


Chapter 1

The Link Between Inclusion and Social Justice in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

At present, there is a growing focus on fostering reflection on educational and social inclusion within the framework of social justice to enhance the quality of education. Inclusion and social justice have emerged as key concerns for institutions' long-term viability. The United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation have also taken an interest in social justice and inclusion, which has resulted in policies meant to break down barriers and advance inclusive systems that give people from all walks of life access to education worldwide. In addition to creating an environment where the younger generation has equal opportunities in an inclusive learning environment, promoting social inclusion, equality, and social justice within the educational system also aids in community transformation. To ensure a better link between social justice and inclusiveness, policies must be presented within a rhetoric of rights rather than individual needs.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

It is clear that the issue of inclusive education has grown to include social and human rights issues. International opinion including scholars like Engelbrecht and

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Muthukrishna (2019), Singal (2019), Walton and Wilson (2018), and Muthukrishna (2001) holds that it is fundamentally about equal access to education and full participation, respecting the human rights principle for all students, and opposing global exclusionary policies and practices for students who are deemed “different”. A well-funded system of separate special schools for white kids with disabilities was established under the former South African government's educational system, which not only divided students based on race but also on (dis)abilities (Walton and Rusznyak, 2014). The 1996 South African Constitution emphasised the government's commitment to restoring the human rights of all marginalised groups in education, which is a fundamental right for all citizens (Republic of South Africa, 1996a). As a result, following 1994, educational goals were established using this legacy (Badat and Sayed, 2014). Human rights provisions in the Constitution were emphasised by significant education policy initiatives like the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) (Engelbrecht, 2006). In 1996, a National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training and a National Committee on Education Support Services were commissioned to jointly study the education and support of students who faced challenges in school, including disabilities (Department of Education, 1997). Their final report's findings and recommendations suggested a change from a medical deficit model of difference (“special needs,” with a focus on disabilities) to a social model of diverse educational needs. This made them more responsive to the different educational needs of the South African context and indicated some important directions for transformation and change (Muthukrishna et al, 2020).

The report's recommendations led to the release of a policy framework in 2001 called Education White Paper 6-Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001). In order to eliminate the educational inequities that were deeply rooted during the apartheid era, Education White Paper 6 recommended that the entire educational system be gradually transformed into an inclusive education and training system. This would make it possible for every student, irrespective of their particular support needs, to acquire an education. Within an ecosystemic theoretical framework, the study addressed learning barriers and provided recommendations at the macro-, meso-, and microsystem levels to establish an inclusive educational system (Swart and Pettipher, 2016).

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