

**DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CLIMATE OF  
SELECTED HIGHER EDUCATION  
INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA**

*Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of*

**Doctor of Philosophy**

*by*

**THADDEUS ALFONSO**



## **CHAPTER – V**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1. DISCUSSION**

The present study about the D&I climate of selected HEIs in India shows a preponderance of findings confirming that the students and faculty had more or less the same understanding of D&I. A majority of study participants in both QUAL and QUAN research strands had better awareness of diversity dimensions like gender, physical disability, religion, region, caste and social class. Comparatively, a smaller number of participants had certain perceptions about gender identity, sexual orientation, academic discipline, political affiliation, learning style and residential status. Most of the participants were aware of diversity domains that have been popularly discussed in India. Their awareness of inclusion was nothing but acceptance of others on campus. For a few, inclusion was a psychosocial construct – one feels belonged and getting included. These results are in congruence with the work of Clark (2011). Also, many participants were hardly aware of self-awareness or empathy as they both form the emotional aspects of D&I. As mentioned by Maike Andresen (2007), the negligible variation in D&I knowledge of students and faculty shows respective individual experience, attitudes, ways of thinking and know-how. Therefore, knowledge is more likely to change in comparison to other diversity factors (Jackson and Ruderman, 1996; Milliken and Martins, 1996; Jackson, May, & Whitney, 1995). The participants' ill-preparedness to understand and address some multicultural concepts is corroborated by other studies (Mayo and Larke, 2010; Sue, Torino, Capodilupo, Rivera, & Lin, 2009). As the participants' D&I knowledge was consistent with their accustomed socio-political discourse, these responses may be sensibly rationalised using personal perceptual processes (Locke, 1967) and cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) of social psychology theory.

Diversity domains such as gender, ethnocentrism as religion, caste and language/region played an important role in the lives of students and faculty on campus. Despite having people from diverse backgrounds on campus, homophily and clique formation followed conventional forms and norms. Though there are people

happy with homophily and clique on campus, one cannot overlook the obvious nepotism and associated challenges these patterns would bring forth. These results are corroborated by other studies carried out in India and abroad (Thornton et al., 2010; Alfonso & Ganesan, 2019).

This form of divisiveness on campus is pervasive and ubiquitous and shows the D&I attitude of students, faculty and staff. The students and faculty members in this study expressed mixed attitudes towards others on campus. There were several instances of prejudices and stereotypes among many faculty members and relatively a small number of students. Their negative attitude influences how they interact with each other as mentioned in a study by Cristina et al. (2010). The cognitive component of the D&I attitude of QUAL and QUAN study participants was apparent in their responses denoting that certain college community members explicitly accepted a few, tolerated some, avoided many, and rejected a couple of them based on the opinion and belief that they had. Their beliefs about them and others on campus have influenced their D&I attitude towards others. Most of them preferred to be in the midst of people hailed from their native region/language, belonged to the same religion and/or caste and gender. This could be because of a member on campus identifying with one's own culture and familiar people to retain his/her/their own identity and thereby feel belonged and accepted. Bloom (2008) and Hyland et al. (2008) also noted that friendship circles were divided by sex, ethnicity and nationality. These findings suggest that students and faculty with similar cultures, caste, religion, region/language tended to socialise together because it was easier to do so. It could be their natural tendency. However, they expressed concerns that certain college community members explicitly accepted a few, tolerated some, avoided many, and rejected a couple of them based on the opinion and belief that they had. Similar results were reported in other studies including the ones carried out by Thornton et al., (2010), Alfonso & Ganesan (2019), Bloom (2008), Hyland et al. (2008), and Cristina et al. (2010).

The *emic* properties of the attitude of a study participant were based on his/her/their description of belief or behaviour which is making sense, consciously or unconsciously, to that individual. Here, diversity acts as an individual variable which stimulates emotional responses. A few responses also implied emotional labour because they had to hide their feelings to tolerate the other person. It was obvious in

the study results that students and faculty had a range of overt and covert affective events during their stint on campus. Cristina et al. (2010) well documented the *emic* properties of the attitude in their study conducted across various nations. The conative component of D&I attitude is a result of study participants' feeling of apprehension and fear about the repercussions that they may encounter if D&I programmes are embraced and/or appreciated. This sort of feeling was prevalent among more faculty than students. Therefore, it is inferred that cognitions as well as emotions of study participants determine their conations, i.e., whom they approach, avoid, accept, or reject. The same result was reported by Elliott et al. (2013) in their study on institutional barriers to D&I work in HEIs. Besides, the same result was supported by the results found in the study of Kraus (1995).

Ethnocentrism (as caste, religion and language), an attitude, could be an antecedent to one's culturally inappropriate behaviours on campus as substantiated by other studies of Young, Haffejee, and Corsun (2017), and Yamada and Marsella (2013). The reported D&I attitude of students and faculty is a psychological function that creates negative value judgments about diverse others based on various dimensions of diversity, and thereby resulting in misunderstandings and conflicts. Hence, ethnocentrism involves stereotyped, negative imagery and hostile attitudes towards outgroups which could be detrimental to inclusive excellence on campus. Such findings are corroborated by several studies and for instance, Matsumoto, Leroux, and Yoo (2005), Levinson (1950), Neuliep and McCroskey (1997), and Brislin (1977). A lack of acceptance of cultural diversity was also reported by Canadian researchers like Berry and Kalin (1995). Though Reichard et al. (2014) and Shaffer et al. (2006) found a negative correlation between high scores of ethnocentrism and the success of individuals who were in a foreign country, the present study did not have the scope for such analysis. The result mentioned here is different from the one reported by La Barre (1994) stating that India has a healthy self-image in comparison to China. However, this apparent contradiction reported by the present study participants substantiates the result of Ahmed (1979) where he mentioned that the open mind in India is as much a cultural legacy as the closed mind. Thus, ethnocentrism can be considered to be the chronic inertia that can impede reasonable progressive interactions between students and faculty belonging to various cultures, religion, caste, gender, sexual orientation and ethnicity. Arasaratnam and Banerjee (2007) signified

the same. Thus, the researcher is in absolute agreement with Hurtado et al. (2003) that multiculturalism must be considered as an approach to D&I in which individuals from diverse backgrounds communicate to increase awareness and attitude to mitigate interpersonal and intergroup conflicts.

A high percentage (70%) of student participants reported adequate mastery-approach score and almost 53% had an adequate score on performance-approach. Even many faculty members mentioned that they experience constant pressure in obtaining research grants, industrial consultation, international collaborations, increase the number of publications, and so on. These are indicative of how students and faculty think about themselves, their tasks, and their performance. Hence, one could conclude that students and faculty members harbour a constant competitive mode to outperform peers on campus as reported in a study by Harackiewicz, Barron, and Elliot (1998). This achievement goal framework could be explained within a social-cognitive framework (Locke, 1967; Festinger, 1957) of social psychology theory within which students and faculty interpret and react to events, and thereby resulting in diverse patterns of cognition, affect, and behaviour. Such patterns among students were documented by other studies (Dweck and Leggett, 1988; Ames, 1987).

The study participants' D&I attitude influenced their D&I practice on campus. Most of the faculty members experienced exclusionary practices whereas about 56% of students experienced and 58% observed bias and/or social isolation on campus. Over half of the students and faculty experienced exclusive or disparaging behaviour indicative of the prevalence of the issues at the colleges and universities. The same observations were made in a study conducted among students, faculty and staff elsewhere (Elliott et al., 2013). Students and faculty perceptions of discrimination can have a significant and negative effect on their performance (Nettles, 1988; Prillerman et al., 1989; Elliott et al., 2013; Smedley et al., 1993; Nora and Cabrera, 1996) and they can experience a higher sense of alienation for a prolonged period (Cabrera and Nora, 1994). Almost all the faculty referred reservation (quota) system as the most important mechanism of inclusion of individuals in Indian HEIs based on caste, disability and gender. More than 50% of students stated that they were treated fairly irrespective of their age, religion and nationality. Though a couple of institutions had

forums to create awareness and discuss D&I issues many HEIs lack clear D&I policy and practice directions.

Prevalence of an intimidating D&I climate across HEIs was evident from the study results because many of them had a palpable sense of fear to share their D&I experience though they were aware of the fact that the study was conducted anonymously. Elliott et al. (2013) agree that the “pervasiveness of this fear is a concern and an indication of an undercurrent that can undermine the University’s efforts to transform itself into a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment”. The persistence of the biased behaviours, the lack of empowerment, and the sense of fear are impediments to the institution’s D&I efforts (Hofhuis et al., 2016; Elliott et al., 2013; Hofhuis, Zee, & Otten, 2015; Groggins and Ryan, 2013). The present study results provide a successful replication of results of other studies (Hurtado et al., 1998; Hurtado and Dey, 1997) as this pattern emphasizes the importance of developing and maintaining a positive campus climate that embraces and encourages communication around D&I-related issues (Mayhew, Grunwald, & Dey, 2006).

Many faculty members revealed that the general climate in their respective institution was not quite conducive for women students and faculty, people with cognitive and/or physical disability, sexual minorities, and for people from a certain religion, caste, region, and nationality. Over 77% of students reported inadequate D&I climate. The present study results on D&I climate substantiate other study findings (refer Elliott et al., 2013). There were incidences of students being failed, and projects and promotions of faculty being delayed. This study also found a significant association between D&I climate and GPA (representing academic performance) of students. The effect of negative D&I climate on campus diminishes academic and psychological adjustment as reported in other studies (Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Nora and Cabrera, 1996). In some cases, though the undesirable D&I climate affected their academic performance it did not affect their persistence in college (Nora and Cabrera, 1996). It could be explained in a way that, although academically confident students of certain backward communities continue to feel marginalized, they learn how to deal with discrimination over their period of stay on campus (Tracey and Sedlacek, 1985).

The present study results indicated that students with higher GPA had higher odds of inadequate D&I climate, i.e., constant pressure among students to obtain higher grades

harms the D&I climate in HEIs corroborating with the results of Hurtado, Carter and Spuler (1996). Nevertheless, the latter longitudinal study reported that students had a decreased sense of belonging to the institution which is not reported by the present study as this was a cross-sectional survey carried out among students. Across all the sampled institutions, the participants agreed that there was an apparent laxity of system-driven policies and programmes that are required to enable the understanding of D&I among students and faculty. These observations are reported by other researchers including Hurtado et al. (1998), Horowitz (1987), Feldman and Newcomb (1969, p. 227), and Milam (1989).

It was evident from the multivariate logistic regression and path analyses that there is a significant linear relationship between D&I knowledge, D&I attitude, D&I practice (KAP) and D&I climate ( $p=<0.05$ ). Though the linear relationship between KAP was well established (Warwick, 1983), there is no study till date, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, that has explored the linear relationship between D&I KAP. Besides, there has been no study that explained the linear relationship between D&I KAP and D&I climate. This is well established in the present study and these significant findings contribute to the relevant literature.

The multivariate logistic regression and the path analyses resulted in a significant relationship between the D&I climate (dependent variable) and students' D&I practice (intervening variable), mastery-avoidance, ethnocentrism as language, and GPA (independent variables). It was found that the higher odds of having inadequate D&I climate in the HEI has a relationship to those students with higher GPA, the adequate score of D&I practice, the adequate score of ethnocentrism as language, and the inadequate score of mastery-avoidance. As evident from the direct effect of significant independent variables, we could make sense that the higher disparity of GPA between students negatively affects D&I climate. Further, students with the practice of speaking in their native tongue when in a group may negatively impact the D&I climate as there may be others who do not know that particular regional language. This sort of attitude and behaviour among a specific group of students may result in others' (belonging to out-group) feeling of being excluded. This calls for a heightened awareness of using an inclusive language as mentioned by Gurin et al., 2002). Also, those students who scored positive in mastery-avoidance do seem to create a positive

D&I climate because they may be less demanding in their interpersonal interactions on campus.

Therefore, one must carefully posit that the present level of cultural sensitivity among students, their constant pressure to mastery-approach, i.e. master their subjects, and their preoccupation with higher academic grades result in undesirable D&I climate in HEIs. This gets toughened with the lack of commitment from the institution. All these remain as a major concern on campus and that calls for a comprehensive intervention to transform these educational institutions into a diverse, inclusive, and equitable HEIs. Because HE is bestowed with a mission of enabling students' academic, social, and professional growth (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004; Smith and Wolf-Wendel, 2005; Jones, 2005). Hence, colleges and universities are required to prepare graduates to "become culturally competent citizens and leaders of a diverse democracy" (Gurin, Nagda, & Lopez, 2004). For the purpose, presence of diverse faculty members on campus is of paramount importance as they are the "designated socializing agents" in HE (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969, p. 227). The way to determine the educational, professional and social benefits of D&I also incorporates the perceptions of faculty, staff and administrators as these are considered important factors for an inclusive campus climate (Shaw, 2005; Mayhew et al., 2006; Alserhan, Forstenlechner, & Al-Nakeeb, 2010; Haq, 2012). These findings suggest that the HEIs in India have the prospect to develop students' and faculty members' skills in global citizenry (Evans and Chun, 2007) with the help of relevant D&I policies and programmes.

Hence, assessing how the educational community (students, faculty, staff and administrators) interprets D&I through qualitative and quantitative measures can expose deeply deliberated tensions and differences related to culture, democracy, HE reform, and social justice (Leo and Barton, 2006). Therefore, affirmative action at the time of student admission and faculty recruitment alone, which is where most of the institutional D&I action is focused on, is deemed insufficient (Alfonso and Ganesan, 2019). The development of awareness of students, faculty members, staff and administrators about the presence or absence of such effects of D&I in HEI is imperative. Rather than using D&I as a politically correct word, it is required that students and faculty must see D&I as a fundamental and important aspect of their daily lives, on campus and beyond (Cress and Hart, 2002; Alfonso and Ganesan, 2019).

Although the change would be brought by campus D&I programmes, we are not likely to see a change all of a sudden unless we actively recognise college community members' perceptions of diversity, analyse throughout, nurture and provide support at every stage. If these differences have to be respected by students and faculty, then the *conscious and continuous endeavour* is required from all stakeholders: students, faculty, staff, administrators, the HE education ministries, State and Centre ... and they must create a system that will not only enable educational processes but also foster diverse and inclusive climate (Alfonso and Ganesan, 2019).

The researcher hopes that the outcome of this study will help in the creation of relevant D&I policies and programmes in HEIs with constant support from all stakeholders including college and university administrators. This, in turn, would enhance D&I knowledge, D&I attitude and D&I practice among students and faculty resulting in a positive D&I climate across HEIs.

## **5.2. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

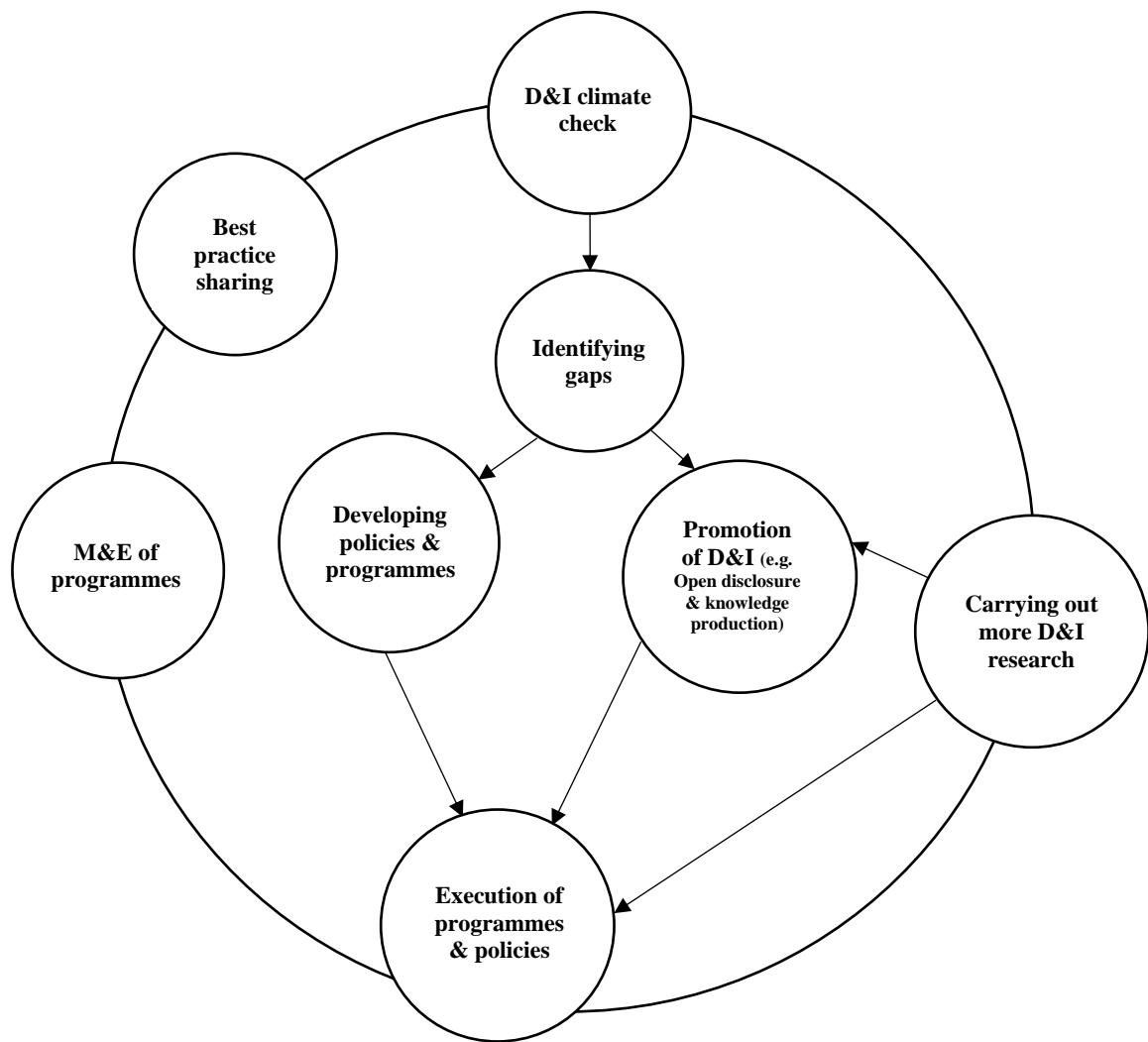
The present study has got significant managerial implications for D&I practitioners, researchers, and academicians. The major implications are as follows:

- ❖ The major findings of this study offer reliable explanations for the emergent need of positive D&I climate in HEIs through the systematic implementation of D&I programmes while enhancing D&I KAP of students and faculty, to begin with. The study findings reveal that there are comparatively inappropriate D&I awareness/knowledge, undesirable D&I attitude and distorted D&I practice among students and faculty leading to unfavourable D&I climate. Therefore, it is imperative to enhance their D&I KAP as the modern employment landscape demands only globally adaptable skills (New American Economy, 2017; Commission on Language Learning, 2017; Jones, 2005; Ulrich et al., 2007). It is high time that HEIs in India take stock of it and start incorporating D&I vision, mission and value (MVV) statement not only into their college and university policies but also execute targeted D&I programmes.
- ❖ The study found a high prevalence of ethnocentrism across HEIs implying less value and respect for a different culture. Besides, there was constant pressure for higher performance and mastery-approach among students and faculty resulting in

a campus climate that is constantly under stress and strain. D&I climate research assumes that ‘people attach meaning to or make sense of clusters of psychologically related events’ (Schneider and Reichers, 1983, p. 21). Hence, HEIs can have many climates, each with a referent. As intergroup relations are embedded in organizations (Alderfer and Smith, 1982) perceptions of D&I climate will be influenced by the balance of power of intergroup relations and pertinent organizational events in the larger system. The management in the HEI needs to address intra- and inter-group interactions systematically using empirically-driven protocols for assessment of group dynamics, development of appropriate interventions, execution of evidence-based interventions, and robust matrix for impact evaluation. Because, in the milieu of “the world as a global village,” students (future employees) and faculty (present employees) are expected to circumnavigate both anticipated and unexpected changes in the market (Ulrich et al., 2007).

- ❖ The study findings suggest that those HEIs which are less aware of the developments in D&I research need to increase their knowledge of the business case for D&I and place more effort into active D&I management for their benefit. While taking in account all the various benefits D&I can render in the education setting and the positive impact, the successful management thereof can bring about through mitigation of the negative and enhancement of the positive effects.
- ❖ Moreover, the HEIs that practice complete D&I integration in their organisational environment could keep in mind that managing diversity does not mean classification of it as a negative phenomenon, rather an opportunity for further improvement of the educational environment and effort to use the full potential of the existing diversity in the student and faculty body.
- ❖ It calls for the management to adopt a more systematic, positive, organizational approach of D&I management with an appreciation of D&I and taking conscious moves toward a scientific as well as ethical and results orientated approach. This approach, however, is not easy to put into practice. Conflicts and social issues obviously cannot be overlooked as they are embedded in their complexity and contexts.

- ❖ The management must accept the fact that this complexity entails the fine-tuning and nimble use of different D&I tools for dealing with it, and for describing each unique diversity constellation of any particular organization, community, region or country. Despite difficulties in overcoming complexity, D&I management has to assume that people are able and willing to change themselves and their thinking and thereby define and redefine D&I in a positive light.



**Figure 5.1. Institutional framework for promoting D&I in HEIs**

The institutional framework outlines a strategy for promoting D&I in HEIs, with interconnected interventions at the institutional level with specific protocols at each intervention phase. The management in HEIs that makes use of this institutional framework has to become cognizant of its comprehensive and interconnected phases. D&I framework phases start from carrying out an in-depth D&I climate check followed by identification of gaps in D&I KAP among students, faculty, staff and

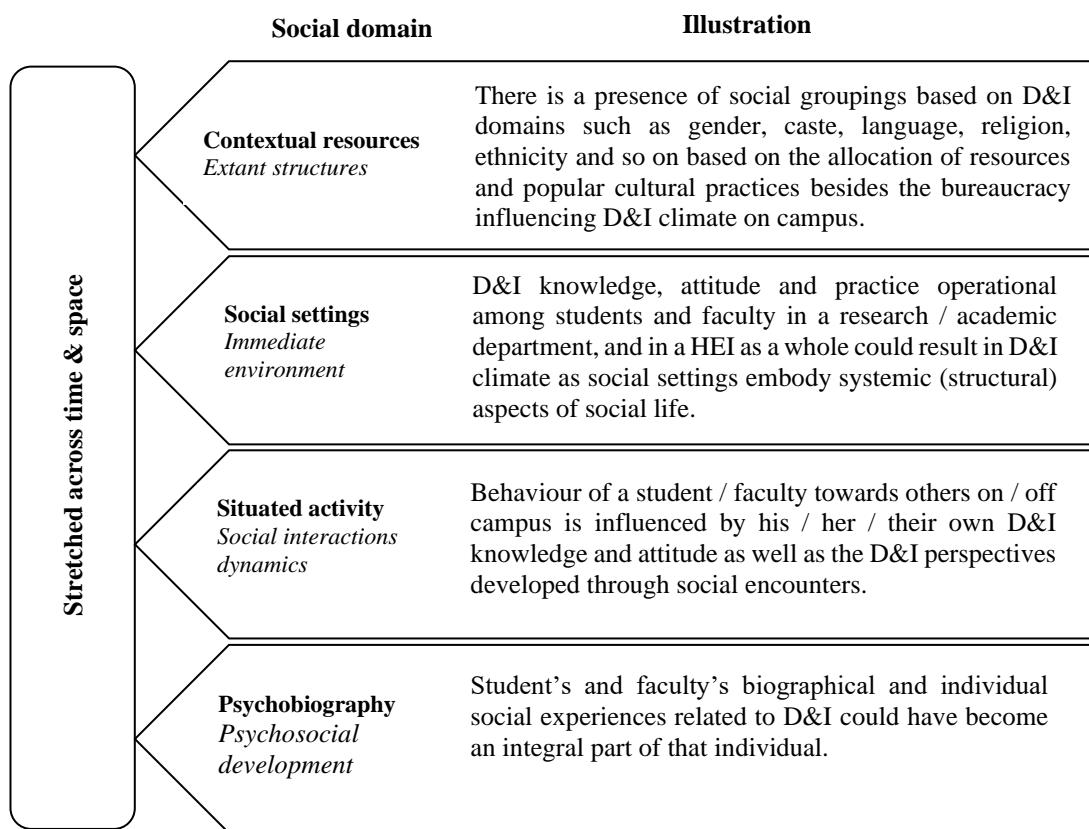
administrators. Promoting D&I through open disclosure of diversity dimensions by college community members, including age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, caste (specific to India), native language, nationality, personality, learning style, academic discipline, political affiliation would aid in developing more appropriate D&I policies and programmes. These efforts must be continuously supplemented by D&I research carried out on campus. Then the execution of evidence-based programmes takes place. These targeted D&I programmes must be monitored and evaluated using robust D&I business matrix in consultation with the D&I researchers, practitioners and academicians. Once the evaluation of the programmes is done systematically, then it is a time for the management of the HEI to disseminate the major learnings not only to the campus community but also to the wider audience who would benefit from the best practices. This phase again would lay the foundation of D&I climate check and the framework is a continuous and virtuous cycle, i.e. the institutional framework for the promotion of D&I in HEIs is a complex chain of activities that reinforce themselves through a feedback loop (Webel and Galtung, 2012).

### **5.3. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

As mentioned in the theoretical framework of this study (figure 1.1), an adaptive theory was adopted by the researcher while incorporating the principles of critical realism (Bhaskar, 1978, 1989, 1998) for primarily constructing and elaborating a theory in conjunction with ongoing empirical research (Layder, 1994; 1998). The adaptive theory combines both agency and structure in an approach that creates a link between ‘human activity and its social contexts’ (Layder, 1994:5). Through this link, the researcher has envisaged combining the use of pre-existing theory with theory generated from the data triangulation (Carlsson, 2005). The adaptive theory has helped the researcher to combine both structure and agency aspects in this research study considering the phenomenon that actions of individuals shape social structure that in turn shapes individual actions.

Cognizant of the study findings related to D&I climate across HEIs in India, the researcher was objective in thinking of the social universe as multi-dimensional instead of a simple dualism of agency and structure. Such a perspective acknowledges the richness, complexity and depth of the social universe (D&I climate on campus)

and its qualities (macro-micro connections) that may be denied or concealed by the reductive tendencies of the other theories (Layder, 2005). Thus, it is apparent that the theory of social domains and the methodology of adaptive theory together provide a D&I climate framework with which to understand agency–structure links. Hence, the theoretical foundation is that the D&I climate across HEIs in India is made up of four social domains such as (i) psychobiography, (ii) situated activity, (iii) social settings, and (iv) contextual resources (Figure 5.2.). These domains can be understood as existing in a ‘vertical’ dimension, representing the ontological depth of D&I, as well as a ‘horizontal’ dimension, indicating how D&I processes are stretched over time and space.



**Figure 5.2. Layered social domain framework for understanding D&I climate**

The four domains are intimately interlinked and bring together objective and subjective aspects of D&I reality to form a complex multi-dimensional D&I climate on a college campus. The constraints of positive D&I climate have an intrinsic (psychobiographical) and an extrinsic (situation, social setting and extant structures) characters beyond individual reasons and motives. The researcher believes that the use

of adaptive theory to inform the underlying social structures behind social actions has improved the quality of this study findings.

To construct a theory that can guide research on effective managerial action, the researcher further argues that a D&I climate entails a set of sustained practices at the individual, group and institutional levels. Following the conception of HEIs as forming, and as dynamic and evolving, practice theory (Nicolini, 2013) places importance both on individuals as active agents and on structural and systemic factors as shaping lives and cultures (Ortner, 1984; Reckwitz, 2002). As theorised by Reckwitz (2002), practices are multi-dimensional, involving habitual, routine, everyday action that has somatic, cognitive, emotional and conative aspects. The practice theory argues that “everyday actions are consequential in producing the structural contours of social life” (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Thus, inclusion or exclusion can be favoured by particular practices. Investigating practices in HEIs allows us to study how everyday interactions can defy D&I phenomena.

The present study findings, therefore, expedite the theory further by acknowledging the shortcomings of contemporary approaches to D&I and the inconsistencies found in extant research. For the purpose, a more appropriate theory such as the Theory of Generative Interactions (Bernstein et al., 2019) is imperative in explaining the findings of this study to enhance its managerial implications. To promote and sustain progressive D&I climate on campus, multiple types of exclusionary dynamics such as self-segregation, communication apprehension, and stereotyping and stigmatizing must be addressed systematically. This is possible through *conscious and continuous endeavours* aiming at adaptive cognitive processing and skill development, and engagement in positive interactions created and sustained by contextually relevant sets of institutional practices. HEIs must consider the provision of the following conditions for generative interactions: pursuing an important and shared D&I purpose, mixing diverse members on campus over protracted periods, enabling different groups to have equal standing in contributing to success, providing collaborative interdependence, interpersonal comfort, and self-efficacy. These interactions are generative as they challenge the guiding assumptions of the organizational culture, reconsider assumptions, and raise fundamental questions about HEIs (Gergen, 1978). The researcher asserts that properly structured generative interactions can help HEIs in to

address all stakeholders in creating optimal D&I climate, and ultimately ensuring equity for all on college /university campuses across India.

#### **5.4. LIMITATIONS**

- ❖ The current study was limited to a sample size of 34 faculty and 1006 students across 12 high ranking elite institutions which are located in the urban and semi-urban India.
- ❖ Given this nature of sampling, the researcher did not address connections between the type of institution and response as it is beyond the scope of data presented in this research study.
- ❖ The present study has not looked into the effect of D&I climate on the performance of participants as studied by many other researchers. However, this study was successful in investigating the independent and intervening variables contributing to D&I climate across HEIs in India.
- ❖ In addition, the data represent a moment-in-time, and many variables affect the data collected. The instruments will gain meaning if such a study is conducted over multiple years, giving researchers longitudinal data from which one could refine the analysis and understanding.
- ❖ While the results are consistent with other existing research works, the findings may not likely to get generalized for other institutions. Despite this concern, the researcher offers this process as a model for HEIs looking to better understand the D&I experiences of their community in congruence with their MVV statements. Besides, the researcher believes that, as the study participants (faculty and students) hail from diverse backgrounds, a good fraction of this study results will have the potential for generalisation across HEIs in India.
- ❖ Last, this mixed-methods study asked about the participants' subjective experiences, both in the QUAL and QUAN strands. In general, subjective experiences reflect the overt and covert biases of the participants, and while there was a great consistency of the experiences shared, the data were limited to who chose to participate and what they chose to share.

## 5.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

While being cognizant of the managerial and theoretical implications and also the limitations of this study, the researcher, further, suggests the following activities targeted towards each stakeholder category on campus, in addition to across-the-board awareness and sensitization. The targeted interventions for each stakeholder are mentioned in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1. Target population and respective D&I programme**

Target Population	Targeted D&I Programme
<b>Students</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Awareness / Sensitization</li> <li>b) D&amp;I curriculum</li> <li>c) Discussion forums / Affinity groups</li> <li>d) Training on globe smart</li> <li>e) Student research on D&amp;I</li> </ul>
<b>Faculty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Awareness / Sensitization</li> <li>b) Training, especially on D&amp;I competence</li> <li>c) Faculty research on D&amp;I</li> </ul>
<b>Staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Awareness / Sensitization</li> <li>b) Collaboration in execution</li> <li>c) Monitoring and evaluation</li> </ul>
<b>Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Awareness / Sensitization</li> <li>b) D&amp;I promotional programmes</li> <li>c) Policy formation</li> <li>d) Reward and recognition</li> <li>e) Redressal mechanisms</li> </ul>

Creating meaningful opportunities for interaction among diverse students and faculty on campus can highlight the understanding and/or the misunderstanding among them and support the development of D&I policies and programmes that can narrow the gap. Initiatives, as mentioned in D&I framework can start from assessing the college community members' *diversity behaviour manifestation* (DBM). Specific details of the recommended D&I policies and programmes specific to each population are detailed in the following paragraphs.

**Students:** D&I knowledge, attitude and practice can be enhanced by formal inclusion of D&I in curriculum across disciplines (arts, science, engineering and management) and promoting student research on the subject. Additionally, the introduction of discussion forums and affinity groups, both online and offline, can help promote a sense of belonging among students of minority groups such as those based on gender,

sexuality and disability; and also enable those not belonging to such groups to gain a sense of allyship. Training on global competencies would also permit students to gain exposure to wider dimensions of diversity (e.g. ethnicity, culture) than they would have otherwise.

**Faculty:** Multicultural competence and D&I training needs to be integrated into recruitment and orientation processes, and periodic capacity building for faculty. Additionally, research programmes and teaching on D&I issues in relevant disciplines can foster a climate of inclusion and healthy discussion among faculty. Encouraging faculty to research D&I would aid in the development of D&I pedagogy, to bridge the gap between the industry and academia, sustained industry-academia relationship, and evidence-based D&I practices on campus.

**Non-teaching staff:** Staff involved in ancillary academic, administrative and finance roles need to be targeted for D&I training along with the faculty and administration because comprehensive assessments of campus climate need to include voices from all members of the institution's community. By including staff in the institution's D&I related research efforts, researchers may succeed in capturing certain nuances of discrimination and prejudice that exist in contexts outside of the classroom but which have great implications for institutional effectiveness (Cox, 2001).

**Management:** Intensive work is needed to inculcate an understanding and appreciation of an inclusive climate in policy and practice. Programmes promoting D&I across faculty-staff-student recruitment and retention, and formulation of inclusive policies are needed. These need to be coupled with strong redressal mechanisms that will address stigma and discrimination based on gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, etc. Frameworks and processes for monitoring and evaluation can help the administration identify progress and gaps in implementing D&I measures on campus. Finally, a system of rewards and recognition for stakeholders who demonstrate extraordinary commitment to and/or best practices in D&I can help enhance the D&I climate in HEI.

Further, the researcher recommends that D&I management be incorporated into theory, process, policy, practice, and human resources across all structures and systems within HE by institutionalizing D&I office across colleges/universities.

## **5.6. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

- Future research studies may consider participants from tier II, tier III and rural colleges.
- Further, a longitudinal research study can be carried out to understand the D&I KAP as a new paradigm across academic disciplines and also across various institutions over some time to get time-tested trends and patterns.
- A comparative study between government, aided and private HEIs would yield further facts on plausible differences of D&I climate to develop targeted interventions appropriately.
- Researchers could consider exploring further the cognitive, affective and conative components of students and faculty related to D&I climate to understand their psychological implications.
- Further, intervention/operation/policy research in this field, using randomised controlled trial (RCT) research design, would be of immense support in the pursuit of identifying the effects of implemented D&I programmes and also to develop policies and programmes based on pieces of evidence.

## **5.7. CONCLUSION**

D&I management is a relatively new paradigm in the business context, and it is seldom studied in HE settings. This is particularly the case for HEIs in the Global South, including India. This mixed-methods study was carried out to fill this important knowledge gap. This doctoral work involved the systematic study of D&I KAP and climate in selected Indian HEIs using a convergent parallel research design approach. Overall, the results found many participants in both QUAL and QUAN strands who had relatively adequate D&I KAP, but it identified several barriers to a desirable D&I climate. Results indicate that there is scope to broaden D&I perspectives in Indian HEIs to incorporate gender identity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, learning style, academic discipline, residential status, age (generational diversity) and nationality. These global and country-specific categories, which have a substantial relevance in other developing societies as well, need amplified attention in Indian HEIs.

Most of the faculty participants believed that gender diversity is addressed if women faculty are recruited at the entry-level. There was little or no mention of the need to ensure women representation in the higher ranks of the academia (say at professorial levels and beyond). The participants acknowledged the need to consider disability and age as genuine diversity domains, however, there was an obvious hesitation and/or lack of preparedness for engaging with the disabled people or those outside the expected age-norms. Neither the participants nor the HEIs are adequately prepared to meaningfully engage students with (dis) abilities. Further, while D&I were considered for student admissions but not for faculty hiring.

Prevalence of high ethnocentrism, constant and distressing competition with peer, homophily, cliques, nepotism and their associated challenges are observed. These are considered to be impediments to the practice of D&I. This study indicates that individual perceptions, cultural realities and institutional climate are important in promoting D&I in HEIs. Apart from the usual discourse surrounding gender, disability and religion in India, there is a need to instil a fuller diversity dialogue that considers the global and country-specific diversity domains mentioned in this work. The participants themselves believe that this ought to be brought about through the recommended institutional mechanisms herein. HEIs are urged to take more focused efforts to address the insensitive and intolerant behaviours on campus along with gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, caste, language and religious tolerance. This can help overcome fears faced by specific groups represented by diversity domains identified in this work.

Fear, vital psychosomatic response to a threat/dangerous situation, undermines the experiences of students and faculty on campus. Such an experience could also weaken the reporting process resulting in a missed opportunity to address these behaviours when they occur. The absence of D&I policies and programmes could add to the agony of students and faculty. Therefore, for HEIs, it is important to address these lacunae concurrently with their academic mandates.

Many participants reported exclusionary practices on campus and were concerned about the unfavourable climate for women faculty and students, women at leadership roles, sexual minorities, persons with a disability, and the third gender. HEIs would benefit from forming and supporting affinity groups for specific populations and offer

targeted interventions for them regularly. Sensitisation of the majority on campus is the key to achieve this goal.

As the current D&I KAP and climate are inadequate, faculty, staff and administrators need to engage in discussions on how to develop, implement, lead and evaluate efforts at the college/university. These conversations should include students and their representatives. A linear relationship between D&I KAP and D&I climate is observed. Hence it is recommended that, to begin with, more awareness around D&I be created on campus. The unpreparedness of the faculty may be addressed at an early stage of intervention since they are a sustained presence and hence an important influence on the overall campus climate.

Furthermore, students and faculty should collaborate to infuse D&I pedagogy into the curricula. Faculty must reconsider their pedagogy to best meet the needs of the rapidly diversifying student bodies in their classrooms. This study points to the benefits of D&I efforts; in fact, they contribute substantially to the scholastic and professional outcomes of the students. Currently these D&I based efforts are at an elementary stage and need immediate attention. Although there is a lack of D&I efforts across HEIs in India, the level of participation of students and faculty in this study signifies a strong foundation on which to lay more comprehensive programmes.

Further research of D&I KAP and climate in Global South would be highly beneficial to understand the complexities of the subject, create elaborate theories, and identify practical implications of the importance of this area of research.