

Conference Proposal

Exploring Diversity in Post-secondary Institutions: Assimilation, Integration, or Inclusion

Purpose

With the shifting demographics of societies such as Canada, access to higher education presents various challenges, one of which is post-secondary institutions' need to adapt to the demands of an increasingly diverse student body. With a genuine feeling of diversity and inclusion rather than assimilation, this proposed study will be presented as a paper to beget positive discussions about the culture of equitable accessibility and accommodation for all post-secondary students. This study aims to examine the factors influencing university prioritization of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and how increased diversity on institutional campuses can help students achieve educational mobility.

In my study, I will make the case that while post-secondary institutions can facilitate improved access, they also need to commit to creating support services and a more welcoming and inclusive atmosphere to ensure student success among an increasingly diverse student body.

To achieve this purpose, the study poses the following questions explicitly:

- i. How do post-secondary institutions create a culture of equal accessibility and accommodation for all students?
- ii. What are the perceptions and experiences of students regarding their institution's DEI policies?
- iii. How can post-secondary institutions promulgate equity, diversity, and inclusion policies into their procedures?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study will incorporate theories of constructivism (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007), components of critical race theory, social identity theory, institutional theory, and Inclusive Excellence Framework (Freire, 1970/2007; Nayak, 2007; Trechter & Bucholtz, 2001) which is a meta-analysis aimed at integrating DEI efforts through dimensions of an organization.

Why is Diversity and Inclusion in Post-secondary Institutions Key?

Despite post-secondary education being a crucial path to economic mobility for citizens in Canada, racial and socioeconomic variables continue to have a substantial impact on who gets access to and succeeds in school (Itano-Boase et al., 2021). Institutions have taken several steps to integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion policies into their operations. However, despite their good intentions and planning, discriminatory exclusions have become unintended consequences (Mohanty, 2012; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019; Wilcox & Lawson, 2022). Thus, there is a need to expand the governance and benefits accessible to all students (Mohanty, 2012; Tamtik, 2022; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). In order to help all students achieve their educational goals, diversity and inclusion initiatives must be developed and put into practice in academic institutions (Itano-Boase et al., 2021; Preston, 2016). In addition, post-secondary institutions must adapt to and mirror the changing demographics, immigration trends, and internationalization happening across Canada and embrace training a skilled workforce that contributes to a vibrant economy and mobility for all (Smith, 2020).

Methodology

Since this study explores how post-secondary institutions prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion and how increased diversity on institutional campuses can aid students in achieving educational mobility, I will utilize a qualitative case study research design to collect and analyze

data (Yin, 2016). A qualitative research design is chosen over a quantitative approach to enable the study's participants to provide deeper and richer information (Stake, 2005).

Furthermore, given the constructivist nature of the meaning-making involved in this study, a qualitative study is ideally suited to the conceptual framework of this research (Patton, 2002). Therefore, one-on-one interviews and document analysis will be used as data collection techniques.

Significance of the study

This paper will build upon, expand the discourse around diversity, and argue for a more inclusive approach, inviting and embracing various socioeconomic, ethnic, gender groups, etc., to create a broader pool of thought processes and worldviews.

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