



Singaporean Perspectives: Attitudes and understanding of DEI in the Workplace

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Abstract

This study explores Singaporeans' attitudes and understanding of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the workplace, focusing on inclusiveness, respect, and belonging. An online survey of 94 participants across industries found that most viewed their organisations as inclusive, with DEI activities significantly enhancing employees' sense of belonging. However, gaps remain in disability inclusion and support for non-native English speakers. While Chinese Singaporeans reported slightly higher levels of respect than Minority Singaporeans (Malay, Indian, and Others), the difference was not statistically significant, suggesting other factors, such as unconscious biases or workplace dynamics, may influence perceptions. These findings support the thesis that Singapore's state-led multicultural education system—by fostering structured, positive intergroup contact from an early age—helps explain the generally inclusive workplace perceptions found, offering a culturally distinct model compared to Western DEI contexts. These findings contribute novel insights to the scarce body of Asian DEI research, informing policymakers and practitioners seeking culturally contextualised strategies for workplace inclusion.

Keywords: Workplace Inclusivity, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), Singapore Workforce, Human Resources Management

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Introduction

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is a concept that has been around for decades. Tessama et al, (2023) noted that DEI had its roots in the United States (US) that go back to the civil rights movement in the 1960s which saw the enactment of several laws including the Age Discrimination Act in 1967, Equal Pay Act in 1963 and the Civil Rights act in 1964 – which prohibits discrimination based on race, biological sex, religion, skin colour, and national origin. By the 1970s, several laws subsequent laws addressed discrimination related to pregnancy, disabilities, and genetic information were passed and corporate America embraced workforce diversity, recognising its role in talent acquisition and innovation. Technological advances in the 1980s emphasised skills over demographic characteristics, creating opportunities for minorities and women. In the 1990s, companies identified a business case for diversity, aligning workforces with consumer bases. The 2010s shifted focus to diversity leadership, with initiatives like Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) fostering inclusive workplaces. Today, we see companies both large and small, that have implemented various initiatives to promote inclusivity and diversity in the workplace to varying levels of success. The situation is made even more challenging with the election of President Donald Trump for this second term. With his executive order, the federal government was no longer requiring its contractors to adhere to DEI requirements, thus leading to companies such as Google abandoning or scaling back their DEI commitments (The Straits Times, 2025). Over the decades, scholars have contributed to the body of literature which has inspired DEI programs and interventions used all over the world, such as the work of Lingras et al (2023)'s 6-step model for developing a DEI Committee and provided examples to aid readers implement each step in their own organisations. As a small nation state nestled in the heart of Southeast Asia, Singapore is renowned for its model of racial harmony in a multicultural society. It does not have the same historical background as the US and thus, may view DEI differently from the latter. Singapore's continued global expansion will require a global workforce with diverse talents, thus underscoring the importance of DEI in companies to attract the best people. Despite the global discourse on DEI, there is a gap in research examining how Singaporeans perceive and understand these concepts in their workplaces, especially compared to the Western world. This study seeks to fill that gap by assessing the level of DEI awareness among Singaporean professionals, exploring their attitudes toward workplace DEI initiatives, and identifying any existing DEI programmes in place. This study will be done through an online survey where the findings will provide essential insights into DEI's current state in Singapore. This study seeks to contribute to a growing body of literature – such as the work of Lim & Chew (2023) on exploring how Singaporeans value workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion, highlighting key priorities and demographic insights to inform inclusive practices that considers DEI within an Asian context, informing future research and policy development to enhance workplace inclusivity.

Literature Review

DEI is essentially made up of 3 separate ideas: Diversity involves real or perceived differences in factors such as race, sex, gender, ethnicity, and ability; Equity looks at fairness regarding opportunities and outcomes; and Inclusion examines the presence and integration of diverse groups especially in spaces where they are underrepresented (Rynarzewska et al., 2024). The

enactment of laws such as the Civil Rights Act brought about a new consciousness among the American public, especially its corporations who now had to ensure that their business practices do not contravene with the law (Tessama et al, 2023). Besides legal compliance, companies also implement DEI policies to improve their business performance. In a study to ascertain the extent to which diversity is related to financial performance of publicly traded companies, Beraki et al (2021) found that there is a positive correlation between diversity and the financial performance of these companies. Other DEI benefits include talent retention, better knowledge and understanding of diverse customer base, and fostering a workplace brimming with creativity and innovation (Tessama et al, 2023). This was echoed by Johnston and Packer (1987), who foresaw even as far back as the 1980s that businesses will need to relook at how they can engage with workers from demographics to remain competitive as traditional sources of qualified labour becoming scarcer. Hence, companies that embrace DEI will be able to adapt to these changing circumstances and become more competitive through their ability to better understand and meet the needs of their customers.

Conversely, others have pointed out problems with DEI initiatives and how they may not work as intended. Konrad (2003) noted that while a business case exists for companies to adopt DEI, DEI is unable to go far enough to address core challenges such as stereotyping and prejudice. She went further to state that DEI initiatives may end up propagating tokenism within the organization. As far as the profitability aspect of the DEI business case is concerned, it was suggested that previously excluded groups will only be hired if it meant that they engage with customers from their own communities (Ely & Thomas, 2001, p. 244-247). This can limit the type of work that these employees get exposed to which can then lead to adverse effects such as attrition and dissatisfaction with their work. Another challenge when implementing DEI policies in companies is the pushback, usually by advantaged groups. Iyer (2022) noted that the pushback by advantaged group as they perceive DEI policies as threats in 3 ways: (1) Resource threat where they lose the advantages and privileges that they have been enjoying thus far; (2) Symbolic threat where they will need to adapt to new practices and culture, and (3) Ingroup morality threat where the advantaged group perceives themselves as 'immoral' for having benefitted from advantages and thus, can become defensive to protect a positive self-identity. All the forementioned challenges may then deter companies from pushing ahead with consequential DEI policies, especially if they are not presently facing legal challenges related to DEI or have a business case for implementing DEI policies.

A key ideology that traditionally underpins DEI is the Multicultural Approach. Its key features include (1) recognising and celebrating differences among cultural, racial, and ethnic groups (2) encouraging individuals to maintain their unique identities, and (3) promotes inclusion by valuing the contributions of historically marginalised groups and fostering environments where diverse identities are acknowledged and respected (Rios & Cohen, 2023). Examples of programmes and initiatives conceived under this approach include cultural celebrations, minority representation in leadership, and diversity training. Multiculturalism is a key feature of Singapore society and thus, the first step to understanding DEI in Singapore workplaces is to understand multiculturalism in the Singapore context.

Singapore and Multiculturalism

Known as a melting pot of cultures, Singapore is a top destination in Asia for high income expatriates due to its reputation as a safe country and overall quality of life (The Straits Times, 2023). They work and live in Singapore and make up around 11% of the 1.77 million non-resident population in Singapore, with the remaining 89% comprised of lower income foreign workers across various sectors (National Population and Talent Department, 2023). Despite the large number of foreigners living and working in Singapore alongside the diversity of Singapore's own population, workplace diversity is not viewed with much importance. A survey conducted by the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) that involved more than 1000 adult Singaporeans and Permanent residents that are either working or actively looking for work found that workplace diversity was ranked 12 out of 15 in a list of important aspects at work, trailing far behind pay adequacy and workplace ethics which were the top 2 in that list (Teo & Chew, 2023).

Discourse and scholarship on workplace diversity in Singapore largely pales in comparison to the US, though like the US, Singapore does have its own history of challenges related to race relations. A key incident that has shaped how Singapore approached race relations is the 1964 race riots that saw the deaths of 22 people and left 454 more injured. According to Low (2001), the State crafted an official narrative or 'national memory' about 1964 riots to justify the implementation of policies such as the national education programme and supporting the need for a national identity, which then birthed the policy of Multiracialism.

Multiracialism was the State's policy aimed at creating racial harmony and promoting an 'Asian Identity' in Singapore, an important endeavour to create a national identity since its expulsion from Malaysia (Ang & Statton, 2018, p. S64) This policy saw the categorization of people into 3 main races (Chinese, Malay, and Indian) where each race was prescribed with its own mother tongue and characteristics (Tan, 2012, p. 28). In the Singapore context, multiracialism is inextricably linked to multiculturalism, defined as a disposition to accord considerations to minority groups based on culture, religion, or ethnicity (Singh, 2015. p. 771). Kuah et al (2020) noted that the State has been taking the lead to promote multiculturalism through the bilingual school system, use of English as the working language, and through social policy such as the ethnic integration policy (EIP). They opined that this approach minimized ethnic enclaves, boosted skilled labour, and promoted social cohesion.

Singapore's approach to multiculturalism is largely state-led, aimed at social cohesion and creating a national identity for the purpose of nation building rather than corporate-driven diversity initiatives.

Current And Planned Protections For Workers

The Singapore Ministry of Manpower (MOM) is responsible for enforcing fair employment practices and addressing workplace grievances such as discrimination. Through collaboration with the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF), the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) was set up in 2006 to promote fair and inclusive employment practices alongside serving as a platform for workers to seek help for workplace discrimination (Tripartite Alliance Limited, 2023). TAFEP saw approximately 370 reported cases annually between 2014 and 2021, of which around 2/3 of these

cases were unsubstantiated due to misunderstandings and the remainder referred to MOM for further investigation (MOM, 2021). In late 2024, Singapore is expected to pass a Workplace Fairness Law (WFL) that will cover areas such as (1) compel employers to implement grievance handling procedures, (2) prohibit retaliation against whistleblowers, and (3) discrimination based on protected characteristics (ie. Age, sex, mental health conditions, marital status, etc) at the recruitment stage (Boo, 2023). This will bring Singapore's legal framework in line with other developed nations that have implemented similar legal protections for its workers much earlier. The Tripartite Committee – comprised of representatives from the government, employers, and workers unions – was formed only as recently as July 2021 to look at ways to strengthen workplace fairness and recommended the WFL (MOM, 2023).

On workplace discrimination, MOM commissioned the Fair Employment Practices survey to track the prevalence of discrimination and procedures for handling such instances in Singapore's workplaces (MOM, 2024). Their latest survey conducted from July 2022 to June 2023 involved 3480 respondents who are representative of Singapore's workforce to ensure generalizability. Key insights from this survey were (1) Downward trend for reports on workplace discrimination – 23.4% in 2023 compared to 42.7% in 2018, (2) higher number of people working for employers with formal procedures to manage workplace discrimination – 63.2% in 2023 compared to 49.6% in 2018, and (3) fewer people sought assistance after experiencing workplace discrimination – 29.5% in 2023 compared to 35.3% in 2022.

It is worth noting that the current literature on workplace DEI in the Asian context – including Singapore – is scarce. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on Western perspectives such as those from the United States, where DEI policies and initiatives have been shaped by its historical, cultural, and political realities. Asian countries such as Singapore, by comparison, face different challenges and opportunities for DEI because of its own unique political, social, and cultural landscape. This contextual difference highlights the need for more research exploring how DEI policies can be effectively adapted to Asian workplaces. Addressing this gap will provide a more globally relevant and locally nuanced understanding of DEI, contributing to practices that better align with the cultural and social dynamics of Asia. It is also noted that the term 'DEI' in Singapore is not used in the same manner as the US. On one hand, Singapore views the various facets of DEI as individual social issues and tackles them individually. Disability, for example, was addressed partly by the establishment of SG Enable to provide information, referral services, and employment support for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), alongside Special Education Schools to provide greater access to bespoke education for PWDs. On the other hand, the term DEI is used broadly in the US and thus results in a holistic approach in addressing the various facets of DEI.

To sum up, the literature review has uncovered key insights that can account for the different DEI approaches between the US and Singapore. When the US passed the Civil rights act in 1964, the nation was already independent, mature democracy for 188 years since its declaration in 1776. Singapore, on the other hand, only became independent in 1965 following race riots that took place a few years before. Hence, the priorities of these 2 nations were different, which would explain their different approaches. The focus of the civil rights movement in the US was to overturn an unjust system of discrimination and segregation against the black community, and this movement was formed at the grassroots by activists like Martin Luther King Jr (Morris, 1999), thus laws were enacted to guarantee protections and equality. As a newly independent nation,

Singapore's priorities were in forging a national identity and culture and thus, focused on its multiracialism policy to ensure peace and stability which would then catalyse its economic development. These efforts were also mainly State-led and alternative voices were discredited.

The Current Study

This study seeks to examine how Singaporeans from various industries perceive their organisations' Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) characteristics, focusing on aspects such as belonging, safety, respect, and fairness in the workplace. It also aims to assess whether being part of the ethnic majority influences employees' perceptions of respect within their organisations. Additionally, the research explores whether the prevalence of DEI practices—such as inclusive leadership, anti-discrimination policies, family-friendly initiatives, and language support—affects Singaporeans' sense of belonging in their organisations. This research also seeks to provide supplementary data for existing research endeavours. By highlighting areas where DEI initiatives may not align fully with employee expectations, the research aims to provide insights that can inform policymaking and enhance DEI strategies in Singapore-based organisations.

The following hypotheses will be tested:

H1: Singaporeans perceive their organizations' DEI practices as inclusive and supportive.

This hypothesis was chosen to evaluate whether Singaporean workplaces reflect the country's commitment to multicultural education and inclusive practices. Initiatives by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) aim to promote equity and fairness in workplaces. By exploring employees' perceptions, this study assesses the effectiveness of these efforts in fostering inclusive and supportive organisational environments.

H2: Chinese Singaporeans are more likely to feel respected by their colleagues

This hypothesis was inspired by the work of Fahmy et al (2023) on racial and ethnic disparities in the perception of respect, listening, and explaining by physicians among skin cancer patients in the United States. In that study, they found significant disparities in how racial and ethnic minority patients perceive respect, listening, and explaining from physicians compared to non-Hispanic White (NHW) patients. In Singapore, where Chinese individuals form the ethnic majority, it is plausible that they may experience higher levels of perceived respect in the workplace, like how NHW patients in the Fahmy et al. study reported more positive experiences with physicians.

H3: Employees who report a higher prevalence of DEI activities feel a stronger sense of belonging in their organisation.

Symes and Price (2024) argued that having DEI principles such as creating a DEI Committee, inclusive programming (ie. Anti-racism lecture series), and Human resources practices (ie. equitable hiring, pronoun disclosure, and diversity training) can foster a sense of belonging to the organization. However, this paper fell short because it did not include any quantitative data collection and analysis to assess the efficacy of their DEI principles in fostering the sense of belonging. Hence, this hypothesis seeks to understand the correlation between the prevalence of DEI activities and sense of belonging in the context of Singapore workplaces.

Methods

Participants

The sample size for this study was 94 participants aged between 21 to 64 years old, ensuring that there were no potentially vulnerable participants that took part in the study. All respondents were also in paid employment and had access to a personal electronic device for completing the survey. The demographic details of the participants are shown in the table below:

Table 1: Profile of Participants

Category	Percentage of Total Respondents
Gender	
Male	71%
Female	27%
Third Gender/Prefer Not to Reveal	2%
Age	
21-34	36%
35-44	56%
45-54	6%
55-64	1%
Race	
Chinese	52%
Malay	31%
Indian	14%
Other Races	3%
Occupation	
Administrative/Support Staff	5%
Management/Executive Staff	49%
Professional/Technical	36%
Others	10%
Industry	
Finance	9%
Education	17%
Healthcare	6%
Technology	16%
Others (Public Service, Building Services, Social Services)	52%
Organisation Operations	
Singapore and Abroad	50%
Singapore Only	50%

Source: Author (2024)

Procedure

Participants were asked to complete an online survey hosted on the Qualtrics Platform. The survey itself was comprised of 19 questions that participants completed within 10 minutes. In curating the survey, a power analysis was carried out to determine the minimum sample size needed to derive a significant result. The significance level was set at 0.05, desired power set at 0.8, and a medium effect size of 0.3 was chosen. Hence, the minimum sample size for this study was determined to be 85 participants. With the large sample size needed, a longer data collection period of 31 days was decided which started on 7th October 2024 and ended on 7th November 2024.

Due to time and resource constraints, convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to get as many qualified survey participants as possible in a short duration. The survey was sent out primarily through social media networks such as Facebook and Whatsapp, where it reached personal and professional networks of the Principal Investigator. Career platforms such as LinkedIn were also used to disseminate the survey as the study was related to workplace matters and could pique the interest of professionals on the platform.

Participants were duly informed of the survey's objectives and how the data collected would be used. They were then asked to indicate that they understood the relevant terms and conditions before they could proceed to complete the survey. This survey was curated to also seek demographic information of the participants but not any personal identifiers. The use of convenience and snowball sampling methods could lead participants to hesitate in providing honest responses, as they may know the Principal Investigator personally, potentially introducing social desirability bias into their answers. Hence, the approach of not collecting personal identifiers ensured not only the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, but also as a motivator for participants to complete the survey with their honest views. All data collected is strictly used for this study.

Measures

This survey was adapted from Morgan-Daniel et al, (2023). Their survey comprised of 17 Likert Scale questions and 2 free response questions where survey respondents could input free texts.

The adapted survey for this study used many of the questions from the original, modifying the word 'library' to 'organisation' as an all-encompassing term to cover employers of different legal structures across various sectors. The free response questions from the original survey were replaced with a multiple option question to identify prevalent DEI-related activities in their organization, which includes work-life balance policies, cultural appreciation events, inclusive leadership, Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) for minority support, training programs on cross-cultural awareness, and inclusive language practices. This question provides insights into the visible DEI practices within participants' organizational environments. Hence, the survey has a total of 19 questions including 7 demographic-related questions.

Inclusiveness and Support: This was measured by questions focused on employees' perceptions of inclusiveness and supportiveness in their workplace. These questions are "I feel this organisation demonstrates a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion," and "I feel this organisation's services and policies are fair and equitable."

Perception of Respect: This was captured in the survey through a question that evaluated how the participants perceive respect in the workplace. The question is “I feel I am treated with respect by my colleagues at this workplace.”

Prevalence of DEI activities: The multiple-choice question presents a range of DEI activities, with participants who select more options indicating a higher prevalence of these activities within their organisations.

Sense of belonging in their organization: The survey question “I feel I belong at this workplace” directly measures employees’ sense of belonging in their organization

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

From the table below, the results are generally positive with most of the mean scores for each question ranging from 1.61 to 3.17, where 1 = strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree on the likert scale. The mean score for the attention check question was excluded from this range. The mean scores for most questions were below 2.5 which indicates stronger agreement with the statements. The sole exception was Q17 which had a mean score of 3.17. However, the question was worded in a negative manner and thus, the higher mean indicates a positive result. The three questions with the lowest mean responses (indicating the most positive responses) were: “I feel welcome to use my organisation’s services and facilities” (1.61); “I feel I belong at my organisation” (1.77); and “I feel I am treated with respect by my colleagues at this organisation” (1.71). Beyond questions 12 and 17, which had higher means for specific reasons, the three questions with the highest mean responses (indicating relatively less positive responses) were: “I am satisfied with my organisation’s services for employees whose native language is not English” (2.33); “I feel my organisation reliably meets the needs of individuals with disabilities” (2.34); and “I feel my organisation is an emotionally safe space” (2.12).

Question 19 asked participants to indicate the DEI related activities, programmes, and initiatives that are prevalent in their respective organisations. The table below illustrates the frequency count for each of the activities:

Table 2: Responses to question on DEI Activities in the workplace

Question	Activity	N
19a	Work-life balance initiatives (e.g., flexible work arrangements)	71
19b	Inclusive leadership (e.g., unbiased behaviours, diverse perspectives)	51
19c	Equal promotion opportunities (age, gender, race, ethnicity)	43
19d	Inclusive recruitment (e.g., blind hiring, no nepotism)	30
19e	Anti-discrimination/harassment policies	49
19f	Employee-led Resource Groups (e.g., minority support networks)	20
19g	Cross-cultural training programs	36
19h	Cultural appreciation events (e.g., CNY, Hari Raya, Deepavali)	60
19i	Inclusive language (e.g., gender-neutral words, preferred pronouns)	21

Source: Author (2024)

Table 3: Survey Results

Question	Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Welcome to use organisation's services/facilities	1.61	0.736
2	Belong at organisation	1.77	0.795
3	Treated with respect by organisation's staff	1.76	0.812
4	Treated with respect by colleagues	1.71	0.798
5	Organisation is an inclusive physical space	1.91	0.935
6	Physically safe place for all	1.80	0.862
7	Emotionally safe space	2.12	1.025
8	Inclusive digital presence (website/social media)	1.91	0.980
9	Services for employees whose native language is not English	2.33	1.010
10	Meets needs of individuals with disabilities	2.34	1.022
11	Welcoming environment for families	1.90	0.905
12	Attention check: "Somewhat Disagree"	3.79	0.670
13	Services/policies are fair and equitable	2.02	0.867
14	Provides support for diverse populations	2.00	0.916
15	Management acts on discrimination incidents promptly	1.89	0.898
16	Welcoming environment for all religions	1.91	0.888
17	Fear of being seen as lacking knowledge or skills	3.17	1.267
18	Strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion	2.00	0.962

Source: Author (2024)

The most prevalent activity was work-life balance initiatives (e.g., flexible work arrangements and job sharing), with 71 participants selecting this option. Cultural appreciation events (such as celebrations for Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, Deepavali) were the second most common, with 60 respondents indicating this activity. Inclusive leadership, characterised by leaders and managers modelling unbiased behaviours and valuing diverse perspectives, was selected by 51 participants. The activity that got the least responses was the Employee Resource Groups with 20 votes and inclusive languages practices where only 21 people indicated that this was prevalent in their organisations.

Certain areas show room for improvement. Support for specific needs, such as disability inclusion, received weaker agreement compared to other areas. Responses to the statement "**My organisation reliably meets the needs of individuals with disabilities**" (Mean = 2.34, SD = 1.022) suggests some participants perceive gaps in this area. Similarly, "**I am satisfied with my organisation's services for employees whose native language is not English**" (Mean = 2.33, SD = 1.010) reflects moderate agreement, highlighting potential areas for development.

For H1, the relevant responses "**I feel this organisation demonstrates a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion,**" (Mean = 2.00, SD = 0.962) and "**I feel this organisation's services and policies are fair and equitable.**" (Mean = 2.02, SD = 0.867) show a low mean score which indicates that the respondents feel fairly supported and included in their respective organisations.

Correlation Analysis

A Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the correlation between the participant's sense of belonging to their organisation and their reported prevalence of DEI activities and initiatives. The data used were the responses to the survey question '**I feel a sense of belonging to the organisation**' and '**DEI_SUM**' – a composite score of DEI activities.

Table 4: Correlation Between Sense of Belonging and DEI Practices

Variable	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
I feel I belong at my organisation	1.000	-	94
DEI_Sum	-0.336**	0.001	91

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis revealed a **moderate negative correlation** ($r=-0.336$), which was found to be **statistically significant** ($p=0.001$, two-tailed).

A lower mean score indicates a stronger agreement with the statement “**I feel I belong at this workplace**”. Hence, the correlation coefficient ($r=-0.336$) indicates that as **the prevalence of DEI activities increases**, participants report a **higher sense of belonging** in their organisation. This result supports the hypothesis that greater DEI activity would foster a stronger sense of belonging for the participants.

The significance level ($p=0.001$) confirms that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance and holds at a confidence level of 99%. However, the r value suggests only a **moderate relationship**, meaning other factors may also play a role in influencing employees’ sense of belonging

Regression Analysis

An Ordinal logistics regression was carried out to ascertain the relationship between ethnicity (Chinese and Minority) and the perception of respect within the organization. A recoding of the ethnic categories – Malay, Indian, and others – was carried out and categorised as ‘Minority’. This independent variable was labelled ‘Merged_Ethnicity’. Similarly, the questions in the survey – Q1 to Q18 - have 5 categories and for ease of analysis, these were recoded into Agree, Neutral, and Disagree. This dependent variable was labelled ‘Merged_Respect’.

The analysis required a reference group for the independent variable and ‘Minority’ was selected to evaluate whether Chinese Singaporeans were likely to feel more respected by their colleagues at their organisations than their minority Singaporean counterparts.

Table 4: Results of Regression Analysis

						95% Confidence Interval	
Parameter	Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	(Lower Bound)	(Upper Bound)
Threshold							
Merged_Respect = 1.00	1.552	0.392	15.683	1	<0.001	0.784	2.320
Merged_Respect = 2.00	1.939	0.425	20.851	1	<0.001	1.107	2.771
Location							
Merged_Ethnicity = 1.00	-0.400	0.583	0.471	1	0.492	-1.542	0.742
Merged_Ethnicity = 2.00	0a	-	-	0	-	-	-

Note: Link function: Logit; This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.

The above Parameter Estimates table shows the predictors and thresholds for differentiating the categories of the dependent variable – Agree, Neutral, Disagree. The first threshold ($B=1.552$, $p<0.001$) indicates the log-odds at which respondents are equally likely to fall into the **Disagree** category or the combined higher categories (**Neutral and Agree**). Similarly, the second threshold

($B=1.939$, $p<0.001$) defines the log-odds at which respondents are equally likely to fall into the **Neutral** category or the highest category (**Agree**). The statistical significance of these thresholds confirms that the recoded respect categories are meaningfully distinct and appropriately separated, supporting the suitability of the model for the data.

The location section analyses the effect of ethnicity (**Merged_Ethnicity**) on respect levels (**Merged_Respect**). The results indicate that ethnicity does not significantly predict perceptions of respect, as the coefficient for Chinese Singaporeans compared to Minority Singaporeans ($B=-0.400$, $p=0.492$) is not statistically significant, though this negative coefficient suggests that being Chinese slightly increases the log-odds of reporting higher respect levels (e.g., Agree or Neutral) compared to Disagree, relative to Minority Singaporeans. The odds ratio ($\text{Exp}(B)=0.670$) indicates that Chinese Singaporeans have approximately 33% higher odds of reporting higher levels of respect than Minority Singaporeans, though the wide confidence interval (-1.542 to 0.742) reflects considerable uncertainty. These findings suggest that in this sample, ethnicity does not reliably explain variations in respect levels within organisations. Further research with larger and more diverse samples is necessary to explore whether subtle or contextual factors related to ethnicity might influence perceptions of respect

Discussion

This study sought to examine Singaporean's perception and understanding of DEI in their workplaces – focused on attitudes, ethnicity, and the impact of DEI practices on organisational outcomes such as belonging. The findings revealed both expected patterns and surprising trends which can building on existing DEI literature related to Singapore.

H1: Perceptions of workplaces as Inclusive and Supportive

The results showed that Singaporeans largely view their organisations as inclusive and supportive, thus validating the hypothesis. The survey participants hail from a variety of industries and yet their experiences regarding inclusivity and support within their workplaces were generally positive. This suggests that Singaporeans had benefitted from the multicultural education that took place while they were in school. For instance, Singaporeans would have had to go through Character and Citizenship syllabus in primary school which included (1) Respect for other races and cultures, (2) Being non-judgmental, appreciative of Singapore's diversity, and valuing others who are different, and (3) Show sensitivity to how friends from other socio-cultural groups think, feel and behave, and put oneself in their shoes (Wu et al, 2023). These aspects of the syllabus overlap with some of the survey's questions related to respect, sense of belonging, and safe spaces. Hence, this would explain the positive scores (<2.0) for those questions. This overlap between multiculturalism and DEI education highlights a baseline understanding of certain DEI principles among the general population which could explain the low number of genuine workplace grievances reported to MOM. The emphasis on race and culture could also explain the relatively higher mean score for questions like "I feel my organisation reliably meets the needs of individuals with disabilities" (2.34). This suggests that multiculturalism education stops short of crucial DEI aspects such as Disability inclusion and possibly not adequately addressed through other educational programmes.

H2: Ethnicity and Perceived Respect

The regression analysis showed that Chinese Singaporeans were more likely to report higher levels of perceived respect than Minority Singaporeans (Malay, Indian, and Others), though the relationship was not statistically significant, evidenced by the wide confidence interval (-1.542 to 0.742) and the high P-value seen in the analysis. This finding suggests that, within this sample, ethnicity alone does not reliably explain variations in how respect is perceived in the workplace and that there are likely other factors besides ethnicity that need to be considered. The efficacy of multicultural education in Singapore which emphasises equality among all races could be a factor in minimising the emphasis on ethnicity when it comes to perceptions of respect. Factors that could also be considered include unconscious biases or workplace dynamics, which may influence individual experiences of respect but were not captured in this study. Revisiting this study with a more robust research design and larger sample size will ensure that various intersectional factors are considered and uncover meaningful insights.

H3: Prevalence of DEI Activities and Sense of Belonging

The statistically significant findings stated that for workplaces with higher prevalence of DEI activities saw a corresponding higher sense of belonging of the participants to the workplace. The results support the hypotheses and prevailing literature that the presence of DEI initiatives promotes a greater sense of belonging to the organisation. However, it is unlikely that the quantity of DEI activities was the sole reason for the higher sense of belonging. Burnett & Aguinis (2024) noted that poorly implemented DEI initiatives can backfire and lead to unintended consequences such as discrimination against underrepresented groups – the very people that were supposed to benefit. This suggests that besides the quantity of DEI initiatives, their quality and impact on the workplace experience of the participants are also factors in improving the sense of belonging to an organisation. While it is the current trend for Gen-Z workers to show a lower sense of belonging by job hopping regularly to secure better remuneration, working conditions, recognition for their work, and achievements (Zahari & Puteh, 2023), these young workers form only a minority of participants. This could indicate that older workers tend to feel greater affinity with their organisations.

The findings above appear to lend weight to Allport (1954)'s Contact Theory, where he argued that different groups will be able to reduce their prejudice for each other when they can attain conditions such as meeting on an equal basis, cooperate on shared goals, and have institutional support. The multicultural school setting in Singapore is where students can fulfil these mentioned conditions through their usual interactions and school work, and be able to carry their reduced prejudice into the working environment.

Implications

The findings serve two purposes: (1) validate the efficacy of current initiatives by the State in promoting multiculturalism in the formal school system that extended into the workplace, and (2) highlights glaring gaps such as disability inclusion and support for non-native English speakers that both the State and employers will need to investigate to achieve DEI in the workplace. Policymakers could leverage these insights to refine upcoming workplace fairness laws, focusing on areas where current DEI efforts fall short such as provisions by employers for workers with

disabilities and those with mental health conditions. Multicultural education could also be reviewed to place greater emphasis on other facets of diversity such as ability, age, and gender so that the lessons learnt could manifest in the workplace when the students eventually enter the workforce. One approach could be to integrate workplace DEI content into existing workforce preparedness programmes by tertiary institutions, which builds on prior multicultural education with DEI knowledge and understanding to help graduates better address DEI challenges in their careers.

Conclusion

This study investigated the perception that Singaporeans had of DEI in their workplaces, looked at the role of ethnicity in shaping respect, and assessed the impact of DEI practices on belonging. Key findings were (1) DEI practices are generally perceived as inclusive but specific areas such as disability inclusion can be improved, (2) ethnicity did not significantly predict perceptions of respect, and (3) a positive relationship between DEI prevalence and belonging was identified. These results contribute to the literature by highlighting the complexities of DEI implementation in Singaporean workplaces and are useful for policymakers and HR professionals in designing programmes and policies that are essential for fostering equitable workplaces.

The Singapore workforce is becoming more diverse with more workers coming from abroad and demographic changes within its own resident population. This study underscores the importance of conducting DEI research within the Singapore context to ensure that programmes and initiatives developed from these insights are effective in promoting workplaces that are truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive for all.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations. The use of convenience and snowball sampling methods may have introduced biases in the participant pool as the initial participants were likely to ask their close acquaintances or people similarly connected to them to complete the survey, thus potentially limiting the generalisability of the findings and likely introduced social desirability bias. This study also did not factor in the organisations that the respondents were working at - such as the size, years in operation, and industry specific challenges - which could impact the efficacy of DEI initiatives within those organisations. Future research could include a qualitative component which could provide richer insights into the experiences of employees and the factors influencing their perceptions of DEI. Areas that future research can expand into include (1) Understanding the overlap between Multicultural Education in Singapore and DEI, (2) Investigate the possible DEI backfire in Singapore workplaces, and (3) Whether ethnicity predicts greater perceptions of respect in the workplace.

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