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# Editorial: Advancing equity: exploring EDI in Higher Education Institutes

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## Editorial on the Research Topic

### Advancing equity: exploring EDI in Higher Education Institutes

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are undergoing a profound shift as student populations become increasingly diverse, influenced by globalization, neoliberal reforms, and expanding access initiatives. Amid this transformation, it is not only timely but imperative to confront and dismantle the enduring legacies of colonialism and to challenge persistent deficit-based narratives. This necessitates a deep and sustained commitment to cultural proficiency, inclusive teaching practices, and transformative pedagogy that reflects and respects the complexities of today's student body.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) are no longer optional aspirations—they are foundational pillars for any institution striving to create a just, responsive, and effective educational environment. This Research Topic seeks to spotlight the urgent need for transformative dialogue and action within higher education, foregrounding critical explorations of how equity can be advanced and how EDI can be meaningfully embedded in institutional structures, pedagogical approaches, and academic cultures. EDI is not just a moral imperative, but a strategic necessity for the future of higher education.

Given the scarcity of research examining the global impact of innovative and collaborative pedagogies in higher education, this Research Topic has emerged as a vital and timely contribution. Drawing from studies and insights around the world, this Research Topic serves not only to fill a critical gap in the literature but also envisions this Research Topic as a platform to engage institutions across international contexts—fostering dialogue, enhancing communication, and promoting coordinated efforts that support a collective journey of transformation in education.

This Research Topic features 14 manuscripts, including original scholarship, systematic reviews, brief research reports, opinion pieces, and policy reports highlighting transformative pedagogy and emphasizing the need for systemic changes to create a fairer, more inclusive environment. This theme is purposefully broad, and our editorial provides a brief overview of the essential findings from the articles published in this research area.

[Arevalo et al.](#), outlined efforts to promote equitable hiring of teaching-focused faculty (TFF) within the University of California system by developing inclusive evaluation rubrics. These were co-created through faculty learning communities to assess teaching, research, and DEI statements more fairly. A key result showed that implementing these

rubrics led to more diverse applicant pools and improved alignment with departmental equity goals, highlighting their potential to foster inclusive academic environments and enhance student success in STEM.

The work of [Klots and Ogwude](#), discusses efforts to promote equitable hiring of teaching- focused faculty (TFF) within the University of California system by developing inclusive evaluation rubrics. These were co-created through faculty learning communities to assess teaching, research, and DEI statements more fairly. A key result showed that implementing these rubrics led to more diverse applicant pools and improved alignment with departmental equity goals, highlighting their potential to foster inclusive academic environments and enhance student success in STEM.

[Berlanga and Corti](#) analyzed how scholarships impact academic success at Universitat Abat Oliba CEU. Scholarship recipients showed higher grades, passed more credits, and had greater continuity compared to non-recipients. For example, students with continuous scholarships had a 100% graduation rate. These findings highlight scholarships as vital tools for promoting educational equity, suggesting further support for non-recipients could bridge existing academic performance gaps.

[Moores et al.](#) examined how fragmented Access and Participation Plans (APPs) often fail to address systemic inequalities in higher education. Despite progress in widening participation, disadvantaged students remained underrepresented in high-tariff institutions. The authors call for sustainable whole-institution approaches, greater sector collaboration, improved resourcing, and alignment of APPs with frameworks like the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to achieve more equitable student outcomes.

[Al-Aqeel and Alhumaid](#) explored undergraduate mentoring programs, finding that mentoring benefits both mentors and mentees. Mentees reported increased academic confidence, personal development, and career guidance, while mentors developed leadership, communication, and reflective skills. The study highlights mentoring as a dual-benefit approach that strengthens student support networks and fosters inclusive educational environments, helping to advance institutional equity and student success.

[Correa et al.](#) investigated women's access to leadership roles in higher education using a multi-method approach. Despite women making up the majority of students, structural and cultural barriers limit progression to senior roles. Their findings highlighted biased recruitment practices, perceptions of leadership norms, and the need for targeted institutional reforms to promote gender equity at the highest levels.

[Nwosu](#) examined the effects of mentoring on the impact on minority ethnic students' academic career engagement. The study revealed no significant differences between Asian and Black students, but notable variances between Black students and those identifying as Mixed or Other ethnicities. Interestingly, while mentoring session quantity negatively correlated with engagement, bimodal delivery produced positive outcomes. Findings suggested Black students may require more tailored mentoring approaches with better-matched role models.

Investigating expatriate health sciences students' experiences in the UAE, [Ahmed et al.](#) conducted a qualitative analysis of 23

students' reflections. Their research identified key challenges in dormitory-study life balance, socialization, support networks, and financial navigation. Their work recommended enhancing student experiences, particularly for educational institutions seeking to improve the support available to diverse student populations.

[Yao and Yang](#) examined the motivation and challenges experienced by academic expatriates on international branch campuses by conducting a systematic literature review. The review identified that the motivations were classified into five categories. Key challenges identified highlighted the complex reality faced by academic expatriates. Their findings demonstrated the necessity for targeted management strategies, exposing a gap in the literature concerning the long-term impacts of expatriation.

[Brozina et al.](#) produced a systematic literature review, examining how researchers define "nontraditional students" (NTS) in U.S.-based studies and identified definitional issues. Of the 65 articles reviewed, only 33 included a specific definition. Thus, it is recommended that a more consistent use of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) criteria be adopted as a baseline definition. The field would also benefit from establishing a national framework for tracking and supporting NTS.

[Bartolo et al.](#) investigated the challenges through the perceptions of students with disabilities. By conducting a survey and semi-structured interviews, the authors analyzed the reflections of 51 students. The findings highlighted the need to develop a welcoming community, socio-emotional and personal development scheme, which would allow students with disabilities to feel more involved in the curriculum.

[Carter-Veale et al.](#) assessed the readiness of five biomedical departments to recruit and retain racially and ethnically minoritized faculty, using an adapted Community Readiness Tool. The authors argued that evaluating readiness for diversification at departmental level yields more actionable insights than an institution-wide assessment, allowing more tailored interventions and a more effective use of resources.

[Naim](#) undertook a comprehensive analysis of the factors driving educational inequity across both general and higher education in the USA, focusing on dimensions such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. Drawing on a wide array of national and institutional data sources, [Naim](#) identified key determinants of student outcomes and offers recommendations to enhance access to a more inclusive and equitable education system.

[Zeedan](#) reported on the pedagogical impact of redesigning two courses focused on Israel and Palestine, aimed at fostering a more inclusive classroom environment. The use of strategies such as experiential learning, digital tools, and scaffolded assignments led to significant improvements in student outcomes. This highlights the potential for inclusive teaching strategies to be successfully adopted across a broad spectrum of subject areas.

Collectively, the contributions in this Research Topic reflect a growing commitment within higher education to not only recognize systemic inequalities but to act decisively in addressing them. They illustrate that while challenges persist—rooted in history, policy, and practice—there is also significant momentum toward transformation. Through evidence-based interventions, collaborative pedagogy, and inclusive leadership, these studies illuminate a path forward: one where equity, diversity, and inclusion are not simply principles but

practices that shape the culture, structure, and future of higher education worldwide.

## Author contributions

KR: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation, Project administration, Supervision, Validation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. EA: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. CF: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. JG: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. AM: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships

that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

## Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

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