

# Chapter 6

## Inclusive Education in Achieving Comprehensive Inclusion in Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Inclusive education (IE) is a goal in higher education (HE) to be achieved for equity, social justice, and the right to learn for all individuals in human rights principles. IE is increasingly applied not only in schools but also in higher education institutions, seeking to ensure that learners from different backgrounds can access and fully participate in academic life. This chapter explores inclusivity in HE, emphasising that IE requires multiple dimensions, including gender, culture, religion, disability, and the needs of marginalised groups. The Social Identity Theory (SIT) underpinned this study, which posits that people's identities are shaped by the social communities. Economic, religious, and socio-cultural factors influence these communities and how individuals participate in HE. Thus, social diversity in HE is evident in the increasing enrolment of students and faculty from varied backgrounds. However, despite these developments, gender inequality persists where women are underrepresented in many HE institutions. It suggests a need to enhance inclusivity in HE practice.*

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3373-7842-8.ch006

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education (IE) in higher education (HE) is strongly grounded in international human rights and policy frameworks that seek to ensure equitable access to education for all individuals (Ainscow, 2020; Amor et al., 2019). From this perspective, inclusive education is widely conceptualised as a rights-based approach that seeks to dismantle structural, institutional, and pedagogical barriers that constrain participation and limit equal educational opportunities, particularly for learners who are marginalised or historically excluded. Consequently, IE extends beyond access to encompass meaningful participation, equitable learning experiences, and successful educational outcomes for diverse student populations.

Furthermore, several global policy instruments provide the normative foundation for inclusive education across educational systems, reinforcing the principle that education systems should be responsive to learner diversity and promote equitable participation (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Kioupi et al., 2023). Within this global policy landscape, international organisations have played a critical role in shaping inclusive education agendas. Especially, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has been influential in advancing international frameworks that guide countries in developing education systems capable of addressing diverse learning needs and fostering equitable learning environments (UNESCO, 2020).

These policy directions are further anchored in international human rights instruments. The United Nations established the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms education as a fundamental human right and emphasises that all individuals should have access to education without discrimination (United Nations, 1948). Building upon this human rights foundation, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) strengthened the global commitment to inclusive education by obligating states to establish inclusive education systems at all levels, including higher education, while ensuring reasonable accommodation and appropriate support to enable equal participation for students with disabilities (Ohonba, 2025).

More recently, global development agendas have further reinforced these commitments. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) emphasises inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all, thereby reaffirming education as a universal human right (United Nations, 2015). Importantly, the goal explicitly promotes inclusive education across all levels, including tertiary education, while encouraging systems that facilitate lifelong learning and full participation in social, economic, and civic life (UNESCO, 2020). Correspondingly, recent scholarship highlights that SDG 4 reflects a global commitment to addressing persistent educational inequalities and expanding equitable

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