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Employees' Lived Experience in Multicultural Work Environments in Governmental Organizations: A Phenomenological Study in Kermanshah Province

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Abstract

Multicultural workplaces, due to their ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, create unique opportunities and challenges for both employees and organizations. Examining employees' lived experiences in such environments plays an important role in improving policies, organizational interactions, and productivity. This study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of employees in governmental organizations when facing multicultural work environments in Kermanshah Province. The present research employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The research sample included 14 employees from governmental organizations in Kermanshah Province. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached and were analyzed using Van Manen's method. Six main dimensions and twenty-one components were identified, including (1) individual perception of diversity (understanding ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences, and perception of organizational justice in relation to diversity); (2) intercultural interactions (collaboration among colleagues of different ethnicities and religions, communication challenges such as language barriers, stereotypes, and misunderstandings, cultural learning, and cultural exchange); (3) experience of challenges (discrimination and social exclusion, sense of injustice, value and norm conflicts, and inequality of opportunities); (4) experience of opportunities (synergy and innovation arising from diversity, increased organizational social capital, enhanced empathy, and employee resilience); (5) organizational responses (policies and practices for managing cultural diversity, training and development of intercultural skills, and establishing supportive welfare-social infrastructures); and (6) individual and organizational outcomes (shared identity, increased or decreased job satisfaction, improvement or decline in organizational productivity, and sense of organizational belonging). This study emphasizes the importance of designing supportive policies and programs in governmental organizations to effectively manage multicultural work environments and demonstrates that a balanced interaction between individual perception, experience of challenges, and organizational responses is the key to creating positive lived experiences and higher employee productivity.

Keywords: employees' lived experience, multicultural environment, individual perception, challenges and opportunities, organizational responses, Kermanshah Province



1. Introduction

In today's globalized and interconnected society, multiculturalism has become a defining feature of contemporary organizations, particularly within public institutions where diversity manifests in ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural forms. Multicultural environments offer both opportunities and challenges for organizational actors, shaping employees' interactions, organizational justice perceptions, and work engagement. Understanding how employees experience cultural diversity within public organizations is essential for advancing theories of organizational behavior, public administration, and diversity management. In this context, the lived experiences of employees can provide deep insights into how organizational structures, values, and leadership practices influence inclusion, fairness, and productivity in multicultural settings (Hashemi Toroghi et al., 2024).

The increasing diversification of the global workforce has transformed the management of human resources from a purely administrative function into a strategic imperative. As Lee and Gyamfi (Lee & Gyamfi, 2023) note, multicultural identities at work shape individuals' self-concept and role performance, affecting interpersonal dynamics and psychological well-being. The intersection of culture, identity, and organizational practices thus defines how inclusion or exclusion is constructed within the workplace. Similarly, Holmes et al. (Holmes et al., 2023) emphasize that inclusion in public-sector workplaces requires both theoretical development and practical implementation that prioritize respect, equity, and cultural awareness. In Iran's public sector, where ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity is pronounced, understanding multicultural dynamics becomes particularly important for promoting organizational harmony and social cohesion.

At the macro level, the discourse on multiculturalism has evolved from assimilationist paradigms toward more inclusive frameworks that value diversity as a resource. Doris (Doris, 2024) argues that effective management of diversity within federal cultural administrations, such as those in Canada, depends on the institutionalization of inclusive values, transparent policies, and participatory decision-making processes. Similarly, in the European context, Croitoru et al. (Croitoru et al., 2022) demonstrated that workplace diversity enhances sustainable company development by stimulating creativity and innovation. In contrast, unmanaged diversity can increase intergroup conflict, communication breakdowns, and organizational fragmentation. These findings underscore the importance of developing context-sensitive diversity management frameworks that balance equality with the recognition of difference.

The Iranian organizational context presents a unique case for the study of multiculturalism due to its rich ethnic and cultural composition. Research by Davoudzadehmoghaddam et al. (Davoudzadehmoghaddam et al., 2024) has shown that workforce diversity in Iranian organizations remains underexplored, with limited systematic approaches to integrating diversity management into organizational policy. Similarly, Ghasempour Ganji et al. (Ghasempour Ganji et al., 2023) found that private sector organizations in Iran often rely on informal mechanisms to address cultural differences, resulting in inconsistent outcomes. Public institutions, however, face greater challenges because of their bureaucratic structure and political sensitivity to ethnic representation. These studies collectively highlight the need for phenomenological inquiries that capture the lived experiences of employees rather than relying solely on structural analyses.

From a theoretical standpoint, the concept of multicultural competence emphasizes employees' ability to interact effectively across cultural boundaries. Corlateanu (Corlateanu, 2023) defines cross-cultural competence as a multidimensional construct that combines cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills. In organizational settings, this competence enables individuals to navigate cultural differences and foster collaborative relationships. The same logic applies to military and governmental organizations where hierarchy and discipline coexist with diversity, creating both synergy and potential conflict. Fangda and Riccucci (Fangda & Riccucci, 2022), through a meta-analysis, found that diversity's impact on public organizational performance depends on mediating factors such as leadership inclusivity, team communication, and organizational culture. These mediators transform diversity from a structural condition into an experiential reality.

Globally, multiculturalism has been widely debated as both a social ideal and an organizational challenge. Castaneda and Ramírez (Castaneda & Ramírez, 2021) revealed that cultural values significantly influence knowledge-sharing behaviors in sustainable organizations. In workplaces where employees perceive cultural diversity as enriching rather than threatening, the exchange of knowledge and innovation increases. In contrast, when diversity is associated with inequality or exclusion, it



produces organizational silence and disengagement. This aligns with the findings of Saeedipour (Saeedipour, 2018), who reported that leadership style and organizational trust significantly affect employees' willingness to communicate in public universities in Kermanshah. The implication is clear: without trust and perceived fairness, multiculturalism may inadvertently reinforce organizational silos.

In contexts with ethnic and linguistic plurality, such as Iran, policy-making for diversity management must reflect both national identity and regional specificity. Derakhsha and Hoshangi (Derakhsha & Hoshangi, 2018) and Seyed Amami and Hoshangi (Seyed Amami & Hoshangi, 2016) emphasized that while Iran's legal and political systems recognize ethnic diversity, implementation gaps persist in promoting equitable participation. Policies addressing minority inclusion often remain symbolic, lacking tangible mechanisms for empowerment or representation. Veysian et al. (Veysian et al., 2016) further demonstrated spatial inequalities in cultural indicators across Kermanshah's counties, suggesting that regional disparities compound workplace inequities. These findings underscore the need for institutional frameworks that translate multicultural ideals into measurable organizational practices.

At the micro level, multiculturalism manifests in employees' day-to-day interactions. Greensmith (Greensmith, 2018) examined the limits of white settler multiculturalism in queer organizations, illustrating how formal inclusivity policies can mask deeper cultural hierarchies. This insight is relevant to public organizations in developing countries, where diversity initiatives often focus on representation rather than transformation. Similarly, Adhikari et al. (Adhikari et al., 2017) documented the experiences of employees in Nepalese public organizations, revealing that ethnic and linguistic identities shape perceptions of fairness and workplace belonging. These micro-level dynamics are critical to understanding how multicultural environments influence organizational commitment and identity formation.

The concept of multicultural identity in the workplace also intersects with emotional and psychological outcomes. Hashemi Toroghi et al. (Hashemi Toroghi et al., 2024) introduced an organizational compassion perspective, arguing that equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) initiatives must address emotional well-being alongside structural reform. This approach is particularly relevant in the post-pandemic era, when hybrid work models have altered interpersonal dynamics. By cultivating compassion and empathy, organizations can reduce intergroup tensions and strengthen social capital. Motsamai and Onyenakeya (Motsamai & Onyenakeya, 2025) further emphasize that internal communication plays a mediating role in culturally diverse workplaces; effective communication strategies foster understanding, while miscommunication exacerbates prejudice and stereotyping.

The link between diversity management and organizational performance continues to be a focal point of contemporary scholarship. Croitoru et al. (Croitoru et al., 2022) demonstrated that diversity not only enhances innovation but also contributes to corporate sustainability through inclusive decision-making. Similarly, Fangda and Riccucci (Fangda & Riccucci, 2022) confirmed that public organizations that invest in inclusive leadership and multicultural competence experience improved performance outcomes. In the healthcare sector, Ieng Lai et al. (Ieng Lai et al., 2025) found that nurses working in multicultural systems reported moderate professional benefits, reflecting both the opportunities and strains of cultural diversity. These studies collectively support the notion that diversity, when properly managed, can yield strategic and humanistic benefits for organizations.

From an Iranian perspective, the intersection of multiculturalism and organizational justice is deeply intertwined with broader socio-political contexts. Moradi and Amiri (Moradi & Amiri, 2020) examined the relationship between organizational culture and responsibility among employees in Kermanshah, revealing that strong cultural alignment fosters responsibility and ethical commitment. However, inequalities across cultural lines can undermine these outcomes. Similarly, Saeedipour (Saeedipour, 2018) highlighted that perceptions of trust and fairness within academic institutions directly influence employees' willingness to engage in open dialogue, a factor critical for managing cultural diversity constructively.

At the global level, Zulkarnain et al. (Zulkarnain et al., 2024) observed that multiculturalism in Germany remains challenged by the integration of Muslim minorities, where inclusion policies often clash with sociocultural resistance. Their findings resonate with those of Doris (Doris, 2024), who emphasized that institutional inclusivity depends not only on policy



design but also on the cultural readiness of the organization. The international literature thus points toward a shared consensus: diversity must be managed not through assimilation, but through mutual adaptation and continuous organizational learning.

The Iranian administrative system, particularly in provinces such as Kermanshah, represents a microcosm of multicultural complexity. As noted by Derakhsha and Hoshangi (Derakhsha & Hoshangi, 2018), ethnic diversity in Iran necessitates inclusive governance that transcends tokenism and focuses on equitable participation. Moreover, the spatial inequalities highlighted by Veysian et al. (Veysian et al., 2016) reinforce the need for adaptive policy-making that reflects local realities. Kermanshah, as a province with rich cultural and linguistic diversity, provides a fertile ground for exploring how employees interpret, negotiate, and experience cultural differences in the public sector.

The organizational experience of diversity is not purely structural but phenomenological. As Hashemi Toroghi et al. (Hashemi Toroghi et al., 2024) and Davoudzadehmoghaddam et al. (Davoudzadehmoghaddam et al., 2024) assert, understanding employees' lived experiences is key to designing effective diversity and inclusion strategies. Phenomenological inquiry allows researchers to explore how employees make sense of cultural differences, how they perceive fairness and justice, and how organizational responses influence these perceptions. This aligns with the humanistic perspectives advanced by Lee and Gyamfi (Lee & Gyamfi, 2023), who emphasize that multicultural identities are both fluid and context-dependent, requiring organizations to foster psychological safety and belonging.

Ultimately, the study of employees' lived experiences in multicultural environments contributes to both theoretical development and practical reform in public management. As Croitoru et al. (Croitoru et al., 2022) and Castaneda and Ramírez (Castaneda & Ramírez, 2021) have shown, diversity can be a source of innovation and resilience if managed with empathy and fairness. However, as Greensmith (Greensmith, 2018) cautions, the rhetoric of diversity must be accompanied by structural change to avoid perpetuating symbolic inclusivity. The Iranian context—with its intersection of ethnicity, language, and institutional bureaucracy—offers a compelling landscape for such an exploration.

Therefore, the present study aims to explore and interpret the lived experiences of employees in governmental organizations in Kermanshah Province when confronted with multicultural work environments.

2. Methods and Materials

The research method applied in this study was phenomenology, aiming to understand the lived experiences of employees in governmental organizations when facing multicultural work environments in Kermanshah Province. The study was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the research problem was defined, and the general framework and research domain were selected, followed by the formulation of research questions. A review of the literature and previous related studies was then presented. The second stage of the research involved conducting fieldwork and qualitative exploration of the lived experiences of employees in governmental organizations regarding multicultural work environments in Kermanshah Province.

Initially, an interview protocol was designed. After developing the protocol, interviews were conducted with the participants. The interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The statistical population of this research consisted of experts from governmental organizations in Kermanshah Province who were selected purposefully. The inclusion criteria for participants were: at least 10 years of service in a governmental organization, experience of interaction within culturally diverse settings, ability to articulate lived experiences, and a minimum educational level of a master's degree, ensuring the participants' ability to comprehend complex concepts and provide personal analyses of their experiences to reveal different dimensions of the lived phenomenon.

The collected data from the interviews were coded and analyzed. To validate the extracted categories, member checking (confirmation by participants) and prolonged engagement with the research subject were used. Since the present study employed a qualitative approach using Van Manen's interpretive phenomenology, the six-step method of Van Manen was applied to analyze the data as follows:

1. Turning to the nature of the lived experience: The researcher began by posing the main research question and focusing on the phenomenon of employees' lived experiences in multicultural environments, establishing a deep understanding of the meaning of these experiences.



2. Investigating experience as it is lived: Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, data were collected to describe participants' experiences as they occurred in real life.
3. Reflecting on essential themes of the experience: The data were reviewed several times and coded to identify the core and shared themes of lived experiences.
4. Describing the phenomenon through writing and rewriting: The extracted themes were rewritten in a phenomenological narrative to form a rich and descriptive portrayal of employees' lived experiences.
5. Maintaining a strong relation to the phenomenon: Throughout the analytical process, the researcher preserved a continuous connection with the phenomenon under study and avoided digressions toward unrelated interpretations.
6. Balancing the parts and the whole: In the final step, the complete text was reviewed multiple times to ensure coherence and balance between detailed themes and the overall essence of the experience.

The number of participants in this study was 14 employees from governmental organizations in Kermanshah Province. The demographic and professional characteristics of each participant are presented in the table below:

Table 1. Demographic and Professional Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Field of Study	Education Level	Years of Service	Organizational Position
P1	Female	Sociology	Master's	—	Middle Manager
P2	Male	Educational Sciences	Ph.D.	—	Senior Manager
P3	Female	Social Sciences	Master's	—	Senior Expert
P4	Male	Human Resource Management	Master's	—	Head of Specialized Unit
P5	Male	Educational Management	Ph.D.	—	Consultant
P6	Female	Psychology	Master's	—	Middle Manager
P7	Male	Public Policy	Ph.D.	—	Senior Manager
P8	Female	Political Science	Master's	—	Senior Expert
P9	Male	Business Management	Master's	—	Middle Manager
P10	Male	Public Administration	Ph.D.	—	Senior Expert
P11	Female	Sociology	Ph.D.	—	Senior Manager
P12	Male	Industrial Management	Master's	—	Middle Manager
P13	Male	Political Science	Master's	—	Consultant
P14	Male	Public Administration	Ph.D.	—	Senior Manager

3. Findings and Results

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed. In this study, the interviews were coded, and the research question was addressed.

Based on the findings derived from the interview analysis, 25 initial themes were extracted from 14 interviews. Subsequently, these initial themes were compared and refined based on similarities and differences, which ultimately resulted in 6 dimensions and 21 components.

Table 2. Summary of Interviews

Interview Excerpt	Conceptual Codes
"Our workplace is composed of employees from different ethnicities and languages. I am Kurdish, my colleague is Turkish, another is Lur, and several others are from different cities. Sometimes, these linguistic differences lead to misunderstandings, especially during meetings or teamwork. However, they have also broadened my perspective toward other cultures. I've learned to listen respectfully and avoid making quick judgments."	Ethnic diversity, cultural learning, mutual tolerance
"What fascinates me is that every ethnic group has its own unique communication and even humor style. By becoming familiar with my colleagues' cultures, I've learned to have a deeper understanding of people's behaviors. This has made it easier to interact with clients too, as they also come from various ethnic backgrounds."	Cultural exchange, intercultural learning, cultural diversity management
"I have worked with people from different backgrounds for many years. I've learned to adapt myself to the environment. Sometimes it's important to understand value conflicts, and sometimes a simple joke can break the ice. In my opinion, individual adaptability is much more important than expecting others to change."	Cultural exchange, value conflicts, tolerance for differences
"Unfortunately, certain stereotypes still exist in the workplace, such as the belief that a specific ethnic group is always late or that a particular accent indicates a lack of education. These prejudices cause tension between departments and prevent trust from forming. When employees feel judged, their motivation to participate decreases."	Cultural stereotypes and prejudices
"The most important factor, in my opinion, is strengthening the skill of empathy. When we learn to see things from the perspective of a colleague from a different culture, many tensions are reduced. Holding cultural orientation workshops, intercultural dialogue sessions, and team-building activities can be very helpful."	Strengthening empathy in multicultural environments



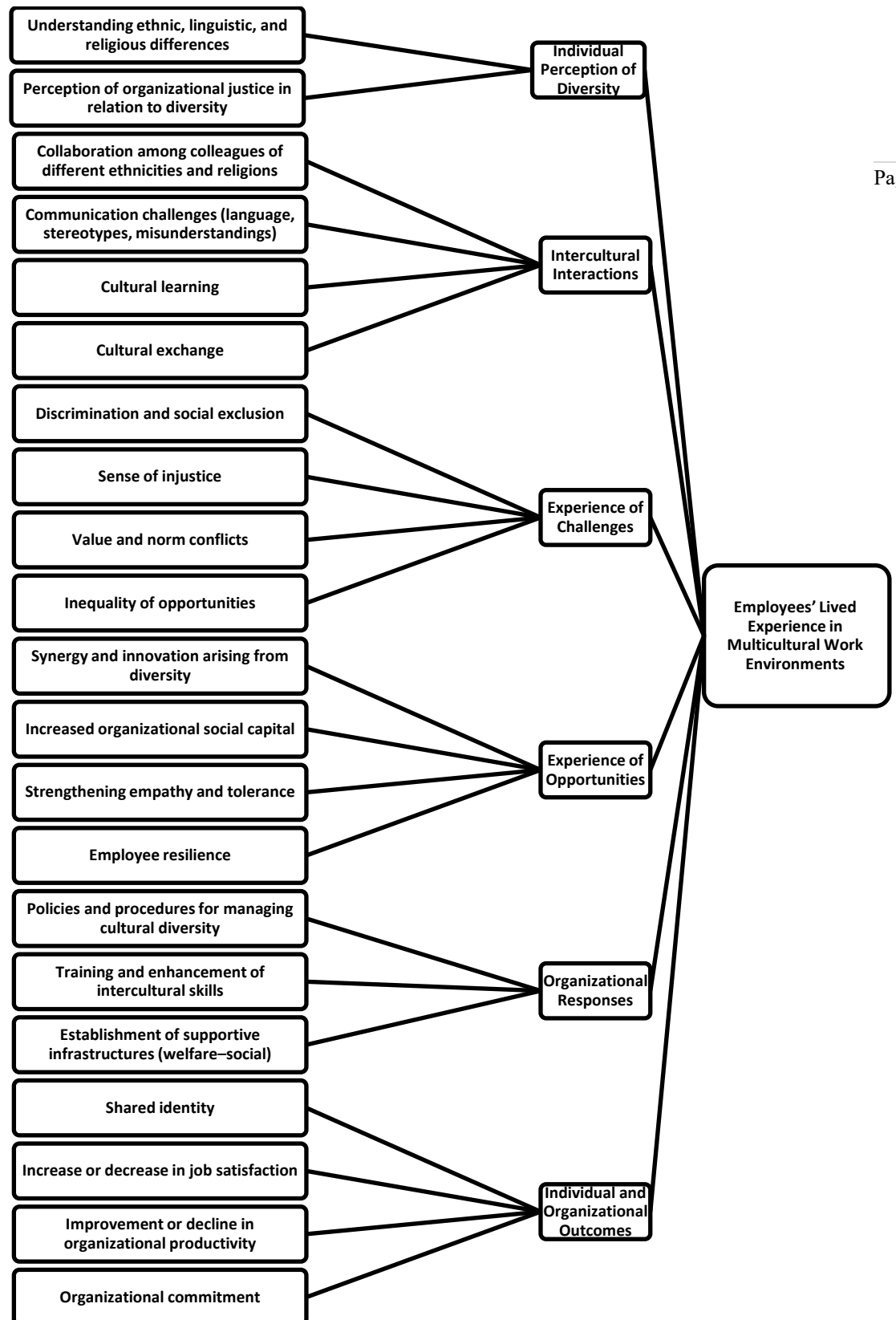


Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Employees' Lived Experience in Multicultural Work Environments

Individual Perception of Diversity

Individual perception of diversity refers to how each person perceives, interprets, and reacts to cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences among their colleagues in the workplace. This perception shapes employees' lived experiences and

directly affects both individual and organizational outcomes. Employees who view cultural diversity as an opportunity for learning and positive interaction demonstrate higher motivation, resilience, and job satisfaction, as well as more constructive interpersonal relationships. In contrast, a negative perception of diversity—such as viewing differences as obstacles or threats—can lead to conflict, reduced organizational commitment, and heightened stress.

Individual perception of diversity is influenced by various factors, including values, beliefs, past experiences, and intercultural training. Organizations can strengthen positive perceptions of diversity and mitigate negative outcomes of cultural misunderstandings by creating supportive environments, offering intercultural training, and promoting a culture of mutual respect.

Experience of Challenges

The experience of challenges constitutes a fundamental part of employees' lived experiences in multicultural environments and involves confronting barriers and problems arising from ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural differences. These challenges can have significant individual and organizational consequences and affect the quality of interactions and employee performance. The most important aspects of experiencing challenges include:

Discrimination and social exclusion: Employees who face discrimination or exclusion because of their cultural or ethnic background may feel marginalized and unaccepted. This decreases organizational commitment, motivation, and active participation in team activities.

Perceived injustice: Inequalities in access to opportunities, resources, career advancement, or rewards create a tangible sense of injustice, reducing job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Value and norm conflicts: Differences in beliefs, values, and cultural norms among employees may lead to misunderstandings, disagreements, and conflicts in decision-making and daily interactions, lowering teamwork quality.

Inequality of opportunities: Unequal access to training, resources, or major projects may diminish motivation, increase stress, and create employee dissatisfaction.

Experience of Opportunities

The experience of opportunities highlights the positive aspects of cultural diversity in the workplace and the advantages employees gain through interactions with colleagues from various cultural backgrounds. These opportunities enhance both individual development and organizational performance while fostering intercultural engagement. The key dimensions of experiencing opportunities include:

Learning and personal development: Interaction with colleagues of different cultural backgrounds provides a context for learning new skills, diverse perspectives, and innovative solutions, thereby enhancing employees' problem-solving abilities, creativity, and adaptability.

Enhanced social and communication competencies: Exposure to a multicultural environment strengthens communication skills, empathy, and understanding of differences, thereby increasing teamwork capacity and constructive collaboration among employees.

Increased motivation and job satisfaction: Employees who regard cultural diversity as an opportunity for growth and learning show higher motivation, greater job satisfaction, and stronger organizational commitment.

Innovation and organizational productivity: Cultural diversity fosters the use of multiple perspectives and experiences, enhancing innovation, creativity, and productivity, and can create a competitive advantage for the organization.

Organizational Responses

Organizational responses refer to the set of actions, policies, and mechanisms that organizations adopt to manage cultural diversity and minimize the negative consequences of ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences in the workplace. These responses play a crucial role in shaping employees' lived experiences and improving both individual and organizational outcomes.

Key dimensions of organizational responses include developing clear and equitable **human resource policies** in recruitment, promotion, training, and compensation to reduce discrimination and cultural misunderstandings while fostering justice and organizational belonging.

Moreover, **intercultural education programs** and **capacity-building for managers and employees** enhance the skills necessary for constructive interaction across cultural differences, thereby strengthening individual and organizational resilience.



Additionally, organizations can provide **psychological and social support mechanisms**, such as access to counseling services, peer support networks, and welfare programs, to help employees cope with challenges arising from cultural diversity and to strengthen organizational solidarity.

Finally, promoting an **inclusive and participatory organizational culture** that reinforces values of mutual respect, empathy, and cooperation creates conditions for constructive interaction and enables organizations to leverage the cultural capacities of their employees.

Individual and Organizational Outcomes

The outcomes resulting from employees' lived experiences in multicultural environments can be analyzed at two levels: individual and organizational.

At the individual level, exposure to cultural diversity influences job satisfaction, organizational commitment, professional identity, resilience, work motivation, and perceptions of fairness and psychological safety. Employees who feel accepted and valued in their workplace demonstrate stronger organizational belonging and greater motivation to participate actively in organizational activities. Furthermore, intercultural training and organizational support can enhance problem-solving, flexibility, and personal resilience, while preventing stress and perceptions of discrimination.

At the organizational level, successful management of cultural diversity leads to increased productivity, enhanced innovation, strengthened social capital and employee solidarity, and improved organizational justice. Interaction among employees from diverse cultural backgrounds expands supportive networks and organizational cohesion, creating a fair and participatory environment that elevates both individual satisfaction and organizational efficiency.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study revealed that employees working in governmental organizations in Kermanshah Province experience multiculturalism as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing six core dimensions: individual perception of diversity, intercultural interactions, experiences of challenges, experiences of opportunities, organizational responses, and individual and organizational outcomes. These dimensions collectively illustrate how cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity shapes the day-to-day lived experiences of employees in public institutions. The qualitative analysis indicated that employees' perceptions of diversity significantly influence their motivation, job satisfaction, and sense of organizational belonging. When employees view diversity as an opportunity for growth and collaboration rather than as a source of conflict or inequality, they demonstrate greater adaptability, empathy, and resilience—findings that are consistent with international and domestic literature on workforce diversity (Davoudzadehmoghaddam et al., 2024; Hashemi Toroghi et al., 2024; Lee & Gyamfi, 2023).

The study found that employees' *individual perception of diversity* plays a central role in mediating their experiences within multicultural workplaces. Those who viewed diversity positively reported higher satisfaction and interpersonal effectiveness, while those with negative perceptions were more likely to report feelings of alienation or injustice. This is in line with the findings of Holmes et al. (Holmes et al., 2023), who emphasized that inclusion in public-sector organizations depends on employees' sense of fairness and recognition. Similarly, Lee and Gyamfi (Lee & Gyamfi, 2023) highlighted that employees who embrace multicultural identities exhibit stronger emotional stability and commitment. In Iran's context, where ethnic heterogeneity is embedded in administrative structures, such perceptions can influence the very fabric of organizational culture. As Moradi and Amiri (Moradi & Amiri, 2020) demonstrated, a cohesive organizational culture enhances responsibility and commitment, yet unequal treatment across ethnic or linguistic lines can erode trust and participation. Therefore, promoting inclusive mindsets among employees through training and dialogue is vital for fostering organizational harmony.

The dimension of *intercultural interactions* revealed that employees encounter both opportunities and barriers in their day-to-day communication with colleagues from diverse backgrounds. Many participants reported initial difficulties related to language barriers, stereotypes, and misunderstanding of social cues. However, with sustained interaction, they developed intercultural communication skills and empathy, leading to improved collaboration. This finding supports the work of Croitoru et al. (Croitoru et al., 2022), who noted that effective management of diversity promotes team synergy, innovation, and sustainable organizational development. Similarly, Motsamai and Onyenakeya (Motsamai & Onyenakeya, 2025)



emphasized that effective internal communication mitigates cultural misunderstanding and builds mutual trust. The current study also aligns with the insights of Ghasempour Ganji et al. (Ghasempour Ganji et al., 2023), who found that Iranian organizations that promote intercultural dialogue tend to achieve higher collaboration and reduced workplace tension. This underscores the importance of developing communication policies that address both linguistic and cultural diversity as strategic priorities.

Page | 9 Participants' *experience of challenges*—including discrimination, social exclusion, perceived injustice, and value conflicts—highlights the persistence of structural and cultural barriers in Iranian public organizations. These challenges mirror the findings of Fangda and Riccucci (Fangda & Riccucci, 2022), who observed that unmanaged diversity often produces tension and reduced performance in public institutions. The sense of injustice voiced by some employees in this study corresponds with prior findings by Derakhsha and Hoshangi (Derakhsha & Hoshangi, 2018), who reported that ethnic diversity policies in Iran often remain under-implemented, leading to symbolic inclusion without substantive equality. Similarly, Seyed Amami and Hoshangi (Seyed Amami & Hoshangi, 2016) argued that policy-making for ethnic diversity in Iran is limited by insufficient institutional mechanisms for fair representation. These parallels suggest that while diversity is officially recognized, operational frameworks for its management are still evolving. The participants' reflections on stereotypes and exclusion reaffirm the concerns raised by Greensmith (Greensmith, 2018), who discussed how structural inequalities persist beneath the surface of formal inclusivity narratives. Thus, Iranian public institutions must go beyond rhetorical commitments and establish enforceable anti-discrimination mechanisms to ensure equality in practice.

Conversely, the *experience of opportunities* dimension revealed significant positive outcomes associated with multiculturalism, such as cultural learning, innovation, empathy, and increased social capital. Employees reported that interactions with colleagues from diverse backgrounds expanded their cognitive flexibility and emotional intelligence. These findings support those of Castaneda and Ramírez (Castaneda & Ramírez, 2021), who found that cultural diversity fosters knowledge sharing and innovation in sustainable organizations. Similarly, Hashemi Toroghi et al. (Hashemi Toroghi et al., 2024) noted that diversity initiatives rooted in compassion and equality enhance employees' sense of belonging and collaborative engagement. In line with Corlateanu (Corlateanu, 2023), cross-cultural competence emerges as a critical resource in managing differences constructively. Moreover, as Ieng Lai et al. (Ieng Lai et al., 2025) demonstrated in the healthcare sector, multicultural work settings can yield moderate professional and social benefits when inclusivity and support structures are present. Collectively, these results emphasize that diversity, when framed as an opportunity for growth and learning, contributes to organizational innovation, adaptability, and long-term sustainability.

The *organizational responses* dimension underscored that institutions with well-defined diversity management policies and inclusive leadership practices generate more positive employee experiences. Participants valued policies that explicitly addressed fairness, intercultural training, and welfare support systems. This aligns with Doris (Doris, 2024), who highlighted the effectiveness of inclusive policies in federal cultural administrations in promoting equality and transparency. Likewise, Croitoru et al. (Croitoru et al., 2022) observed that organizations with structured diversity strategies enjoy enhanced sustainability and stakeholder trust. However, several participants in the present study indicated that Iranian governmental organizations lack consistent diversity frameworks, and initiatives often depend on individual managers' discretion. This gap reflects the systemic weaknesses identified by Davoudzadehmoghaddam et al. (Davoudzadehmoghaddam et al., 2024), who noted the absence of standardized diversity policies in Iranian organizations. By establishing comprehensive frameworks for intercultural competence and equitable human resource practices, organizations can address these inconsistencies and enhance employee trust and engagement.

The *individual and organizational outcomes* dimension integrates the cumulative effects of the preceding components, demonstrating that employees' perceptions, interactions, and organizational experiences converge to influence job satisfaction, productivity, and commitment. Positive perceptions of diversity were associated with higher levels of empathy, belonging, and resilience, while negative perceptions correlated with stress and disengagement. These findings are consistent with global evidence suggesting that inclusive organizational climates foster psychological safety and commitment (Holmes et al., 2023; Lee & Gyamfi, 2023). Similarly, Fangda and Riccucci (Fangda & Riccucci, 2022) found that inclusive public organizations

exhibit improved performance outcomes due to stronger interpersonal trust and collaboration. On the domestic front, Saeedipour (Saeedipour, 2018) and Moradi and Amiri (Moradi & Amiri, 2020) confirmed that organizational culture and leadership play pivotal roles in shaping responsibility and silence behaviors in Kermanshah-based institutions. The current study reinforces these conclusions, demonstrating that employees' experiences of fairness and respect translate directly into enhanced organizational productivity and innovation.

Another critical aspect observed was the role of empathy and emotional intelligence in bridging cultural divides. Participants noted that empathy training, interdepartmental collaboration, and shared cultural events reduced prejudice and enhanced mutual understanding. This resonates with Hashemi Toroghi et al. (Hashemi Toroghi et al., 2024), who proposed that organizational compassion serves as a strategic mechanism for equality, diversity, and inclusion. Additionally, Zulkarnain et al. (Zulkarnain et al., 2024) observed similar dynamics in the context of Muslim minorities in Germany, where inclusion and empathy were key to reducing social tension. Such parallels reinforce the universality of intercultural sensitivity as a cornerstone of inclusive governance. In this regard, Veysian et al. (Veysian et al., 2016) highlighted that spatial and cultural inequalities can undermine collective cohesion, a pattern also evident in participants' accounts of unequal access to promotion and training opportunities. Therefore, institutionalizing empathy within management training and policy design is essential to achieving equitable and cohesive workplaces.

The findings also revealed that while employees appreciate diversity, they perceive structural inequalities as persistent barriers to inclusion. Several participants mentioned that certain ethnic groups continue to face underrepresentation in senior administrative roles, mirroring observations in other national and international studies (Derakhsha & Hoshangi, 2018; Doris, 2024; Seyed Amami & Hoshangi, 2016). This aligns with global evidence from public organizations that institutional biases, whether implicit or explicit, hinder merit-based advancement and equity (Fangda & Riccucci, 2022; Holmes et al., 2023). Addressing these disparities requires both policy reform and cultural change. Corlateanu (Corlateanu, 2023) and Castaneda and Ramírez (Castaneda & Ramírez, 2021) argue that sustainable inclusivity must involve participatory leadership models that empower diverse employees to influence decision-making processes. Iranian public organizations could benefit from integrating such participatory mechanisms to promote inclusivity and ensure equitable representation across ethnic and linguistic groups.

Furthermore, this study's results contribute to the growing recognition that multiculturalism is not a static condition but an evolving organizational process. As employees continually engage with diversity, they co-construct shared norms and hybrid cultural practices that redefine organizational identity. This dynamic view of culture, supported by Lee and Gyamfi (Lee & Gyamfi, 2023), reflects the fluid and relational nature of multicultural identities at work. Fangda and Riccucci (Fangda & Riccucci, 2022) similarly argue that diversity's benefits materialize through adaptive learning rather than mere demographic representation. The lived experiences of employees in Kermanshah illustrate this evolution, as participants reported that long-term exposure to cultural variety enhanced their empathy, creativity, and problem-solving skills—key elements for resilience in complex administrative environments.

Taken together, these findings provide a comprehensive picture of how employees in multicultural governmental settings navigate diversity. The evidence from this study not only confirms existing theories but also contextualizes them within the Iranian public sector, where sociocultural pluralism intersects with bureaucratic rigidity. It supports the broader argument that effective diversity management requires an integration of individual-level competencies, interpersonal interactions, and institutional mechanisms (Davoudzadehmoghaddam et al., 2024; Ghasempour Ganji et al., 2023; Hashemi Toroghi et al., 2024). Ultimately, fostering inclusive organizational cultures is not merely a normative goal but a strategic necessity for enhancing performance, legitimacy, and social cohesion in public institutions.

Despite its valuable insights, this study has several limitations. First, the qualitative and phenomenological nature of the research, while providing depth, restricts the generalizability of findings beyond the specific context of governmental organizations in Kermanshah Province. The study's reliance on self-reported experiences may also introduce subjective bias, as participants' accounts could be influenced by social desirability or personal interpretation. Additionally, the sample size of fourteen participants, although adequate for phenomenological inquiry, may not capture the full spectrum of multicultural



experiences across different departments or administrative levels. Another limitation concerns the regional focus—Kermanshah's distinctive ethnic composition may not reflect the dynamics of other Iranian provinces or international contexts. Finally, while the study identifies the key dimensions of multicultural experience, it does not quantitatively measure the relationships among these variables, limiting its predictive and comparative potential.

Future studies should expand upon these findings through mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to explore causal relationships between diversity perceptions, organizational justice, and performance outcomes. Quantitative surveys could be used to validate and generalize the six identified dimensions across a broader population of public-sector employees nationwide. Comparative analyses between public and private organizations may also reveal contextual differences in how multiculturalism is managed within bureaucratic versus market-oriented systems. Additionally, future research could examine the mediating role of leadership style, emotional intelligence, or digital communication in shaping multicultural experiences. Expanding cross-national studies between Iran and other multicultural societies, such as Canada or Malaysia, may also deepen understanding of how governance models affect diversity outcomes. Finally, incorporating intersectional perspectives—considering gender, age, or professional hierarchy—could provide a richer understanding of how multiple identity dimensions interact within multicultural organizational settings.

Practically, organizations should institutionalize inclusive policies and intercultural training as part of human resource management strategies. Managers must receive regular training on cultural intelligence, empathy, and communication to better handle diversity-related conflicts. Establishing mentorship programs that pair employees from different cultural backgrounds could also enhance knowledge sharing and solidarity. Moreover, organizations should create formal feedback channels and support systems—such as diversity councils, counseling units, and welfare programs—to address employees' concerns proactively. Performance evaluation systems should reward collaboration and inclusivity rather than mere compliance. Lastly, promoting transparent and equitable recruitment and promotion policies will foster trust and reduce perceptions of discrimination. These measures, collectively, can transform multicultural workplaces into cohesive, innovative, and resilient organizational communities.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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