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# Editorial: Inclusive higher education in cross-cultural settings

Editorial

“Disability is one of the most serious barriers to education across the globe”  
–UNICEF (<https://www.unicef.org/>)

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## Introduction

With each passing day, the composition of students in higher education institutions is becoming diverse (Fabricius *et al.*, 2017). Students from various socio-economic backgrounds, physical disabilities and ethnicity are joining mainstream education (Betancourt *et al.*, 2000; Burkhardt and Bennett, 2015). Based on UNICEF for “Education for All” and “inclusive education” policies, equal opportunities for all students have increased. And there are vast chances that these demographic changes will increase proportionately, with acknowledgement of individual differences and more awareness of the relevance of education in individual and nations’ growth. This forecast calls for an education system that serves all students with the same level of knowledge and skills deliveries and requires policymakers and practitioners with stakeholders (teachers, staff) to contribute towards the effective implementation of inclusive education (Jayakumar, 2008).

According to UNICEF, inclusive education is “the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to thrive” (Inclusive education, n.d.). An inclusive environment in educational institutions protects children with special needs from being robbed of their right to learn. An inclusive setting enables the effective participation of such children in their communities, workforce and decisions (Opoku *et al.*, 2017). In other words, inclusive education refers to all children studying in the mainstream education system surpassing their difference, all in the same classrooms and the same educational institutions (UNICEF, 2011). Such an educational shift aims to provide authentic learning opportunities for special needs students who were traditionally excluded based on differences like colour, language, disabilities and like reasons (Srivastava *et al.*, 2015).

In research, inclusive education is studied with varied education contexts. Some emphasized understanding of inclusive practices, while some highlighted the factors predicting and consequence of inclusive education (Björnsdóttir, 2017; Messiou, 2019). In the latter focus, Daniels and Garner (2013) provided an elaborative understanding of the philosophical, political, educational and social implications of “inclusion”. Mittler (2012) provided more comprehensive frameworks of current policies to avail adequate provisions to reduce poverty, eliminate social exclusion and develop policies to support the United Nations’ Education For All. In line with this, Göransson and Nilholm (2014) highlighted the need to define inclusive education more cautiously. They presented different understandings of inclusive education – inclusion as placement of special needs students in mainstream classrooms, inclusion through meeting their social/academic needs both for special needs students and all, and inclusion through the creation of communities. These review-based elaborations indicated different views of what educational institutions need to accomplish to attain inclusive education. Scholars also proposed other theories or approaches towards understanding the concept of inclusive education (Al-Shammari *et al.*, 2019). Some highlighted the relevance of behaviourism-based inclusive education practices (Doolittle, 2014; Li, 2018), which refers to the application of behaviourism in inclusive education settings. This approach is concerned with student behaviour and performance in employing



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stimulus materials (Ertmer and Newby, 2013). Cognitivism-based inclusive education practices emphasized on applications of cognitivism in inclusive education settings (Evgeniou and Loizou, 2012). This approach underlines mental information processing and interactions in guiding student learning (Ertmer and Newby, 2013). Apart from these theories, constructivism-based inclusive education practices was another theory considered in inclusive education. In this theory, “constructivism focuses on creating cognitive tools that reflect the wisdom of the culture in which they are used as well as the insights and experiences of learning” (Al-Shammari *et al.*, 2019, p. 411).

Inline, teacher’s role towards inclusive education explored its theoretical and practical perspectives in different contexts – ranging from primary schools (Andrienko *et al.*, 2017; Stemberger and Kiswarday, 2018; Schwab *et al.*, 2021) to secondary (Paseka and Schwab, 2020; Saloviita, 2020) to higher educational institutions (Moriña, 2017; Srivastava and Shree, 2019). The studies indicated teachers as the critical asset towards effective implementation of inclusive education. Teachers and the faculty team are responsible for executing inclusive practices and establishing an inclusive environment (Meyer and Keenan, 2018). A class comprising students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, beliefs, and physical and mental competency (Srivastava and Dhar, 2016) poses significant challenges before the teachers and administration. Increasing the learning tendencies of such a combined nature of students requires more involvement of teachers. When students’ differences are extreme and require significant attention, inclusive mindset is required (Lambe and Bones, 2006; Soodak, 2003). The development of inclusive classrooms calls for rigorous efforts on the part of teachers (Haines and Mueller, 2013). While making children learn lies in teachers, they also have this additional responsibility to manage diversity. Srivastava and Shree (2019) also mentioned the role of leaders in developing an environment for an inclusive classroom set-up.

Although these studies placed the relevance of adopting inclusive education to bring all students to mainstream education and reduce discrimination, the gap in steps to implement inclusive education in higher education still exists. Similarly, studies considering the changing compositions of students in higher education, cross-cultural perspectives and student exchange program-based analysis require more emphasis. Also, these studies grounded on their limitations of generalizability and context specificity paved the way for more studies to explore factors connected to inclusive education. Thus, addressing the concerns concerning the implementation of inclusive education in the higher education context, this special issue combined studies conducted by authors from different cultures and countries.

Thus, the special issue aims to

- (1) Know the factors that affect the inclusiveness in higher education institutions.
- (2) Understand the possible impact of various predictors on inclusive practices in higher education institutions.

### Articles included

Below given are the summaries of papers included in this special issue

Khanelwal *et al.* (2022), in “Breaking out of your comfort zone: an archival research on epistemology in inclusive education pedagogy for Industry 4.0”, emphasized on inclusive pedagogies to ensure students meet the technological needs of Industry 4.0. They stated that Industry 4.0 is more technology-oriented and need people skilled in technologies to give equal opportunities to all, even the specially-abled candidates. This change calls for emphasizing faculties upgrading themselves and using inclusive practices to improve students’ employability. The study highlighted that “inclusive education pedagogy through technology is the hot ticket for success for employers and disabled persons to survive in

Industry 4.0 development” (p. 4). They provided blended learning, art-based innovative pedagogy, massive open online courses (MOOCs), flipped classrooms, designing student engagement, crowd learning and gamification as different inclusive oriented pedagogies. Such pedagogies can help students work together in teams, accept cultural values and physical differences and support all students to study without discrimination in the mainstream. Through such an inclusive education learning, students can prepare themselves for future industry needs. This study utilized an archival research approach that focused on the topical literature to examine well-organized ways to upraise the understanding of all learners in inclusive settings. The archival research method involves “collections of credentials (e.g. annual reports and newsletters), artefacts (e.g. photographs) to gain a perceptive of a preferred organization or professional group (e.g. teachers)” (p. 5). This process is an essential method of assisting educators in recognizing and investigating using this epistemology in new innovative, inclusive teaching pedagogy with technologies in Industry 4.0. Through this analysis, the authors provided that teachers “need to develop their skills and competency by breaking their comfort zone, and individual recital of every faculty affiliate is a decisive feature in accomplishing quality for inclusive education” (p. 4). Also, they emphasized developing an educational institution that provides passable facilities to academicians and students to adapt and utilize technology efficiently without any discrimination in Industry 4.0.

Bodhi *et al.* (2022), in the article “Impact of psychological factors, university environment and sustainable behaviour on teachers’ intention to incorporate inclusive education in higher education”, conducted a cross-sectional study on a sample of Indian academicians and scholars and explored the factors affecting teacher’s intention towards inclusive higher education. Based on the theory of planned behaviour (TPB), authors formulated an integrated model to evaluate the effect of teacher’s attitudes, concerns, self-efficacy, spirituality, university environment and sustainable behaviour on incorporating inclusive behaviour. The data collected were analysed using the structural equation modelling (SEM) technique. The results showed the positive effect of teachers’ attitudes, university environment and spirituality on teachers’ intention to incorporate inclusive education. While contrary to common understanding, it showed a negative impact of teachers’ self-efficacy on inclusive behaviour. Teachers’ concern and sustainable behaviour played no significant role in incorporating inclusivity in the classroom. This analysis supported the TPB and emphasized that a positive attitude towards specific behaviour chains the intent to exhibit that behaviour. In other words, to teach inclusive behaviour, educational institutions need to reframe policies and structures to advance teacher efficacy, attitude and spirituality.

Aboramadan *et al.* (2022), in “Inclusive leadership and extra-role behaviours in higher education: does organizational learning mediate the relationship”, emphasized the need for innovative academic leadership practices to incorporate the strengths of mutual approaches into a more postmodern concept of relational and inclusive leadership. Based on social exchange theory and relational leadership theory, this paper highlighted the relevance of institutional leadership. The study proposed and analysed the impact of inclusive leadership on extra-role behaviours and innovative work behaviour of academic staff, with an intervening mechanism of organizational learning. The data from academic staff working in the Palestinian higher education institutions were analysed through the partial least squares (PLS-SEM) analysis technique. The analysis showed that inclusive leadership in this context positively affects organizational citizenship behaviour and organizational learning. Further, the results indicated organizational learning mediated the relationship between inclusive behaviour and dependent variables. This study highlighted the role of leaders in developing inclusive higher education institutions.

Kistyanto *et al.* (2022), in their paper titled “Cultural intelligence increase student’s innovative behaviour in higher education: the mediating role of interpersonal trust,”

emphasized the relevance of innovative behaviour among students to develop cultural intelligence. The authors stressed the positive effect of student exchange programs and how such programs develop individual competencies in understanding cultural differences and possess essential cultural intelligence. With a quantitative research approach, the study analysed the relationship between cultural intelligence, students' innovative behaviour and intervening impact of interpersonal trust through SEM-PLS. The sample for the study included Indonesian students' who have completed or are a part of student exchanges or studying abroad in the Asia and Australia region. The findings showed that cultural intelligence is needed to ensure inclusive behaviour. Higher cultural intelligence represents "individuals conscious of other cultures' knowledge and cultural differences, which provides them with new approaches to new ideas, opinions, concepts and scripts, to expand creative potential to innovate" (p. 14). Predictability of cultural intelligence and innovative behaviour highlights, individual's interest in learning about new situations and cultures and enjoyment in interacting with diverse people. This further help development of an inclusive environment as "individuals with great cultural intelligence do not make inaccurate and superficial judgements during intercultural interactions and respect salient ethnic differences" (p. 14).

In the article "Technology Facilitation on Inclusive Learning; Higher Education Institutions in Sri Lanka", [Kirupainayagam and Sutha \(2022\)](#) emphasized on diversified ethnicity of students. The study grounded on technology acceptance theory, which brings out the attributes towards technology and its acceptance and usage, analysed the importance of technology towards building inclusive learning. The investigators conducted semi-structured interviews with students and academicians from different ethnic groups from five national universities in Sri Lanka. The study provided that technology usage in classroom lectures provided more inclusive classroom settings. Use of social networking, web-based instructing, class web journals, Wikis, podcasting, intuitive whiteboards and cellphones help in making students evolve in an inclusive higher education environment. Further, educational aids like learning management system (LMS), virtual learning environment (VLE), module system, multimedia projectors, MS Office software, mobile phones and the Internet were the leading technology platforms that enabled teachers to overcome diversity concerns. The study also indicated that students in select universities rarely felt discrimination based on ethnicity, learned faster while accepting ethnic differences and maintained friendly relationships.

[Bandyopadhyay et al. \(2022\)](#), in their paper titled "Addressing Inclusion through Service Learning in Management Education: Insights from India", addressed the need to internalize the inclusion and diversity concerns in the education system. Through extensive literature review and presentation of case studies from top management institute in India, this paper indicated the role of service-learning programs in advancing students' inclusive mindset in management education. The study included articles published in scientific journals till 2020 for the review and examined the trend on service-learning programs. This analysis highlighted the gaps in the current education system in the Indian context and stressed the need for change in implementing inclusive education. This process also highlighted the effect of service-learning interventions on moral cognition and the inclusive mindset development process. Additionally, through real-life field-based case studies from the top three management education institutions, the study provided evidence of the importance of service-learning in management education in the Indian context. The case studies presented three leading management schools in India that have achieved the intended inclusive learning outcomes through their integrated service-learning program. Additionally, the study also explored the social issues causing the exclusion of disadvantaged community sections based on their socio-economic status.

In the article, "Does authentic leadership really develop inclusive classrooms: a model examination", [Srivastava and Shree \(2022\)](#) questioned the relevance of authentic leadership

in developing an inclusive classroom. Emphasizing the role of authentic leaders in resolving societal issues, the authors presented an integrated model of authentic leadership and inclusive classrooms with the intervening part of academic optimism and art-based innovation pedagogy. Based on the social information processing theory, the study emphasized that leaders have to communicate overall expectations, policies and practices to develop an inclusive mindset among faculty. Institutional values and objectives need to be communicated clearly to ensure effective teaching and learning in classrooms, surpassing the students' socio-economic backgrounds. Even attempts to bring special needs students to mainstream education should be made through rounds of training and counselling to teachers, who have the primary responsibility of implementing inclusive education. The study collected data from higher education institution faculty members in cities with diverse student compositions in India and analysed it through hierarchical regression analysis. The result indicated that authentic leaders in this context of higher education could enable inclusive classrooms. Further, academic optimism mediated the relationship between authentic leadership and inclusive classrooms. Thus, the authors presented the psychological process of how authentic leaders can effectively develop inclusive classrooms through this model. However, arts-based pedagogies did not have a significant moderating effect on inclusive classrooms. The study paved the way for future studies by exploring more independent and intervening factors.

Thus, this special issue combined all the broad categories of measures that can be considered to enable the development of an inclusive education system and meet the UN objectives of inclusion.

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### Further reading

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