural differences, it increases psychological safety among students of different cultures. It promotes inclusivity and diminishes prejudice or exclusion feelings (Holliday et al., 2010). Empowering trust, respect, and open communication in an institution of learning creates a psychologically safe space for the students and the educators (Frazier et al, 2017).

Trauma-informed care (TIC) recognizes the prevalence and influence of trauma and applies this understanding to practices and policies (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014). TIC must deal with making an environment safe, promoting trust and credibility, supporting peer collaboration, and empowering individuals (SAMHSA, 2014). In educational institutions, TIC guides the staff to understand the impact of trauma on student behavior and learning. The approach

allows effective and compassionate responses (Brunzell et al., 2016). For students of diverse cultural origins, with potentially different forms of traumas, TIC is particularly pertinent (Kataoka et al., 2012).

All students of diverse cultural origins can be helped through a whole system that is provided by the integration of psychological safety and TIC in schools. To identify and respond to symptoms of trauma and to develop a welcoming and supportive climate, staff must be trained (Chafouleas et al., 2019). Research indicates that culturally responsive TIC, which addresses the cultural background of students' experience, is more effective at promoting healing and engagement (Johnson & Pugach, 1990). For instance, culturally adapted care has been put in place to improve performance among minority children by incorporating the norms and values of culture into the care intervention (Joo & Liu, 2020).

The search terms used throughout this project are psychological safety, trauma informed care, cultural diversity and mental health.

2.1 Psychological safety

Psychological safety means that one can argue openly, speak out, take interpersonal risks, and voice concerns without being afraid of backlash or the need to sugarcoat bad news. In the field of mental health, where recovery-oriented treatments depend on interprofessional teamwork to make difficult decisions, working in a psychologically good setting is essential. Even though psychological safety has been the subject of extensive research, the methods for raising this safety throughout and inside a healthcare organization at several levels have received less attention (Hunt et al, 2021).

The approach is especially significant for team dynamics and workplace culture since it gives participants the assurance that they won't face humiliation, rejection, or punishment for voicing their opinions, questions, concerns, or errors. When people are psychologically safe, they become open and take risks when carrying out teamwork. When contributing to teamwork, problems could easily be solved, and new innovations

can be made (Edmondson, 2019).

2.2 Trauma informed care practices

Understanding a patient's past experiences is crucial to effective, patient-centered care. Identification of these experiences allows healthcare professionals to provide trauma-informed approaches that can increase patient engagement and improve well-being for both patients and healthcare providers. Trauma-informed care identifies and acknowledges the experiences of trauma survivors and ensures that care is specific to their needs (Flussman et al., 2019).

Trauma-informed interventions are equally important in educational facilities to address the challenges among students who have experienced trauma (Chafouleas & Overstreet, 2020). Recent studies increasingly focus on the need for trauma-informed practices across communities, from health agencies to educational settings. It is ensured that people in these different settings are supported on their paths toward healing and prosperity.

2.3 Cultural diversity

Cultural diversity in health should focus on how important it is to provide care that is culturally competent to patients from different backgrounds (Bhui et al, 2021). It is very necessary for health care practitioners to acknowledge and respect cultural differences because it is by doing this that they will be able to provide effective and equitable care. The presence of different cultural groups within a society, characterized by variations in race, ethnicity, religion, language, and customs, is referred to as cultural diversity.

According to Oxford Dictionary, cultural diversity deals with multiple ethnic or cultural groups within a society. There is convincing evidence which states that culture shapes our perceptions of health and illness as well as how we interpret them, and that these cultural variations may have a significant effect on how illness is treated. One

component of cultural variation is the perception of the source or character of disease or illness (Gopalkrishnan & Babacan, 2015).

2.4 Mental health

Mental health has been defined variedly by different authors and institutions. The widely used and well-known definition is that of the World Health Organization. According to WHO (2021), Mental Health “is a condition of mental well-being that allows people to deal with life's pressures, realize their potential, study, and work effectively, and contribute to their community”. The definition brings out the significance of mental health not just in terms of absence of mental disorders, but as a positive, dynamic state of internal equilibrium where the individual is active in their capabilities and coping.

On the other hand, the Public Health Agency of Canada, defines Mental Health as “the capacity of each and every one of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections, and personal dignity” (Manwell et al., 2015). Different emotions, such as grief, worry, and fear, are normal parts of existence. However, it becomes a mental health concern when one's emotions, feelings, thoughts, and mood have a detrimental impact on their capacity to perform.

That is one of the reasons why defining mental health is challenging, as is identifying mental health issues. Mental health deals with responding to issues constructively and keep the ability to function throughout the emotions. Numerous factors, such as genetic, biochemical, environmental, and socioeconomic ones, have an effect on mental health. Additionally, the effects of cultural and environmental pressures on mental health, such as poverty, instability, and social isolation, are becoming increasingly recognized (Brown & Harris, 2023).

3 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

3.1 Purpose

The purpose of the project is to improve international students' psychological safety and wellbeing by implementing trauma-informed care techniques at SAMK.

3.2 Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

Develop a comprehensive document for the staff at SAMK, with basic information and resources on how to implement trauma-informed care methodologies.

Identify and analyse patterns related to psychological safety with regard to trauma informed care and support SAMK staff to foster a psychologically safe environment for those who have been traumatized.

Emphasize the importance of cultural competence in delivering effective trauma-informed care and enhance the understanding and application of trauma-informed care strategies.

4 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN OF THE PROJECT

4.1 Description of the target group

The targeted group for this project thesis topic is the staff at Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK). According to a source from the SAMK website, as of 2024, SAMK has a total of 487 staff members. This figure covers both teaching and non-teaching staff. These individuals play an indispensable role in creating a helpful and considerate learning environment for the diverse student population of the institution. The staff at SAMK consists of educators, administrators, counselors, and support personnel who work together to help the institution achieve its mission of academic excellence and holistic student well-being.

SAMK hosts more than 1000 international degree students from over 100 countries and cooperates with more than 200 partner universities around the world. Its staff of over 150 have been instrumental in positioning SAMK as an internationally recognized leader in education, earning the title of "International Employer of the Year" in 2023 (SAMK, 2024). However, the multidimensional nature of its student population carries along specific challenges, such as cultural adjustment and trauma-related effects, which call for specific interventions from the staff.

The main characteristics of the target group are that it is in direct contact with the students and bears responsibility for the educational and social atmosphere at SAMK. Staff members can influence the student's study success, social integration, and mental health in general. It is, therefore, essential to develop their understanding of trauma-informed care and psychological safety. Edmondson and Lei (2014) define psychological safety as a condition in which people are free to take interpersonal risks without the threat of negative consequences. In this context, it means creating an environment where students can actively engage themselves and interact with their peers.

Trauma-informed care practices also bear great relevance for SAMK staff. TIC is based on the realization of the prevalence and impact of trauma in service policies and practices (SAMHSA, 2014). By providing staff with identifying and responding to

trauma training, SAMK can offer special care to its international students who have been exposed to adverse situations like war, displacement, or racism (Kataoka et al., 2012).

The current project, therefore, utilizes thematic content analysis through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to assign value to the experiences, needs, and perceptions of staff. These instruments will provide data on staff knowledge, attitude, and practices on psychological safety, trauma-informed care, and cultural diversity. The results will inform the development of educational material and training programs for enhancing competencies among staff on such issues.

Secondly, the ability of the staff to identify and minimize cultural biases will be another important area of focus in this project. Cultural bias occurs when an individual understands other people's behavior and experiences using their own cultural background, which mainly results in misunderstanding and conflict (Gopalkrishnan & Babacan, 2015). The project will create a culturally sensitive working environment where diversity is appreciated, and inclusiveness encouraged.

The project focuses on providing the knowledge and tools that will help the staff of SAMK handle international students successfully. If these staff members help students create a psychologically safe and trauma-informed academic environment, the students can more easily work academically and socially-emotionally, thus enhancing their success and increasing the reputation of SAMK. The main goal, therefore, aligns very well with the values for a diverse and inclusive higher education institution.

4.2 Methodology

The study employed a project-based research approach to build practices of trauma-informed care and psychological safety at SAMK. The approach was selected with regard to the purpose of the study, which is to raise awareness and other cultural students' staff interventions. It is beneficial to have a systematic process in planning, executing, and tracking appropriate interventions that enhance inclusivity, psychological safety, and trauma-informed care in an organization.

The Waterfall method was chosen because the project was a sequential project (Saravanos and Curinga, 2023), hence, each phase was completed before going to the next. The Waterfall model gave the researchers a systematic process and organized steps, which best was applied in the case of having educational content generation, employee training, and qualitative re- search. The Waterfall method guarantees proper documentation, accountability, and ease of implementation, so it was an appropriate method in this research.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The study employed the qualitative approach in examining the perceptions of SAMK staff regarding psychological safety, trauma-informed care, and cultural sensitivity in supporting international students. Data collection was achieved through self-completed questionnaires.

Questionnaires were designed to measure staff attitudes, practices, and knowledge towards trauma informed care and psychological safety. The questionnaires provided insight into how cultural awareness and intervention strategies are perceived by staff members while handling international students. The questionnaires administered were based on previous theoretical knowledge. Questionnaires sent online allowed for wide participation, and a diverse range of opinions were collected.

Questionnaires were distributed to the SAMK teaching and non-teaching staff to obtain a deeper understanding of their viewpoints and experiences concerning cultural sensitivity, trauma informed care, and psychological safety. The questionnaires involved open-ended questions such as “how” and “why” questions. The open-ended questions were created to gain insight on their knowledge of cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed treatment, their experiences dealing with international students, and any difficulties they may be having in this area. A total of 17 participants responded to the questionnaire.

The study involved participation in the staff awareness training which was organized

through a webinar. The aim of the project is to increase the understanding of those working with international students with the aim of promoting psychologically safe educational and work environments.

In addition to the richness of the study, participation of staff in awareness training programs through webinars and workshops was observed. The training program was meant to enhance the capabilities of staff in handling students from diverse backgrounds. By examining staff involvement and feedback, the study assessed the effectiveness of the training programs in improving staff preparedness and intervention approaches.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data collected using open-ended questionnaires. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis guided the analysis, an adaptive yet systematic method of deciding, exploring, and reporting patterns in the data (themes). Familiarity with the data was achieved through rereading responses several times in an attempt to develop a general sense of meaning. In the second step, initial codes were coded manually by selecting major phrases and repeated points throughout the data set. The third step entailed looking for themes by grouping the codes into possible thematic categories. In the fourth step, these themes were examined to confirm they precisely represented the coded data and the whole dataset. At step five, the themes were also named and captioned to represent their core meaning. Finally, at step six, the themes were reported within the findings section.

To assist in building credibility and dependability, peer review and member checking were employed in the research. Cross-validation of the themes and interpretations was conducted by the research team members, and preliminary findings were shared with some participants to confirm the accuracy of their data. This added rigor to the analysis.

4.4 Resources and risks

In any educational environment, resources are needed to make the learning environment safe because it helps organizations modify their risk management procedures (Savolainen, 2023). At the very least, developing psychological safety and implementing trauma-informed practices will require a strong structure that strikes a balance in resource allocation and management of risk for sustainable and effective delivery. The section talks about what resources are most key for such initiatives and the risks that might compromise successful implementation with in-text references to scholarly literature.

Human resources form the backbone of any implementation of psychological safety and trauma-informed care. The workforce should be well-trained and competent, while the staff members will need to be aware of how to identify and respond to trauma with much cultural sensitivity. Consequently, the training programs for SAMK personnel as proposed (Edmondson & Lei, 2014). "Other human resources are hired from other experts who will help them or even train them for specialized services of being trauma informed" (SAMHSA 2014).

Another key resource is access to comprehensive and culturally relevant educational resources. These materials serve as guides for the staff and offer practical guidelines for implementation of trauma-informed care practices. As was noted in the SAMK project, developing these kinds of resources helps ensure that staff are prepared to meet the unique challenges presented by students from diverse cultural backgrounds. (Chafouleas & Overstreet, 2020).

Financial investment is required to support training programs, development of educational material, and conduction of workshops and webinars. Grants, institutional funding, and collaborations with organizations are some possible sources of funds that can be achieved. Brunzell et al. (2016) indicated that trauma-informed initiatives do require financial support, particularly when certain resources are at a shortage.

Technological resources are at the very core of sharing information and getting in

contact with the audience. It is impossible to imagine a hybrid model, such as the one proposed for the SAMK staff, without resorting to online platforms, webinars, and digital learning materials. Technological resources also allow gathering data and making analyses, offering deeper insights into the perspectives and experiences of the staff by using, for example, thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Success with regard to psychological safety and trauma-informed care requires commitment from leadership and support on an institutional level. Organizational policies need to reflect the principles of inclusion and cultural sensitivity. Such support allows staff to feel comfortable implementing trauma-informed practices without fear of reprisal (Frazier et al., 2017). Cultural diversity, understanding and respect provide the basis for trauma-informed care. Resources promoting cultural competence include training modules in multiculturalism and diversity, wherein staff can take into consideration specific cultural contexts relevant to the experiences students have lived through and, as a result, can do interventions in an effective manner (Kataoka et al., 2012).

A project risk is an unforeseen occurrence that may occur over the course of a project and may harm the project's quality if it does, hence it is critical to examine the potential risk to identify measures to control it when it occurs. Risk management strategies are a process that begins with the conception of a venture and continues throughout the project's life cycle (Planview, 2021.) To identify the risks of this project, the SWOT analysis chart will be used to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats represented on the table below showing the helpful and harmful influences of the internal and external factors of the project.

Table 1: SWOT Analysis

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <p>Potential to do more within the given timeframe than working individually.</p> <p>A built-in support system that allows members to help one another, share feedback, and help when problems arise.</p> <p>Each member will bring distinct capabilities to the table, such as research abilities, communication skills, or cultural competence, which can improve the overall quality of the project.</p> <p>Division of duties among group members, harnessing individual strengths and skills to ensure the project's many parts are completed efficiently.</p>	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <p>Scheduling meetings can be difficult, especially if group members have conflicting responsibilities or live in different time zones.</p> <p>Differences in viewpoints, work styles, or degrees of dedication may cause disputes inside the group, thereby impeding progress.</p> <p>A lack of effective communication among group members can lead to misconceptions and incomplete work.</p> <p>If one individual becomes disengaged or fails to participate adequately, the project's quality and timeliness may suffer.</p>
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <p>Enhanced creativity.</p> <p>Learning and growth.</p> <p>Networking.</p> <p>Long-term impact.</p>	<p>THREATS</p> <p>Time constraints.</p> <p>Resource limitations.</p> <p>Cultural barriers.</p> <p>Technical problems.</p>

Comprehensive training programs are vital and essential to overcome resistance to

change and cultural bias. Trauma-informed care and cultural competence training sessions should be specific to the institution and staff needs (SAMHSA, 2014). Resource planning with effective distribution of financial, human, and technological resources is done. Institutions should concentrate on initiatives that would result in the maximum positive influence, finding external funding for these programs whenever possible (Brunzell et al., 2016).

The development of a culture of inclusivity and resilience requires supportive institutional policies and leadership. Policies should clearly endorse psychological safety and trauma-informed care, while leadership demonstrates accountability for these principles (Frazier et al., 2017). Providing mechanisms for evaluation and feedback ensures that the initiatives remain relevant and effective. Surveys, focus groups, and thematic content analysis may offer valuable insights from both staff and students (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Another effective strategy involves the promotion of staff well-being. Organizations should ensure that the mental health and wellbeing of staff are a priority through counselling services, peer support groups, and flexible working. These measures reduce the burnout and enhance the engagement of staff accordingly (Hunt et al. 2021).

The balanced implementation of psychological safety and trauma-informed care practices call for balancing resources and risks. It is about creating an enabling environment that caters to the needs of all stakeholders through appropriate investment in human, financial, and technological resources while mitigating the risks associated with resistance, cultural bias, and burnout. Continuous evaluation and adaptive strategies are very important to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of such initiatives. Ultimately, psychological safety and trauma-informed care offer a culture of resiliency and inclusivity where students and staff can thrive and be successful.

4.5 Assessment plan

An assessment plan is a structured framework that is used in ascertaining the degree to which a specific project or a program realizes preestablished objectives via systematic data collection, its analysis, and interpretation (SPREP, 2020). In educational and project contexts, the focus of an assessment plan dictates its use in enabling

stakeholders to make quality decisions. The project provides the overall assessment plan, psychologically safe, trauma-informed, and culturally diverse as demonstrated in the project "Developing Psychological Safety and Trauma-Informed Care Practices at SAMK".

The current assessment plan will help measure the efficacy of interventions and training programs meant to improve the knowledge of the staff and students' outcomes at SAMK. It has the particular emphasis on quantifying the impact of trauma-informed care practices and psychological safety interventions on the student's academic performance and wellbeing, while assessing the development of cultural sensitivity in staff and identifying emerging themes in their perceptions with the purpose of informing future program designs (SAMK 2024). It also expects to provide actionable knowledge on how culturally responsive and trauma-informed practice can be used in creating an inclusive classroom context for students from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds.

The assessment plan is in harmony with the broader objectives of fostering psychological safety, cultural competency, and trauma-informed practice in care. It is aimed at determining the gaps in knowledge about the themes among the staff of SAMK through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Besides, it evaluates the effectiveness of webinars and workshops in raising cultural sensitivity, fostering inclusivity, and enhancing preparedness among the staff to support students from different cultural backgrounds (Frazier et al., 2017). The plan also assesses the use and quality of educational resources released in collaboration with these training programs in monitoring advancements on measures of students' engagement in school, their well-being, and a sense of connectedness (Newman et al. 2017).

Theoretical underpinnings guiding the review are the integral concepts of psychological safety, trauma-informed practice, and cultural diversity. Psychological safety is required to promote open communication and collaboration in learning; it helps individuals feel secure to put forth their thoughts without any adverse effects (Edmondson, 2019). Trauma-informed care, on the other hand, requires sensitivity to trauma and the integration of supportive mechanisms into institutional policies, especially for students who have gone through a lot of distress in their lives (SAMHSA, 2014). Working with and identifying cultural diversity ensures interventions are contextually relevant and

inclusive, addressing students varied cultural backgrounds and experiences (Gopalkrishnan & Babacan, 2015).

The assessment was therefore based on qualitative research methodologies, with thematic content analysis serving as the key methodology. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which were administered to SAMK staff. The questionnaires had open-ended questions, which allowed the participants to reflect on their experiences regarding cultural sensitivity, psychological safety, and trauma-informed practices. Through thematic content analysis, one can understand the recurring patterns that give insight into the staff's perceptions of these issues and the degree to which they support an inclusive learning environment. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Pre- and post-training surveys are a primary evaluation measure, measuring changes in staff attitudes and knowledge before and after participation in webinars and workshops. Observation and student feedback provide additional data on the impact of these efforts on academic engagement and well-being. Thematic content analysis was used to review responses from surveys and interviews, with a focus on patterns of psychological safety, cultural sensitivity, and trauma-informed care (Chafouleas & Overstreet, 2020).

Criteria for evaluation were based on how the interventions enhance staff cultural competence and student satisfaction. Staff response to the relevance and usability of the training content will be monitored, whereas student outcomes will be cross-referenced with academic performance indicators, retention rates, and well-being surveys. The results will be used to determine recurring patterns that inform further improvement in staff training and institutional policy in the institution. (SAMHSA, 2014). Cultural bias was prevented by the use of culturally adapted interventions and diversity of representation in training materials (Holliday et al., 2010).

This measurement plan suggests the formalized method to validly measure trauma-informed care, interventions, and cultural diversity at SAMK. This systematic measurement will enhance awareness in staff, well-being in students, and towards an inclusive study environment. These practices as outlined will correspond to the vision of SAMK

in terms of psychological safety and the well-being of its international students for 2025.

4.6 Ethical consideration

Ethical principles in research and development methods are crucial to ensure integrity, credibility, and respect for participants. According to reliable sources such as the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) and the World Health Organization (WHO), key ethical principles include protecting the dignity, rights, and welfare of research participants, ensuring informed consent, respecting privacy, avoiding plagiarism, and preventing harm. Good scientific practice involves upholding honesty, transparency, and accountability in research conduct, data collection, analysis, and reporting. The thesis permission was acquired from SAMK.

The thesis titled “Developing psychological safety and trauma informed care practices at SAMK: a strategy to enhance staff awareness and intervention for students from diverse cultural backgrounds” involves dealing with the ideas of individuals (staff and students). To address ethical issues in the thesis, data was collected anonymously to protect the privacy of individuals. Informed consents were obtained from participants, clearly outlining the purpose of the study and their rights. Moreover, ethical guidelines were adhered to, using provisions by reputable organizations such as WHO and TENK to maintain the highest standards of research integrity. The researchers also signed a document called “research permit” which is a document containing permission to carry out the research.

Incorporating these ethical principles into the thesis, aims to not only comply with regulatory requirements but also uphold the values of respect, fairness, and integrity in research. Regulatory and ethical standards were paramount, which includes adherence to legal requirements and policies governing research (Resnik & Shamoo, 2011).

5 FINDINGS

A total of 17 participants responded to the questionnaire that were distributed online, all of whom were staff of SAMK. The findings of the study are presented as evolved themes grounded on the thematic analysis of the data. Each theme describes a prominent aspect of psychological safety and trauma-informed care among students of diverse cultural backgrounds. From the research we developed the following themes; Psychological Safety Among Students of Diverse Cultural Backgrounds, Cultural Sensitivity to Trauma-Informed Care and Staff Awareness Training Effect on Student Support.

Theme 1: Psychological Safety Among Students of Diverse Cultural Backgrounds:

50% of the participants highlighted from the findings that the creation of trust and allowing room to express ideas without judgment was essential in ensuring psychological safety. Some participants highlighted the need for a conducive platform where the students are esteemed and respected regardless of their origin. Other participants highlighted that recognizing and acknowledging cultural differences as an important component of psychological safety. With regard to how psychological safety is impacting, there were mentions of its aid in learning since it enables students to engage actively and freely. Also, 30% of the participants were of the opinion that psychological safety enhances the well-being of the students by reducing stress and anxiety, and it facilitates collaboration since it makes it possible for students to work together in groups without fear of being rejected.

Theme 2: Cultural Sensitivity to Trauma-Informed Care:

Through the findings, 38% of the respondents indicated that learning about the emotional and cultural background of the students was essential to enabling academic success. Additionally, the respondents noted that averting miscommunication and providing enhanced guidance helps sustain emotional balance as well as limit

potential conflicts. Another group of respondents believe that cultural awareness benefits counseling as it allows workers to give informed and culturally suitable counsel.

Furthermore, cultural awareness staff training has become a central component of trauma-informed care. Out of the 17 respondents to the questionnaire, 48% indicated that the training was an aid to enhance staff capacity to work more effectively with students from diverse backgrounds. Participants indicated that, in addition to reinforcing staff knowledge regarding cultural sensitivity, the training served to strengthen more compassionate staff-student relationships. About 16% of the participants also explained that such training created a fairer and more balanced approach to providing support such that no student was marginalized or left behind due to his/her cultural background.

Theme 3: Staff Awareness Training Effect on Student Support:

Based on the results, 37% of the respondents stated that training staff improves communication through its ability to help teachers understand students' diverse needs and problems. Some were of the opinion that training improves inclusivity since it makes students feel valued and part of the group leading to teamwork. This improves empathy among staff, leading to more compassionate interactions with students.

On the institutional benefits of training staff, a majority of respondents stated that cultural awareness training plays a key role in eliminating cultural prejudice and bias in the learning environment. 30% of the respondents were of the opinion that the training provides an open forum where students feel comfortable coming to staff members for help as it brings a sense of openness and trust. Others pointed out that such training improves staff-student relationships through building mutual respect and confidence among the two parties.

Psychological safety was most frequently referred to as being paramount in trauma-informed care. Presenters tended to mention that trusting relationships are central in creating the safe space required for students to be able to present their thoughts and opinions freely without fear of aggression or judgment. Some respondents stressed letting there be a respectful space where all the students feel valued regardless of

whatever background they may have. Others highlighted that the recognition and appreciation of cultural differences are crucial in establishing a psychologically safe environment.

Participants were questioned regarding the impact of psychological safety, and the majority stated that it improves learning by promoting active engagement and free scholarly discussion. Others highlighted that it positively affects student well-being through reducing tension and anxiety related to academic pressures. Some of the responses also suggested that psychological safety promotes collaboration since students are more willing to work and share openly when they are accepted. Ultimately, a culture of psychological safety results in a feeling of belonging and engagement in the learning environment.

International student support was widely mentioned among participants. Most pointed out the need for one-on-one academic and social support in the form of mentorship and counseling programs specific to the needs of international students. A number of respondents underscored the need for comprehensive student services like academic advising, career advising, and mental health counseling to facilitate their integration into a new education system. They also mentioned the value of cultural sensitivity programs in making both students and employees understand various cultural norms and expectations better and hence easier to integrate into academic life. These measures were together considered to make the educational life of foreign students better and more comfortable, with their inclusion, assistance, and motivation towards achievement.

The participants mostly agreed that an awareness of students' cultural and emotional backgrounds is the most important aspect of facilitating academic success. Several of them discussed how individual experiences and cultural contexts shape learning tendencies and results. The respondents emphasized that awareness of these aspects enables teachers to frame teaching approaches in more effective manners. Others also suggested that being culturally sensitive prevents miscommunication that might happen due to the difference in communication styles, expectations, or social behavior. Others suggested that greater cultural awareness improves the quality of counseling and care provided by staff so that they can provide more informed and contextually

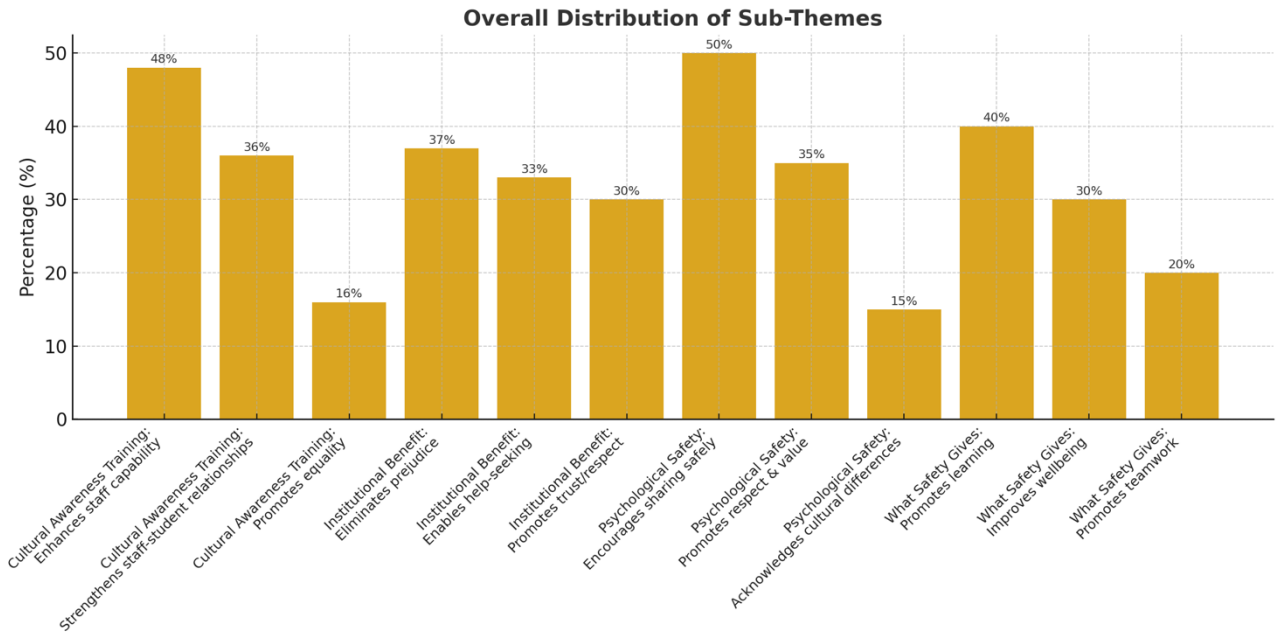
responsive support. In general, such observations strengthen the importance of culturally responsive teaching and mentoring to enhance both academic and personal growth.

The second of the emerging themes that came with much enthusiasm was the importance of staff sensitization in creating avenues for communication and interaction with students. 36% of the participants reported that training programs give staff the ability to recognize and meet the diverse needs of students, leading to clearer academic expectations and greater engagement thereby strengthening staff-student relationships. Respondents also pointed out that promoting inclusiveness within the classroom and extracurricular settings instills a feeling of belonging among all students regardless of background. Participants mentioned that staff empathy, when maximized through training, brings about a more empathetic and supportive setting that operates for all students.

Staff training was mentioned most often as central to the cultivation of effective institutional support systems. Some respondents indicated that training of this sort increases staff readiness to serve a culturally diverse student body and react more inclusively to academic difficulties. Some indicated that relationships between staff and students were substantially improved when responsiveness and active listening were the training focus. A number of respondents also viewed training as promoting fairness and equity in the form of equal opportunity and assistance to all students.

Some respondents also described how staff training has contributed to the breakdown of institutional barriers. A number noted that biases and prejudices that would prevent quality student-staff interactions can be eliminated through such training. Participants agreed that it encourages the creation of a welcoming and friendly learning environment where students can freely ask questions and report issues. Increased trust, respect, and open communication were also found to be critical outcomes of effective staff training. Collectively, these findings suggest that effective staff training programs are key to assisting institutions to meet the needs of diverse student populations in a meaningful and equitable manner.

Figure 1. Percentage Distribution of Sub-Themes



The figure above is a graphical representation of the sub-themes in the findings along with a percentage representation of their relative significance as signified by participants. Every sub-theme, under the major themes are represented by their total percentage responses. The figure accentuates the most prominent sub-themes, such as building psychologically safe environments and enhancing the capability of staff through training.

6 DISCUSSIONS

According to Edmondson and Lei (2014), psychological safety allows individuals to speak up, cooperate, and engage without fear of punishment or humiliation. This is in line with the present study, which found that in a multicultural environment such as SAMK, psychological safety is central to preventing feelings of loneliness and cultural miscommunication among international students.

Newman et al. (2017) point out that collectivist students can find it difficult to voice their views in educational environments where individualistic cultural norms prevail. This observation is consistent with the conclusion of the present study that SAMK needs to adopt measures to provide a learning environment where students from different backgrounds feel at ease to engage in discussions. The study lends credence to Frazier et al.'s (2017) argument that psychological safety is built on respect, trust, and open communication, which are vital for boosting student well-being and academic achievement.

Trauma-informed care has also become widely emphasized in schools as an approach to supporting students who have experienced or witnessed adverse events. Brunzell et al. (2016) theorizes that trauma-informed care works best when it is culturally responsive since different cultures express trauma differently. This study determined that SAMK personnel need training to recognize and work with trauma in culturally sensitive ways, which is in line with existing literature on culturally responsive trauma-informed care (Kataoka et al., 2012).

Cultural awareness is another key component of building an inclusive learning environment. According to Gopalkrishnan and Babacan (2015), cultural competence is having an awareness of and appreciation for the diverse values and practices of different cultural groups. It became clear from this research that staff cultural awareness is critical in addressing international students as miscommunication occurs when cultural differences are not acknowledged. Bhui et al. (2021) also emphasize that culturally

aware mental health intervention improves student success, a phenomenon that is emulated in the current study's recommendation for increasing staff training on cultural sensitivity.

Staff training initiatives have been identified as a critical strategy for developing psychological safety and trauma-informed care. Chafouleas et al. (2016) established that training programs enhance the ability of educators to support students with diverse backgrounds. This study confirms that claim since staff members who underwent training indicated greater confidence in addressing the needs of international students. The webinars and workshops based SAMK hybrid model of training lends credence to Frazier et al.'s (2017) conclusion that awareness training improves staff-student interactions, building a more inclusive learning environment.

Institutional culture is central to ensuring psychological safety and trauma-informed care practices. Nembhard and Edmondson (2022) argue that institutions with high levels of staff engagement in cultural awareness training have improved student satisfaction and academic performance. The present study confirms that the integration of psychological safety and trauma-informed care into SAMK's policies would enhance student well-being and enable the university to establish a reputation as an inclusive institution.

Long term payoffs from these investments are increased rates of international student retention and more institutional reputation for diversity and inclusion. Edmondson (2019) points out that psychological safety results in innovation and collaboration, critical in managing multicultural learning spaces. This study affirms that finding, suggesting that SAMK's commitment to psychological safety and trauma-informed care will be a model to other institutions in building more inclusivity.

From the research, several major themes emerged. Perhaps the most significant of these was the importance of psychological safety in student well-being. Staff members attested that creating a safe and nurturing climate is crucial to allow students to feel comfortable and seek help. Another widespread theme emphasized the significance of cultural competence in trauma-informed care, as most staff members admitted that

being sensitive to students' diverse backgrounds impacts their ability to provide effective support.

Furthermore, staff awareness training impacting student support was an important recurring theme. Participants in trauma-informed care training expressed increased confidence in identifying and responding to students with trauma. However, challenges to implementing such practices at SAMK were also evident, including that some of the staff listed lack of resources and institutional buy-in as the reasons for the incomplete implementation of trauma-informed care in their day-to-day work with students.

In a nutshell, the results of this study concur with psychological safety, trauma-informed care, and cultural competence literature. Through systematic training programs and the institutionalization of these values within policy, SAMK can build a more supportive and inclusive learning environment for international students. Not only does this ensure student success but also solidifies the university's reputation as a culturally responsive organization.

7 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study are highlighted by the importance of trauma-informed care and psychological safety in creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for culturally diverse students at SAMK. The research emphasizes that psychological safety enables students to learn without fear of judgment, which fosters open communication and collaboration. By recognizing the impact of trauma on student well-being, the study emphasizes the need to train staff in trauma-informed care to deliver culturally responsive interventions that foster student resilience and success.

The study recognizes that staff cultural awareness is paramount in being effective in addressing the particular concerns for international students. Evidence also indicates that culturally diverse students may present with psychological distress in ways that are different from their peers, and therefore teachers must adopt culturally responsive practice. Staff training programs have been shown to increase awareness, improve interactions, and contribute to the development of a more inclusive classroom climate. The evidence indicates that schools that actively promote psychological safety and trauma-informed care achieve higher student engagement, well-being, and academic success.

Recommendations for study are as follows: SAMK can implement formal staff training programs that are geared towards providing staff members with knowledge and skills in trauma recognition and response. Institutionalization of trauma-informed care principles in institutional policies would solidify the university's strategy for inclusivity and student support. Additionally, creating specific safe spaces for students where they can share their experiences and receive support would foster psychological safety. The study also recommends ongoing evaluation of training effectiveness through feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement.

In total, the findings point out that establishing psychological safety and trauma-in-

formed care at SAMK is critical to developing an inclusive academic culture in which international students can flourish. The investment of the university in such principles would not only enhance student well-being but also position SAMK at the leading edge of culturally responsive higher education.

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Introduction

Satakunta University of Applied Sciences (SAMK) is home to over 1,000 international students from various cultural backgrounds. These students often face challenges related to cultural adaptation, mental well-being, and academic success. This project aims to improve psychological safety and trauma-informed care practices at SAMK by enhancing staff awareness and intervention strategies.

Aim and Objectives

- **To develop** a structured approach to psychological safety and trauma-informed care.
- **To train** staff on cultural sensitivity and trauma awareness.
- **To create** an inclusive environment for international students.
- **To enhance** the academic and mental well-being of students through structured interventions.

Themes and Key Findings

- **Psychological Safety:** Ensuring students feel safe to express themselves and participate actively without fear of discrimination.
- **Trauma-Informed Care:** Recognizing the impact of trauma on students' mental health and learning experiences.
- **Cultural Awareness:** Understanding the role of cultural diversity in shaping students' academic and social interactions.
- **Staff Training and Support:** Equipping SAMK staff with tools to foster an inclusive and supportive educational environment.



Findings from thematic analysis highlight that institutions that integrate psychological safety and trauma-informed care experience improved student engagement, retention, and overall well-being. SAMK staff who participated in awareness training reported increased confidence in supporting international students effectively.



Conclusion

Implementing psychological safety and trauma-informed care strategies at SAMK fosters an inclusive academic environment that supports international students' success. Training staff, integrating culturally responsive approaches, and promoting institutional policies that prioritize mental well-being will ensure that SAMK continues to be a leading institution for diversity and student support.

Keywords

Psychological Safety, Trauma-Informed Care, Cultural Diversity, Mental Health, Staff Awareness, International Students, Inclusivity.



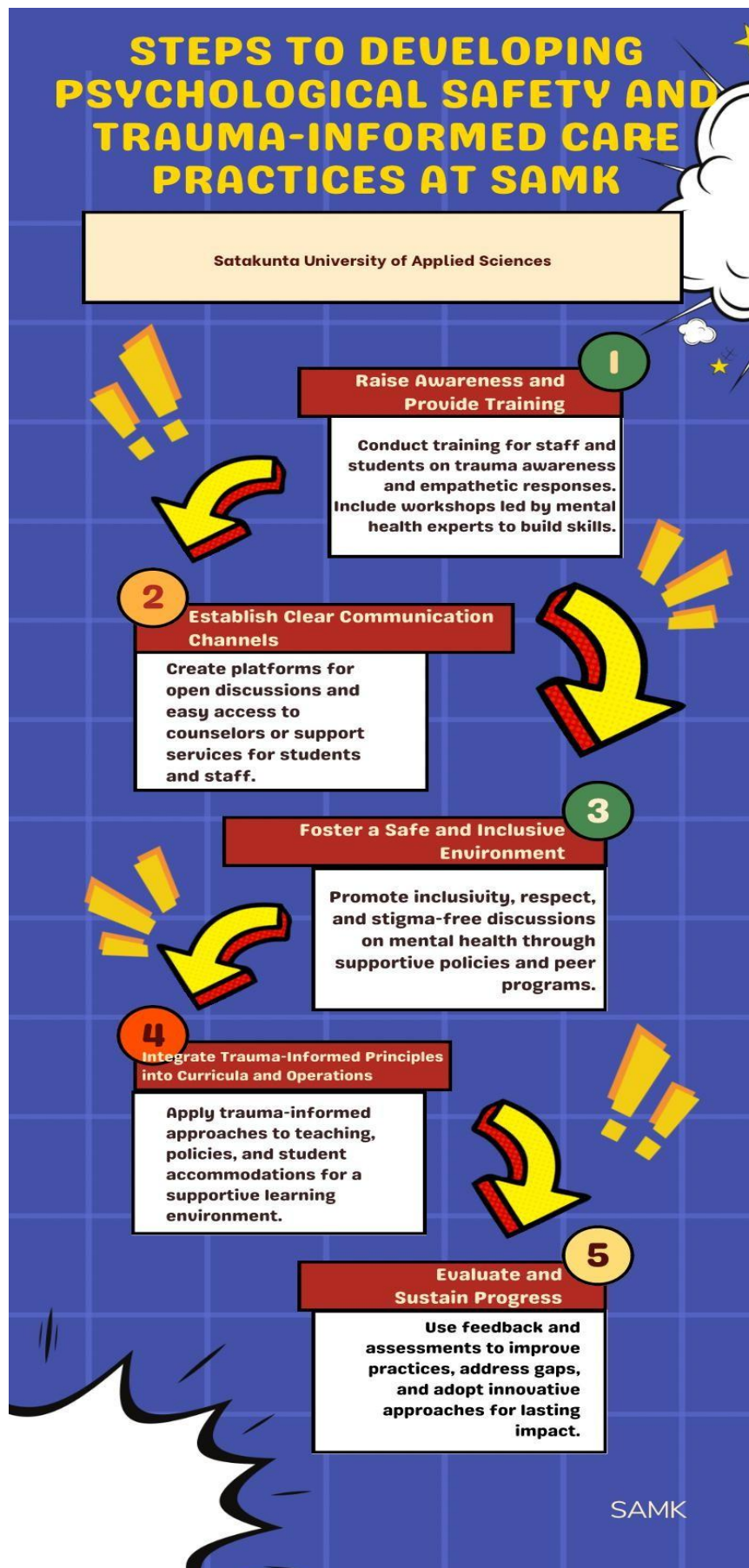
Developing Psychological Safety and Trauma-Informed Care Practices at SAMK

A Strategy to Enhance Staff Awareness and Intervention for Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

Authors:

Oyindamola Oke, Takwa Herman, Mengwe Mba-atanga

BROCHURE



Appendix 3. Questionnaire

Id	Start Time	Comple- tion Time	How do you support psychological safety for students with diverse cultural backgrounds?	Why is creating a safe learning environment important for SAMK students?	How do you support international students at SAMK regarding their cultural and emotional needs?	Why is it important for staff to understand the needs of international/cultural backgrounds of international students?	Do you think it's important to create staff awareness on supporting students from diverse cultural backgrounds? Why?	What will staff training help you do more effectively in supporting students from different cultural backgrounds?	Why is SAMK staff's engagement in training for cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed care practices important?

Appendix 3. Questionnaire

1	21.11.2024 16:24	21.11.2024 16:32	Having personal discussions and trying to get to know the students' background. Trying to create a safe environment where they feel comfortable sharing.	It is important for learning: students dare to ask questions, which encourages open discussions.	By having personal discussions regularly and guiding them to student services when needed.	It is needed for study progression, to help students graduate. Personal guidance is essential.	It is important to know about diverse cultures and be aware of your own culture for better communication.	It leads to better communication and understanding of backgrounds.	It is important (I repeat myself) helps in communication with the students.
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22.11.2024	22.11.2024	I try to create a safe and trusting atmosphere where everyone feels comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences despite cultural differences.	Without safety, learning does not happen.	I try to understand diversity and take different backgrounds into account. I also try to see students as individuals, not just as products of their cultures.	Understanding different cultures is key to creating a safe learning atmosphere. What is "ordinary" for one may not be for another.	Yes, absolutely. One of SAMK's goals is timely graduation, which requires an inclusive environment where students feel safe.	Increase awareness of this crucial topic.	To effectively support students, staff need more tools for working with international students.
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<p>325.11.2024 10:32</p>	<p>25.11.2024 10:54</p>	<p>I ensure that students respect each other and carefully form student groups based on cultural compatibility, especially in online lectures.</p>	<p>Students should feel responsible, free to express themselves, and be able to ask questions.</p>	<p>I integrate cultural considerations into assignments and avoid examples that might cause embarrassment. If needed, I would like to refer students to SAMK's support services.</p>	<p>Teachers should acknowledge different learning styles across cultures. Some students may be silent listening without asking questions.</p>	<p>Training is essential. Without international experience, understanding cultural importance is difficult.</p>	<p>I have extensive multicultural experience, but all teachers should receive training in this area.</p>	<p>Training helps create a study environment that supports diverse cultural needs without additional stress for student.</p>
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Appendix 3. Questionnaire

<p>427.11.2024 13:30</p>	<p>27.11.2024 13:38</p>	<p>I try to be kind smile, and ask students how they are doing. If I know about their background, I ask about their culture or explain Finnish culture.</p>	<p>So, students feel welcome and included, which may encourage them to stay in Finland. Inclusion improves well-being.</p>	<p>I ensure international students are included and understand what is expected in different situations.</p>	<p>Cultural norms shape behavior. Without understanding, misunderstandings can arise. We often take things for granted.</p>	<p>Helps avoid misunderstandings, makes students feel welcome, and enhances SAMK's reputation among future students.</p>	<p>I haven't participated in training, working, and interacting on campus.</p>
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52.12.2024 12:50	2.12.2024 13:07	Encourage students to reflect on their thoughts and learn from mistakes. Promote open dialogue and participation. Build an environment where students can feel comfortable seeking answers.	A safe learning environment improves performance. If students feel secure, they can focus on learning. It encourages positive communication and collaboration.					
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