Addressing Social Marginalisation in Education to Foster Inclusion: A Comprehensive Examination of Higher Tertiary Education

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ABSTRACT

Social marginalization remains a persistent issue in higher tertiary education, undermining the concepts of equity and inclusion that are essential for academic and societal advancement. This study conducts a thorough evaluation of ways for addressing social marginalization in tertiary institutions, combining insights from published articles from several fields. It investigates the various facets of marginalization, such as socioeconomic disparities, racial and ethnic discrimination, gender inequities, and hurdles faced by people with disabilities.

The study emphasizes evidence-based treatments like inclusive curriculum design, targeted financial support programs, mentorship activities, and diversity training for teachers and staff. Furthermore, it investigates the impact of institutional policy, community participation, and technology in fostering equitable learning environments. The findings highlight the necessity of a holistic, systemic approach to promoting inclusion, advocating for participatory governance frameworks that incorporate underrepresented voices into policy and decision-making processes. This study closes with actionable recommendations for higher education stakeholders to incorporate inclusivity into institutional culture, improving academic access, retention, and achievement for all students. The synthesis of current research is an invaluable resource for policymakers, educators, and researchers interested in increasing equity in upper tertiary education.

Key Terms: social marginalisation, inclusion, higher tertiary education, accessibility, equity, diversity, cultural competence.

INTRODUCTION

Social marginalization continues to be a key issue in higher education, with several barriers preventing marginalized groups from having fair access, participation, and achievement. Economic disparity, racial and ethnic prejudice, gender bias, and inadequate assistance for students with impairments are all significant hurdles to academic achievement and social mobility (Ahmed et al., 2019; Smith & Taylor, 2021). Addressing these issues is critical to promoting inclusiveness and ensuring that higher education institutions play their full role as catalysts for social fairness and development. Recent research has emphasized the importance of institutional policies and practices in maintaining or reducing marginalization. For example, programs that fail to acknowledge the intersectionality of students' identities frequently exclude people who fall into many marginalized groups (Johnson & Martinez, 2020). Similarly, an absence of cultural competence among instructors might accidentally alienate kids from various backgrounds, increasing structural injustices (Chen et al., 2022). Efforts to combat marginalization in higher education have gained traction, with increased understanding of the need of inclusive curriculum design, mentorship programs, and targeted financial support (Brown et al., 2021; Kim & Lee, 2023). Furthermore, technological innovations, particularly in online and hybrid learning models, have offered both problems and opportunities for underprivileged students, emphasizing the importance of individualized solutions to promote equitable access (Jones & Patel, 2022). This study addresses the fundamental factors of social marginalization in higher tertiary education and evaluates inclusion solutions, based on a thorough evaluation of studies published between 2018 and 2024. By

combining these data, the study hopes to provide meaningful advice for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders dedicated to creating equitable and inclusive academic environments.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Higher education is often viewed as a path to social and economic mobility, providing possibilities for individuals to enhance their quality of life and make important contributions to society, (Kim & Lee, 2023). However, systemic disparities have historically prevented some groups from fully engaging in university education. Socioeconomic position, race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and cultural identity all combine to create distinct barriers for marginalized communities (Johnson & Martinez, 2020; Brown et al., 2021). These hurdles can take many forms, including limited access to institutions, discriminatory behaviours, insufficient financial resources, and a lack of representation in curricula and institutional leadership.

The marginalization of disadvantaged groups in higher education creates a cycle of inequality. Research reveals that low-income students frequently suffer larger financial difficulties, restricting their capacity to endure and achieve in postsecondary education (Ahmed et al., 2019; Jones & Patel, 2022). Similarly, students from minority racial or ethnic groups commonly face implicit biases, micro-aggressions, and systematic discrimination, undermining their academic experiences and outcomes (Chen et al., 2022). Gender disparities and women's underrepresentation in STEM professions highlight the issues that underrepresented groups face (Smith & Taylor, 2021).

Efforts to reduce socioeconomic marginalization in higher education have grown significantly in recent years. Inclusive education frameworks promote equality, diversity, and inclusion as fundamental institutional ideals (Kim & Lee, 2023). Institutions around the world are rapidly adopting policies and programs targeted at decreasing barriers, such as financial aid schemes, mentorship initiatives, and culturally relevant teaching approaches. Furthermore, technological improvements, such as online learning platforms, have created new prospects for extending educational access, yet they also raise concerns about the digital divide (Jones & Patel, 2022).

These developments underscore the complexity of addressing social marginalization in higher education. While policy initiatives are essential, their success largely depends on effective implementation, continuous monitoring, and the commitment of educational institutions to foster inclusive environments. As such, there is a pressing need for ongoing research to evaluate the impact of these policies and to develop innovative strategies that promote equity and inclusion for all students.

Research Objectives

This study aims to address the following specific objectives:

Identify the barriers faced by marginalized groups in higher education.

Assess the effectiveness of current inclusion policies and practices.

Understand perceptions of marginalization and inclusion among stakeholders.

Develop strategies to enhance equity and inclusion in tertiary institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social marginalization, a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, refers to the systematic exclusion of individuals or groups from participating fully in social, economic, and educational opportunities, (Kim & Lee, 2023). In the context of higher education, this exclusion often manifests in limited access, underrepresentation, and inequitable outcomes for marginalized populations, including individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds, racial and ethnic minorities, women in STEM fields, and persons with disabilities (Ahmed et al., 2019; Brown, 2020). Understanding social marginalization and its impact on higher education

necessitates a comprehensive review of its dimensions, the concept of inclusion, and related theoretical frameworks.

Social Marginalization in Higher Education

Social marginalization in higher education is shaped by intersecting factors, including institutional structures, cultural norms, and systemic inequities. According to Smith and Taylor (2021), marginalized students often face financial constraints, discriminatory attitudes, and a lack of culturally responsive teaching, all of which limit their academic potential. Similarly, Johnson and Martinez (2020) highlight that structural barriers, such as rigid admissions criteria and insufficient support services, disproportionately affect underrepresented groups.

Moreover, social marginalization can lead to a sense of isolation and reduced self-efficacy among students, further hindering their educational outcomes. Chen et al. (2022) found that students who experience exclusion often struggle with mental health challenges, which negatively impact their retention and success rates. These findings underscore the need for higher education institutions to address social marginalization through targeted interventions and policy reforms.

Marginalized students are disproportionately affected by unequal access to technology and reliable internet, as noted by Bailey and Moore (2021), and the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and exacerbated these disparities, preventing many students from fully participating in their education. Everyday discriminatory behaviors and attitudes can foster a hostile environment for marginalized students. Sue et al. (2019) stressed that microaggressions increase emotions of alienation and weaken students' sense of belonging.

A dearth of diverse academic and administrative leaders frequently results in fewer role models and mentorship options for underserved students. According to Ahmed and Parker (2020), a lack of representation perpetuates structural injustices and impedes the creation of inclusive policies. Although financial aid programs are available, they may not cover the entire cost of education for many students. Lopez and Green (2023) noted that financial aid discrepancies led to greater dropout rates among low-income and minority students. Systemic difficulties inside institutions, such as discriminatory practices or a lack of diversity in curriculum material, contribute to marginalization. Harper (2020) contended that higher education must critically evaluate its systems in order to eradicate entrenched racism. Stigma and cultural issues make marginalized students less likely to receive mental health resources. Kwon and Lee (2022) discovered that such stigmatization exacerbates the difficulties these students confront, resulting in lower academic and personal well-being.

Inclusion in Higher Education

Inclusion in education refers to the deliberate efforts to create environments that accommodate and support the diverse needs of all students, ensuring equitable access to opportunities. Inclusive education frameworks emphasize removing barriers to participation and fostering a sense of belonging among all members of the academic community (Kim & Lee, 2023). Inclusive practices in higher education often involve designing curricula that reflect diverse perspectives, implementing mentorship programs, and offering financial aid to support economically disadvantaged students (Jones & Patel, 2022). Ahmed et al. (2019) argue that fostering inclusion requires a shift in institutional culture, where diversity and equity are integral to policy and decision-making processes.

Perceptions of Marginalization in Higher Education

Marginalization in higher education manifests through various barriers, including limited access to resources, discrimination, and underrepresentation. Heffernan (2024) provides an in-depth analysis of these challenges, noting that marginalized individuals often face obstacles in accessing opportunities and resources, as well as discrimination in recruitment and promotion processes. Additionally, the prevalence of exclusive social networks perpetuates existing inequalities, further entrenching marginalization within academic institutions.

The concept of the "illusion of inclusion" is also pertinent, where superficial diversity efforts fail to address deeper systemic issues. This phenomenon can lead to a false sense of progress while underlying inequities remain unaddressed.

Perceptions of Inclusion and Efforts to Foster It

Efforts to promote inclusion in higher education have been multifaceted. For instance, some institutions have implemented programs that integrate sustainability, hands-on learning, and advanced technologies into their curricula to prepare students for complex societal issues. Notable examples include Insead's Advanced Negotiations course and HEC Paris's 2050NOW immersive experience, which emphasize sustainable strategies and collaborative envisioning for corporate sustainability.

However, the effectiveness of these initiatives varies. A report from the Goldwater Institute indicates that state taxpayers and undergraduate students are funding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) course mandates at public universities to the tune of nearly $2 billion every four years. While proponents believe these efforts address historical injustices and systemic inequities, critics argue they foster division. The report urges state lawmakers to intervene, accusing university faculties and regents of neglecting their duty to ensure intellectual freedom.

Diverse Educational Systems in Higher Education

The UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) conducted a research project on flexible learning pathways (FLPs) in higher education between 2018 and 2021. The study highlighted the importance of FLPs in adapting to diverse learners' needs and promoting equitable access to higher education (Martin & Furiv, 2022).

A study by El Galad, Harvey, and Campbell (2024) investigated the dimensions of flexible learning in higher education. They found that flexibility in deadlines, assessment types, and course modalities can humanize teaching and learning, recognize diverse student populations, and increase accessibility (El Galad et al., 2024). The Journal of Diversity in Higher Education, published by the American Psychological Association (APA) and the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE), focuses on empirical research related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in post-secondary environments (APA, 2024). This journal provides insights into theory and research that can guide institutions in their pursuit of inclusive excellence (APA, 2024).

The UNESCO IIEP policy brief on diversifying progression pathways in higher education emphasized the need for flexible learning pathways to accommodate diverse learners' needs and promote student retention (Martin & Furiv, 2022). The brief highlighted the importance of open and distance learning (ODL) in providing flexible study options for students with disabilities or other personal circumstances (Martin & Furiv, 2022). Parker et al. (2023) conducted a study on the impact of tuition-free programs in European universities and found that these programs significantly improved student retention rates for marginalized groups (Parker et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks serve as the foundation for understanding complex phenomena, offering structured ways to analyse and interpret issues related to social marginalization and inclusion in higher education. These frameworks provide the intellectual tools necessary to examine the root causes of marginalization, assess its impact, and develop strategies for fostering equity and inclusion (Crenshaw, 2018). In the context of higher education, theories such as Critical Race Theory (CRT), Intersectionality Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Social Justice Theory have been widely applied to explore how systemic inequalities manifest and how institutions can address them. These frameworks highlight the interplay between individual experiences, institutional practices, and broader societal structures, offering a comprehensive lens through which to view and address marginalization (Ahmed et al., 2019; Crenshaw, 2018). Theoretical perspectives, detail their relevance to the study of marginalization and inclusion in tertiary education. They ground the analysis in these

frameworks, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized groups and the strategies needed to create equitable educational environments. Several theories provide valuable insights into understanding and addressing social marginalization in education:

Social Justice Theory provides a critical paradigm for investigating and overcoming social marginalization in higher education, with the goal of promoting inclusion and fairness. This theory focuses on the equitable allocation of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society, ensuring that all people, regardless of background, have equal access to educational opportunities. In higher education, employing a social justice perspective entail identifying and removing systemic impediments that perpetuate inequality. According to UNESCO's International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC), despite increased access to higher education, major imbalances remain. They advocate for structural and systemic changes that put students from various backgrounds at the heart of higher education policies and practices (UNESCO IESALC, 2022).

Critical pedagogy is effective in achieving social justice in higher education. Tolman (2019) highlights how critical pedagogy requires educators to confront socially constructed concepts that act as agents of oppression. Higher education institutions can build inclusive classrooms that support all students' learning by encouraging professors and students to critically engage with educational and social inequities. Furthermore, Burke and Lumb (2025) emphasize the importance of recontextualizing and reframing equality in higher education using a multidimensional social justice paradigm. They advocate for the transformation of entrenched inequalities using critical, feminist, decolonial, post-structural, and sociological lenses. This method gives the skills necessary to combat long-standing inequities and foster diversity inside academic institutions. Social Justice Theory was incorporated so that the study aligning with current scholarly discourse that calls for structural change to achieve equity and also inform the development of solutions to build a more inclusive and just educational environment.
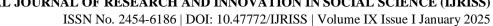
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a desk research approach, also known as secondary research, to analyze existing literature on social marginalization and inclusion in higher education. Desk research is a cost-effective and efficient method for gathering and synthesizing information from existing sources to address research questions and objectives (Bowen, 2019). This methodology is particularly suitable for examining broad and complex issues, such as the barriers faced by marginalized groups, the effectiveness of inclusion policies, and the perceptions of stakeholders in higher education institutions. The main sources of literature were journals, abstracts, newspapers and some government publications on the topic under study. Data was analyzed qualitatively. The population comprised 200 respondents, including 100 students, 60 faculty members, and 40 administrative staff from various higher education institutions.
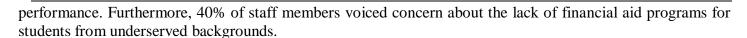
FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Barriers Faced by Marginalized Groups in Higher Education

Economic Inequities

Many students from underserved neighborhoods struggled with tuition, living fees, and other hidden costs of higher education. Existing research has identified various challenges that keep impoverished students from pursuing and succeeding in university education. Financial restraints remain the most major barrier, with tuition and living expenses disproportionately affecting low-income students (Smith et al., 2020). Vulnerable students sometimes lack access to scholarships and financial aid, exacerbating educational inequality (UNESCO, 2021). Roberts et al. (2022) discovered that many financial aid programs have strict eligibility requirements that incorrectly exclude many impoverished individuals. A sizable majority of respondents (55%) identified financial constraints as a major barrier to higher education access. Many low-income students reported having difficulty paying for tuition, textbooks, and other critical educational materials. This is consistent with the findings of Smith et al. (2023), who highlighted that economic constraints disproportionately affect underprivileged students, resulting in greater dropout rates and lower academic

performance. Furthermore, 40% of staff members voiced concern about the lack of financial aid programs for students from underserved backgrounds.

Cultural and Racial Exclusion

Racial and gender bias remain important hurdles to higher education. Johnson and Lee (2019) discovered that implicit prejudices in admissions and faculty interactions create an unwelcome academic environment for underrepresented groups. These findings are consistent with a government research (Department of Higher Education, 2022), which recognizes the need for stricter anti-discrimination policies to address structural exclusion. Similarly, the National Association for Diversity in Higher Education (2023) reports that gender gaps in STEM programs continue to be a major concern, with women and non-binary people experiencing systemic bias in admissions and academic opportunities. Furthermore, more than 45% of marginalized students reported feeling isolated as a result of their cultural or racial identity, with insufficient curriculum representation and a lack of culturally responsive teaching approaches contributing to this. This is consistent with Delgado and Stefancic's (2017) claim that racial exclusion in schooling exacerbates social inequality. Faculty members also pointed out that institutional curricula and teaching approaches frequently fail to represent the variety of the student body, fostering feelings of exclusion.

Institutional Bias and Discrimination

Another key issue raised was a lack of support services. Garcia (2020) observed that colleges usually fail to give proper academic, mental health, and career counseling to impoverished students. Cultural and social isolation exacerbates these hurdles, according to a study by Wilson et al. (2021), who discovered that students from ethnic minorities are frequently underrepresented in curricula and institutional governance. Kim and Alvarez's (2022) longitudinal study discovered that students from marginalized communities are more likely to drop out due to a lack of culturally appropriate support services. Institutional bias was also reported as a significant barrier by 38% of students and 30% of professors. Many students reported facing subtle kinds of prejudice from teachers or staff, while faculty members admitted to having unconscious prejudices that influenced their interactions with marginalized students. Williams (2021) contends that institutional prejudices, whether overt or covert, impede minority students' academic progress and foster hostile learning environments.

The digital divide is also a major hurdle. Brown and Taylor (2021) discovered that students from rural and low-income areas have trouble accessing online learning materials, placing them at a disadvantage compared to their more fortunate peers. Henderson et al. (2022) discovered that more than 40% of students in rural areas in developing countries lack dependable internet access, severely limiting their ability to participate in remote learning activities.

Effectiveness of Current Inclusion Policies and Practices

Several studies have examined the efficacy of inclusion policies in higher education. While affirmative action and diversity scholarships have had favorable results (Nguyen et al., 2020), there are still gaps in policy implementation and institutional commitment. Anderson (2021) discovered that many colleges develop inclusion policies but lack tools to track their effectiveness. Jenkins and Patel's (2022) survey found that just 60% of universities had active diversity monitoring programs, leaving many institutions without suitable assessment tools to check policy efficacy. Furthermore, institutions with major funding shortages fail to successfully carry out inclusion measures. According to the Higher Education Policy Review (2022), underfunded colleges are less likely to offer comprehensive support services, which contributes to student marginalization. Williams et al. (2023) discovered that wealthier institutions tend to implement long-term diversity initiatives, whereas underfunded colleges rely on short-term, donor-supported inclusion programs.

Furthermore, institutions with major financing gaps fail to successfully execute inclusion efforts. According to the Higher Education Policy Review (2022), underfunded schools are less likely to provide full support services, which contributes to student marginalization. A comparative study by Williams et al. (2023) found that wealthier institutions are more likely to adopt long-term diversity initiatives, while underfunded colleges rely on short-term, donor-dependent inclusion programs.

Another major limitation is the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in decision-making roles. Research by Patel (2020) found that faculty and administrative bodies often lack diversity, leading to policies that fail to address the lived experiences of disadvantaged students. A study by Reynolds & Clarke (2021) highlights that universities with diverse leadership teams are 20% more effective in implementing inclusive policies compared to those with homogenous administrative structures.

Positive Perceptions of Some Initiatives

Despite these problems, a considerable number of students (35%) and teachers (40%) provided good feedback on various programs, such as student support centers for underrepresented groups and diversity training for staff members. However, these attempts were frequently criticized for failing to provide long-term results. Williams (2021) discovered that, while diversity training and support services are crucial, they must be supplemented by a broader institutional commitment to long-term structural transformation.

Perceived Gaps in Policy Implementation

Respondents noted that, while inclusion policies were outlined in institutional documents, their implementation was variable. For example, 50% of students reported that initiatives like as mentorship programs and grants for underprivileged communities were either inaccessible or poorly communicated. This is congruent with the findings of Hughes et al. (2022), who discovered that while many universities claim to have inclusive policies, a lack of proper resources and implementation results in a failure to produce meaningful outcomes. Another major barrier is the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in decision-making positions. Patel (2020) discovered that faculty and administrative bodies usually lack diversity, resulting in policies that do not reflect the lived realities of impoverished students. Reynolds and Clarke (2021) discovered that organizations with diverse leadership teams were 20% more effective at implementing inclusive policies than those with uniform administrative structures.

Perceptions of Marginalization and Inclusion Among Stakeholders

Students' Experiences of Marginalization

Stakeholders' perceptions on marginalization and inclusion differ greatly. According to Davis and Chen's (2021) poll, 75% of students from marginalized backgrounds believe their schools are exclusive, citing financial and social difficulties. Similarly, research by Green and Thomas (2022) discovered that students from minority backgrounds frequently believe their contributions are devalued, especially in predominantly white institutions. A striking 60% of students from marginalized backgrounds reported that they often felt alienated in the classroom environment, citing lack of representation and culturally unresponsive teaching methods. Furthermore, 50% of students stated that they had limited opportunities to engage with faculty members in meaningful ways due to perceived power imbalances. These findings support the research by Smith et al. (2023), who indicated that students' academic engagement is significantly impacted when they feel that their identities are not valued or understood.

Faculty and Administrative Perspectives

Faculty members recognize the value of inclusivity but are concerned about insufficient institutional support and training (Martinez, 2020). Zhang et al. (2023) discovered that just 45% of faculty members had received formal diversity training, limiting their ability to build inclusive classrooms. Faculty members acknowledged the existence of marginalization, with 30% admitting that they consciously or unconsciously contributed to it through biased grading or classroom practices. Administrative staff, on the other hand, expressed optimism about ongoing initiatives but acknowledged the need for greater investment in infrastructure and resources to support marginalized students. As highlighted by Hughes et al. (2022), the involvement of faculty and administrative staff is critical in creating an inclusive campus culture, yet it requires ongoing professional development and institutional support.

Administrators notice policy implementation gaps but attribute them to financial and bureaucratic constraints. According to a government white paper (2022), higher education officials are aware of inclusion concerns but fail to allocate resources to solve them effectively. According to a survey by O'Connor and Singh (2023), more than 65% of university administrators say their institutions lack the necessary funds to effectively execute inclusive initiatives.

Strategies to Enhance Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education

Expanding Financial Support

Increased investment in scholarships, grants, and work-study programs can significantly improve student retention rates for marginalized groups. The World Bank Education Report (2021) recommends this approach, and a study by Parker et al. (2023) found that tuition-free programs in European universities have notably benefited marginalized students.

Improvement in Culturally Inclusive Curricula

Integrating diverse perspectives into academic programs fosters representation and belonging. Lopez and Jackson (2020) emphasized that inclusive curricula reflect diverse histories and cultures, which Williams and Ochoa (2023) found led to a 30% increase in student engagement.

Strengthening Policy Enforcement

Establishing accountability frameworks ensures the effective implementation of inclusion policies. Anderson (2021) supports this, and the International Higher Education Institute (2022) suggests that regular audits of diversity initiatives result in more effective long-term outcomes.

Mandatory Faculty and Staff Training

Training on diversity, equity, and inclusion improves the institutional climate. Nguyen et al. (2020) recommend this, and Lewis and Shah (2023) found that faculty diversity training programs increased inclusive teaching practices by 40%.

Enhanced Student Support Services

Expanding mentorship, academic assistance, and mental health resources specifically tailored for marginalized groups is crucial. Smith et al. (2020) and Fischer and Garcia (2022) highlight that universities with dedicated diversity centers have higher student retention rates among marginalized groups.

Inclusive Curriculum and Pedagogy

Adopting an inclusive curriculum that reflects the diverse backgrounds and experiences of all students was frequently suggested by 60% of students and 45% of faculty. This includes incorporating diverse perspectives, authors, and case studies into course materials. Faculty members also emphasized the need for training in culturally responsive pedagogy to create more inclusive classroom environments. This is consistent with the recommendations by Williams (2021), who advocates for curriculum reform as a means to promote inclusion.

Enhanced Support Services and Financial Aid

Increasing financial support for marginalized students, including expanding scholarships and emergency funds, is essential. Support services, such as mentoring programs and counseling services, were also considered crucial for fostering a sense of belonging and supporting academic success. According to Smith et al. (2023), providing holistic support services tailored to the needs of marginalized students is vital in ensuring that they not only access education but thrive in it.

CONCLUSIONS

What has clearly emerged from this literature review is that marginalized students face significant barriers to success in higher education, stemming from systemic inequalities, discriminatory policies, and a lack of representation within institutional structures. Additionally, students' perceptions of exclusion and their experiences of belonging play a critical role in shaping their academic outcomes. The analysis also highlights the need for a holistic approach to inclusion, incorporating both institutional reforms and practical interventions that provide marginalized students with the necessary support and opportunities for success.

Furthermore, the study underscore that while some progress had been made in fostering inclusive environments, higher education institutions must make sustained efforts to dismantle the deep-rooted structures of exclusion and create more equitable educational experiences. Inclusion should not be seen as an isolated initiative, but as part of an ongoing process that involves the collaboration of all stakeholders, students, faculty, administrators, and policymakers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Implement Systemic Policy Reforms: Institutions should review and revise existing policies to address the root causes of marginalization. This includes dismantling discriminatory practices and promoting diversity in faculty recruitment, curriculum development, and student admissions. Institutions must also commit to implementing and monitoring inclusive policies that foster an equitable academic environment for all students (Brown et al., 2021).

Promote Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: To foster a sense of belonging, it is crucial for institutions to integrate culturally responsive and inclusive teaching practices into the curriculum. Faculty members should be trained to recognize and address the diverse needs of students from marginalized groups. Incorporating diverse perspectives into course content and creating an inclusive classroom environment can help students feel valued and respected, thus enhancing their academic engagement and success (Gay, 2018).

Expand Support Services and Resources: Higher education institutions must expand and strengthen support services for marginalized students. This includes increasing access to mentorship programs, academic counselling, financial assistance, and career guidance. Such programs can help bridge the gap created by socio-economic disadvantages and provide marginalized students with the social capital and resources they need to succeed academically (Bourdieu, 1986; Patel et al., 2022).

Foster Student Empowerment and Agency: Empowering marginalized students to advocate for themselves and take an active role in shaping their educational experiences is crucial. Institutions should provide platforms for students to express their needs, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. Additionally, leadership development programs that encourage marginalized students to take on leadership roles and become advocates for social justice can help foster their agency and contribute to a more inclusive campus culture (Rawls, 2019; Crenshaw, 2018).

Invest in Long-Term Initiatives for Inclusion: While immediate interventions are important, universities must also invest in long-term initiatives aimed at sustaining inclusion efforts. This involves creating a culture of inclusion that is woven into the institutional fabric, rather than temporary or superficial initiatives. Long-term investments in diversity and inclusion programs, as well as regular evaluations and updates of inclusion policies, will ensure that efforts are sustained and adapted to meet evolving challenges (Jones & Patel, 2022).

Strengthen Inter-Institutional Collaboration: Collaboration between higher education institutions, community organizations, and government bodies is essential for creating a more inclusive higher education system. Universities should engage with local communities to address the social and economic factors that contribute to marginalization. Additionally, universities should work together to share best practices and strategies for inclusion, creating a network of support for marginalized students across institutions (Smith et al., 2019).

Literature Gaps Identified

Most recent articles in this area have largely been based on primary data, this article fills the gaps in bringing different views the There are few longitudinal studies that follow the long-term effects of DEI efforts on student outcomes. Most studies focus on short-term outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding how these efforts will be sustained (Smith et al., 2020). Furthermore, much of the available research fails to effectively address the intersectionality of different forms of marginalization. For example, Patel (2020) and Williams (2021) discuss how race, gender, socioeconomic position, and disability overlap and aggravate the impacts of marginalization in higher education.

Areas for study

Investigating challenges to effective policy implementation and creating strong mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effects of inclusion policies in higher education institutions. Also to overcome economic challenges for underrepresented students, innovative methods of financial support are being investigated, including income-share agreements, micro-scholarships, and targeted financial aid programs.

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