

Understanding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Policies and Practices – a book review

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Introduction

Understanding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Policies and Practices (2024), edited by Dr. Smita Sinha (Berhampur University, India), Dr. Abha Gupta (Old Dominion University, USA), and Dr. Pratip Kumar Mishra (Bhubaneswar, India), is a compelling edited volume reflecting an insightful collaboration among eminent scholars with deep expertise in linguistics, education, literacy, and public administration. The editors bring decades of leadership in equity, language policy, and community engagement.

This collection, introduced by Dr. Pamela Mason (Harvard University), includes 19 well-crafted chapters, an epilogue, and three reflective essays, contributed by authors from Asia, Europe, and North America. Adopting a multidisciplinary lens, spanning linguistics, psychology, sociology, and education, the volume comprehensively addresses global policies and practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). The chapters are organized by themes into four sections as listed below. It aligns closely with the *Educational Role of Language* (ERL) framework, especially the major strands concerning discourse formation, language-related identity, and equitable educational access.

Section 1: Conceptualizing diversity, equity, and inclusion

This opening section grounds the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of DEI. It moves beyond definitions by addressing psychological and sociological perspectives, highlighting how language, culture, and education shape identity construction. Topics include the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on underprivileged learners, the interplay between language and cultural identity, prejudice in classroom dynamics, and issues of stereotyping and sexism. One chapter also explores how Catholic classrooms grapple with diversity, underscoring the universal challenges of equity in educational contexts.

Chapter 1: Sinha and Das foundationally define DEI, distinguishing diversity, equity, equality, inclusion, and belonging. They emphasize the importance of equity as tailored support to achieve fairness and highlight inclusion as creating environments where all individuals feel genuinely respected and valued. The chapter warns organizations of the critical risks of inadequate DEI implementation.

Chapter 2: Gupta, Lee, and Maira analyze the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on marginalized students in rural India. The study shows evidence of drastic enrollment drops, infrastructural deficits like internet access, disrupted communication and motor skills, and teacher shortages, illustrating the exacerbation of educational inequities during crises.

Chapter 3: Alnefaie and Alyami explore the dynamic interplay between language and culture in shaping identities, advocating for embracing multilingualism and culturally responsive pedagogies as key to fostering inclusive classrooms that nurture academic success and identity formation.

Chapter 4: This philosophical exploration by Molina urges dismantlement of discriminatory paradigms related to race, caste, religion, and gender. Examining global DEI best practices, the chapter advocates shifting focus from differences toward intrinsic human dignity, promoting empathetic, respectful cultures that transcend compliance.

Chapter 5: This chapter by Gupta situates social inequality within persistent divisions like race, caste, and gender, despite biological human unity. It calls for robust educational and policy reforms to confront structural exclusion and to construct societies that are inclusive and equitable.

Section 2: Policies on equity and inclusion

This section examines the policy structures that frame DEI in varied societies. The chapters offer ethnographic insight into language education policies and emphasize linguistic rights as a central principle for empowering marginalized voices. The analyses collectively stress culturally responsive practices and collaborative policymaking as essential tools for fostering equity.

Chapter 6: Saxena traces four decades of ethnographic research on multilingual classrooms, articulating how language education policies profoundly influence equity. It advances translanguaging theory integration with ethnography as a pathway to social justice and learner agency in diverse educational contexts.

Chapter 7: Anju Sahgal Gupta reviews India's constitutional provisions and affirmative action policies aimed at historically marginalized castes, tribes, economically disadvantaged groups, persons with disabilities, and transgender rights. The chapter critically examines policy successes and continuing gaps in enforcement and inclusivity.

Chapter 8: Duruttya employs corpus linguistics to advocate for culturally responsive education, emphasizing pedagogical materials and classroom interactions that respect diverse cultures and languages, fostering empathy and inclusivity within equitable learning environments.

Chapter 9: Badar and Mason document a design-based research approach for educating out-of-school children, highlighting community and policy engagement, collaborative strategy development, and culturally relevant methodologies to include marginalized learners in formal education.

Section 3: Equality, equity, and inclusive society

In this section, chapters expand on DEI in broader cultural and societal contexts. Examples include U.S. adoption policies affecting Indian children, the societal consequences of excluding individuals of low socioeconomic status from healthcare, and the financial empowerment of women through self-help groups. Together, they demonstrate how social, health, and economic inequities intersect, drawing attention to the indispensable role of collective action in building inclusive societies.

Chapter 10: Hernandez examines literacy equity, promoting instruction that values students' cultural and linguistic assets while dismantling structural barriers that perpetuate unequal outcomes, advocating inclusive literacy practices.

Chapter 11: Lee and Gupta assess the amplified health and social inequities confronting Asian Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic, situating these within longstanding racialized experiences and urging policies that mitigate such disparities through equity and inclusiveness.

Chapter 12: Pandey explores the experiences of Indian adoptees in the United States, emphasizing identity negotiation and cultural belonging. The chapter advocates culturally sensitive support systems to affirm adoptees' multifaceted identities within multicultural contexts.

Chapter 13: Panigrahi investigates the mental health consequences of exclusion from advanced healthcare by low socio-economic groups, highlighting the psychological toll of structural barriers and stigma, and calling for inclusive health policies to address intersecting inequities.

Chapter 14: Das and Akankshya ethnographically examine India's transgender and Hijra communities, documenting their exclusion, survival strategies, and resilience. The chapter underscores the need for legal recognition, educational inclusion, and social support reforms to promote empowerment and dignity.

Section 4: Gender, inclusion, and empowerment

The final section focuses on gender-based challenges in inclusion and empowerment. Case studies on transgender communities and women's access to technology education reveal the enduring systemic

inequalities tied to gender. Nevertheless, the chapters also underscore the transformative effect of inclusive policies, offering practical pathways to foster empowerment.

Chapter 15: This multidisciplinary chapter by Das and Akankshya focuses on transgender identity search and survival amidst pervasive social exclusion and institutional neglect in India. It combines psychological, sociological, and legal analyses to highlight urgent demands for comprehensive protections and social acceptance.

Chapter 16: Priyabadini and Udgata analyze women's technology education journeys in India, identifying gender stereotypes, mentorship deficits, and socio-cultural challenges. They present success narratives alongside recommendations for policy reforms supporting equitable STEM inclusion and empowerment.

Chapter 17: Mahapatra, Sahool, and colleagues offer empirical evidence of social exclusion faced by transgender communities in India across education, health, and employment sectors. They argue for integrated policy frameworks and societal sensitization to achieve real inclusion.

Chapter 18: Pradhan and Acharya extend gender and inclusion analyses to urban deprived children, highlighting systemic challenges and initiatives promoting equality and empowerment, with a focus on educational interventions and social support mechanisms.

Chapter 19: Mishra quantitatively assesses the empowering role of women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in financial socialization. Emphasizing peer support, collective decision-making, and knowledge-sharing, the chapter positions SHGs as catalysts for women's economic inclusion and community transformation.

Reflective essays

The book concludes with three reflective essays that deepen its critical engagement: the first essay examines the resurgence of identity politics and the complex struggles of marginalized groups for recognition; the second offers a poignant personal narrative of transgender resilience amid social stigma; and the third highlights Rotary International's enduring commitment to embedding diversity, equity, and inclusion in its global humanitarian work, illustrating how organizations can foster unity and positive social change.

Critical perspectives: strengths and weaknesses

The book's strengths lie in its wide international and interdisciplinary scope, adeptly blending theoretical, empirical, and applied perspectives to provide a comprehensive view of diversity, equity, and inclusion. It excels in its rich and nuanced examination of intersectionality, particularly the interrelations of language, culture, identity, and equity across educational and societal domains. The editors' transparent approach to authorship fosters scholarly rigor. However, the volume shows variability in critical depth, with some chapters leaning more toward descriptive narrative than analytical rigor. Additionally, the diverse authorship results in occasional challenges related to consistency of style and integration across chapters, affecting the overall cohesion of the collection.

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, *Understanding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Policies and Practices* is a significant interdisciplinary contribution that enriches the field of educational equity and social inclusion. The volume offers a comprehensive synthesis of theoretical insights, empirical research, and practical applications that together advance understanding of how language, identity, and policy intersect to shape inclusive societies. While variation in analytical depth across chapters signals opportunities for deeper critical engagement, the book's broad scope and rich case studies provide valuable foundations for future research. It is an essential resource for scholars, educators, policymakers, and practitioners committed to fostering equitable and inclusive education and social systems worldwide.