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Research Article

Promoting Diversity And Inclusion In Higher Education: Strategies And Best Practices

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ARTICLE INFO | **ABSTRACT**

Higher education institutions acknowledge the importance of embracing diversity in all forms and fostering an inclusive environment where every community member is respected and valued. Online learning environments offer flexibility that is particularly beneficial for students who manage work, home responsibilities, or disabilities. However, some teachers, administrators, and educational staff who prefer traditional methods may resist these new strategies for inclusivity. Engaging local communities and utilizing technological tools like virtual desktop environments (VDI), which are supported by cloud computing services, can significantly enhance access to higher education for remote or off-campus learners. To promote diversity and inclusion effectively, higher education must implement a variety of strategies and best practices, ensuring a more equitable and supportive learning environment for all students. This paper examines the importance of diversity and inclusive practices in higher education institutions. The literature review here analyses the challenges in promoting diversity, successful strategies and technologies for inclusion enhancement, and the results seen from those initiatives. The research methodology consists of a series of surveys among educational stakeholders that are used to evaluate the existing diversity and inclusion programmes and their results. The obtained outcomes reveal a connection between enhancement programmes and education quality. The positive worth of the above factors also indicates the importance of engaging local communities to enhance the quality of Higher Education

Key words: Interlinked society, Diversity, Inclusion, Higher education, Equity, Learning environments

Introduction

In today's globalized and interlinked society, promoting diversity and inclusion in college and universities has become an increasingly important problem. As per the view of Bong & Chen (2024), institutions of higher learning understand the significance of accepting diversity in all of its forms and fostering an inclusive culture where everybody in the community feels valued, and respected. As per recommendation of Fuentes, Zelaya, & Madsen (2021), particular demographics have traditionally dominated higher education, frequently excluding marginalized populations like people of colour, persons with disabilities, LGBTQ+ people, and those from lower socioeconomic strata. Even though diversity and inclusion have grown more and more important in colleges and universities, many institutions still struggle tremendously to effectively promote these ideas.
Despite the positivity for the diversity in the inclusion education, there are some drawbacks of the factors. As per Salmi & D'Addio (2021), the recruitment, retention, and encouragement of communities that are underrepresented continue despite attempts to improve representation and establish inclusive cultures. The most common issue is the lack of proper academic experience of the trainer and the faculty of Higher Education Institutions.

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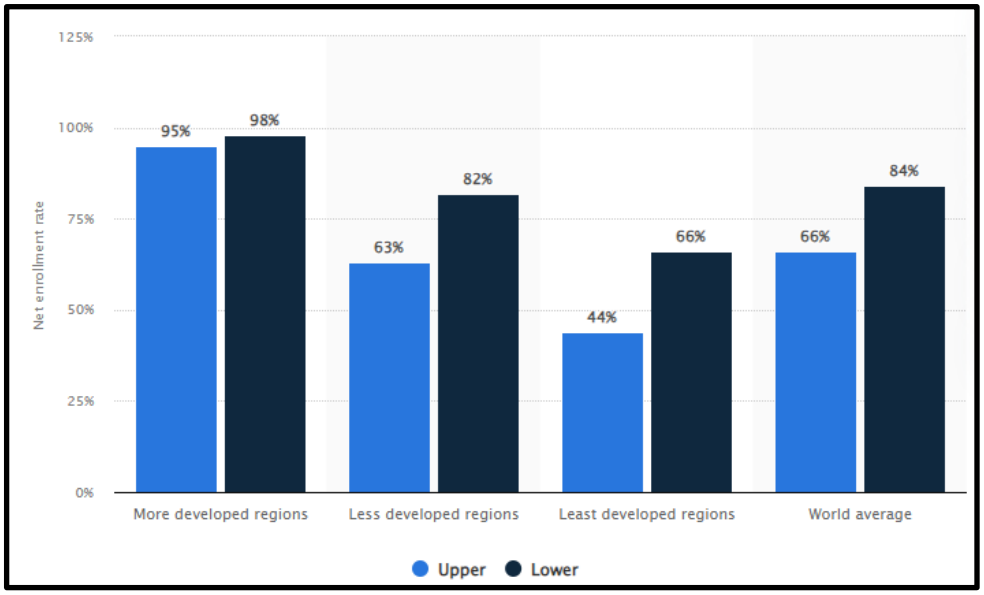

Figure 1: Enrollment rate of diverse people in the education sectors worldwide
(Source: Statista, 2024)

The above statistical image indicates the total enrollment of students from upper and lower categories in the year 2020. It can be said that in the world the percentage of students at the lower level is 84% and which is for the upper level is 66%.

Research aim and objectives

The purpose of the study is to investigate effective approaches and industry standards for advancing diversity and equality in educational institutions.
The objectives of the study are
RO1: To evaluate the inclusion and diversity programmes currently implemented in schools
RO2: To examine the potential barriers and challenges in promoting inclusion and diversity in the higher education sector
RO3: To access the management and leadership processes influencing efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions
RO4: To determine the methods and technologies that support the inclusion efforts in the higher education sector

Research questions

The arising questions are:
RQ1: What inclusion and diversity programmes are currently implemented in schools?
RQ2: What are the potential barriers and challenges to promoting inclusion and diversity in the higher education sector?
RQ3: What management and leadership processes influence efforts to promote diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions?
RQ4: What methods and technologies support inclusion efforts in the higher education sector?

Literature review

Inclusion and diversity programmes that are being run by higher education sectors

In recent years, there has emerged a greater understanding of the positive effects of inclusiveness and diversity in higher education, both in terms of strengthening the educational process and setting pupils up for success (DeMatthews, Serafini & Watson, 2021). As per UNESCO implementation of inclusion and diversity in the education sector decrease the depression level of the students. 89% of educational instructors believe that diversity in the education sector increases the happiness of students (Rosenkranz et al., 2021). The continuous effectiveness of the researcher in implementing diversity in the educational sector leads to the implementation of creative thinking and innovativeness among the students. NEP recommends implementing diversity and equal participation of students with special needs across the higher education sector (Devi, 2022).

Figure 2: Model of school inclusion
(Source: Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021)

Figure 2: Model of school inclusion
(Source: Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021)
From the figure of the school inclusion model in the education sector determines the development of inclusion Strategies and the implementation of school capacity.

Challenges to Promote Inclusion and Diversity in the Higher Education Sectors

One of the most common challenges for achieving diverse and inclusive education is the scarcity of inclusive schools for children with special needs. Resistance to new strategies for inclusiveness and diversity may come from stakeholders such as teachers, leaders, and educational staff who are accustomed to current procedures. McGee (2020) highlighted that financial constraints in higher education institutions limit their ability to devote sufficient resources to diversity initiatives. This financial instability may impede inclusive projects, particularly when it comes to hiring multicultural instructional staff (Aleixo, Azeiteiro & Leal, 2020). Additionally, Pacansky et al. (2020) suggest that implicit biases and stereotypical mindsets within the educational sector can be a barrier to creating dynamic classrooms and maintaining a positive environment.

Technologies and strategies that support inclusion in the higher education sector

The inclusion of new and innovative technology in the higher education process helps to encourage as they work to create environments that reflect the rich tapestry of human perspectives and experiences. As per the view of Jones et al., (2021), students with a variety of learning requests, such as those who must balance obligations at work and home or disability, can benefit from flexibility available through online learning platforms and technology for education.

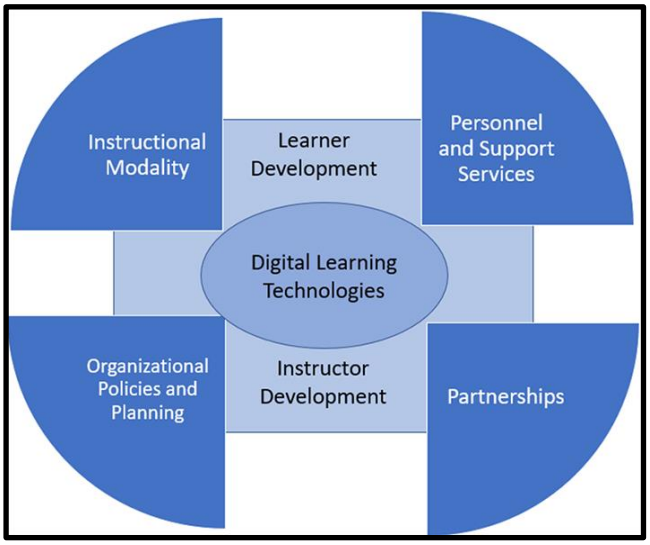

Figure 3: Digital technologies in higher education
(Source: Prakash et al., 2023)

In the above figure digital technology in higher education has been shown. It can be said that the complementation of digital technology developed the instructions and the learner through instructional

modality and improvement of partnership (Sanger, 2020). The use of effective Technology like "Augmented reality or AR" and "Virtual reality or VR" in the educational sector quality learning style and provides the student with minimal opportunities to explore their Idea and thoughts.

Research Gap

Research is needed to determine the long-term impact of diversity and inclusion projects, in particular how to maintain them over time, even if many of them focused on making improvements right away. The use of the primary quantitative method is the reason for less data about the current diversity in the higher education sectors (Bong & Chen, 2024). There is a study deficit concerning ways to foster inclusion as well as diversity among teachers and staff because more than half of the attention has been on student diversity.

Methodology

"Survey investigation" is one of the main quantitative techniques frequently employed in investigations pertaining to increasing diversity and inclusion in higher education. Primary quantitative data collection has been used in the research for collecting responses directly from the primary sources related to the impact of diversity and inclusion initiatives in the higher education sector. The application of the primary method of data collection in a study is the authenticity and reliability of the outcomes by providing direct thoughts of the people related to the background (Colomer et al., 2020). A questionnaire with 13 questions (through google form) has been used related to the topic to collect reviews from 65 respondents (across the country) to find an effective strategy for implementing diversity in the education sector. All of the questions that are used in the questionnaire are designed to explore various aspects of the importance and challenges associated with the diversity in the higher education. Use of more questions can be effective for covering a boarder range of factors for the better understanding of the prospective of the respondents about the topic. The SPSS software is applied in the research to execute the reliability, correlation, and validity tests.

Findings
Frequency table
Age

What is your age?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-30 years	8	12.3	12.3	12.3
	31-40 years	23	35.4	35.4	47.7
	41-50 years	23	35.4	35.4	83.1
	50 years and above	11	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Figure 4: Frequency table of age
(Source: SPSS)

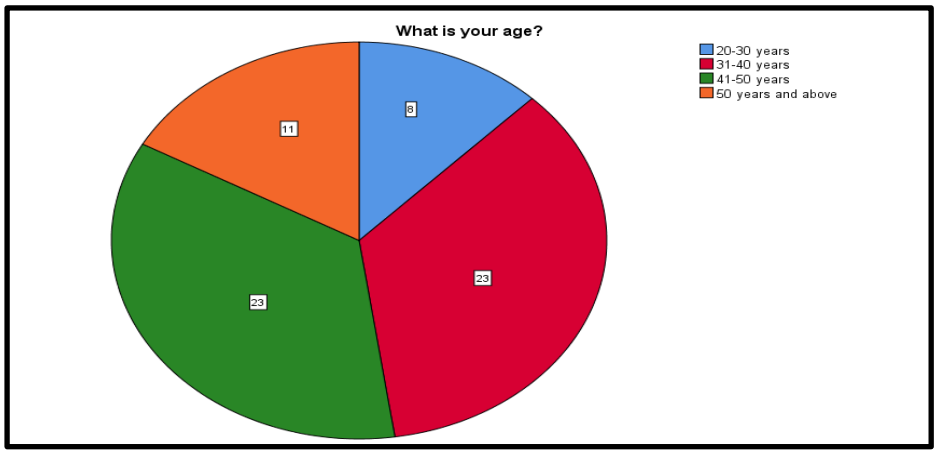

Figure 5: Age-frequency
(Source: SPSS)

The above two figures indicate the age distribution of the participants. From the first part of the frequency table, we can see that 35.4% of the participants are in the age group of 31 to 40 years. The pie chart shows that participants aged between 20 to 30 years make up 8% of the total. Furthermore, individuals in the age group of 41 to 50 years have the highest representation in the survey, with a cumulative percentage reaching 83.1%.

Gender

What is your gender?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	34	52.3	52.3	52.3
	Male	20	30.8	30.8	83.1
	Prefer not to say	11	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Figure 6: Frequency table of gender
(Source: SPSS)

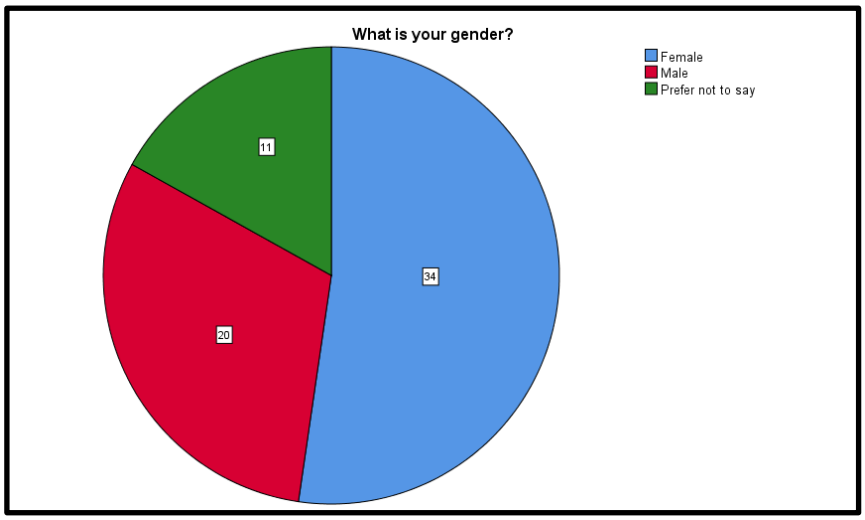

Figure 7: Gender frequency
(Source: SPSS)

The gender frequency table shows that 52.3% of the survey participants are female and 47.7% are male. Additionally, 11% of the participants prefer not to disclose their gender. Therefore, it can be said that males have the highest representation in the survey.

Experience

What is your experience?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-2 years	8	12.3	12.3	12.3
	2-3 years	11	16.9	16.9	29.2
	3-4 years	23	35.4	35.4	64.6
	4 years and above	23	35.4	35.4	100.0
	Total	65	100.0	100.0	

Figure 8: Frequency table of experience
(Source: SPSS)

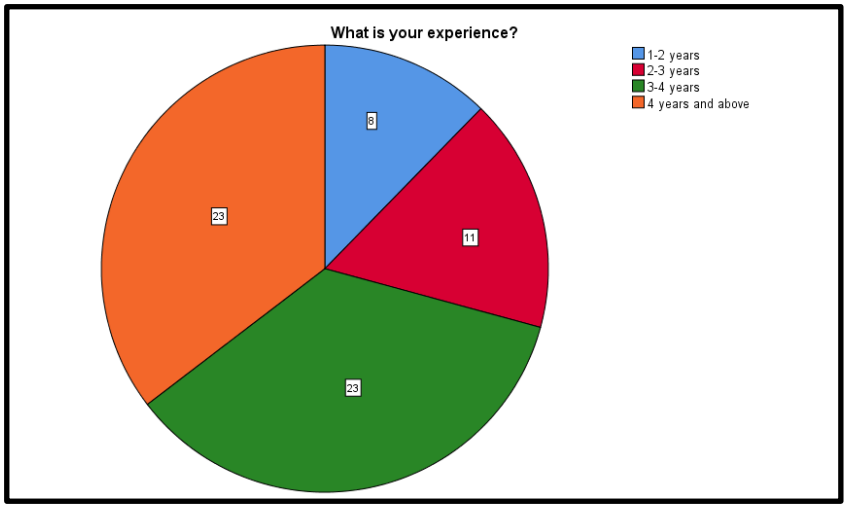

Figure 9: Work Experience
(Source: SPSS)

The two figures present survey data regarding the respondents' work experience. According to the first figure, 35.4% of the respondents have more than 4 years of experience. Additionally, those with 2 to 3 years of experience constitute a valid percentage of 16.9%.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
DV_Higher education	65	2	5	4.12	1.375	-.935	.297	-1.163	.586
IV1.1_Better training	65	3	4	3.69	.465	-.853	.297	-1.314	.586
IV2.2_Retention of diverse faculty	65	1	5	3.31	1.298	-.423	.297	-.953	.586
IV3.1_Effectiveness of diversity	65	2	5	3.51	.986	-.072	.297	-.984	.586
IV4.2_The communities engagement	65	1	5	3.29	1.487	-.258	.297	-1.363	.586
Valid N (listwise)	65								

Figure 10: Descriptive statistics
(Source: SPSS)

From the descriptive statistics displayed in the figure, we can see that the mean value for the training process effectiveness in educational institutions is 3.69. The standard deviation for this measure is 1.375, which indicates the variability of responses regarding the implementation of training in higher education. However, to conclude that improved training significantly contributes to the growth of students, further analysis beyond these descriptive statistics would be necessary. The positivity in the value of standard error indicates the positive impact of the training and diversity on the area of the higher education.

Reliability

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.007	5

Figure 11: Reliability statistics
(Source: SPSS)

The above figure of Reliability statistics indicates the value of Cronbach's Alpha is 0.007. As per the view of Lubis (2024), the high value is evident because there is very little little internal coherence between the items on the rating system or survey. This means that the effectiveness of utilization of new technology in higher time is undeniable. The value of the Cronbachs' alpha is the indicator of the internal connection of the effect of community engagement with the improvement of the educational quality in an education sector.

Validity

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.313
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	378.181
	df	10
	Sig.	.000

Figure 12: Figure of Validity
(Source: SPSS)

From the table, we can observe that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy is 0.313, and the value obtained from Bartlett's test of sphericity is 378.181. The positive value of the above factors indicates the importance of engaging local communities to enhance the quality of Higher Education.

Table of Regression

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.936[a]	.877	.868	.350	.877	106.594	4	60	.000	3.333

a. Predictors: (Constant), IV4.2_The communities engagement, IV2.2_Retention of diverse faculty , IV3.1_Effectiveness of diversity, IV1.1_Better training

b. Dependent Variable: DV_Higher education

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	52.113	4	13.028	106.594	.000[b]
	Residual	7.333	60	.122		
	Total	59.446	64			

a. Dependent Variable: DV_Higher education

b. Predictors: (Constant), IV4.2_The communities engagement, IV2.2_Retention of diverse faculty , IV3.1_Effectiveness of diversity, IV1.1_Better training

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-34.500	3.644		-9.468	.000
	IV1.1_Better training	6.500	.617	3.137	10.531	.000
	IV2.2_Retention of diverse faculty	-.833	.048	-1.122	-17.541	.000
	IV3.1_Effectiveness of diversity	2.500	.214	2.558	11.685	.000
	IV4.2_The communities engagement	2.667	.226	4.113	11.790	.000

a. Dependent Variable: DV_Higher education

Figure 14: Regression analysis
(Source: SPSS)

"From the regression analysis model summary table, it can be said that the adjusted R-squared for the relationship between the dependent and independent variables of the study is 0.868. Since this value is

substantially greater than 0.5, it indicates a strong relationship where the independent variables can explain a significant proportion of the variance in the dependent variable. This means that diversity plays a crucial role in improving the overall quality of the education system. From the value of the standard error in the analysis process, it can be said that the implementation of the training process has the highest effect on the improvement of the quality of the education system.

Correlations

Correlations

		DV_Higher education	IV1.1_Better training	IV2.1_Diversity and inclusion on campus	IV3.1_Effectiveness of diversity	IV4.1_Support system
DV_Higher education	Pearson Correlation	1	.158	-.380**	.333**	-.173
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.209	.002	.007	.168
	N	65	65	65	65	65
IV1.1_Better training	Pearson Correlation	.158	1	.163	-.063	-.180
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.209		.195	.619	.152
	N	65	65	65	65	65
IV2.1_Diversity and inclusion on campus	Pearson Correlation	-.380**	.163	1	-.377**	-.713**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.195		.002	.000
	N	65	65	65	65	65
IV3.1_Effectiveness of diversity	Pearson Correlation	.333**	-.063	-.377**	1	.002
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.619	.002		.987
	N	65	65	65	65	65
IV4.1_Support system	Pearson Correlation	-.173	-.180	-.713**	.002	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.168	.152	.000	.987	
	N	65	65	65	65	65

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

Figure 13: Correlations
(Source: SPSS)

The correlation analysis indicates a value of -0.380 between diversity and higher education. The negative correlation value between the independent and dependent variables shows that there are both positive and negative effects of the implementation of diversity in the higher education system as one variable increases, the other tends to decrease.

Discussion

All students, including those with special needs, have access to course materials in various formats—audio recordings, captioned films, and screen reader-compatible documents—facilitating inclusive education. The integration of digital technologies into higher education has significantly transformed teacher training processes (Brottman et al., 2020). This transformation is enhanced by the support from mentors and peers, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Furthermore, the competition among students from different universities has decreased by 24% (Bong & Chen, 2024).

Higher education institutions can encourage participation from distant or off- campus learners by providing accessibility technologies, such as Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI) which is hosted on cloud computing services, enabling students to access computer programmes and computing resources from any location in the world.

Developing online discussion boards and peer coaching programmes that allow learners to share their experiences, and take part in cooperative learning. The remote learning procedure can be helpful and effective for the growth and development of education quality for students who belong to rural area (Gandolfi, Ferdig & Kratcoski, 2021). Additionally, student success dashboards and analytic tools are valuable for tracking the progress of the student and identifying individuals at risk.

This study has assessed the existing programmes of inclusion and diversity in schools, explored the possible barriers and challenges to increasing inclusion and diversity in the higher education sector. It also examined the administrative and leadership work that affect inclusion and diversity around higher education institutions, and identified the resources and technology supporting diversity and inclusion in the higher education sector. Therefore, the aims of the study have been adequately addressed. The study focused insight into the positive consequences of inclusiveness and diversity in higher education, found problems in fostering diversity, and emphasized the need of using new technology to enhance inclusion efforts.

Implications of the study

The study's implications are that diversity and inclusion programmes aimed at the higher education sector have their benefits and drawbacks. The actual investigation shows a correlation between diversity approaches and higher educational quality. It also highlights the importance of engaging local communities and utilizing

technological tools to enhance access to higher education for remote or off-campus learners. The study also proves that the interconnection between enhancement programmes and educational quality, which necessitates more efficient approaches and methods based on such best practices to ensure a more equitable and supportive learning environment for all students.

Conclusion

To sum up, it can be stated that diversity promotes an increase in interest and understanding among students in higher education. The rise in understanding and interest in the educational sector also increases their overall ability and efficiency in securing better professional opportunities in education. By leveraging technology and inclusive practices, colleges and universities can design more accessible and inclusive learning ecosystems that maintain the accomplishment and well-being of each student. However, without adequate representation, it is improbable that any new initiative in the inclusive education system be prosperous.

By implementing the inclusive strategies described above, one can put pressure not only on creating an inclusive learning environment but also ensure that striving for equality is in all other social spheres. Academic programmes could be effectively helped with these efforts given the enormous potential of technological progress and the wide access to the internet. However, using them as a tool is not as important as the very foundation of the policy – the presence of diversity and representation. The higher institutions also ensure that their faculty and administrative bodies reflect the diversity they aim to promote.

The path to a completely inclusive educational system is not without difficulties, though. In the absence of adequate representation and ongoing attempts to rectify systemic disparities, the advancement towards inclusivity may come to a standstill. Therefore, it is imperative that programmes moving forward concentrate on maintaining representation and aggressively removing obstacles to success and access.

In addition to examining the best techniques for preserving diversity and representation in higher education settings, future research should also look at the long-term effects of inclusive policies on student outcomes. The educational environment will change to suit the demands of its diverse student body through persistent work and continual assessment. From the study conducted we can conclude that community engagement in higher education is a useful tool that contributes towards elevating the quality of education.

Suggestions and Recommendations

The study outlines several recommendations for supporting diversity and inclusion in higher education. The evaluation of successful programmes, efforts, and initiatives of diversity and equality is necessary. There is a need to determine potential challenges and barriers and look at management processes and leadership. In addition, it is crucial to identify the use of processes and technologies that can be applied to support inclusion efforts. Local communities should be involved, and technological tools must be used. Moreover, strategies should be applied to improve the quality of higher education, and there should be research on the implementation of diversity and inclusion projects to assess their long-term impact and promote inclusion and diversity among teachers and staff. Finally, higher education systems should invest in digital technologies, such as augmented reality and virtual reality, to partner and improve learning programs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research questionnaire

Survey link: https://forms.gle/kHLKySecBmstsZcd8

DV: Higher education

IV1: Adoption of specific strategies

IV2: Promotion of diversity

IV3: Utilization of technologies

IV4: Engagement of local communities

- What is your age?
- What is your gender?
- What is your experience?
- Promotion of diversity and inclusion is in higher education institutions is important
- Providing a better training in the education sectors is played an effective role in the higher education
- Student organizations and clubs play in fostering diversity and inclusion on campus
- Higher education institutions engage with local communities to promote diversity and inclusion
- Retention of diverse faculty and staff can be improved within higher education institutions
- Assessing the effectiveness of diversity take an initiatives within higher education
- Support system is necessary for the improvement of the quality of higher education

- The communities engagement increase the attendance of the students in the education sectors
- Utilization of new technologies grow the interest among the students
- Adoption of effective strategies is important for the higher education sectors