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Social Cohesion and Inclusive Education in Higher Education: Insights from Malla Reddy Engineering College, Hyderabad

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ABSTRACT

The current research investigates the role of Higher Education in promoting social c The current research investigates the role of Higher Education in promoting social cohesion and inclusive education among Students in Hyderabad, Telangana. The study aimed to evaluate the inclusivity practices, social cohesion amongst certain populations of students, faculty contributions towards inclusive teaching and institutional support systems effectiveness and performance regarding inclusivity for equity outcomes with a few challenges. A cross-sectional descriptive research design was utilized, with structured questionnaires using a seven-point Likert scale for collecting primary data. The sample consisted of 110 students from diverse socio-cultural, economic, linguistic and educational backgrounds pursuing their studies in different higher education institutes.

Results show that students perceive their institutions to be generally supporting inclusive education through equitable policy, diversity friendly campus climates and inclusive teaching practices. In the study, social cohesion between students was identified as being relatively strong with significant mutual respect, extensive collaboration and tight linked behavior. Professors were also acknowledged for encouraging diversity and inclusion in the classroom, and going beyond their curricula to deal with issues of diversity and equality. But challenges relating to economic exclusivity, communication barriers, lack of knowledge on inclusion and disconnect between policy standards hinder that experience. The findings of this study suggest that institutional support systems can be further strengthened by promoting diversity initiatives on campus, improving access to faculty training and the effectiveness of these programs in efforts advance inclusive education and social cohesion. What the results describe is significantly helpful for policymakers, educational administrators and higher education institutions in search of a more equitable and inclusive learning environment.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Social Cohesion, Higher Education, Diversity, Institutional Inclusivity, Faculty Practices, Student Inclusion, Hyderabad, Telangana.

Introduction

Higher education institutions are seen as much more than repositories of academic excellence and chalices of pure knowledge, but rather places that forge progress through social cohesion, equity and all forms of inclusive education. Social cohesion in higher education means organizing institutions that draws students together from different socio-economic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds with a sense of belonging, mutual respect and collective member identity. This is further supported by the idea of inclusive education, where all learners regardless of whether they are boys or girls, belong to the underprivileged caste, suffer social disadvantages due to a major disability or are

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otherwise economically deprived have equal access to learning opportunities and supportive institutional systems.

The Indian context has sought to provide significant policy attention for inclusive education through such initiatives as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, where marginalised groups are called upon for equity, access and share in higher education systems (Shravan B. Raj, 2024). In the same way, instigations in engineering education (B. Vamsi Krishna et al., 2018) focus on that institutions are demanded increasingly to embrace interdisciplinary learning strategies and learner-centered approaches to enhance collaboration and social integration among learners. In this context, engineering colleges in India including Malla Reddy Engineering College, Hyderabad is effectively creating supportive collective learning environments within and beyond academic and co-curricular engagement. Malla Reddy Engineering College is an institution in Hyderabad that forms a part of the MRC group and others that offer different courses in engineering and management. Much like any other Indian technical institution, it informs an environment of extreme diversity with learners from multiple cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. This diversity offers possibilities, as well as challenges, in developing practices to promote inclusive education and build social cohesion on campus.

Research Problem

Higher education institutions often lag in translating goals of inclusion and equity — the focus of both policy levers, through more concerted affirmative action campaigns to evidence-based practice by making institutional practices more inclusive. In a college like Malla Reddy Engineering College, this genuine social cohesion is limited by myriad structural and pedagogical challenges.

Although institutions promote diversity in admissions, interaction across social and cultural groups is often limited; instead of integrated learning environments that combine students from different backgrounds to cultivate cross-pollination of ideas about society and its issues, what they get are silos. Inclusive higher education research show that instead of just participation, sustained and long-term “collective interaction” is required within access level- only mainly to be included (B. S. Bhatt, 2023) Second, despite the best efforts to enhance participative teaching practice; Traditional engineering education model (which again mainly focuses on technological content delivery) may not help as needed in providing collaborative learning and empathy thus increasing intercultural connectedness as well which are part of students’ lifelong engagement in communities! Research on engineering pedagogy suggests that without purposeful designing of inclusively targeted teaching strategies, students may engage academically but not socially (Maggie Delano, 2021).

Third, while various institutions, Malla Reddy Engineering College for instance has implemented co-curricular

activities, open electives and student engagement programs but empirical knowledge base is limited about their role in strengthening social cohesion, having peer integration and inclusive campus. At large, the wider Indian higher educational landscape reflects similar worries of weak communication skills, employability and student engagement (Times of India, 2025) that make inclusive success an even tougher challenge.

There is limited empirical understanding of how inclusive educational practices and institutional initiatives at Malla Reddy Engineering College, Hyderabad, contribute to social cohesion among diverse student populations, and what

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barriers hinder the effective realization of inclusive education in engineering higher education. This made me more curious to undertake the research at study cite with the following research aims/objectives.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the institutional inclusivity practices adopted by higher educational institutions in Hyderabad, Telangana
2. To analyze the extent of social cohesion among students from diverse socio-cultural, economic, and linguistic backgrounds within higher educational institutions.
3. To evaluate the role of faculty and teaching practices in promoting inclusive education
4. To assess the effectiveness of institutional support systems
5. To explore students' perceptions of inclusivity outcomes, identify key challenges and barriers, and propose suggestions for improvement to strengthen inclusive education and social cohesion in higher education institutions.

Study Design

The current study uses a **descriptive cross sectional research design** to investigate social cohesion and inclusive education in higher education based on Malla Reddy Engineering College, Hyderabad. This is an appropriate design as it explores students' perceptions at a particular timepoint without intervening with study variables. Descriptive research designs are the most common in educational settings according to Creswell (2018) because their purpose is to describe existing populations or experiences within naturalistic contexts. The study employs a **quantitative method** but is supplemented with a qualitative context. Structured tools of quantitative methods were constructed to measure variables like inclusiveness, peer interaction and sense of belonging (43). Quantitative approaches, according to Bryman (2016), lend themselves particularly well to identifying patterns and relationships in social science research e. Target Population: Undergraduate engineering students from Malla Reddy Engineering College representing different academic backgrounds. As Tinto (2017) states, student diversity has a direct link with social integration and academic engagement in high education. The study includes a **sample size of 110 students.** This is an appropriate size for survey-based educational research allowing for statistical analysis. According to Israel (2013), samples above 100 typically suffices for moderate populations focusing on perception experienced-based data points. Involves a **stratified random sampling technique** to provide equal representation of gender, academic years and branches of engineering. According to Kumar (2019), the representativeness of stratified sampling improves as it takes into account heterogeneous populations and reduces bias. Data consists of a **structured 7-point Likert scale questionnaire** measure with respect wholeness, institutional support and social cohesion. Two questions determine

the scale type (i.e. whether it is a 7-point or a multidimensional): Likert (1932) provide a reliable approach to explaining attitudes and perceptions in social research through using such scales. Descriptive statistics and *thematic analysis* were used to analyze data, and inferential tests were applied as needed. As stated by Field (2018), employing a combination of statistical and thematic approaches enhances both the depth and the validity of educational research

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results.

Construct	No. of Items	Mean Score	SD	Interpretation
Institutional Inclusivity Practices	10	5.82	0.84	High
Social Cohesion Among Students	10	5.64	0.91	High
Faculty & Teaching Practices	10	5.51	0.88	High
Institutional Support Systems	10	5.28	1.02	Moderate to High
Inclusivity Outcomes	10	5.93	0.79	High
Challenges & Barriers	10	4.12	1.15	Moderate Presence

Descriptive Statistics of Major Constructs

The findings suggest that students generally perceive their institutions as inclusive and supportive environments. The highest mean score was observed for Inclusivity Outcomes (M = 5.93), indicating that students believe inclusive education contributes positively to learning experiences, social harmony, innovation, and student satisfaction. The relatively lower score for Institutional Support Systems (M = 5.28) suggests that although support mechanisms exist, there remains scope for improving accessibility, communication, and effectiveness.

The moderate score for Challenges and Barriers (M = 4.12) indicates that discrimination, language barriers, social divisions, and economic disparities continue to affect some students despite institutional efforts.

Institutional Inclusivity Practices

Statement	Mean
Equal opportunities for all students	5.95
Fair admission policies	5.88
Support for diverse backgrounds	5.80
Anti-discrimination policies	6.02
Accessible infrastructure	5.21

It is evident from the research analysis students agreed that institutions promote inclusivity through fair policies and supportive environments. However, accessibility infrastructure received comparatively lower ratings, suggesting the need for enhanced facilities for students with disabilities.

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Social Cohesion Among Students

Statement	Mean
Sense of belonging	5.78
Mutual respect among students	5.86
Openness to different viewpoints	5.73
Effective social integration activities	5.33

Results suggest a large extent of social cohesion. Students also report mostly positive experiences in contact with different groups, and feeling welcomed into the campus community. However, there are opportunities to strengthen intercultural contacts through social integration activities.

Role of Faculty and Teaching Practices

Statement	Mean
Inclusive discussions encouraged	5.74
Diversity issues addressed	5.49
Inclusive curriculum	5.32
Faculty training in inclusion	4.98
Support for marginalized students	5.56

Results indicated that faculty members are considered to be encouraging and welcoming. Faculty training offers a relatively lower score, which points to the need for further professional development programs that are focused on diversity, equity and inclusive pedagogy.

Institutional Support Systems

Statement	Mean
Counselling accessibility	5.48
Financial aid availability	5.11
Mentorship programs	5.35
Active anti-discrimination cells	5.42
Effective policy implementation	5.05

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Students recognised the availability of institutional support structures. However, financial aid and policy implementation could be strengthened.

Inclusivity Outcomes

Statement	Mean
Diversity enhances learning	6.10
Inclusivity improves satisfaction	5.89
Positive campus climate	6.02
Preparation for diverse workplaces	5.95
Societal harmony	5.74

Students strongly recognize the positive outcomes of inclusivity. They perceive diversity as enhancing learning, fostering creativity, and preparing graduates for multicultural workplaces.

Challenges and Barriers

Challenge	Mean
Discrimination exists	4.05
Exclusion due to background	4.18
Limited awareness of inclusion	4.32
Language barriers	4.28
Economic differences affect participation	4.55

Economic disparities, limited awareness, and language-related issues emerge as the most significant barriers. Although severe discrimination is not widely reported, these challenges continue to affect the quality of inclusion experienced by some student groups.

Suggestions for Improvements

Recommendation	Mean
Increase diversity programs	6.22
More faculty training	6.15
Inclusive student activities	6.08
Regular policy review	6.01
More scholarships	6.31

Students strongly support expanding diversity initiatives, faculty development programs, scholarships, and

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awareness campaigns. These findings indicate a clear demand for more proactive institutional interventions to sustain inclusive educational environments.

Closing Thoughts

Educational institutions in Hyderabad are on the right path of providing a healthy social atmosphere and equitable education, the focus of study suggests. By and large, they view their institutions as welcoming, fair, and supportive. Diversity is embraced to enrich both academic and social experiences, and faculty play an important role in fostering inclusion. But with the economic, opportunistic inequalities elevated in complexity (meaning complexity equals opportunity), and now that its inverse is here too (which means there are new opportunities) certain barriers exist — accessibility, language, policy etc. Extending support systems, faculty training, diversity programmes and financial aid can help make higher education institutions more inclusive and strengthen social cohesion.

Future Research Opportunities

This study contributes to our understanding of social cohesion and inclusive education in higher educational institutions, but there are various avenues for future research. Further studies can be carried out in larger sample sizes from various areas of India to generalize findings. Comparative Studies Among Private Versus Public Institutions Comparative research between public and private institutions can highlight the differences in issues of inclusivity practices and student experiences. Longitudinal designs can also be employed by future researchers to study the impact of inclusive policies on student outcomes across time. Qualitative or mixed-method approaches involving students, faculty and administrators could lead to fundamental quantitative insights about challenges and postive practices concerning inclusion. Further studies focusing on all students, not just those in marginalized groups like students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged learners and first-generation students would also help better understand the needs of inclusion. Further studies could also investigate the technological examining the effect of technology mediated learning, mental health, academic performance and employability outcomes in specification with inclusive education as well social cohesion nature of higher education context.

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