

Is it enough with diversity in higher education?

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This study aims at understanding what does diversity in higher education mean and why it is needed. It will further investigate if there are relations between diversity, interculturality and social justice in higher education. Do we need to look at diversity without relating it to interculturality and social justice?

Some people were forced to immigrate to Europe due to armed conflicts, poverty and different forms of human rights abuses experienced in their countries of origin. These new groups as well as the existence of national minorities contributed to a large population with different backgrounds within the same nations. Due to their social and educational backgrounds (Lardy, Bressoux & Clercq, 2021) students from these minorities are not securing results that allows them to join higher education.

Encouraging the engagement of immigrant students in school work and to increase their results can positively influence their ambitions and motivations for further studies which can result in diversity in higher education (Umans, Collin & Tagesson, 2008). The need for diversity of students in higher education was expressed in Bologna process as “to reflect the diversity of population” and “increasing participation of underrepresented groups” (Tolstrup Holmegaard, 2017).

Students and staff with diverse backgrounds can share with their peers’ knowledge and experiences of cultural, religious and other life experiences which could contribute to diversity and inclusion in a positive way (Ogunyemi, Clare, Astudillo, Marseill, Manu & Kim, 2020). This can even contribute to intercultural communication and enrich diversity in higher education (Otten, 2009; Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009; Borghetti, Beaven & Pugliese, 2015). In this process, “international mobility and domestic multiculturalism” (Otten, 2009) can help not only interaction but also co-construction of interculturality (Borghetti, Beaven & Pugliese, 2015). Interculturality that aims at equality, common goals, cooperation and support from responsible authorities (Schweisfurth & Gu, 2009).

Diversity can encourage intercultural communication among persons in higher education with different gender, race, ethnicity, functional variation, sexual orientation, culture, religious faiths etc. Beyond the observable diversities, higher education also needs to give room for and embrace diversity of perspectives (Gonzales & LaPointe Terosky, 2020). Diversity of perspectives could widen students view so that they need not take for granted research results and academic reasonings as absolute truths. Instead help them to understand that knowledge develops and changes through time with new research and findings.

Diversity and interculturality are relevant but higher education should even aim beyond. Marginalized groups have limited access to resources and opportunities within higher education and in the society (Behtou, & Høyer Leivestad, 2019). There are hindrances for them to get acceptable education to fulfil the criteria to join higher education. If higher education should worth its salt, it needs to involve in societal debates and actions to improve the life situation for younger people from marginalized groups (Chile & Black, 2015). It needs to work for social justice, that considers as its goals distribution of resources, acknowledgment of differences and allows participation for marginalized groups to be heard (Avis, 2019).

Meaningful diversity leads to intercultural exchange and working for social justice for marginalized groups within higher education. Working for social justice in the long run will help equity and equality in accessing all forms of resources that give opportunity for marginalized groups in the society to get their fair opportunity to join higher education (Bagga-Gupta, Messina Dahlberg & Vigmo, 2020; Danvers & Hinton-Smith, 2022). It is important to allow students to be a part of the dialogue by taking their account of what it means to be marginalized and how inclusion and social justice could be realized for the diverse groups (Messiou, 2019).

Method/methodology.

This study is a desktop study based on literature from a scientific database. For identifying relevant texts, a search is done in one general databased, Primo used by the University of Borås. Academic texts used for this presentation are produced between 2000-2023. For further understanding of the concepts used in this presentation a search was undertaken based on the concepts of diversity, interculturality and social justice in relation to higher education.

While this is a preliminary search and finding of valuable results from the articles accessed, the search is not exhaustive enough to produce scientific text for publication. This means a search for more texts in various databases will continue and further analysis of the three themes and their interrelations will be accomplished.

Concluding remarks

The articles review shows, the important of diversity and its relation to other areas of relevance for higher education. The focus on diversity should be ethical in interaction of groups with each other. The knowledge of the diverse group should not only focus on the benefit of one group for marketization of services to the “other” (Haapakoski & Pashby, 2017).

Diversity needs to help in the process of achieving social justice, intercultural communication and in extension even internationalisation that many higher education institutions are striving for. Diversity should also show respect, acceptance and inclusion of persons with gender, function variation, race, sexual orientation and other variations in all societal activities. It also should strive for the right of marginalized groups to get access to all resources that will allow them inclusion, equality and equity in the higher education.

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