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Moving beyond performative inclusion toward systemic change: A case of a South African university

Sub theme: Equity, Access, and Inclusion: Addressing systemic inequalities, the digital divide, and diverse learning needs.

Format: paper presentation

The pursuit of equitable and inclusive education remains a major challenge within higher education particularly in contexts shaped by socio-economic disparities, unequal access to digital resources, and diverse student learning needs. The integration of technology-enhanced learning has come with increased opportunities for access while giving rise to major systematic inequalities that continue to marginalise vulnerable student populations. This study explores how higher education institutions can design and implement inclusive teaching and learning practices that bridges digital divide to ensure academic success for all students. The qualitative study adopts a critical realist ontology and enacts Nancy Fraser's Social justice theory as its analytical framework. The theory's interconnected dimensions -redistribution, recognition and representation best fit to address inequalities in higher education. Data includes interviews and document analysis. The study makes use of the interpretivist qualitative research approach and adopts an exploratory research design. Document analysis, students and lecturer interviews will be contacted to explore the support or lack thereof on equitable access and success in digital literacy in a distance learning. The study will use a non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling. Data quality will be ensured through triangulation of data collection tools and ethical practices. The study contributes to ongoing conversations about transforming higher education into a more equitable and inclusive space. It ultimately argues that sustainable educational transformation requires institutions to move beyond performative inclusion toward systemic change that actively dismantles barriers to learning and success.