

## Inclusive learning in higher education: anthropology and critical consciousness lens

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### ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions have come under fire for their perceived restrictive tactics and lack of diversity among students and faculty. This article dives into the possible synergy between anthropology and critical consciousness, drawing inspiration from Paulo Freire's seminal contributions. The major goal is to create a revolutionary transition in higher education toward a more inclusive educational paradigm. Furthermore, this study investigates the influence of political landscapes on educational curriculum, emphasizing the need for a revolutionary pedagogical framework that fosters critical consciousness in both students and instructors. The prospect of developing a more equitable and inclusive learning environment within higher education becomes reachable via the harmonic integration of different pedagogical techniques, one that is sensitive to the diverse requirements of all learners. This attempt, however, is not without difficulties, such as opposition to change and the political terrain's intricacies. Professional development opportunities and coordinated efforts between educators, administrators, and policymakers are required for successful implementation. To summarize, the priority of social responsibility in higher education is evident, and adopting transformational pedagogy is critical for tackling the multiple issues inherent in the twenty-first century.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of our interconnected world, the utmost significance lies in establishing all-encompassing educational settings that foster egalitarian prospects for every student [1]. Inclusive learning, as a foundational concept, hinges on the fundamental belief that each student possesses the capacity to learn and achieve, and thus warrants unfettered access to a high-quality education [1]. This paradigm extends beyond the mere accommodation of students with disabilities; it entails the cultivation of a scholastic milieu characterized by an ethos that venerates and reveres the heterogeneous tapestry of the student body, encompassing individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, socioeconomic, and cognitive backgrounds [2]. Inclusive learning is underpinned by the philosophical tenet of embracing all children, irrespective of their racial or ethnic identities, physical attributes, appearances, colors, abilities, or disabilities, and entrusting them with a support network emanating from educational institutions, parental guardians, and the broader community [3]. The manifold advantages of inclusive learning encompass

academic attainment, alongside fostering social and emotional prosperity, thereby manifesting as a holistic framework that redounds to the benefit of students who partake in educational institutions characterized by inclusivity [4].

Although higher education has traditionally been perceived as a vehicle for social mobility and economic advancement, conventional higher education institutions have frequently exhibited exclusivity, mirroring the biases, and prejudices inherent in broader societal constructs. Consequently, numerous students hailing from marginalized demographics have encountered exclusionary practices or marginalization within the sphere of higher education [5]. This movement has been galvanized by a myriad of factors, including the escalating diversity characterizing the composition of the student body, a burgeoning recognition of the pivotal significance of diversity and inclusivity within an increasingly globalized society, and a heightened consciousness concerning the mechanisms through which conventional higher education establishments inadvertently perpetuate societal inequalities. Therefore, critical consciousness education emerges as a potent and prospective catalyst for the transformation of inclusive education within the ambit of higher learning, warranting further exploration and scholarly investigation.

The critical consciousness pedagogy involves recognizing and analyzing social inequality in society and taking action to address it [6]. Freire [7], a Brazilian educational philosopher, first introduced the concept in his book “The pedagogy of the oppressed”. Critical consciousness is the outcome of critical thinking, which enables individuals to comprehend unjust social situations and motivates them to take action against unfair systems [8]. This ability can be summarized in three keywords: critical reflection, critical motivation, and critical action [9]. Essentially, critical consciousness necessitates individuals to critically reflect on unjust social conditions, be motivated to create social justice, and take critical actions that support social change and reject inequality in social life [10].

In recent years, research has shown that critical consciousness is related to adaptive development outcomes, including those related to career, citizenship, social-emotional, and academic domains, particularly for marginalized youth [11]. Moreover, critical consciousness has been identified as a key predictor of success for individuals from oppressed groups and their communities [12]. One study found that critical consciousness has a positive impact on students’ personal lives by expanding their thinking beyond their own worldviews [13]. Additionally, students with critical consciousness can benefit society by being sensitive to implicit messages about gender, culture, race, and social class in pop culture [14]. Therefore, building critical consciousness in students is highly relevant to educational goals based on the philosophy of reconstructionism, which aims to create a more just society by empowering active, critical, and ethical citizens [15]. Pedagogy that reflects the goals of reconstructionism can equip students with critical consciousness to address various social, economic, political, cultural, and ecological problems [16], enabling them to find a solution to the problem at hand.

On the other hand, the use of anthropological approach in inclusive education has been explored in several studies. Geleta [17], for example, identified inclusive education as one of the key strategies to address issues of marginalization and exclusion. In line with this, Klibthong [18] discussed critical issues related to the development and practice of inclusive education of young children, from the perspective of Bourdieu's conceptual lenses of habitus, capital, and field. Meanwhile, Xue *et al.* [19] found that teachers’ inclusive learning competency is the key to the successful implementation of inclusive education. The significance of cultural, political, and human resource variables in the effective implementation of inclusive education has also been noted in other research [20]. Technology from today has also influenced every aspect of our existence, including inclusive education [21].

According to the justifications given above, anthropology and critical consciousness pedagogy are two strategies that may be employed to change higher education in the direction of inclusive education. Anthropology may challenge preconceptions and provide a more welcoming learning atmosphere since it is the study of human variety. Contrarily, critical consciousness teaches students how to confront injustice by educating them on how privilege and power function in society. With this strategy, all students may benefit from a more just and equal learning environment.

## 2. METHOD

This study used a literature review to obtain information from diverse library sources such as books, journals, and articles. The gathered materials are extensively evaluated in order to achieve a clear comprehension of the study issue. The study aims to investigate the possibilities of critical consciousness in inclusive learning using anthropological and pedagogical approaches. The steps of the research process are described. Figure 1 displays additional resources related to the research topic, which are also examined to enhance understanding.



Figure 1. Stage of research [22]

The first stage in doing a literature review is determining the research subject. This will aid in identifying relevant sources of information and narrowing the scope of the literature search. Second, create a research conceptual framework to guide the literature search and analyze research findings. Third, determine sources of information relevant to the topic from various scientific journals, books, articles, and other publications. Fourth, conduct a literature search using databases or academic search engines. Literature search was carried out systematically, iteratively, and comprehensively. Fifth, evaluate the suitability and quality of the information sources found to ensure that the information sources can be used in the research context. Sixth, read critically and examine relevant literature to understand the findings and information found. Seventh, organize literature by similar topics or themes to assist in compiling a structured and informative literature review. Eighth, compiling a literature review covering important findings and relevant information found during the literature study. Ninth, analyze and interpret the findings in the research context so that a conceptual framework is built. And tenth, compiling a clear and comprehensive literature study [23].

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through an in-depth study of some of the recent literature, a conceptual framework can be built that links anthropological approaches and critical consciousness pedagogy to build inclusive learning as shown in Figure 2. The conceptual framework for developing inclusive learning with an anthropological approach and a critical consciousness pedagogy is based on the principles that all students have the right to a quality education, that students learn in different ways and at different paces, that it is important to create a welcoming and supportive learning environment, and that students should be encouraged to critically examine the world around them and develop skills to challenge inequality and injustice.

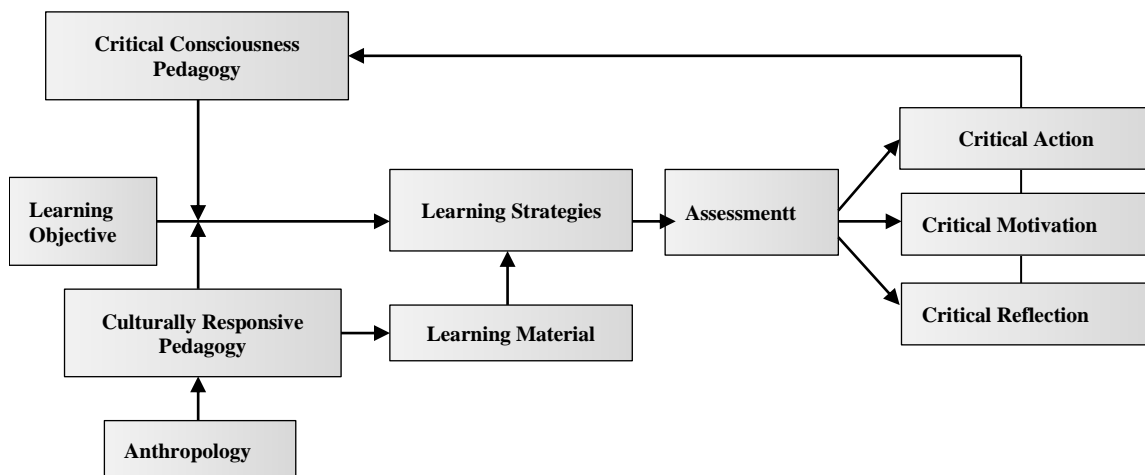


Figure 2. Ecosystem of inclusive learning

#### 3.1. Conceptualising inclusive learning in higher education

The notion of inclusive learning values all students' variety, regardless of their origin, abilities, or experiences [24]. It is founded on the notion that every individual has the right to a high-quality education that develops and protects their potential [25]. Inclusive education promotes the values of equality, human rights, and tolerance for diversity [26]. It is a complete method that helps disabled kids to thrive in mainstream educational environments [27]. In order to achieve inclusion in higher education, attention must be paid to the physical environment, curriculum, and general campus culture [28]. This involves guaranteeing

accessibility, making reasonable modifications, embracing varied viewpoints, and cultivating a friendly and supportive environment [29].

The social model of disability and universal design are two approaches that may be used to create inclusive learning environments [30]. Inclusive learning benefits students with intellectual and developmental disabilities who have limited access to higher education [30]. Intercultural learning and active inclusion programs are crucial in Asian higher education contexts to ensure that students get the most out of their education and are able to use it during times of transition [31]. Campus diversity offices are critical in higher education for encouraging inclusiveness and assisting disadvantaged and underprivileged groups [32].

Implementing inclusive learning in higher education can lead to improved academic accomplishment, better self-confidence, and a greater sense of belonging for students [33]. It can also lead to a more diverse and vibrant campus community, as well as a greater reputation for excellence among schools [34]. Providing accommodations for students with disabilities, incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum, using inclusive teaching methods, celebrating diversity, and providing opportunities for students to learn about and understand different cultures are specific examples of how to implement inclusive education in higher education [35], [36]. The adoption of inclusive education demands clear regulations and required training in inclusive practice for academic personnel in order to create a fair and unified educational program [37]. Full-service schools can be an effective method of encouraging inclusive learning [38].

### **3.2. Revisiting educational anthropology to determine inclusive learning**

Educational anthropology is an interdisciplinary field that investigates sociocultural settings and educational processes [39] in order to create more inclusive learning environments that are welcoming and supportive of all learners [40]. Educational anthropology investigates community learning cultural patterns that can impact society [41]. Educational anthropology is a broad science that studies the patterns and effects of community learning culture on society [42]. It has long been associated with social justice and highlights the importance of culture in education and learning [43]. Educational anthropology can contribute to inclusive learning environments by helping us understand the cultural factors that lead to exclusion, offering insights into inclusive approaches, and challenging the idea that exclusion is inevitable [44], [45]. Culturally responsive pedagogy, which considers students' cultural experiences and perspectives, is one way to create inclusive learning environments [46].

### **3.3. How can critical consciousness pedagogy perspective be applied to the development and implementation inclusive learning?**

Critical consciousness pedagogy is a great legacy of Paulo Freire in various struggles of thought in the field of education and social change theory, especially related to radical and revolutionary changes in society [47]. Critical consciousness can be interpreted as an individual's consciousness of systemic oppression, motivation to fight oppression, and involvement in individual or collective action to fight oppression [47]. The essence of Freire's idea is a critique of the power structures that oppress and create social inequality [47]. Therefore, Freire advocates for "literacy" education as a tool for oppressed people's emancipation [47]. Literacy, according to Freire, is important for grasping the ambiguity of social reality, exposing unfair power systems, and then adopting collective action to improve the situation [47].

Critical consciousness is thus viewed as an educational asset [48] and a resource that may foster community empowerment [48]. Critical consciousness can also propel the growth of marginalized individuals based on race, social class, gender, economy, and other socio-ecological aspects [49]. Freire's critical consciousness paradigm has quickly evolved into a modern critical pedagogy utilized by many educators in schools across the world. Critical consciousness pedagogy may assist instructors in building a more inclusive classroom atmosphere by providing a space where all students feel welcome and respected, and where their perspectives are heard [49], [50].

### **3.4. Capturing various learning strategies based on critical consciousness pedagogy**

Several studies have found that by implementing various learning strategies, critical consciousness may promote academic achievement and pupil engagement in learning. According to the results of Brooks *et al.* [51], critical consciousness may be a valuable tool for outdoor and experiential education. This can assist students in developing a more in-depth consciousness of the environment, recognizing the link between environmental challenges and social justice, and taking action to solve environmental issues. Boone *et al.* [52] discovered that critical consciousness is also necessary for poor people to confront the systemic roots of their oppression. Schoorman *et al.* [53] investigated both challenges and opportunities associated with teaching critical global consciousness in undergraduate classes. They advocated for a range of educational techniques, chances for pupils to learn about diverse cultures and viewpoints, assistance in developing critical

thinking abilities, and encouraging students to participate in civic activity. Sacramento [54] suggested an inquiry-based and critical racial dialogue-based paradigm for social justice education.

Similar to findings as describe above, Monjaras-Gaytan *et al.* [14] found that students who engaged in more critical action and perceived more inequalities were more likely to have social justice conversations with their mentors. Anderson *et al.* [55] conducted a qualitative study with high school students and found that their critical consciousness developed as they engaged in youth participatory action research (YPAR) on food security. Epstein-HaLevi *et al.* [56] argue that eco-activists have developed a powerful form of education, called ecopedagogy, that raises critical consciousness and inspires people to take action to protect the environment.

Finally, critical consciousness may be cultivated through a range of learning modalities, such as outdoor and immersive education, conversation and collaboration experiential learning, and social action. These tactics can assist students in developing the skills and information required to think critically about the world around them, identify and question injustice, and take action to build a more just and equitable society. Figure 2 depicts the learning ecosystem that is consistent with this interpretation of practical implications.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

In conclusion, through encouraging inclusivity, the combination of anthropology and critical consciousness pedagogy has the potential to generate a big transformation in higher education. Anthropology gives insights into human variety and questions traditional assumptions, fostering an inclusive environment. Critical consciousness pedagogy promotes critical thinking and social justice, enabling students to challenge inequity and fight for a more equitable educational environment. Institutions may create a more inclusive educational environment by adding culturally sensitive teaching, servant learning programs, and reflective pedagogical practices.

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