Ethnic Studies: Students' Attainment of the Seven Essential Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

In 2021, California's Assembly Bill 101 was approved, requiring students in the class of 2030 to complete at least a one-semester course in ethnic studies. Months prior, the State Board of Education approved an Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum, in which they emphasize certain essential outcomes for students in Ethnic Studies. However, due to the recentness of these developments, no research has been conducted on the impact of Ethnic Studies on students' attainment of the essential outcomes. Employing an action research-based approach, this study aims to examine students' attainment of the seven essential outcomes and provide suggestions for course enhancements so that attainment of the outcomes can continue to increase. In a three-part qualitative study, students' attainment of the outcomes at X school district were indicated through their Likert scale responses, and themes emerged through thematic analysis to support the data. Overall, students' attainment of the essential outcomes increased because of Ethnic Studies, which the suggested course enhancements can increase further.

Introduction

In October 2021, Assembly Bill 101 was approved, establishing California as the first state to require Ethnic Studies (**ES**) as a high school graduation requirement. Ethnic Studies is an interdisciplinary field of studies that includes content "considered missing from traditional curriculum" and focuses on four foundational disciplines: African American, Chicanx and Latinx, Native American, and Asian American and Pacific Islander studies so that students can acknowledge, understand, and appreciate diverse populations and cultures (State Board of Education, 2022, pp. 1-7, pp. 7-22). Commencing with the 2025-26 school year, California school districts with students in grades nine to twelve are required to offer at least a one-semester course in ethnic studies, and commencing with students graduating in the 2029-30 school year, high school students are required to complete a one-semester course in ethnic studies to graduate (A.B. 101, 2021).

Essential Outcomes

Prior to the approval of A.B. 101, on March 18, 2021, the State Board of Education (**SBE**) adopted an Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (**ESMC**), which serves as a guide for school districts that can be adapted to "reflect [their] pupil demographics" (State Board of Education, 2022, pp. 1-7). In the ESMC, the SBE outlines eight essential outcomes for student learning in ES. The outcomes include community focus, inclusivity, interpersonal communication, intersectionality, justice, self-empowerment, self-understanding, and cultural awareness. However, for the purpose of this study, only seven outcomes were examined. 'Community focus' and 'inclusivity' were combined under the umbrella term, 'representation,' because of their similar definitions in the ESMC (for definitions, see Figure. 1).

Definitions of the Seven Essential Outcomes

Cultural Awareness	"Recognition of the nuances of one's own and other cultures" (Cultural awareness, n.d.).
Interpersonal Communication	"The ability to meet, discuss, and analyze sometimes controversial topics and issues that garner multiple diverse points of view" (*Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Chapter One*, 2021, p. 19).
Intersectionality	The meeting of social identities that can influence one's life trajectory and "may influence how a person is perceived and treated by others, including both by individuals and by institutions" (*Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Chapter One*, 2021, p. 18).
Justice	1. "Address the experiences of [systemic racism,] slavery, conquest, colonization, immigration" 2. "[Examines] the process of social change and [how] individual and collective efforts can challenge and overcome inequality and discriminatory treatment" 3. "Help students comprehend the various manifestations of racism and other forms of ethnic bigotry, discrimination, and marginalization" (*Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Chapter One*, 2021, p. 16).
Self-Empowerment	"A reflection of the increased personal value and self-worth that comes out of our experience of having real influence in one or more areas of our lives." It is measured by "witnessing real change" (Formica, 2015).
Self-Understanding	"The attainment of knowledge about and insight into one's [identity and] characteristics, including attitudes, motives, behavioral tendencies, strengths, and weaknesses" (American Psychological Association, n.d.; *Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Chapter One*, 2021, p. 17).
Representation*	Depictions of a group of people (Armstrong, 2022; Merriam-Webster, n.d.), with "special emphasis [on] the foundational disciplines while making connections to the varying experiences of all students" (Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Chapter One, 2021).

Figure 1

Note. 'Community focus' is defined by the SBE as "devoting special attention to ethnic groups that have been significantly present in their own communities," and 'inclusivity' is defined by the SBE as "incorporating the experiences and contributions of a broad range of ethnic groups" (State Board of Education, 2022, p. 17-19). Because both of these definitions include the incorporation of specific ethnic groups that are prevalent in the community, they were combined.

Literature Review

Curriculum Centered on a Single Ethnic Group

Much of the pre-existing literature that discusses students' attainment of the seven outcomes focuses on the impact of curriculum that's centered on a single ethnic group (Halagao, 2004; Hernández et al., 2017; Vasquez, 2005; Wiggan & Watson-Vandier, 2017). For both college and high school students, a curriculum that focuses on an ethnic group increases the self-understanding of the students who identify with the ethnic group and increases the cultural awareness of students who don't identify with the ethnic group.

Specifically, reading literature (including books, ballads, poetry) that's written from the perspective of different racial groups can increase students' self-empowerment and cultural awareness (Vasquez, 2005; Wiggan & Watson-Vandier, 2017). In a study that examined the experience of 18 college students in a Chicano Narrative class, all students from diverse backgrounds reported that they were able to connect and learn from the texts. While the Latinx and Chicanx students expressed that reading Chicano literature provided them a sense of ethnic validation, empowerment, and community (Vasquez, 2005, p. 907-909), the non-Latinx students emphasized that it was "eye-opening" to learn about their cultural differences (Vasquez, 2005, p. 913).

Similarly, Dr. Patricia Halagao (2004) gained insight on the experience of six Filipino American college students with *Pinoy Teach*, a course she co-designed to prepare students to teach a transformative multicultural curriculum on Filipino history to seventh grade students. Dr. Halagao concluded that the students attained cultural awareness, self-understanding, and self-empowerment through learning and teaching their ethnic history. Additionally, the study highlights how student learning, and therefore attainment of the outcomes, is influenced by culturally responsive pedagogy, a theoretical model that emphasizes caring environments and supporting students' cultural identities to develop their critical consciousness (Cammarota & Romero, 2006; Cauhtin et al., 2019, p. 22; *Culturally relevant pedagogy*, n.d.).

Ethnic Studies in High Schools

Research on the impact of high school ES courses on students' attainment of the seven outcomes is limited. Sacramento City Unified School District's (**SCUSD)** Board of Education Executive Summary provides a brief overview of their internal post-assessment of their piloted ES course, which was launched in the 2016-17 school year. From the three questions asked in the student focus groups, SCUSD concluded that ES had positively impacted students' cultural awareness, self-understanding, and sense of agency (Sacramento City, 2017).

The only other study that focused on ES as a whole was conducted in 2016 by Dr. Thomas Dee and Dr. Emily Penner, who observed that the ES course at San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) increased the academic performance, attendance rates, and graduation rates of ninth grade students with a GPA below 2.0 (Dee & Penner, 2016). While the increased academic performance of students at SFUSD is consistent with the findings of other studies, such as the impact of Mexican American Studies at Tuscan Unified School District in Arizona on students' academics (Cabrera et al., 2014) and the correlation between racial identity and academic attainment among African American students (Chavous et al., 2003), these studies do not address the seven essential outcomes for ES.

Gap in the Research

While some studies have been conducted to examine the efficacy of ES on the academic performance, attendance rates, and graduation rates (Dee & Penner, 2016; Chavous et al., 2003; Sleeter and Zavala, 2020) of students who have a GPA below 3.0 (Chavous et al., 2003) and below 2.0 (Dee & Penner, 2016), other research has examined the impact of curriculum that's centered on a single ethnic group on students' attainment of a few of the essential outcomes—cultural awareness, self-understanding, and self-empowerment (Halagao, 2004; Martin, 2009; Sacramento City, 2017; Vasquez, 2005; Wiggan & Watson-Vandier, 2017). However, no study has evaluated the impact of ES as a whole on the extent to which secondary students from a high-scoring and relatively economically advantaged school district

obtain the seven essential outcomes for ES. Which leads to the research question: To what extent has X school district's Ethnic Studies course impacted students' attainment of the seven essential outcomes, if at all? Essentially, through an action research approach, this study aims to determine how well ES students have attained the seven essential outcomes, gain insight into X district's ES courses, and then provide suggestions for increasing attainment.

Delimitations

X School District refers to the East Bay school district that participated in this study, and was chosen because it contains a uniquely high-scoring and economically advantaged student population. Out of the three high schools that participated, there's an average 48% minority enrollment, an average 98.7% graduation rate, and an average 5.3% of socioeconomically disadvantaged students in the 2021-2022 school year (see Appendix A). Therefore, the scope of the study was predefined by the student population, and serves as a delimitation to this study.

Assumption and Hypothesis

When the ES course at X school district was initially developed, prior to 2020, the SBE had not approved the ESMC. Consequently, X school district's ES courses weren't implemented with the specific essential outcomes in mind, but instead, were based off of the guidelines that existed at the time and the already established ES courses at other school districts, such as Fremont Unified School District and SFUSD. Nevertheless, based on previous studies, it is assumed that the ES curriculum provides greater representation of minority groups than other classes ES students have previously taken. Therefore, it is hypothesized that due to increased representation in curriculum, ES will increase all ES students' attainment of the seven essential outcomes.

Methods of Data Collection

Design

This action research-based study aims to examine the impact of an East Bay school district's ES course on high school students' attainment of the seven essential outcomes for ES. Since ES is a state-wide high school graduation requirement for the class of 2030, and all high schools are mandated to offer an ES course by 2025, it is imperative to understand students' attainment of the outcomes set by the SBE.

A three-part, qualitative study was employed for this purpose. As qualitative data is used to "understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and interactions" (Pathak et al., 2013), this study examined students' attainment of the essential outcomes based on their self-reported beliefs, which provided explanations for their experiences and suggestions for course enhancement. The specific methods of data collection included 1) teacher and student surveys; 2) semi-structured teacher and student interviews and 3) recorded class discussions. The data collection and analysis of these three methods, which was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), serve to corroborate each other, as with methodological triangulation, in which the analysis of multiple methods enhances the credibility of the findings (Bhandari, 2022).

Surveys

Based on the pre-existing literature, three influences were identified that can significantly affect students' learning, and thus, achieving the essential outcomes: students' identity, the curriculum, and the classroom environment (Ambrose, 2010; Cuauhtin et al., 2019, p. 22; Halagao, 2004, p. 461; Howard, 2001; p. 10-15; Sleeter, 2016; Sleeter and Zavala, 2020). As a result, the survey questions were divided into these three categories (see Appendix B). While the teacher surveys served to inform the units referred to in the student surveys (each class had different units. See Appendix C), the student surveys provided evidence that the students had either gained or lacked the essential outcomes. These findings were based on the curriculum-related questions, which contained the Likert scale, a 7-point bipolar agreement scale that allows participants to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with a statement (McLeod, 2019). Collectively, the teacher and student surveys were employed to identify the alignment, or lack thereof, between the teachers' and the students' opinions on their classroom environment to understand if the classroom environment affected students' attainment of the outcomes.

Interviews

The recorded semi-structured teacher and student interviews were conducted via virtual conferencing platforms to gain elaboration on the survey responses and a deeper understanding of the course. The interview procedures conducted in this study followed Creswell's (2009) "interview protocol" (p. 183), and since the interviews were semi-structured, there were both predetermined questions and follow-up questions that arose from the conversations (see Appendix D). However, only the student interviews were analyzed because the students' responses provided data from which claims could be made regarding their attainment of the essential outcomes. The teacher interviews were used as a reference in the discussion of the findings.

Recorded Class Discussions

Recordings of a class discussion that the teacher already had planned for the month (similar to any normal discussion in the class) served as evidence to either support or challenge the alignment of student opinions, teacher input, and the overall student to student and teacher to student dynamic expressed in the classroom environment questions from the surveys. However, thorough analysis of the recorded class discussions became unnecessary because they didn't add new information to the study, but rather, corroborated the existing findings. Therefore, analysis of the recorded class discussions will not be discussed for the findings of this study.

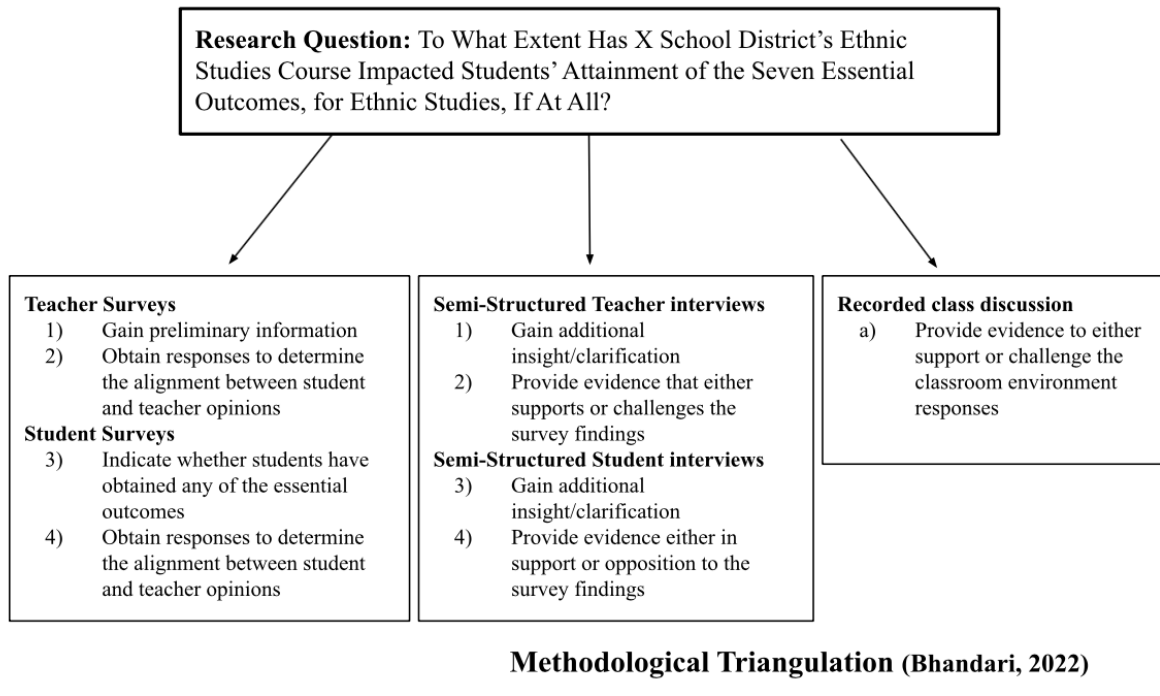*Three-Part Method Design in Alignment to the Research Question*

Figure 2

Participants

The teachers at all four high schools that offer ES in X school district were contacted through email, with periodic updates providing additional follow-up (see Appendix E). After completing the teacher consent form (see Appendix F) and surveys, the teachers facilitated the student consent forms (see Appendix G), caregiver consent forms (see Appendix H), and student surveys. Out of the four high schools that offer ES in X School District, three participated. These three school districts will be referred to as School A, School B, and School C. Overall, the participants in this study included three ES teachers and 15 eleventh and twelfth grade students who are currently enrolled in ES.

Total Participants		
Surveys	Interviews	Recorded Class Discussions
School A ● 6 out of 30 students (20%) **School B** ● 5 out of 13 students (38%) **School C** ● 4 out of 11 students (36%)	**School A** ● 0 interviews **School B** ● 2 interviews **School C** ● 3 interviews	**School A** ● 1 discussion **School B** ● 1 discussion

Note. For the student surveys, there was 20% participation from School A, 38% participation from School B, and 36% participation from School C. Out of the students that completed the student survey, zero students agreed to an interview from School A, while 2 students from School B and 3 students from School C participated in less than 30 minute-long interviews. Additionally, School A and School B recorded one class discussion each. The 30-minute interviews were recorded via Zoom, and the recordings were deleted upon the completion of this study. The teachers consented to deleting the footage of their recorded class discussions, which were completed once the students and their caregivers (if they were under 18 years old) consented to participate.

Figure 3

Data

Identity/Past Experiences

Culturally responsive pedagogy encompasses the consideration of the students' identities, students' past experiences, the curriculum, and the classroom environment (Ambrose, 2010; Cuauhtin et al., 2019, p. 22; Halagao, 2004, p. 461; Howard, 2001; Sleeter, 2016; Sleeter and Zavala, 2020). Therefore, patterns between any of these factors and students' attainment of the essential outcomes can provide explanations for why certain groups of students attained certain outcomes to the extent they did. For example, a student from School B emphasized in their survey response, "I can take aspects from my personal life and apply it into this class".

Data
The following figures contain the demographics of the 15 participants and their self-reports on experiencing hate and racism.

Figure 3
Participants' Demographics

Participants' Race

Race	No. of Participants	Percentage
Asian American/ Pacific Islander	4	26.7%
Latinx/ Chicanx	2	13.3%
White	5	33.3%
Asian and Hispanic*	1	6.7%
White and Asian American*	1	6.7%
I prefer not to say	2	13.3%

* Students answered using the "other" option.

Have You Ever Experienced Racism Directed Towards You?

Experience with Racism	No. of Participants	Percentage
Yes	5	33.3%
Somewhat	4	26.7%
No	6	40.0%

Do You Identify with the LGBTQ+ Community?

LGBTQ Identification	No. of Participants	Percentage
Yes	8	53.3%
No	4	26.7%
I prefer not to say	3	20.0%

Have You Ever Experienced Hate Directed Towards You Because You Identify as LGBTQ+?

Experience with Hate	No. of Participants	Percentage
Yes	6	40.0%
Somewhat	4	26.7%
I do not identify with the LGBTQ+	4	26.7%
I prefer not to say	1	6.7%

Participants' Gender

Gender	No. of Participants	Percentage
Female	4	33.3%
Male	2	66.7%

Have You Ever Experienced Hate Directed Towards You Because of Your Gender?

Experience with Hate	No. of Participants	Percentage
Yes	6	46.7%
Somewhat	4	13.3%
No	4	40.0%

Initial Understandings

Initially, the impact of students' identity and past experiences with racism and hate were going to be addressed. However, there was no correlation between the seven outcomes and students' identity or experiencing racism and hate. Possible explanations are in the following.

1. Students' identification with certain groups didn't influence their attainment of the seven essential outcomes as much as in prior research. One student from School C noted, "I have experienced hate directed towards me at [School C] in general, but it has not impacted [my learning] in Ethnic Studies".
2. There were not enough participants for patterns to emerge, as less than half of the students in each class participated.
3. There were correlations between students' identity and their attainment of the outcomes, but were missed because of misinterpretation of the data.
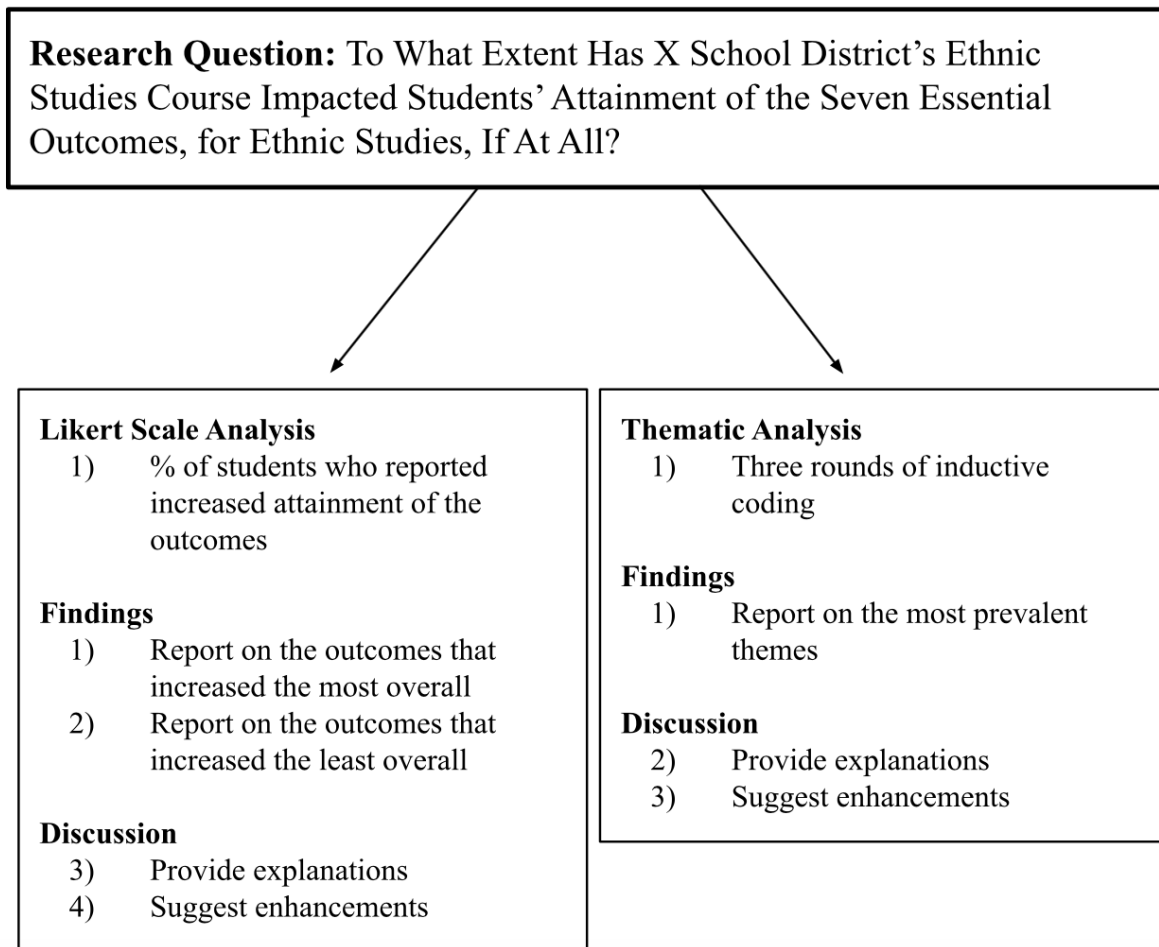
Classroom Environment

Moreover, there were no obvious patterns between students' opinions on their classroom environment and their attainment of the outcomes, as all of the students expressed learning in a positive classroom environment regardless of differences in their responses and their teachers' different methods for fostering a positive classroom environment. Since both teachers and students expressed being in a positive classroom environment, it is unnecessary to focus on suggestions to improve the classroom environment. Instead, the reported positive classroom environment can contribute explanations to the overall findings in the following sections.

Analysis

There are two sets of analysis in this study: analysis of the Likert scales and thematic analysis of the open-ended responses in the student surveys and student interviews.

Figure 5
Two-Part Data Analysis in Alignment to the Research Question

Research Question: To What Extent Has X School District's Ethnic Studies Course Impacted Students' Attainment of the Seven Essential Outcomes, for Ethnic Studies, If At All?

Likert Scale Analysis
1)   % of students who reported increased attainment of the outcomes

Findings
1)   Report on the outcomes that increased the most overall
2)   Report on the outcomes that increased the least overall

Discussion
3)   Provide explanations
4)   Suggest enhancements

Thematic Analysis
1)   Three rounds of inductive coding

Findings
1)   Report on the most prevalent themes

Discussion
2)   Provide explanations
3)   Suggest enhancements

Note: Each section of analysis contains a discussion of the findings that addresses both the gap in the scholarly literature and the alignment between the findings and the research question.

Likert Scale Analysis

Figure 6
Likert Scale Example

Unit #__ has increased my interpersonal communication. *

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Unsure
Unit 0	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Unit 1	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Unit 2	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Unit 3	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Unit 4	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Unit 5	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Note. In the surveys, students selected the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statement that "[insert unit #] has increased my [insert outcome]". While the units are different in each school (see appendix D), the purpose of the Likert scales was to find students' overall attainment of the outcomes. Therefore, in the Likert scales, students were only asked to reflect upon the individual units so that the process of reflection would be more manageable. In addition to the seven-point Likert scale, which contained the statements 'strongly disagree,' 'disagree,' 'somewhat disagree,' 'neutral,' 'somewhat agree,' 'agree,' and 'strongly agree,' the statement 'unsure' was included for students who couldn't discern if they attained a certain outcome.

Once the data was collected, the graphs in Appendix I display the number of times students selected each statement per outcome. Since the 'disagree' statements ('strongly disagree,' 'disagree,' 'somewhat disagree') indicate that students' attainment of the outcome decreased, and the 'agree' statements ('strongly agree,' 'agree,' 'somewhat agree') indicate that students' attainment of the outcome increased, in order to find the students' overall attainment of the outcomes for each school, the total number of times students selected any of the 'disagree' statements was subtracted from the total number of times students selected any of the 'agree' statements. Since the statement "neutral" is neither an increase nor a decrease, it was not subtracted from anything and remained as is. The difference is the total number of times students reported that their attainment of each outcome had either increased or decreased. Because students had selected the 'agree' statements more than they had the 'disagree' statements, the difference was that the total number of times students reported their attainment of each outcome had increased. Essentially, in each of the three schools, students reported that their attainment of each outcome had increased (see Appendix J).

## Findings and Discussion

Likert Scales Findings

In order to understand the students' overall attainment of the outcomes across all three classes, the results from each school were combined (see Figure 7). Overall, students not only attained the seven essential outcomes, but because of ES, their attainment increased.

It is important to note that this school district's ES course is currently in its second year of full implementation and for one of the school's teachers, this is their first year of teaching ES. With the course being so new, all three teachers have already expressed implementing change to their course. As such, the suggestions provided in this study are meant to aid the ES teachers and increase the already attained seven essential outcomes.

Figure 7
Students' Attainment of the Seven Essential Outcomes Across All Three ES Classes

Total Increase vs. Outcome
Overall, the students' attainment of the outcomes increased because of Ethnic Studies
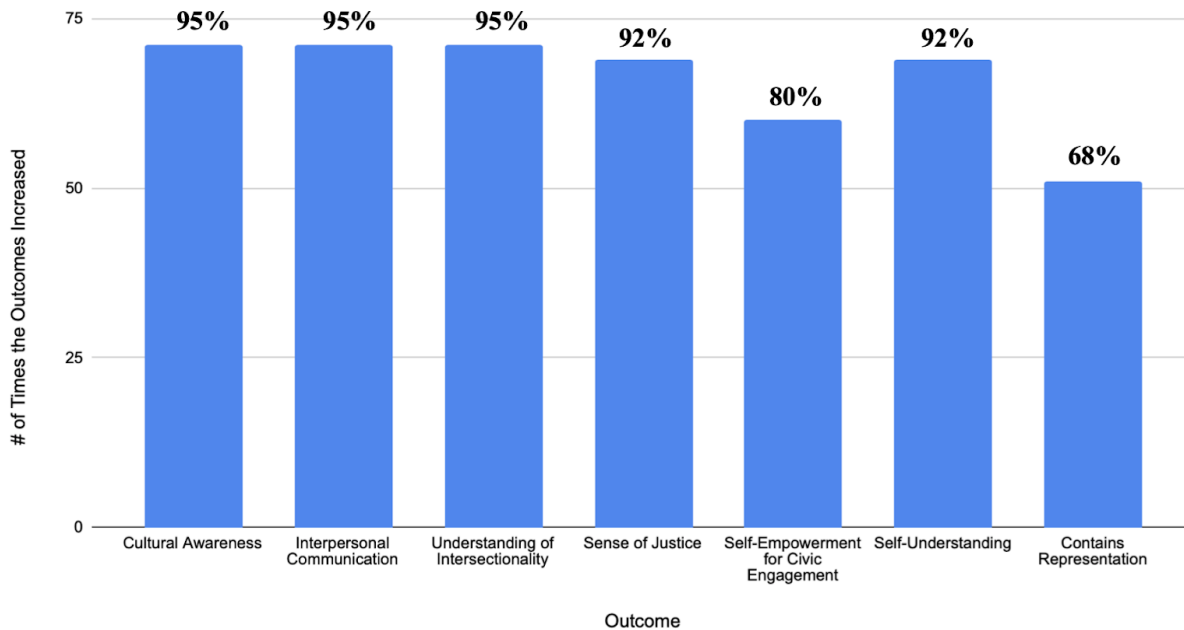
Note. At the greatest attainment, 95% of students reported that their cultural awareness, interpersonal communication, and understanding of intersectionality had increased as a result of ES, while at the second-lowest increase, 80% of students reported that their self-empowerment for civic engagement increased. Additionally, 68% of students reported that ES provided increased representation of the racial group(s) they identify with.
The bar graph displays the overall number of times students indicated that ES had increased their attainment (y-axis) of each outcome (x-axis) after subtracting the number of times students reported that ES had decreased their attainment of each outcome. The percentages above each bar are the total extent that each outcome had increased, and were found by dividing the total number of times students indicated that their attainment of each outcome had increased by the maximum number of times students could select a statement of agree or disagree per outcome. For example, 95% of students reported that their attainment of cultural awareness had increased because 71 (the number of times students agreed that ES increased their cultural awareness) divided by 75 (15 students multiplied by five units) is 95 when rounded to the nearest whole percent.

'Cultural Awareness', 'Interpersonal Communication', and 'Understanding of Intersectionality'

Across the three schools, 95% of students reported that their attainment of "cultural awareness", "interpersonal communication", and "understanding of intersectionality" had increased as a result of ES. The overall increase of the seven outcomes can be partially attributed to the reported positive classroom environment, since such environments

are optimal for students' learning (Ambrose, 2010; Howard, 2001; p. 10-15). For example, a student from school B explained that their peers "take into account each other's thoughts and ideas" during discussions. This respectful conduct, along with students' engagement in discussions and the teachers' teaching style, contributes to a positive classroom environment that allows students to learn. Specifically, these factors can increase students' interpersonal communication, as they create an environment in which students are inclined to engage in fruitful discussion (*Three Types*, 2021).

'Representation'

Overall, 68% of students believed that there was 'representation' of the racial group they identify with. While 75% and 90% of students in School B and School C indicated that ES provided representation of the racial group(s) they identify with, only 47% of students in School A agreed. The difference in outcomes between School A and the other two schools could be because the curriculum in School A contained units separated by racial groups instead of by thematic topics as in School B and School C (see Appendix B). According to Teacher A, teaching ES by racial groups was a change from last year, in which the units were previously organized thematically. In the interview, Teacher A explained that after trying out the curriculum with units focused on specific groups, they preferred thematic units because within each theme the experiences of different ethnic groups can be discussed, and thus, "build bridges between different ethnic groups". For example, the topic of housing discrimination can be taught through the perspective of different minority groups so students can understand how the same issue has affected multiple communities.

This finding is corroborated by pre-existing research from Dr. Halagao, who studied the impact of curriculum focused on Filipino American history and culture, explains that inclusion, rather than the spotlighting of ethnic groups allows for minority students "to see their history situated within the world and American history" (Halagao, 2004, p. 475). Consequently, if School A switches back to thematic units, this outcome could increase to the percentage of the other schools.

'Self-Empowerment for Civic Engagement'

While 'self-empowerment for civic engagement' had the second lowest increase, the responses that contributed to this outcome were primarily from School A and School B, in which 83% and 68% of students believed the outcome had increased, compared to School C's greater percentage of students at 90%. While the difference in increased attainment between School A and B is greater than the difference between School A and C, the lack of responses to the open-ended questions in the student surveys for School A hinders the emergence of explanations that can be extrapolated from the data. However, the overall lower increase from School A and School B could be explained by the fact that at the time students filled out the survey, these schools had not covered their final units, in which students will research a social issue and provide solutions. A student from School C acknowledged that "Unit 4 [activism] has allowed me to work with other students to come up with ways in which we can increase social justice and overcome inequality". Hence, during the completion of this project, students' self-empowerment for civic engagement, which is, according to the SBE's model curriculum, attained when students "become more engaged locally and are better able to contribute to constructive social change" (State Board of Education,2022, p. 16), may increase to the level of School C.

However, even if students in School A and B research social issues and solutions, self-empowerment for civic engagement comes from action and not solely from learning. Dr. Halagao found that while her university students expressed a sense of empowerment from learning about their ethnic history, "the real empowerment came from doing something with the knowledge," which in their case, was teaching the curriculum to 7th grade students. Similarly, the 80% of students whose attainment of "self-empowerment for civic engagement" increased, can be explained by students' understanding of the topics taught in ES, as a student from School B expressed that ES "helped encourage [their] need to be active in the community and make a change". The difference between increased attainment at School

A and B compared to School C can be attributed to the lack of action that follows the realization of a "need to be active." Hence, it may be beneficial to include projects in which students can act upon the solutions they researched. This approach serves as a bridge between the curriculum and the students' lives (Cammarota & Romero, 2010, p. 490). For instance, at School C, students worked with their school's administration to organize a school-wide assembly in which student speakers shared their experiences with racism. Afterward, 25 pairs of students, which included 40 students who weren't in ES, went to homerooms to help teachers lead a discussion on race and racism. In the words of Teacher C, these students were "practicing how to be civil rights activists".

Conclusions

Likert Scale Conclusions

Overall, the three conclusions from the Likert scale data include that 1) students' overall attainment of the seven outcomes increased; 2) strategies to stimulate students' nuanced perspectives can increase students' interpersonal communication; 3) thematic units provide more representation for students and 4) activism can increase students' self-empowerment for civic engagement.

Analysis

Thematic Analysis of Surveys and Interviews

Thematic analysis of the students' open-ended survey responses and transcribed interviews was conducted to 1) understand the underlying factors that contributed to students' attainment of the seven essential outcomes and 2) provide suggestions for enhancing the course so that students can increase their attainment of the outcomes. Through this analysis, an inductive approach was employed to reduce the raw qualitative data into descriptive codes so that patterns, or themes, could emerge (Braun and Clarke, n.d.; Saldana, 2015, p. 3; Yukhymenko, et al., 2014, p. 97). Through following Braun and Clarke's (n.d.) phases for thematic analysis, three rounds of separate inductive coding resulted in the emergence of seven final themes (see Appendix K). The four most prevalent themes that support the likert scale findings and provide avenues for course enhancement are: 1) positive class environment; 2) curriculum expansion of ES; 3) responding to racism and microaggressions and 4) stigma associated with taking ES.

Findings and Discussion

Four Prevalent Themes

Figure 8
Four Most Prevalent Themes

Theme	Category	Codes	Exemplar Quotations
Positive classroom environment	Teacher and student connection	Teacher encourages students' community involvement	"The day after it [racist incident] happened, my teacher, [...], mentioned it and he was like 'do you guys want to do anything about it?' And we all said 'yes.'... And then he got us a bunch of meetings with the principal and the admin—that was how it started" (School C, Student 1). "I love the teacher" (School A, Student 5).
		Students and teacher connection	"I think my teacher does a good job of looking at history holistically" (School B, Student 4).
	Class curriculum	"Flexible" (student choice)	"Since the class is more flexible, we are able to discuss with more time and choose how much we want to cover a topic for the most part" (School B, Student 5).
	Classroom setting	Discussion facilitation	"We actually sit in a physical circle a lot, so it's a lot easier to have round table discussions" (School B, Student 3).
	Student connections	"Special bond" between students	"I really like the class environment because we kind of went through this whole thing together so it's kind of like a special bond we've formed through that" (School C, Student 1).
		"Open-minded" students	"The type of people who take Ethnic Studies are the ones who want to learn about other cultures, and they are generally open-minded" (School B, Student 3).
		Community belonging	"[My biggest takeaway was] learning that I'm not alone in my struggles as a Hispanic" (School C, Student 2).
		Respect	"We all make sure to take into account each other's thoughts and ideas" (School B, Student 5).
		Student voice	"By providing my takes and insight, I add to the conversation" (School B, Student 5).

Theme	Category	Codes	Exemplar Quotations
Curriculum expansion of ES		Lessons centered on specific cultures	"I think it would also help to have more lessons about each culture" (School C, Student 2). "I would like to focus more on different groups" (School B, Student 3).
		Middle Eastern cultures	"I would love to learn more about the cultures from Asia [and] the Middle East" (School B, Student 3).

Theme	Category	Codes	Exemplar Quotations
Stigma associated with taking ES		Stigma	"The type of people who would benefit from taking a class like Ethnic Studies don't want to take it because they don't want to be seen as, I guess the term would be, 'a snowflake,' or somebody who's trying to be politically correct, because a lot of people, especially high school boys, have a certain humor and they're friends with a certain type of person that might think it's like not as cool if their taking ethnic studies…So, I guess there's definitely a stigma surrounding who takes it" (School B, Student 3). "I dislike the stigma around taking the course" (School C, Student 1).
Responding to racism and microaggressions (overall, students believe that the ES curriculum provides tools/solutions for students to combat/respond to racism/microaggressions)		Does provide tools/solutions (3 students)	"After I started taking [Ethnic Studies], I could notice a lot of microaggressions and flat out racism more clearly than before. And now, I'd be more comfortable talking and standing up to someone because I think prior, I might be able to recognize if something is off because of racism, but I wouldn't be able to stand up and say anything because I didn't feel educated to say it. But now, I would stand up and tell them why it's wrong" (School C, Student 4).
		Doesn't provide tools/solutions (1 student)	"As it currently stands, I think that maybe students can pick up on it, based on reading about how different activists have stood up to oppression, or racism, or marginalization, but I don't think that we have well equipped tools just yet" (School B, Student 4).
		Brings awareness to the issue of racism, which can be used as a solution to combat racism (1 student)	"But like possible solutions, I don't even know. I mean, I guess just keep bringing awareness about it…So I feel like expanding the curriculum would be one way, or could be a possible solution" (School C, Student 2)

Positive Class Environment

Across all three schools, students highlighted their ES class' positive classroom environment as contributing to their ability to learn and discuss topics. Overwhelmingly, students emphasized that "I [they] value the classroom environment the most" in their ES course. These sentiments are in corroboration with prior research centered on the connection between the classroom environment and students' learning (Ambrose, 2010; Howard, 2001; p. 10-1).

Curriculum Expansion of ES

Throughout the responses, students provided examples of projects in which they had the
opportunity to research about a topic or racial group of their choice. While students appreciated this "freedom," they also emphasized that besides their own research, they hadn't learned about the racial group they identify with in the curriculum itself. The lack of curriculum on specific racial groups could account for student sentiment that learning from lessons about cultures would be beneficial.

When asked if the inclusion of courses centered on specific racial groups in addition to
ES would be beneficial, 80% of participants believed it would and the remaining 20% expressed their interest in such courses with the caveat that the implementation of additional courses would be difficult when few students are already taking ES. Overall, this indicates that students desire to expand their learning of different ethnic groups. Despite none of the students identifying as Middle Eastern, students still specified interest in learning about Middle Eastern cultures, which wasn't thoroughly covered in the curriculum. In the model curriculum, the SBE provides four lessons about Jewish Americans, Arab Americans, the Armenian Migration, and Antisemitism. In particular, the topic of Arab

stereotyping in media can be included in the schools' unit on biases, the Armenian migration to southern california can be discussed in School B's unit on immigration, and the Arab Spring can be included in Units focused on justice and resistance (State Board of Education, 2022).

Responding to Racism & the Stigma Associated with Taking ES

Out of the five students that participated in the interviews, three believed that ES provides solutions for responding to racism and microaggressions because they are no longer afraid of standing up for themselves and others when they hear racist comments since they are now more comfortable with talking about racism and "feel educated" to explain why racist comments are "wrong". Contrastingly, one student, while recognizing that students can "pick up on" solutions for responding to racism based off of learning about social justice activists, maintained that they hadn't been equipped with tools "just yet". While there are various reasons for the differing opinions, including different interpretations of 'solutions to combat or respond to racism,' there is an underlying understanding that ES provides awareness on issues that can prepare students for when they encounter racism or microaggressions.

Students also felt that outside of the ES classroom, there is a stigma attached to taking ES because other students believe that the course is for the "politically correct", which they don't wish to be labeled as; they believe the course is exclusively for minority students; and they don't want to engage in any social justice-related curriculum. These factors are not only hindering students from enrolling in the course, but they also contribute to attitudes against discussing certain issues such as racism. Thus, in conjunction with bringing awareness to the issues discussed in ES, bringing awareness to ES itself can remove the stigma and open conversations, which Social Psychologist Robert Livingston, a Harvard Kennedy School lecturer in public policy, identifies as being crucial to solving racism (Laidler, 2021). By raising student voices to convey the damage that racism, microaggressions, and biases have had on students through action projects and community involvement, as in School C's school-wide assembly, students can engage in solutions to respond to racism, the stigma associated with taking ES can be reduced, and students can increase their self-empowerment for civic engagement.

Conclusions

Thematic Analysis Conclusions

Based on the thematic analysis of the data collected, there are three conclusions: 1) the positive classroom environment may have contributed to students' overall increased attainment of the outcomes; 2) expanding the ES curriculum provides increased cultural awareness and representation; 3) raising awareness of issues discussed in ES and of ES itself can prepare students to respond to racism, reduce the stigma associated with taking ES, and can increase students' self-empowerment.

Overall Conclusions

Figure 9
Overall Conclusions

Likert Scale Conclusions	Thematic Analysis Conclusions

1. Students' overall attainment of the seven outcomes increased.	1. The positive classroom environment may have contributed to students' overall increased attainment of the outcomes.
2. Thematic units provide more representation for students.	2. Expanding the ES curriculum provides increased cultural awareness and representation.
3. Activism can increase students' self-empowerment for civic engagement.	3. Raising awareness of issues discussed in ES and of ES itself can prepare students to respond to racism, reduce the stigma associated with taking ES, and can increase students' self-empowerment.

Note. Overall, students' attainment of the seven essential outcomes increased as a result of ES, proving the hypothesis to be true. Similar to previous studies that found that students' sense of ethnic-identification, self-empowerment, and cultural awareness increased as a result of curriculum centered on an ethnic group (Halagao, 2004; Hernández et al., 2017; Wiggan & Watson-Vandier, 2017; Vasquez, 2005), ES can increase students' attainment of the seven essential outcomes. Moreover, the areas of growth that are acknowledged are meant to enhance students' attainment of the outcomes, which had already increased.

Fulfillment of the Research Gap

This study examined the extent that students attained the seven essential outcomes for ES. This addressed the gap in the pre-existing literature, as no other study had examined students' attainment of the outcomes in the ESMC. Furthermore, none of the studies that addressed students' attainment of cultural awareness, self-empowerment, and self-understanding, such as the post-assessment from SCUSD, provided specific improvements to the course based on the findings. In adherence to the nature of this study, which is rooted in action research, course enhancements were suggested so that students' attainment of the essential outcomes can continue to increase in X school district.

Implications

The results of this study reflect the beliefs of real students in a real school district. Consequently, the course enhancements suggested for the three schools in X district may have real impact if implemented. Additionally, there are further implications for other school districts, as ES will be a requirement for students in the class of 2030. 1) Since students overwhelmingly reported that their ES class had a positive classroom environment, which can increase their attainment of the outcomes, other districts can employ methods for fostering a positive classroom environment. While all three schools in X school district contain a "Love and Community Unit," large school districts such as San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) and Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) don't include a unit designed for building a community within the class. 2) As thematic units may be more effective than units separated by racial groups at providing students with greater representation, school districts such as LAUSD could consider the effect of switching unit topics. 3) Based on the units listed in their course description, LAUSD and Fremont Unified School District could implement more action-based projects so that students can practice the knowledge they've obtained from the course (*Ethnic Studies course implementation brief*; Fremont Unified School District, (n.d.); Los Angeles Unified School District, n.d.).

Limitations

Since the nature of this study requires participation, the ability to make sound conclusions that are reflective of each class relies on the number of teachers and students who participate. Despite efforts to work with all four ES teachers in X school district, only three were willing to participate, which prevented the facilitation of student surveys at one school. With only three teachers and 15 student participants out of the four teachers and over 54 students taking ES in the district, there are limits to the extent that the findings in this study are true for all students in the X district's ES classes. Due to various levels of participation for each method, (see Figure 3), the suggestions for course enhancement may not be responsive to all students. Additionally, the suggestions could have already been implemented in certain classes, but there simply wasn't any data to confirm. However, the findings are still reflective of the students that did participate, which formulate tentative conclusions.

Moreover, at the time students in School A and B completed the survey, their final units hadn't been covered. As a result, their attainment of the outcomes could change upon the completion of the course. While efforts to minimize this limitation were initiated by asking past ES students to complete the survey, due to confidentiality, teacher changes, and the lack of past ES student participants, it remains as a limitation.

Finally, since ES is a relatively new curriculum in X school district, the curriculum is still being adapted to fit students' needs. Therefore, the findings in this study only reflect the beginnings of the course.

Future Research

The delimitations of this study lend itself to areas of future research. 1) Since this study and studies in the pre-existing research only observed the short-term impacts of curriculum centered on ethnic groups, future research can examine if students' attainment of the outcomes are sustained after completing the course. 2) This study can be replicated after the 2029-30 school year in order to examine students' attainment of the outcomes when it is a required course. Not only will there be more students in the classes, but there will also be more students who didn't choose to take the course, which may influence students' attainment.

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