


# Chapter 2


## Bridging Systemic Inequalities Through Transformative Inclusive Leadership: A Multi-Level Framework for Equity, Social Justice, and Educational Participation

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter examines systemic inequalities that shape educational participation and presents a transformative inclusive leadership framework for advancing equity and social justice. It explores how structural barriers across policy, institutional cultures, curriculum, pedagogy, and socio-economic conditions contribute to persistent exclusion. Drawing on intersectionality, decolonial theory, social justice education, Universal Design for Learning, and strength-based approaches, the chapter outlines practices that foster meaningful participation for diverse learners. It highlights the roles of families, communities, NGOs, and higher education institutions in sustaining inclusive ecosystems and offers policy pathways for long-term structural change.*

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# INTRODUCTION

## Background and Context

An increase in focus has been made in the last decade and more so with the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) that requires inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning access and opportunities to all. This is a global necessity that makes education not just an issue of human right, but also as a means of social justice, economic mobility and democratic participation. The international conventions such as UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and Education 2030 Agenda by UNESCO tend to point to the necessity of dismantling the obstacles to education and to ensure that every child, youth, and adult regardless of who they are or what their socio-economic status they belong to, can actively participate in the educational processes. Such promises are a sign of a growing realization that inclusion does not merely entail the ability to receive schooling but ensuring learning is in such a way that all learners feel valued, respected and supported (Nishii & Leroy, 2022).

Despite such distant worldly desires, there is still a distinction between the policy sentiments and the actualities of education regimes. The liberal policies have been adopted by most governments that promote inclusive education, gender equality, multilingual education and disability rights. However, it is patchy or partial at the grassroots. Schools may be staffed with inept and unqualified teachers, substandard facilities and learning materials. The institutional cultures tend to present themselves in the form of the hierarchical, examination-based and deficit-based ones, that fail to satisfy the requirements of the various forms of learning. Accordingly, equity-based policies may not be capable of altering anything but remain as mere figurative devices, to which all learners, especially the marginalised groups, will remain victims of the exclusionary policies. These policy speech-life experiences disjunctures exhibit systemic barriers that cannot be achieved by mere legislative or administrative intervention. Despite such distant worldly desires, there is still a distinction between the policy sentiments and the actualities of education regimes. The liberal policies have been adopted by most governments that promote inclusive education, gender equality, multilingual education and disability rights. However, it is patchy or partial at the grassroots. Schools may be staffed with inept and unqualified teachers, substandard facilities and learning materials. The institutional cultures tend to present themselves in the form of the hierarchical, examination-based and deficit-based ones, that fail to satisfy the requirements of the various forms of learning. Accordingly, equity-based policies may not be capable of altering anything but remain as mere figurative devices, to which all learners, especially the marginalised groups, will remain victims of the exclusionary policies. These policy speech-life

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