



INDEX OF INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION: FURTHER DEVELOPING THE IDEAS OF TONY BOOTH AND MEL AINSCOW

Kukiboyeva Mahliyo Makhmudjanovna
Associate Professor, PhD,
Namangan State University, Uzbekistan
e-mail: mahliyokukiboyeva@gmail.com

Tokhtaboyeva Yodgora Sohibjon kizi
Independent Researcher
Namangan State University, Uzbekistan
e-mail: yodgoratoxtabayeva@gmail.com

Abstract

This article studies the foundational concept called “Index of Inclusion” that was developed by the British scholars Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow to assess the inclusivity in school educational systems. Article will state the theoretical basis of this concept, discuss its opportunities and limitations. Most importantly, this article will propose a way to modify that index in order to create an index system of inclusion that fits the circumstances in higher educational institutions.

Keywords: Inclusivity, index of inclusion, higher education, institutional governance, inclusive policies.

Introduction

Modern educational policy and practice adopt inclusive education as their main principle because it guarantees all students the right to learn in classrooms that celebrate their unique backgrounds while creating accessible pathways for their academic involvement. Education systems need to develop inclusive frameworks which support diverse learners according to international standards established by UNESCO and other international organizations. The Salamanca Statement established a key milestone because it requested all educational institutions worldwide to adopt inclusive educational policies.



The Index for Inclusion developed by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow stands as one of the most powerful instruments to help schools achieve inclusive transformation. The Index offers educational institutions a framework to assess their institutional practices and school environment and their success in reaching educational accessibility for all students. The Index has been used widely in primary and secondary education, but its basic framework needs complete adaptation to suit the particular needs of higher education institutions.

The inclusion process in universities faces different obstacles because of the combination of their admissions policies and student diversity and academic freedom and their complicated organizational frameworks. The university evaluation process for inclusive environments requires new conceptual instruments that universities need for their evaluation work. This article aims to extend the ideas of Booth and Ainscow by proposing a conceptual framework for an Index of Inclusion in Higher Education.

Theoretical Foundations of the Index for Inclusion

The Index for Inclusion created by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow is one of the most important frameworks for developing inclusive educational systems. The Index functions as a practical resource for schools by providing a systematic method which educational institutions use to assess their core values and institutional policies and operational methods for the purpose of discovering methods to eliminate learning obstacles and improve student engagement.

The Index for Inclusion establishes three interconnected elements through which educational institutions develop their inclusive practices which include building inclusive school cultures and establishing inclusive institutional regulations and developing inclusive educational methods.

The first dimension, inclusive cultures, focuses on building a school community based on shared values of respect, collaboration, and participation.

The second dimension, inclusive policies, addresses the formal structures and regulations that guide institutional decision-making. The policies of the institution function to implement inclusion throughout all its strategic priorities while showing how this value will operate within their organizational framework.

The third dimension, inclusive practices, refers to the everyday activities of teaching and learning, which require educators to develop teaching methods that support all students.



Limitations of the Existing Index for Higher Education

The Index for Inclusion developed by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow has been widely applied in school contexts. It is difficult for the higher education system to use the framework because it was designed for primary and secondary school environments which have different institutional structures and governance models and educational practices than universities. The current model fails to cover specific aspects of higher education because it omits multiple dimensions that need explanation.

The main distinction between the two systems stems from their different methods of handling institutional governance and organizational complexity. Universities operate through decentralized systems that include faculties and departments and research units which grant their components different levels of independence. The institutional structure of schools enables their leaders to implement inclusive policies across the entire institution while universities face greater difficulties because their organizational design operates as a decentralized system.

The first constraint operates because it affects university institutions which have academic research obligations. Higher education institutions require teaching staff to deliver educational programs and conduct research activities while creating new knowledge. Research environments and academic collaboration and scholarly activities need to adopt inclusive practices which extend beyond classroom teaching. The original Index does not discuss three vital elements which include equitable research funding access and inclusive supervision methods and diverse scholar participation.

The selective admissions processes which universities use create social inequalities because they fail to treat all students fairly. Certain student groups face challenges because of three factors which include admissions criteria and financial obstacles and their academic readiness. Roger Slee and other scholars assert that educational systems need to undergo an essential process of assessing their fundamental structural barriers which create obstacles to inclusion.

The Index for Inclusion needs to be modified because higher education institutions require different framework concepts to address their unique needs and institutional challenges and operational functions.



Indicators for Institutional Self-Assessment

The conceptual framework needs to be transformed into a practical university assessment tool through the creation of indicators which enable self-evaluation by universities. The proposed Index for Inclusion in Higher Education system requires universities to evaluate their inclusion progress through scheduled evaluations of their institutional practices and cultural environment and their institutional regulations. Indicators serve as guiding questions that help institutions identify potential barriers to participation and evaluate the effectiveness of existing strategies.

The dimension of inclusive institutional culture enables indicators to measure student and staff experiences at the university base on their various backgrounds which determine their right to feel respected and supported at the institution. The questions will assess how institutional values display diversity their student body involvement in decision-making processes and their campus initiatives which create equal opportunities and belonging.

The dimension of inclusive governance and policies requires indicators to measure institutional policies that establish equal access and participation rights for all users. The evaluation process requires assessments of three specific components which include admissions procedures and financial support systems and academic support services that cater to underrepresented student populations. The assessment process requires universities to evaluate their existing regulations because these rules might create obstacles that prevent students from participating in university activities.

The domain of inclusive teaching and learning uses indicators to evaluate curriculum development learning resource accessibility and assessment methods that allow for different testing options. The learning environments should be developed through inclusive pedagogy methods which Lani Florian describes because they need to support different types of learners from their initial creation.

The research environment and campus infrastructure assessment will involve additional indicators that measure how accessible laboratories and digital platforms and student support services. The framework uses indicators to help universities find their development needs which will help them create more inclusive educational environments.



Discussion

The Index for Inclusion in Higher Education operates through its developed base concepts which The Index for Inclusion. The original framework- which schools use as a development tool- needs higher education institutions to adopt different methods because their complex organizational systems and various institutional missions create different learning environments. The proposed framework defines university inclusion through its recognition of university activities beyond the classroom space. Higher education institutions create their participation and equity systems through their admission processes and research opportunities and academic career development pathways and campus space. The process of building inclusive universities demands complete organizational transformation which needs to eliminate all academic and structural obstacles that prevent students from participating.

The framework demonstrates its compatibility with present-day theoretical models of inclusive education which require educational institutions to undergo complete institutional changes instead of making minimal modifications for individual needs. Educational systems need to undergo structural changes and fundamental belief shifts according to Roger Slee and other scholars who study educational inclusion. From this perspective, educational institutions need to change their entire organizational framework together with their support systems because only then will they reach complete inclusion.

Current discussions about inclusive teaching methods in higher education drive universities to establish inclusive educational frameworks. The research work of Lani Florian demonstrates that educational environments need to be created to meet the learning needs of all students without using methods that require special treatment for particular learners. The framework establishes complete implementation of inclusive practices as a major challenge which universities will face during their adoption process. The speed of changes and their overall progress will be determined by institutional traditions and available resources and existing institutional demands. The Index serves as a flexible reflective tool which institutions can customize to meet their particular requirements and situations according to its proposed use.



Implications for Universities

The development of an Index for Inclusion in Higher Education has several important implications for universities seeking to enhance equity, participation, and social justice across their institutions. First, the system provides an organized method which enables universities to conduct self-assessments for their inclusive practices and governance systems and educational programs and research activities and campus facilities' accessibility. The process establishes shared responsibility because it involves various participants such as students and academic staff and administrative personnel who work together to create an inclusive environment.

The framework establishes requirements which affect both policy development and strategic planning processes. The Index serves as a tool which universities can use to create and execute policies that ensure equal access for students to admissions processes and financial assistance programs and academic materials and research facilities. The institution will detect deficiencies in its support systems which assist first-generation students and students with disabilities. The institution will direct resources toward activities which will eliminate unfair treatment throughout its support systems.

The Index supports teaching methods which enable all students to learn through its development of inclusive teaching methods and its creation of educational resources. The universities need to implement universal design for learning together with flexible assessment methods to create teaching methods which help students with various learning requirements to achieve their educational goals. The research conducted by Lani Florian demonstrates that educational environments should be designed to address all types of diversity which exist in those learning environments according to their needs instead of developing special accommodations which will solve problems after they occur.

The framework uses research environments which support all people to demonstrate how essential inclusive research spaces and digital learning systems and laboratories together with student assistance facilities. When institutions implement systematic methods to handle these specific aspects of their operations, they create conditions which help all students and staff members to succeed while improving their chances of success. The Index provides universities with a complete framework which enables them to achieve inclusion through their entire institutional systems while creating an equitable and accessible higher education system.



Conclusion

The core principle of inclusive education has gained acceptance as the essential standard that higher education institutions must follow to ensure all students receive equal opportunities for access and active participation and academic success. The Index for Inclusion developed by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow provides schools with a useful framework yet universities require a different method to meet their specific operational needs. The different governance structures and academic autonomy and research obligations together with the needs of various student groups create the need for a complete inclusion system that combines structural elements and teaching methods.

The article presents a higher education framework which modifies the Index for Inclusion through its proposed framework development. The framework now enables universities to measure their inclusivity status through its extension of original dimensions into six areas which include institutional culture and governance and policies and teaching and learning and research environments and campus infrastructures. The self-assessment indicators help institutions with their reflective practice process which enables them to discover obstacles and develop specific solutions and track their advancement.

The framework demonstrates that institutions must treat inclusion as a fundamental process which requires active institutional backing and stakeholder assessment and inclusion in academic and institutional operations. The current Index needs empirical testing to establish its validity yet it serves as a practical tool which universities can use to develop inclusive practices throughout their entire institutional operations. Higher education institutions can create equitable and accessible and supportive academic environments which recognize the various backgrounds of their students and staff members and academic communities through the application and improvement of this framework.

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