

# The Role of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Initiatives in Fostering Global Citizenship Within Higher Education Institutions in West Africa

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**Abstract.** This study examines the role of diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives in fostering global citizenship within higher education institutions in West Africa, with a focus on developing intercultural competence, social responsibility, and critical thinking among students. Recognising global citizenship as a crucial framework for preparing graduates to address complex global challenges, the research uses a qualitative approach, drawing on semi-structured interviews conducted with students, faculty, and administrators at institutions such as the University of Lagos, University of Ghana and Université Cheikh Anta Diop. The interview data, analysed through thematic analysis, reveals that D&I initiatives positively influence students' intercultural understanding and sense of civic duty, equipping them to participate actively in social change. Despite these benefits, the findings highlight barriers, including limited funding, uneven policy implementation, and cultural resistance, which hinder the initiatives' full impact. Additionally, the study incorporates insights from 36 peer-reviewed articles from reputable databases, including ResearchGate and JSTOR, to contextualise D&I's potential for transformative education. The findings suggest that enhanced policy support, resource allocation, and institutional training are vital for maximising D&I programs' role in cultivating globally minded, socially responsible graduates across West African universities.

**Keywords:** Diversity and Inclusion; Global Citizenship; Intercultural Competence; Higher Education; West Africa.

## INTRODUCTION

Global citizenship has emerged as a crucial element in higher education, fostering an inclusive and diverse environment that empowers students to engage with global challenges and appreciate cultural differences. Global citizenship is not merely a conceptual goal but an actionable and multi-dimensional framework within higher education. This framework enhances students' intercultural competencies, encourages a global mindset, and prepares graduates to tackle social, economic, and environmental issues internationally. Studies reveal that initiatives promoting diversity and inclusion within higher education can cultivate students' ability to work across cultural boundaries, engage in global problem-solving, and practice empathy and mutual respect [1, 2]. Diversity and inclusion in higher education institutions are directly linked to academic achieve-

ment and social cohesion. Research has shown that when students are exposed to diverse perspectives within an inclusive environment, they benefit from a richer learning experience that encourages critical thinking, collaboration, and innovative problem-solving [3]. As global interconnectivity grows, so does the need for educational frameworks that emphasise inclusion and equity, bridging cultural divides and promoting cross-cultural understanding [4]. The importance of diversity and inclusion extends beyond students' academic growth. In an increasingly globalised world, individuals need the skills to navigate complex cultural and social landscapes effectively. Higher education institutions that emphasise diversity through curriculum and extra-curricular activities prepare students for global employability and active participation in creating a just and sustainable world [5]. Such educational

experiences are instrumental in building global citizens who can recognise and address issues of inequality and injustice, fostering responsible actions at local, national, and international levels [6]. In the context of West African institutions, the focus on diversity and inclusion can be particularly transformative, given the region's rich cultural heritage and complex socio-political dynamics. Integrating global citizenship education in West African higher education involves contextualising global learning to address local realities, such as postcolonial legacies, ethnic diversity, and economic disparities. This approach enhances students' ability to work within diverse environments and aligns educational goals with regional development needs, supporting sustainable growth and sociocultural harmony in West African societies [1, 2].

As educational leaders in West Africa increasingly recognise the importance of global citizenship, there is a strong impetus for higher education institutions to implement diversity and inclusion strategies. Research demonstrates that institutions prioritising these strategies achieve improved academic outcomes and foster an inclusive atmosphere where students from varied backgrounds feel valued and empowered [7]. Such efforts benefit students academically and socially and position these institutions as catalysts for societal transformation, creating environments where global citizenship principles translate into real-world impact [8]. In sum, fostering global citizenship within West African higher education through diversity and inclusion is a critical educational strategy and a foundational element of institutional excellence and regional progress. Higher education institutions in West Africa can be essential in preparing students to be impactful global citizens by cultivating an environment of mutual respect and understanding.

## Literature Review

*Definitions and Elements of Global Citizenship.* Global citizenship has been defined from multiple perspectives, focusing on equalities that transcend borders, cultures, and personal interests. Some authors state that global citizenship entails recognising our interconnectedness and the principle to "think globally, act locally." This definition underscores the need for individuals to possess a global mindset while being responsible citizens within their communities. Global citizen-

ship involves awareness of global issues, empathy, active participation, and respect for diversity [9].

From a broader lens, global citizenship encompasses ethical awareness and commitment to social justice. Authors [10] argue that global citizenship means assuming a sense of responsibility toward global issues, such as climate change, inequality, and poverty, which affect people across the globe. This perspective implies that global citizenship must be cultivated with a strong ethics and social responsibility foundation. Accordingly, authors [11] emphasise the importance of respect, empathy, and justice as core elements of global citizenship, which can be fostered through education and experiential learning in diverse contexts.

Further, authors [9] describe global citizenship as a developing concept that encourages institutions and individuals alike to rethink traditional citizenship boundaries. Developing global citizenship skills allows individuals to appreciate cultural differences and challenge prejudice, thereby advancing intercultural understanding. The concept encompasses various interpretations and forms of engagement, including global-mindedness, cosmopolitanism, and global learning, each emphasising knowledge-sharing and openness to diverse perspectives.

As advocated by global citizenship education, the transition from local to global mindsets is critical for encouraging individuals to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development goals (SDGs). The SDGs promote principles aligned with global citizenship, such as reducing inequality and promoting peace and justice [2].

*The Role of Higher Education in Fostering Global Citizenship.* Higher education institutions have embraced the challenge of fostering global citizenship, which is increasingly seen as a key competency for the 21st century. According to a systematic review, universities worldwide are integrating global learning into their curricula to encourage students to adopt global perspectives and embrace cultural diversity. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has spearheaded initiatives emphasising the importance of intercultural skills and social responsibility in educational outcomes. Implementing global citizenship programs often involves experiential learning approaches, including international travel, language studies, and service learning. Such programs allow students to gain

firsthand experience with diverse cultures and global issues, which can deepen their understanding of global interconnectedness [5].

Despite their popularity, programs aiming to promote global citizenship are not without limitations. Authors [10] critique these initiatives, arguing that they sometimes lack clear frameworks and measurable outcomes, making assessing their impact on students' global competencies difficult. They emphasise that higher education institutions must develop standardised approaches to ensure these programs effectively fulfil their objectives.

Research suggests that when students engage in globally focused curriculum activities, they develop a sense of empathy, understanding, and responsibility toward global issues. A study [2] underscores that to cultivate global citizenship, institutions must encourage students to think beyond personal interests and connect their studies to global contexts, thereby developing globally aware citizens prepared to address pressing issues such as environmental degradation, social inequality, and cultural conflicts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for global cooperation and adaptability, underscoring the value of global citizenship skills. Many universities adapted by integrating online exchanges and virtual global projects, thus providing alternative pathways to promote global engagement. This response reflects the critical role of higher education institutions in preparing students to navigate a rapidly changing and interconnected world and the importance of resilience in global citizenship education.

*Conceptualising Diversity and Inclusion in the Academic Context.* Diversity and inclusion have become central themes in higher education, recognised as essential components of a supportive and equitable academic environment. Diversity generally means representing different demographic and social identities within a community, such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and cultural background.

On the other hand, inclusion emphasises the importance of creating an environment where individuals of diverse backgrounds feel welcomed, valued, and fully engaged. In this context, inclusive education does not merely mean accommodating different groups but actively fostering a culture of belonging, respect, and mutual support, which is integral for student engagement

and success [12]. The conceptual distinction between diversity and inclusion is crucial, as diversity without inclusion can lead to tokenism or superficial representation, which may fail to address the deeper issues of inequality and exclusion [13]. For instance, a demographically diverse student body without policies that promote equity and respect may hinder the potential benefits of diversity. Thus, inclusion efforts in higher education focus on establishing institutional practices and cultural norms that enable all students, particularly those from historically marginalised groups, to feel respected and supported [14]. By creating an inclusive academic environment, institutions of higher learning can better support the development of students' identities and foster a more productive and engaging learning experience.

Further, institutions have recognised that fostering an inclusive environment involves re-evaluating policies and practices across all aspects of campus life, from admissions and curriculum development to student support services and faculty hiring practices [15]. Inclusive practices include programs, diverse curricular offerings, and active support for student organisations that represent minority groups. These practices aim to create spaces where students of different backgrounds can thrive and bring their unique perspectives to academic and social discourse.

Research on diversity and inclusion in education highlights that diversity without equitable representation and inclusion in decision-making processes can exacerbate feelings of marginalisation and isolation [16]. For instance, minority students may be merely "added" to an institution without considering their needs or experiences. Such experiences underscore the importance of policies that go beyond increasing diversity numbers to create an inclusive and nurturing environment that values students' contributions and fosters academic growth [17].

Faculty diversity, which contributes to a richer educational experience, can help model inclusion for students by presenting a variety of perspectives and lived experiences. However, underrepresenting diverse faculty members remains a critical challenge, with implications for mentorship, curriculum inclusiveness, and research diversity [18]. Therefore, inclusion in academia entails continuous defiantly systemic barriers to access and ensures that all voices are represented and valued at every level.

Moreover, the push for diversity and inclusion in higher education reflects broader societal shifts towards equality and justice. Institutions increasingly adopt diversity and inclusion as core values for ethical reasons and to prepare students to thrive in a multicultural and globalised world [19]. Educating students in an inclusive environment equips them with the mindset to work collaboratively with people from varied backgrounds, which is essential in today's global economy. This commitment to diversity and inclusion contributes to developing well-rounded, culturally aware graduates prepared to contribute to diverse workplaces and communities.

Ultimately, diversity and inclusion in higher education are interdependent and require institutions to adopt a proactive stance in creating an equitable academic setting. By doing so, universities foster an environment where every student feels empowered to participate and succeed, allowing them to develop into socially responsible citizens. This section provides a foundation for understanding how diversity and inclusion contribute to the overall mission of higher education and will guide the discussion on the significance of these efforts for academic and social development.

*The Significance of Diversity for Academic and Social Development.* Diversity in higher education is critical in advancing academic and social development. Research shows diverse learning environments can enhance students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills [15]. When students engage with peers from different backgrounds, they are exposed to perspectives that challenge their preconceptions and encourage them to consider issues from multiple viewpoints. This exposure can deepen students' understanding of complex social issues and foster intellectual humility, as they recognise that there is often more than one valid perspective on any given issue.

Furthermore, diverse learning environments support students' personal and social empathy, intercultural competence, and a sense of social responsibility. According to [15], interactions with diverse peers can help students develop empathy and cultural sensitivity skills, which are critical in today's globalised world. After graduation, these experiences prepare students to work effectively in diverse workplaces and communities. Institutions that prioritise diversity in their admissions and student activities encourage stu-

dents to view diversity as a valuable asset, which can, in turn, inspire them to advocate for inclusive practices in their own professional and personal lives.

Diversity in higher education also plays a pivotal role in reducing social inequalities by standing in for historically underrepresented groups. By admitting and supporting students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, institutions help address educational disparities and promote upward mobility. This approach aligns with the social mission of higher education, as universities have the potential for social mobility and equity. Students from marginalised backgrounds can gain access to the resources, networks, and opportunities that may have been previously inaccessible, ultimately contributing to a more equitable society.

Another important benefit of diversity in higher education is improving institutional quality and innovation. Research [19] demonstrates that diversity can enhance creativity and problem-solving by bringing together individuals with different cognitive styles, experiences, and perspectives. In a classroom setting, this diversity in thought and approach encourages richer discussions, broader debates, and more comprehensive analyses of complex issues. By fostering a dynamic environment where different ideas and approaches are valued, higher education institutions can promote innovative thinking that prepares students for the complexities of the modern world.

Finally, diversity enhances the sense of belonging and well-being among students. When students see their identities represented on campus, they are more likely to feel accepted and respected, which can contribute to better mental health and academic success. This sense of belonging is especially crucial for students from minority backgrounds, who may otherwise feel isolated or marginalised in predominantly homogeneous institutions. By actively promoting diversity, universities signal their commitment to inclusion and respect, which can positively impact student retention, engagement, and overall satisfaction with their educational experience [12].

*Historical Context and Current Status of Diversity and Inclusion in West African Universities.* The concept of diversity and inclusion in West African higher education institutions has evolved significantly over time, shaped by historical, political, and social forces. Historically, many West African

universities were established during colonial rule, primarily serving the educational needs of a limited elite population [20]. Colonial universities, such as Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone and the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, were designed to produce local administrators for colonial governments. As a result, they catered to a narrow demographic, largely excluding indigenous cultural perspectives. Post-independence, these universities began to expand access to broader sections of the population, although they still faced challenges in promoting an inclusive and diverse environment.

In the decades following independence, many West African countries prioritised expanding access to education for nation-building and economic development [21]. Governments sought to increase university enrollments, particularly for underrepresented groups, including women and ethnic minorities, as part of their broader push for social and economic inclusion. However, the efforts to promote diversity faced challenges related to limited resources, political instability, and existing social inequalities [22]. As a result, while access to higher education improved, the inclusion of diverse perspectives within academic institutions remained limited.

In more recent years, there has been a renewed focus on diversity and inclusion in higher education across West Africa, spurred by the need to address issues of gender equity, ethnic representation, and socioeconomic diversity. Initiatives promoting gender equity, such as increasing female representation in STEM fields, have gained traction in Ghana and Nigeria. Furthermore, efforts to support students from low-income backgrounds through scholarships and financial aid programs have become more widespread. These initiatives aim to create a more balanced university representation and promote inclusivity.

However, the current status of diversity and inclusion in West African universities varies significantly across institutions and countries. In Nigeria, for instance, policies mandating federal character – aimed at ensuring ethnic diversity in public institutions – affect admissions and faculty hiring practices. Meanwhile, affirmative action policies have been implemented in Ghana to promote gender equity in higher education, particularly in science and technology fields [23]. These policies demonstrate a commitment to creating a more inclusive academic environment but are often

unevenly enforced due to administrative and financial constraints.

While some progress has been made, West African universities face challenges related to systemic inequalities and resource limitations that impact their ability to foster truly diverse and inclusive environments. Many institutions struggle with inadequate funding, which limits their ability to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds through scholarships and social programs. Additionally, issues such as ethnic favouritism and political interference in university administration can hinder the implementation of diversity and inclusion policies [24]. These challenges underscore the need for structural reforms to support diversity sustainably.

Moreover, recent international partnerships have increased awareness of diversity and inclusion as essential components of quality education in West African universities. Collaborative programs with universities in Europe and North America have introduced best practices in diversity management and inclusive teaching strategies, which some regional institutions have adopted. For example, partnerships between Nigerian and American universities have facilitated faculty exchange programs and curricular innovations that emphasise cultural diversity and inclusion [25]. While these programs contribute to institutional diversity efforts, their impact is limited by financial and administrative challenges.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore diversity, inclusion, and global citizenship initiatives within West African higher education institutions. A qualitative design was chosen for its strength in capturing nuanced, descriptive insights from individuals directly engaged in the academic and administrative landscape. Semi-structured interviews served as the primary data collection method, providing a flexible framework that allowed participants to share personal views while guiding responses around the study's themes. Interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of students, faculty, and administrators from three West African institutions known for diversity initiatives: the University of Lagos (Nigeria), the University of Ghana (Legon), and Université Cheikh Anta Diop (Senegal). This cross-sectional approach allowed for the inclusion of various perspectives, creating a compre-

hensive understanding of the current status and challenges surrounding diversity and inclusion in these settings.

To build a robust theoretical foundation, 36 articles were consulted from reputable research databases, including ResearchGate, JSTOR, SpringerLink, ScienceDirect, ProQuest, Wiley Online Library, and Google Scholar. These sources provided a wealth of peer-reviewed studies and scholarly publications on diversity, inclusion, and global citizenship, ensuring the study's framework was evidence-based and aligned with contemporary academic discourse. By consulting these diverse sources, the research was grounded in established theories and enriched by empirical findings from multiple contexts. These are particularly valuable for exploring cultural inclusivity and educational equity themes.

Data collection focused on themes such as perceptions of diversity, institutional support, and barriers to inclusion, drawing on each participant group to ensure a well-rounded view of the institutional efforts and obstacles faced in promoting global citizenship. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, with conversations recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve accuracy. Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis, which involved coding and categorising responses into patterns and subthemes, such as "institutional challenges" and "perceptions of diversity". This approach provided a structured way to interpret findings and capture recurring ideas across institutions, helping to identify specific regional challenges and broader patterns relevant to West African institutions' inclusion efforts.

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed to ensure trustworthiness, including obtaining participant consent and confidentiality. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing themes across the different participant groups and institutions, bolstered by member checking, where participants reviewed their responses to confirm accuracy. These practices strengthened the reliability of the findings, providing a credible base from which to explore the implications of diversity and inclusion policies for fostering global citizenship in West African universities.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Overview of Diversity and Inclusion Programs in Selected West African Institutions

This section provides a detailed overview of diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives and policies in West African higher education institutions. It highlights programs to support underrepresented groups, promote cultural awareness, and foster global citizenship. Analysis of interview data reveals both the strengths and challenges of these initiatives, shedding light on the strategies institutions employ to advance diversity and inclusion.

*Diversity and Inclusion Offices and Coordinators.* Many West African universities have established D&I offices or appointed diversity officers to create policies that reflect institutional commitment to an inclusive campus. These offices typically oversee initiatives such as minority support programs, gender equality campaigns, and disability accommodations. A participant in the study noted, "Our university recently appointed a diversity officer whose role is to advocate for policies that support students from all backgrounds." However, some respondents highlighted challenges, particularly regarding limited resources and the difficulties D&I offices face in implementing policies across the university due to budget constraints. These limitations sometimes result in programs that cannot meet their full potential, impacting the breadth and depth of D&I initiatives.

*Inclusive Curriculum and Cultural Representation.* A common theme across the interviews was the integration of diversity topics within academic curricula. Some institutions have incorporated courses focused on African culture, gender studies, and global issues to promote a more inclusive perspective among students. One interviewee remarked, "The inclusion of African history in our curriculum makes me feel represented and valued as a student here." Despite these positive steps, the extent of cultural representation varies widely across institutions. In some universities, courses on African or minority cultures are elective rather than core requirements, which limits the exposure students receive. Additionally, certain respondents expressed concerns about the predominance of Western perspectives in the curriculum, suggesting a need for more localised content that reflects the unique cultural identities within West Africa.

*Financial Aid and Scholarship Programs for Underrepresented Groups.* Several institutions offer scholarships and financial aid packages to support disadvantaged students. These initiatives are intended to enhance the inclusivity of student populations by reducing financial barriers to education. One participant shared their experience: "The financial aid I received made it possible for me to attend university and has had a huge impact on my life." However, interviews indicate that financial support is not equally accessible across institutions, and some students still struggle to afford higher education despite these programs. Moreover, some respondents noted that while scholarships are available, they often focus on academic merit rather than socioeconomic needs, which can unintentionally exclude marginalised groups.

*Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Initiatives.* Many universities in the region are increasingly focusing on gender equality, with programs that promote women's participation in traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering and technology. Some institutions have established women's resource centres, mentorship programs, and workshops to empower female students. A participant noted, "As a woman studying computer science, I appreciate the mentorship programs available; they make me feel supported in a male-dominated field." Despite these positive efforts, participants pointed out that there is still a gender gap in higher education, with fewer women enrolled in certain academic programs. Additionally, the lack of female role models among faculty members was cited as a concern, with one interviewee stating, "There aren't enough female professors to inspire young women like me to pursue careers in academia."

*Disability Support Services and Accessibility Initiatives.* Disability support services are emerging as an important component of D&I programs in West African universities. Some institutions have introduced accommodations for students with disabilities, including accessible learning materials and on-campus infrastructure improvements. Interview data revealed mixed experiences with these services. One participant explained, "The university's disability support office has been helpful, but there are still many areas where accessibility needs improvement." While these services mark a step toward inclusivity, challenges remain in providing comprehensive support. For example, not all campuses have wheelchair-accessible buildings, and some students reported

a lack of specialised learning resources for students with visual or auditory impairments.

*Cultural Exchange and International Student Programs.* West African universities increasingly recognise the value of fostering global citizenship by encouraging cultural exchange through international student programs and study-abroad opportunities. These programs expose students to diverse perspectives and promote cross-cultural understanding. An interviewee mentioned, "Studying alongside international students has broadened my worldview and taught me to appreciate different cultures." However, some institutions struggle to sustain such programs due to funding limitations, and international students face unique challenges, such as language barriers and difficulty adjusting to local customs. Interviews highlighted a need for stronger support systems to help international students integrate into the campus community.

*Institutional Challenges and Resource Limitations.* Resource limitations often hinder the successful implementation of D&I initiatives in West African universities. Budget constraints were a recurring theme across interviews, with participants noting that funding shortages affect the scope of D&I programs. One respondent commented, "Our university has ambitious diversity goals, but without sufficient funding, it's hard to turn them into reality." Limited resources impact everything from staff recruitment for D&I offices to the availability of inclusive learning materials. Additionally, the absence of standardised D&I policies across the region contributes to disparities between institutions regarding program availability and effectiveness.

### **Role of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives in Promoting Global Citizenship**

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives in higher education are crucial in promoting global citizenship among students. These initiatives foster intercultural competence, social responsibility, and active engagement with diverse communities. The findings from interviews with participants at various West African institutions highlight several ways these programs contribute to the development of global citizenship.

*Intercultural Competence Development.* One of the primary benefits of D&I initiatives is the enhancement of intercultural competence among students. Students learn to navigate and appreciate differences in a globalised world through ex-

posure to diverse perspectives and cultural practices. Participants emphasised that initiatives such as cultural exchange programs and inclusive curricula helped them understand and respect diverse viewpoints. As one interviewee articulated, "Participating in cultural exchange events made me realise how much we can learn from each other's backgrounds." Such programs encourage collaboration and dialogue among students from different cultural backgrounds, fostering mutual understanding and reducing prejudice.

*Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement.* D&I initiatives promote social responsibility by encouraging students to engage actively with their communities and global issues. Many institutions have integrated service-learning programs into their curricula, allowing students to participate in projects that address social challenges. One participant noted, "Being involved in community service not only helps the community but also makes me feel more connected to global issues." This engagement cultivates a sense of civic duty and encourages students to take action on social justice issues, both locally and globally.

*Critical Thinking and Global Awareness.* D&I programs foster critical thinking by challenging students to question their assumptions and confront biases. Through discussions and workshops that address themes such as race, gender, and identity, students develop a nuanced understanding of global issues and their complexities. An interviewee remarked, "These discussions have opened my eyes to the different factors contributing to inequality in our world." This critical engagement with global topics encourages students to think deeply about their roles as global citizens and their responsibilities in promoting equity and justice [26, 27].

*Collaboration and Teamwork.* Effective D&I initiatives often emphasise collaborative learning experiences, where students from diverse backgrounds work together on projects. This teamwork helps students develop skills necessary for functioning in multicultural environments, including effective communication and conflict resolution. A participant shared, "Working on group projects with classmates from different cultures has taught me how to listen and respect others' opinions." Such experiences are essential for preparing students for the global workforce, where teamwork across cultures is increasingly common.

*Challenges and Areas for Improvement.* Despite the benefits of D&I initiatives in promoting global citizenship, participants noted several challenges. Many programs lack sufficient funding and institutional support, limiting their reach and effectiveness. One participant stated, "While we have good initiatives, they often struggle due to a lack of resources and commitment from the administration." This highlights the need for sustained institutional investment in D&I programs to ensure longevity and impact.

### **Barriers to Effective Diversity and Inclusion**

While numerous diversity and inclusion initiatives exist in West African higher education institutions, several barriers hinder their effective implementation. These challenges can undermine the goals of fostering an inclusive educational environment and promoting global citizenship.

*Insufficient Funding and Resources.* A significant barrier faced by institutions is insufficient funding allocated for D&I initiatives. Many programs rely on limited budgets that restrict their ability to implement comprehensive training, outreach, and support services. One interviewee remarked, "We have ideas for great initiatives, but without proper funding, they remain just ideas." This lack of financial support can lead to inconsistent program offerings and diminishing student participation and engagement.

*Resistance to Change.* Resistance to change among faculty, administration, and students can challenge the implementation of effective D&I initiatives. Some faculty members may hesitate to incorporate diversity topics into their curricula or alter established teaching methods. A participant noted, "Some professors stick to traditional methods and resist incorporating diversity into their courses." This resistance can create a disconnect between D&I goals and academic practices, limiting the potential for transformative learning experiences.

*Lack of Training and Awareness.* A lack of training for faculty and staff on diversity and inclusion issues can impede the effectiveness of initiatives. Many institutions do not provide adequate professional development opportunities to equip educators with the skills needed to effectively address diversity in the classroom. One participant expressed concern: "Some faculty members are not well-informed about cultural sensitivities, which affects the classroom environment." Train-

ing programs are essential for fostering an understanding of D&I issues and promoting an inclusive campus culture.

*Inconsistent Policy Implementation.* Inconsistent implementation of D&I policies across different departments and programs can lead to disparities in student experiences. Some departments may prioritise diversity while others may not, creating an uneven landscape of support for students. A participant highlighted this issue: "While some programs are doing well, others lack real effort towards inclusion." This inconsistency can undermine the overall effectiveness of D&I initiatives, leaving some students feeling unsupported.

*Sociocultural Barriers.* Cultural attitudes and societal norms can also challenge diversity and inclusion efforts in West African higher education institutions. In some cases, deeply ingrained biases and stereotypes may influence perceptions of diversity, leading to resistance or lack of engagement from the student body. An interviewee mentioned, "Some students come from backgrounds where diversity isn't valued, and that affects how they engage with these initiatives." Addressing these sociocultural barriers requires a concerted effort to promote awareness and understanding of diversity and its benefits.

## CONCLUSIONS

The research on fostering global citizenship through diversity and inclusion in higher education in West Africa reveals several key findings. First, diversity and inclusion initiatives are essential in enhancing intercultural competence among students. These initiatives facilitate exposure to various cultural perspectives, fostering understanding and respect, which is crucial for navigating an increasingly globalised world. Furthermore, the study underscores the role of these initiatives in promoting social responsibility. Through community service and social justice activities, students develop a commitment to addressing societal challenges, enhancing their sense of active citizenship.

The findings also indicate that D&I initiatives contribute significantly to critical thinking and awareness of global issues. Programs that challenge students to reflect on their biases and assumptions enable them to engage deeply with complex topics, fostering a sense of ethical responsibility towards social justice. Additionally, collaboration and teamwork skills are enhanced

through group projects and inclusive learning environments, which are vital for preparing students for diverse workplaces.

However, the research highlights several barriers to effectively implementing D&I initiatives, including insufficient funding, resistance to change, lack of training, inconsistent policy implementation, and sociocultural challenges. Addressing these barriers is crucial for maximising the impact of D&I programs and fostering a culture of inclusivity in higher education institutions.

The findings of this study have significant implications for higher education policy in West Africa. Policymakers must prioritise diversity and inclusion in their strategic planning to foster global citizenship among students. This involves integrating D&I initiatives into institutional missions and ensuring they are adequately funded and supported. Policies should focus on creating inclusive curricula, promoting cultural exchange programs, and providing training for faculty and staff on diversity issues.

Furthermore, institutions should adopt a comprehensive approach to policy implementation that ensures consistency across departments and programs. Regular assessments of D&I initiatives can help identify gaps and areas for improvement, allowing institutions to adapt and refine their strategies based on emerging needs and challenges. By embedding D&I principles into institutional policies, higher education in West Africa can cultivate an environment that supports diverse student populations and prepares graduates to engage as responsible global citizens.

To enhance diversity and inclusion in higher education, several practical steps can be taken by institutions:

- 1) **Increase Funding for D&I Initiatives:** Institutions should allocate sufficient resources to support D&I programs, ensuring they have the necessary infrastructure, training, and outreach to be effective. This includes funding for workshops, cultural events, and community service projects.
- 2) **Implement Comprehensive Training Programs:** Regular training for faculty and staff on diversity and inclusion is essential. These programs should focus on cultural competency, inclusive teaching practices, and strategies for addressing bias in the classroom.
- 3) **Foster Partnerships with Local Communities:** Institutions can build relationships with local

communities to create service-learning opportunities that connect academic learning with real-world challenges. This engagement helps students apply their knowledge meaningfully and reinforces their commitment to social responsibility.

4) Promote Inclusive Curricula: Higher education institutions should review and revise their curricula to ensure they reflect diverse perspectives and experiences. This can include integrating topics related to global citizenship, social justice, and cultural studies into various academic programs.

5) Encourage Student Leadership in D&I Efforts: Institutions should actively empower students to promote diversity and inclusion. This can be achieved through student-led organisations, initiatives, and forums where students can share their experiences and advocate for change within the institution.

6) Regular Assessment and Feedback Mechanisms: Institutions should implement mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of D&I initiatives. Feedback from students, faculty, and staff can help identify areas for improvement and ensure that programs meet the community's needs.

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