Leading article

Inclusive university: towards the recognition of diversity and the pursuit of continuous improvement

MENDIVE
REVISTA DE EDUCACIÓN

Universidad inclusiva: hacia el reconocimiento de la diversidad y la búsqueda del mejoramiento continuo

Universidade inclusiva: rumo ao reconhecimento da diversidade e à busca do aprimoramento contínuo

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Attention to diversity is increasingly important in determining the excellence of university processes, although much remains to be done in unifying criteria, instruments, and indicators for its assessment. The variability of diversity, international standards related to culture, and interests serving society are topics of debate on agendas, forums, conferences, and other academic spaces for socialization. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the one corresponding to objective 4, "quality education" in Higher Education, objective 1 of the III Regional Conference on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean proposes "improving and consolidating quality assurance systems for higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean, within a framework of recognition of diversity and the search for continuous improvement" (UNESCO-IESALC, 2018, p. 33).

Framing diversity in terms of improving and enhancing the quality of education presupposes identifying it as a strength and indicator of excellence in the face of different positions in the processes carried out. Attention to diversity at the university is a fundamental approach to ensuring

that all students, faculty, and support staff, regardless of their personal, educational, or social characteristics, have equal opportunities for learning and development.

To achieve these goals, institutional policies that promote inclusion and equal opportunities must be established and implemented. Substantive processes must include conscious attention to issues such as age, gender, skin color, religion, disability, health, among others, openly addressing topics such as discrimination, harassment, and violence.

To achieve this, the University's climate must foster a culture of respect and acceptance through awareness-raising and training programs on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Furthermore, concrete actions are required: R&D&I (research, development, and innovation) projects investigate and generate personal and professional guidance and support services to help students manage their academic and personal lives. These must provide resources and support services, such as tutoring and academic advising, to help students overcome socioemotional, access, and learning barriers and challenges.

Other necessary changes to achieve an inclusive university of excellence are based on design and planning, which should not be tailored to the needs of a majority, but rather to the variability of all, ensuring a sustainable, accessible response to temporary and permanent situations. Accessibility must enable all physical and virtual spaces to be usable by all. This includes adapting classrooms, laboratories, digital resources, recreational areas, and more.

Further Beyond the spaces, the design must be materialized in an inclusive curriculum, with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This is achieved by Consider different learning rhythms, interests, and neurodiverse needs. The call is for diversification of teaching methodologies, a more flexible curriculum, with an emphasis on assessment methods, timing, and formats; as well as the inclusion of content that reflects diverse cultures and perspectives, following the logic of the profession and science.

A university that aspires to establish itself as a paradigm for addressing diversity must establish relationships with community organizations and resources that support diversity, which can enrich the educational experience and offer more resources to students, faculty, and support staff. This goal will be difficult if faculty members are not trained in inclusive pedagogies and in managing diversity in the classroom and university settings so they can adequately address the needs of all students.

It's not just a matter of teachers and support staff fostering active student participation, self-awareness, and agency in decision-making related to their education; it will be a catalyst for the changes and adjustments needed to create more inclusive environments. Attention to diversity not only enriches the educational environment by achieving higher quality standards, but also prepares students, through their respective professional models, for an increasingly diverse, competitive, and complex world of work.

Mendive magazine has published 167 articles related to attention to diversity in universities. Aligned with its vision of achieving visibility and informative coverage in the field of education, teaching, and the ongoing professional pedagogical training of human resources, it defends the right to inclusion, inextricably linked to equity and quality in education, as one of the most current trends in educational sciences at the service of the society to which it is dedicated.

REFERENCES

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Conflict of interest

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Authors' contribution

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