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Contemporary Issues in Higher Education: Diversity, Inclusion, Management and Governance

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**Contemporary Issues in Higher Education:
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Governance**



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Abstract

Purpose: Teachers, students, and the administration of higher education institutions face a variety of opportunities and challenges as a result of diversity and inclusion. This study looks at diversity and inclusion as a current concern in postsecondary education from the perspectives of instructors, students, and institutional administration. It aims to offer suggestions for dealing with these problems in universities. Higher education institutions are independent and not subject to government oversight in the same manner as public sector organizations, despite receiving significant public funding. The governance, management, and autonomous status of higher education institutions are other topics covered in this work.

Methodology: This review draws from inclusion theory which has transformed the view on diversity management from preventing discrimination, which suits the moral view on equality as procedural or individual justice, to ensuring inclusion, which fits the moral view on equality as recognition of diversity. The information is based on literature from various sources.

Findings: This study highlights that diversity and inclusion creates a better workplace for everyone while creating an inclusive learning environment. Good governance assures the quality of decision-making hence promotes effective delivery of educational services in a higher learning institution.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: This review article discusses various initiatives, strategies and challenges on diversity and inclusion in higher education as a contemporary issue. The paper also discusses the differences in management and governance as applied in higher education.

Keywords: *Higher Education Institutions, Diversity, Inclusion, Management, Governance*

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INTRODUCTION

Diversity is the representation of different people in an organization (Daya, 2014) and inclusion is ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute to the vision of the organization whilst influencing every part and level of the organization having a sense of belonging (Swartz et al., 2019). Inclusion ensures that everyone feels safe at the organization (Diemer & Ali, 2009). Inclusion in higher education learning refers to all learners being able to access and gain equal opportunities to education and learning (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). Inclusion is achieved when institutions create a culture that celebrates diversity and thus achieves equality. Diversity and inclusion are closely linked values which are implemented by organizations which support different individuals and groups of people with different races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, disabilities, and religions. In higher education, diversity and inclusion provides equitable employment opportunities, education and support to those with different and special needs, hence creating a positive teaching and learning environment. This also fosters cultural respect and brings understanding among the institutions and hence reduces bullying.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diversity is a contemporary issue when it comes to higher education staffing because it deals with workplace discrimination against a certain group of people or individuals due to their country of origin, marital status, disability, race and sex just to mention a few. A higher learning institution benefits if it has policies on diversity and inclusion because diversity promotes new perspectives through having a wide range of people with different expertise, views, backgrounds and experiences (Davis, 2022). Diversity and inclusion are contemporary issues in the higher education system when it comes to the actual teaching and learning process including the staffing processes (Riedel et al., 2023). When it comes to the actual teaching diversity is an issue because this means presenting concepts in different modes whilst encouraging a culture of reflection and thoughtful discussions. The students might disagree with some of the ideas but must be able to see through the differences and appreciate the other person's thoughts and rights. Inclusive teaching and learning is an engaging process that embraces the challenges of all students and creating teaching modules that support all learners both abled and disabled. Inclusive teaching and learning environment gives a sense of belonging to the learners and teachers. The issue of diversity and inclusion in higher education also includes equity which is the recognition of institutional racism in the society and educational sector such that it can be prevented (Amaral, 2022). Equity aims to address the challenges and barriers faced by students and staff members from marginalized backgrounds. Equity hence implies equal opportunities and resources.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Lecturers, Students and Institutional Management

The current higher education system is beset by a wide range of issues such as funding for education (Brown et al., 2016), student mental health (Jones et al., 2021), sexual assault (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018), qualification accreditation, disciplinary policies diversity and inclusion. Diversity and inclusion is closely related to Sustainable Development Goal 10 which is on Reduced Inequalities (*The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals An opportunity for Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2018) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 which is Quality Education (*The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals An opportunity for Latin America and the Caribbean*, 2018). To achieve quality education, I think

one needs to address diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education. The funding and employment opportunities presented by higher education institutions mainly in the Sub-Saharan Africa region do not have ethnic inclusiveness, diversity, cross-culturalism, cultural diversity, ethnic mosaic, and multiracial. Adopting practices that are informed by principles of equity, diversity and inclusion can enrich research outputs, the research environment, teaching and learning environment. An inclusive approach helps marginalized communities feel as though they belong and that their perspectives and insights are valued. Typical inclusion criteria include demographic, clinical, and geographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, marital status, educational experience, language, type of occupation, physical activity, medical conditions, and the presence of medical, psychosocial, or emotional conditions. Inclusion in higher education makes sure students are fully equipped to be global citizen, reflects the needs of the students within the curriculum and ensures all curricula are accessible to every learner regardless of the background. An inclusive classroom will have different learning styles due to the mixture of students with disabilities, gifted students and visual impaired students (Lawrie et al., 2017). A teacher who pursues inclusive teaching practices values students as individuals and strengthens their diversity without them feeling neglected or unwanted. Inclusive learning practices will provide a safe space for learning such that the teacher provides a sensitive environment and a quiet area for reflection on the learning material (Moriña, 2017). Also sets clear learning outcomes, facilitate student autonomy and provide guidance and motivation for the students. An institution of higher education to achieve inclusion should fight exclusion and segregation and have empowerment and integration for all. To have effective inclusion practices in higher education institutions, a leadership mindset of empathy, self-awareness and courage should be a key factor to create an environment where all staff members feel valued and respected (Aboramadan & Dahleez, 2022).

According to (Florian & Camedda, 2020), teachers are finding it difficult to address inclusion issues due to the ever changing demographic profiles of the education system. It is also important to note that diversity and inclusion also has challenges among faculty members, support staff and students in the classroom. In higher education communities where they are not open to new ideas, they might end up having anxiety, discomfort and ineffective communication due to the presence of people of marginalized backgrounds in their institutions. Teachers sometimes find it difficult to be implementing diversity and inclusion in their teaching due to lack of understanding the importance of diversity and inclusion, lack of experience dealing with different cultures and people and lack of motivation to include these terms in their teaching practice.

In some areas during the COVID-19 pandemic era there was no learning taking place due to the disparities associated with educational technology (Ratten, 2023). Institutions of higher learning could not provide electronic devices for students from marginalized background. The learning process was also affected by distractive home environments since learners were subjected to home schooling, lack of parental or guardian academic supervision and also limitation of high-speed internet affected learning (Betthäuser et al., 2023). These are some issues which contribute to the diversity gap in higher learning

Governance and Management in Higher Education

Governance is the process of making and enforcing rules, regulations and policies whereas management is the application and implementation of those rules, policies and regulations (Mora, 2001; Rytmeister, 2009). In an institution of higher education, governance is the

practice of the board of directors coming together to make decisions about the direction of the learning institution and their duties and activities include general oversight, strategic planning, decision-making and financial planning (Blaschke et al., 2014). Management is the managing of resources and overseeing the day-to-day operations of the learning institution and the duties for the management are defined by the governance board (Arnwine, 2002). Management in a higher education institution is multi-faceted with managers and faculty administrators dealing with the health and safety of students and staff, educational achievements and creating a positive working environment just to mention a few.

Difference between Management and Governance as Applied in Higher Education

At university level, governance is controlled by the governing body which is the university council. The council has the responsibility to make the university a high-performance organization. The members of the council make statutory instruments, approve programmes, provide resources to support academic activities, lay down policies, plans and establish the working procedures which govern the university. The university council depends on the governance of the senate when it comes to academic matters while maintaining the overall control and responsibility of the university. At my institution the senate has the overall authority over academic matters such as admissions, academic regulations, examinations, learning programmes and qualification awarding just to mention a few. The senate members include the students' representatives, head of departments, faculty members including the dean, the deputy and vice Chancellor of the university. The senate ensures that the university has quality teaching and learning, and that the university community adheres to approved academic standards. The senate delegates much of its work to the management comprising of various departments, committees and faculties and the overall recommendations are approved by the senate.

The university management is responsible for the day-to-day running and administration of the university. The management is grouped into three main groups which are student affairs, finance and administration and academic affairs. The management members are specialized staff with expertise in their division. Their main duties involve organizing, planning, leading, and controlling the university community. Departments in the same faculty work closely together to constitute a faculty which is headed by a dean who gets reports from the head of department. The human resources department has a level of management which deals with the staffing of academic and support staff. Personally, my direct manager is the head of the chemistry department whose aim is to help me achieve my teaching, research, and governance goals. The management at my institution is divided into three different levels namely top-level management, executive or middle level management and supervisory management which is the lower level of management. Each leader in all these positions have their own leadership style which affects how they perform their duties (Kasalak et al., 2022). The common leadership styles in higher education are instructional, transformational, constructivist, servant and strategic leadership (Mews, 2019).

Governance and management can be applied in higher education research projects (Bredillet, 2008). Looking at the two terms in higher education research projects, project governance deals with the strategic management and governance of portfolio of the project to deliver the specified projects mandate and value. On the other hand, project management deals with the day-to-day basis and decision-making processes of the project depending on the scope as given by the project board. In other words, project management is a set of skills and methodologies

that enable the project participants/ investigators to accomplish the goals and objectives of the project within the specified scope.

Autonomous in Higher Education Institutions

In higher education, autonomy is the ability and capacity of an higher learning institution or university to govern itself without the interference of the government or state (Erçetin & Fındık, 2018). Higher learning institutions get to a point of self-governance for effective decision making hence they become autonomous. The autonomy of a higher learning institution has various dimensions such as staffing, academic affairs, administration, and organizational structure. Making an institution autonomous will require the institution to determine the appropriate internal organizational structure and have the management which deals with admissions, academic content, financial aspects, and the overall running of research. Autonomous in higher education gives rise to high quality education and attains better performance in teaching and learning because it encourages commitment from teachers, students and the management (Warnock, 1992). An educator can also promote student autonomy during online discussions through offering choices of the discussion points, asking students to help shape the discussion for the subject matter, giving students an option for synchronous and asynchronous discussion. The educator can also ask the students if they have alternative methods of interactions and sharing documents such as Moodle, blackboard, and Google Doc. These activities give students a learning path for themselves and aids in having strategies for independent learning.

The challenges associated with institutional autonomy range from inadequate funds to run the institution to low enrollment numbers due to lack of sponsorship of student education. Some of the challenges are inadequate infrastructure, inability to recruit and retain faculty and support staff, absolute laboratory instruments for students learning sciences, and very paucity research output. Some of the problems can be resolved by having collaborations and memorandum of understanding with other institutions and having strategies which are ideal for international students rather than the traditional students. Within the institution strengthening training, retraining, self-development and mentoring of faculty members and support staff will expand their knowledge and hence cope with the ever-changing work environment (Beals et al., 2021; Gamage et al., 2021). The institution can also have different modes of learning such as block-release and part-time learning for delivering the academic programmes so that the institution can capitalize the gap in academic industry whilst benefiting financially.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the diversity gap in higher education comes from structural inequalities and disparities in access to resources and data. Closing the gap yields an enhanced learning environment with students who are culturally competent and hence increased opportunities. A higher learning institution which practices diversity and inclusion gives the students a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and also equips the students to be global citizens who know their strengths through contributing their perspectives and views. On other note, diversity and inclusion practices provide multiple perspectives and challenges in higher education. Four different powerful forces that make inclusion a difficult balancing act in diverse cultures are economics, religion, ethnic rivalries, and patriotism in higher education. Also, the work of a teacher is governed by policies and procedures associated with accreditation bodies. The issue of diversity and inclusion should be addressed by these bodies before it can

be fully implemented and practiced in the classroom. Diversity as a civil right issue affecting higher education, finding strategies to close the diversity gap improves social and economic standing. Hence, there is still room to develop policies which have a comparative approach to establish diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education.

In conclusion, higher education institutions need to gear up to be an autonomous institution. This will require new strategies which can produce quality education and research outputs whilst sustaining the autonomous status for a longer period. Being a high performing institution in education, research and service will require policies on generating funds, breaking existing habits and having a support system for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Recommendations

Diversity and inclusion in higher education is a contemporary issue which can be solved by having awareness on the issue through workshops and conferences which include students, teachers and all stake holders in higher education as delegates or participants. This will assist institutions to make policies which are drafted on a widely understood subject matter based on the views of all stakeholders. Upon making policies, I think strategies informed with evidence on the current situations involving diversity and inclusions are needed such that they are inclusive of all students especially looking at their participation and overall academic performance. These strategies can also be used in hiring faculty members and administrators such that the process is inclusive of all (May & Bridger, 2010). Strategies should be informed by evidence regarding the impact of current practices on the presence, participation, and achievement of all students. There should be an emphasis on whole-school approaches, in which teachers are supported in developing inclusive practices. Education departments, locally and nationally, must provide leadership in the promotion of equity and inclusion as principles that guide the work of teachers in all schools. According to (Moreu et al., 2021), focus groups and climate surveys can be used to understand diversity and inclusion as these two terms focus on behaviour change rather than mental constraints. Promoting inclusive behaviour in the academic environment improves inclusion experiences of individuals such that they feel valued, welcomed, recognized and this will successfully promote diversity and inclusion. Inclusive practice of a higher learning institution should have workshops that facilitate faculty-student and peer-to-peer dialogues on diversity, inclusion and equity. The institutions can develop inclusive course design tools that support staff reflection on their inclusive practice during their teaching and learning process (Smith, Pickford, and Sellers, 2021).

Higher learning institutions can post their diversity statistics on their institutional website (Tienda, 2013) for prospective students and the community and large to see and this might also encourage people to have meaningful conversation with people of different backgrounds instead of being xenophobic. The issue of equity can be addressed by having specialized programs within the institution which address unbalanced conditions faced by students and faculty members. For example, conducting leadership training workshops and seminars for women in engineering and science programs so that they are equipped to take leadership positions in an area dominated by men thus, promoting gender equality (Patrick & Kumar, 2012; Rosa & Clavero, 2022). Academic counselling and mental health support programs can also be offered to students and faculty members who would have been subjected to conditions which deprived their participation or performance due to issues related to diversity, inclusion and equity. Faculty members and students can take it upon themselves to have protests and

open letters to address diversity and inclusion issues this action can make the general public aware of the issues hence reduce segregation and social exclusion.

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interests.

Author Contribution

Nyasha Makuve drafted and critically revised the article for significant intellectual content as part of her contribution to its conception.

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