International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Significance of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion [DEI] in Higher Educational Institutions [HEI]

*Dr. Manisha Bele [a], Dr. Rashmi Hebalkar [b]

[a]Associate Professor, Modern College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Pune-16, Maharashtra, India
[b]Director, Prabodhan Management consultancy and Research, Pune, Maharashtra, India.

A B S T R A C T

Human Resource is working together in diverse conditions in every organization for achieving its pre-determined common goals. It resulted into the importance of the study of diversity management. This diversity as regards nationality, caste, religion, values, norms, gender, equality, opinion, views, thoughts, beliefs, education etc; and also as regards the emerging cross-cultural manners, etiquettes, traditions etc. acted as a barrier for the management and employees. Diversity management is a process to promote diversity, equity and inclusion at the workplace .Human mind requires proper conditioning and training to develop a sense of understanding in diverse and multi-cultural situations. The focused efforts are needed to strengthen the ecosystem for diversity management, equal opportunities and inclusive environment. Knowing the awareness of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)as well as the challenges and opportunities with respect to DEI in the higher educational institutes (HEI)is a major part of this study. This primary data is covering 175 teaching and non-teaching staff of one of the premier institutions in Pune. The data is collected through a structured questionnaire. The paper is based on the first-hand experience of the researchers. The findings show that, the awareness of DEI is at the medium level so HEIs need to take efforts to increase the awareness of DEI .The researchers took the efforts to suggest few ways to promote diversity management. A model is designed by the researchers in this regard. It will help in stimulating the diversity management at the workplace in order to achieve inclusion and equality.

Keywords: diversity, equity & inclusion (DEI), diversity management, higher educational institute (HEI)

1. Introduction

National Education Policy 2020 is an evolution in the education field. It tried to increase access, equity, and inclusion as one of the key changes. Internationalization of higher education has received its due importance in NEP, for making India a hub for international students. DEIs will play a vital role in attracting foreign students in India. The universities will also have to be alert and make themselves ready for welcoming these students.

The demographic diversity and heterogeneity is increasing in educational institutions. The diversity includes gender, region, class, caste, religion, ability, etc. The human resource in the HEI needs to be well versed with the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion . Diversity management is a systematic and planned responsibility. It is in areas of recruitment, detainment, rewards and promotions of the diverse or heterogeneous employees. It ensures equal opportunities to the human workforce . (Ongori & Agolla, 2007) To know the awareness of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)as well as the challenges and opportunities with respect to DEI in the higher educational institute (HEI), this study is conducted.

2. Review of Literature

Sometimes, by diversity it is misunderstood that it is about finding differences in human resource, but on the other hand, it is for linking everyone. Diversity is not how we differ.

Cultural diversity in general means understanding that each individual has distinctive features and recognizing the individual identities on parameters of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, nationality, caste and religion, beliefs and opinions, or other principles.

Workplace diversity is about the difference amongst the people in an organization. Diversity embraces gender, religion, custom, race, economic status, life style, nationality, values, norms, opinion, views, thoughts, beliefs, physical appearance, ethnic group, age, personality, organizational function, education, background and much more.

Amaram (2007) opines that increase in diversity is studied as the opportunities and challenges like cultural influences on job satisfaction, inter group bias and prejudice, degree of cooperation, individual and group performance. As per the author, the primary objective of diversity is to acknowledge people's individualities.

Diversity initiatives and training is a boon to improve workplace culture as it gives creative and skilled workforce. More efforts are needed to make tailor made programs under diversity training which will link to individual performance. (Prieto, Simone, & Osiri, 2009)

Okoro & Washington (2012) commented that the local and global workplace needs intercultural competence with focused diversity initiatives and workshops. One of the past researchers suggested that diversity audit is an effective tool to examine the company's recent situation. (Jablonski, et al., 2007)

Menon, Narayanan (2015) believed that cultural differences are largely under estimated, and therefore, future research is required to deal with the unique and different ways to embrace it. Case studies, observations, use of simulation exercises and peer reports, are some of the methods suggested by author.

Amaram (2007) suggested the remedies to manage cultural diversity. It includes diversity training, covering diversity as an objective, open door system, grievances, feedback, follow rituals on holidays, promote diet plans and dress code without hampering routine work.

The initiatives related to diversity management, diversity, equity & inclusion towards higher education in Indian scenario needs to be studied here. Some of the initiatives are discussed further.

The role of **Equal opportunity centre** (UGC, n.d.) is laid down by University Grant Commission, New Delhi under 12th plan [period 2012-17] in HEI is to make the education inclusive. The aim of this centre is to oversee the effective implementation of policies and programmes for disadvantaged groups, to provide guidance and counselling with respect to academic, financial, social and other matters and to enhance the diversity within the campus.

The remedial coaching for SC/ST/OBC students is laid down by University Grant Commission, New Delhi under 12th plan [Period 2012-17] in HEI initiated for the students to get merge in the main flow and they can upgrade themselves academically with the support of teachers. The remedial coaching was consist of lectures, practicals etc. for the specified students and also the funding was given to acquire the resource material for them.

SAKSHAM (UGC, 2013) are the measures for ensuring the safety of women and programs for gender sensitization on campuses .These guidelines took a foremost step to spread the awareness of gender sensitivity and also important for tackling sexual harassment issues at university and college level .Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) should try to oppose discrimination and harassment, especially sexual harassment on campuses across the country. The task force conducted surveys of 1300 respondents and their major finding was lack of gender sensitivity. Gender sensitization is not a matter for students alone but is required in all colleges and universities, and for all sections of the community - students, faculty in all disciplines, support staff and administration. They recommended that all members of higher educational institutions must undergo processes of gender sensitization, whether students, faculty, administration or support staff.

National Education Policy, (NEP)2020 is based on the principles related to diversity, equity and inclusion. Equitable and inclusive education as per NEP 2020 aims to ensure that every child should get opportunity to learn and excel. Special emphasis will be given on 'Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Groups' [SEDG]which include: gender identities, socio-cultural identities, geographical identities, , and socio-economic conditions A separate Gender Inclusion fund will be created and also the 'Special Education Zones' for disadvantaged regions and groups. Children with disabilities will be enabled to fully participate in the regular schooling process from the foundational stage to higher education. Every state/district will be encouraged to establish "Bal Bhavans" as a special daytime boarding school, to participate in art-related, career-related, and play related activities. The unutilized capacity of school infrastructure will be used to promote social, intellectual, and volunteer activities for the community and to promote social cohesion during non-teaching / schooling hours and may be used as a "Samajik Chetna Kendra". (NEP2020, n.d.)

CPRHE, Policy Briefs on Higher Education , (2017) commented of the disparities like socio-economic disparity, disparity with income levels,urban & rural ,religion disparity etc.

The higher education institutions [HEIs]can be more effective if they try to follow the equality or avoiding inequalities/disparities to make equity based society and should frame diversity related goals and see that it is achieved from time to time ,diversity training is suggested as one of the key measure to achieve academic integration .

LGBTQ is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning.

It's got legal status on 24 August 2017 . India's Supreme Court gave the country's LGBT community the freedom to safely express their sexual orientation. Therefore, an individual's sexual orientation is protected under the country's Right to Privacy law. Their civil rights include the right to marriage, right to adoption, right to surrogacy, right against discrimination, freedom from sexual assault etc.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Problem statement

In the era of globalization and technology development, human resource needs to interact with people in local to global situations even across the borders. It becomes vital that a sense of acceptance, sense of inclusiveness etc; is developed for dealing with the persons from diverse backgrounds at the workplace. The diversity at workplace is more of heterogeneous in nature. The inclusive environment creates a better and comfortable workplace.

The gates of education are now open for all the government schemes and non government initiatives support the education of the poorest of the poor. As a result, diverse students take education together. This diversity is as regards gender, caste, creed, religion, customs, economic status, life styles, Nationalities, values, norms, opinion, views, thoughts, beliefs, physical appearance, ethnic group, age, personality, organizational function, educational, background and what not. On this background, it becomes necessary that staff in HEIs should become literate in the field of this diversity and bring equality for inclusion.

The HEIs are the supporter for the development of the students who later on add their contribution to the national economic development. The need of the hour is to explore the challenges and opportunities of the staff with regard to diversity, equity and inclusion in higher educational institutions. This may result into designing the 'diversity and inclusion policy' best suited for the academic institutions.

3.2 Research Questions

The following Research questions came in the minds of the researchers:

1. To what extent the staff of the colleges is aware with the concepts diversity at workplace, diversity management, diversity, equity and inclusion.

2. What kind of initiatives are undertaken at present and are planned in future with regard to diversity ,equity and inclusion? How the innovation ecosystem with regard to diversity ,equity and inclusion is established in the college?

3. What are the challenges with regard to diversity and inclusion?

4. What are the opportunities with regard to diversity and inclusion?

3.3 Objectives

1. To know the level of the awareness of the concepts relating to diversity (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Diversity at Workplace,

Diversity management) amongst the teaching and non- teaching staff of the educational institute.

2. To explore the Challenges faced and the Opportunities perceived for the institute in this regard.

3. To design a model on diversity management as a measure to spread the awareness of DEI.

4. To design the training program on Diversity Management [DEI] for the teaching and non- teaching staff of the educational institute.

3.4 Research Design

The data collected from the following sources:

1. *Primary Data*

The primary data is collected from the teaching, Non-teaching staff from the premier institute in Pune, Maharashtra for the academic year 2020-2021.

The data is collected through structured questionnaire. This data is covering 175 respondents, teaching staff [65%]and non -teaching staff [35%].

    i.   *Population & Sample size*

	Population	Expected sample	Collected samples	%with total sample
Teaching staff	**139**	**103**	**115[83%]**	**65**
Non -teaching staff	**66**	**57**	**60[91%]**	**35**
Total	**205**	**160**	**175**	**100**

Table 1: Population & Sample size [Source: field work]

    ii.   *Sample type*

The teaching and non-teaching staff working in the premier institute in Pune considered as sample.

    iii.   *Questionnaire design*

- ❖ It consists of Questions regarding awareness of diversity at workplace, diversity management, diversity ,equity and inclusion[DEI].

- ❖ Questions are included to check whether innovation ecosystem of DEI is properly established in the institute or not. The following points were considered: programs conducted, initiatives taken, policies framed or followed, problems encountered, outcomes of the program and initiatives etc.

- ❖ Questions regarding challenges related to diversity ,equity and inclusion

- ❖ Questions regarding opportunities related to diversity, equity and inclusion

- ❖ Open ended questions

    2.   *Secondary Data*

It includes the   available literature –research papers, books, articles, etc. It also covered the annual reports, official website and policy documents of the institute and apex bodies etc.

3.5 Scope of the study

The scope of the study is around the following conceptual areas:

- Workplace diversity & diversity management

- Diversity, equity and inclusion [DEI].

- Challenges & opportunities in diversity, equity& inclusion

3.6 Limitation of the study

1. The survey is conducted   in the academic year 2020-21.

2. The study is done in one of the selected premier institutes in Pune, Maharashtra .

3. Sample type: The respondents covered in the study are teaching, non-teaching staff from the selected institute.

4. Sample size : sample of teaching staff from 175 respondents is 115 [65%] and non- teaching staff is 60 [35%]

5. The research is based on the perceptions or opinion of the respondents.

4. Analysis & Result

The data is collected through structured questionnaire. The orientation session was conducted to brief the information about the concept and the questionnaire. The questions on personal profile   ,awareness of workplace diversity, diversity management & diversity and inclusion ,opinion on programs ,initiatives of diversity & inclusion, policies regarding   DEI, and challenges and opportunities in the area of diversity , equity &inclusion.

The data is collected from 175 respondents and is analyzed. The interpretation are drawn from the basis of analysis. The data is collected on 5 point Likert scale which includes the scale like strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree .

1. The staff (Teaching & non-teaching) gets exposure on DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) from the various sources like colleagues /peers of different culture, newspapers, movies/ documentaries/short films /TV media/web series etc.

2. The student diversity is in the areas like gender, religion, custom, caste &creed, ethnicity &language, economic status, life style, nationality, values &norms, disabilities, opinions, views, and the thoughts.

3. Diversity principle is followed by the institute while recruiting the staff. The staff diversity is in the areas like age, gender, religion, customs, caste, ethnicity, economic status &life style, values, norms, beliefs, opinions, views, thoughts, experience, and disabilities.

4. The awareness about the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion, diversity at workplace and diversity management is of medium level. Out of these concepts, the awareness about 'diversity management' is comparatively less.

5. Majority of the respondents (76%) feel that they should think and explore diversity management and DEI more

6. The information about 'sexual harassment cell' or 'anti-ragging cell' and the information about the schemes like vishakha, saksham is displayed through boards/flex/notice.

7. 74% staff members agree that the institute has created a work environment to increase the satisfaction, motivation and commitment of diverse people.

8. The institute conducts various diversity initiatives or programs like workshops and publications on gender sensitivity, democracy, election and governance, constitution, human rights, workshop on GST under 'Girl Students' Empowerment Program', sessions for the students from North East, Identification of first generation students, scholarship to divyangjan (blind) students, celebration of constitution Awareness Day, Voter Awareness Day, celebration of birth anniversary of great personalities and so on.

9. More than 80% staff members agree that

   - The diversity initiatives are the boon to improve the workplace culture.

   - The values like responsibility & accountability, honesty & integrity, self-discipline, respect and confidentiality should be present in the staff members.

   - Diversity management skill is a critical leadership competency.

   - Diversity Audit is a tool to manage workplace diversity.

   - Diversity audit be conducted from time to time.

   - Diversity training is one of the tools to improve organization culture.

10. The institute gives the information about the legal implications of discrimination at workplace to all the staff and students.

11. The government rules, norms and regulations, policies regarding the recruitment of employees are followed by the institute.

12. As per the respondents, the **challenges related to diversity, equity and inclusion are in the following areas**

I)   Staff Level

- clashes & conflicts due to difference in opinions,

- discrimination/favoritism

- difficulty in understanding the perspective of peers, etc.

II)   Organizational level

- increase in cost of training,

- increase in labor turnover /more attrition due to poor understanding of DEI,

- spoiling organizational culture,

- non- support to the policies.

13. **The opportunities are in the following areas**

I)   **At individual level**

1. Updating cultural knowledge,

2. promoting active participation in decision making or suggestions,

3. adaptability,

4. freedom &flexibility,

5. open mindedness & authenticity,

6. developing positive attitude for learning,

7. overcoming unconscious bias,

8. tolerance for different styles of culture.

II)   **At professional level**

1. experimentation &innovative ideas,

2. collaboration &problem solving,

3. completion of project/task,

4. individual performance,

5. team performance,

6. ability to succeed in multiple & diverse environments,

7. job satisfaction, leadership attitude.

III)   **At organizational level**

1. overall performance,

2. healthy organizational culture,

3. attrition,

4. retention,

5. organizational effectiveness,

6. increase in quality of work life

5. Suggestions

1. The awareness, sensitization and capability of the staff be enhanced in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion [DEI] and cultural intelligence [CI] (topics: as given in the challenges) through -

   i. The talks by the experts,

   ii. Training programs/Workshops (online and offline)

   iii. Cultural programs, get-to-gethers, during festivals, picnics, frequent cultural exchange programs, exhibitions, projects etc.

   iv. Competitions like poster making, skits, poems, essays on DEI.

2. Special programs be designed and implemented for the under privileged, deprived or economically backward students, to build their competencies in DI.

3. The impact of all the trainings should be measured.

4. Open and group discussion sessions should be arranged for teachers and students for promoting sensitization towards diversity.

5. Though the college has framed the guidelines for dealing with the challenges related to diversity, Diversity, equity and inclusion policy [DEI policy] be framed (in alignment with vision, mission and objectives of the college). This will help in consistent and sound decision making in these areas.

6. Induction program for the new staff members and students be organized every academic year to give awareness about the values and policies of the college.

7. Awareness sessions be conducted to share and discuss the changes in government rules, policies and procedures etc.

8. DEI master / DEI leader / DEI architect/ DEI ambassador be identified (separately from the students, teaching and non- teaching categories) every year and be felicitated.

9. Initiatives for formal communication channels be identified and kept open to share and express openly.

10. Need to keep a separate budget for all the various activities and initiatives under diversity, equity and inclusion.

11. A cell of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion [DEI Cell] be formed to conduct the activities promoting the equality at workplace.

12. The Model design towards diversity management and increasing the awareness from the perspective of HEI is discussed below.

The Model design towards diversity management and increasing the awareness: From the perspective of HEI

Model suggested in Figure 2 deals with diversity management towards diversity, equity & inclusion. It shows that the first step to promote DEI is to identify DEI challenges, prescribe policy for the same. The next step is to recognize opportunities in the same area. These opportunities are categorized as training opportunities and non- training opportunities. Few such opportunities are listed below.

This model is accompanied with the design of one day training program on diversity management [DEI]. This program is just a sample format. The experts and the trainers should use their creativity, innovation and expertise to implement the training sessions.
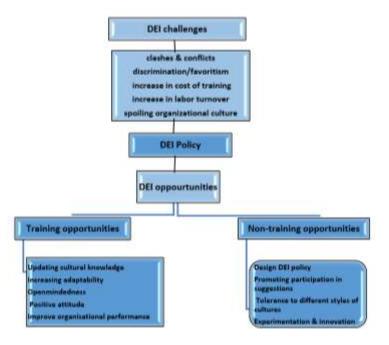

Figure 1: Model for Diversity management (towards diversity, equity & inclusion)   (1)

6. Future Directions

The DEI audit to be conducted for students in HEIs to know their awareness and making them familiar with the challenges in DEI. The training on DEI and its impact on the performance and interpersonal relations be checked . DEI could be connected with job satisfaction and performance of the employees.

This is a primary level of audit. Critical level of audit is recommended by which more sound suggestions can be given for the development of the college as regards diversity, equity &inclusion. [DEI]

7. Conclusion

As per the research, the awareness of DEI is at the medium level so HEIs need to take efforts to spread awareness of DEI on higher scale. The study suggested few ways to increase awareness on DEI.

There are certain challenges at individual level and organisational level in the area of DEI. At individual level, clashes & conflicts due to disrespect towards other' opinions, discrimination, favoritism, difficulty in understanding the perspective of peers are few challenges. At organisational level, the challenges include increase in cost of training, increase in labor turnover /more attrition due to poor understanding of DEI, spoiling organizational culture, non- support to the policies etc.

Certain opportunities unveil in the area of DEI at individual level, professional level and organizational level. At individual level, the opportunities include updating cultural knowledge, promoting active participation in decision making or suggestions, adaptability, freedom & flexibility, tolerance for different styles of culture etc..

At professional level, the opportunities related to DEI include experimentation & innovative ideas, collaboration & problem solving, team performance, leadership attitude etc. At organisational level, the opportunities related to DEI include overall performance, healthy organizational culture, organizational effectiveness, etc. The consistent efforts are required to increase awareness of DEI in HEIs. It is not one time activity, but a continuous process. Frequent trainings, workshops are required to keep the organizational work flow tuned with initiatives of DEI.

The workforce in the HEI is required to be ready to face the challenges related to diversity management. If the teachers are well conversant with the challenges and opportunities related to diversity management, then it could be inculcated to their students in a subtle way.

References

1. Amaram, D. (2007). Cultural diversity: Implications for workplace management. Journal of Diversity Management, 2(4), 1-6.

2. Bele, M., & Hebalkar, R. (2020). The study & analysis of the effect of cultural intelligence on quality & performance of the employees in selected companies in and around Pune city. Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth.

3. CPRHE Policy Briefs on higher Education, Brief. (2017) New Delhi: National University of Educational Planning and Administration . Retrieved from CPRHE Policy Briefs on higher Education, Brief 1,2017 published by National University of Educational Planning and Administration ,New Delhi

4. Jablonski, H., Luthi, E., Matoba, K., Plate, A., Amershi, B., Unruh, K., . . . Keil, M. (2007). Training manual for Diversity Management. International Society for Diversity Management,idm.

5. Menon, S., & Narayanan, L. (2015). Cultural Intelligence: New directions for research in Asia. Canadian Center of Science and Education, 11(18), 193-202.

6. NEP2020. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/5294663_Salient-Featuresofnep-Eng-merged.pdf

7. Okoro, E., & Washington, M. (2012). Workforce Diversity & Organisational Communication:Anaysis of Human Capital performance & Productivity. Journal of Diversity Management, 7(1), 57-62.

8. Ongori, H., & Agolla, J. (2007, July). Critical review of literature on workplace diversity. Academic journals -African Journal of Business Management, 72-76.

9. Prieto, L., Simone, T., & Osiri, K. (2009). Linking workplace Diversity to organizational performance: A conceptual framework. Journal of Diversity Management, 4(4), 13-22. doi:https://doi.10.19030/jdm.v4i4.4966

10. UGC. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/7894390_equal-opportunity-cell.pdf

11. UGC. (2013). Retrieved from https://www.ugc.ac.in/pdfnews/5873997_SAKSHAM-BOOK.pdf

Annexure

Annexure on Workshop on DEI

One day Training Program on   Diversity Management [DEI]

Target group   :   *Teaching & non -teaching staff*

Size of the group   :   *20 to 30*

Objectives   :

- *To aware the participants about the concept of diversity in general & in particular, diversity management, it's importance, benefits & challenges in the diversity management in present situation.*

- *To sensitize the participants about the challenges and opportunities in diversity management.*

- *To build the capacity of the participants on overcoming the challenges and optimize through diversity   management.*

Expected Outcome   :

At the end of the program, the participant will be able to -

- *Recognize challenges and understand benefits & importance of diversity management*

- *Will get and develop the attitude, tactics and strategies to deal with and be capable to solve various diversity related issues.*

Time	Activity	Particulars	Training Methodology	Remarks
9.30 - 10.00	*Registration & breakfast*			
10.00 - 11.30	*Session 1*	*Welcome* *Ice Breaker* *Pre test* *Concept of Diversity and Diversity Management* *Diversity related laws*	*Lecturette with PPT and open discussion*	
11.30-11.45	*Tea break*			
11.45 -1.15 noon	*Session 2*	*Challenges in diversity*	*Case Study* *Role Play* *PPT and discussion*	
1.15 - 2.00pm	*Lunch break*			
2.00- 3.30pm	*Session 3:*	*Why & How to Manage Diversity Effectively?* *Opportunities and Benefits of diversity management.* *Discussion on real life cases*	*Group Discussion & Presentation.* *Management game*	
3.30- 3.45pm	*Tea Break*			
3.45 – 5.00pm	*Session 4:*	*Diversity audit.* *Diversity Policy framing* *Post test*	*Lecturette with PPT* *Question Answers* *Group Assignment and presentation*	*PPT, Videos of CEO & directors*

Source: (*Bele & Hebalkar, 2020*)