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Decolonising Inclusive Pedagogy: Teaching Gender, Caste, and Sexuality Across the India–UK Divide

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Abstract

'Decolonization is not a metaphor' (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p. 1). This article adopts a reflective, critical approach to examine how inclusion frameworks of Western origin in higher education, designed primarily around race, disability, and neurodiversity, fail to account for the intersections of caste, gender, and sexuality in Indian classrooms. Drawing on the author's dual pedagogical experience as an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Lecturer at the University of Exeter (a Russell Group university in the United Kingdom) and as an Assistant Professor of English at St. Mary's College, Manarcad (affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kerala, India), the article critically interrogates the travelling concepts of 'inclusion' and 'diversity' across geopolitical, institutional, and epistemic divides. Through critical autoethnography and decolonial feminist analysis, it shows that each institutional framework renders visible precisely what the other cannot see: the UK framework is fluent in race, disability, and gender identity but has no vocabulary for caste, while the Kerala framework is organised around caste-based access but leaves gender, sexuality, and disability largely unaddressed. The article proposes 'intersectional translation', comprising categorical interrogation, curricular reciprocity, and affective attunement, as a decolonial feminist pedagogical

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practice. It argues that meaningful inclusive pedagogy requires not the transplantation of Western frameworks but their radical rethinking through caste-gender-sexuality matrices rooted in local knowledge traditions.

Keywords: decolonial pedagogy, inclusive education, caste-gender intersectionality, masculinities, autoethnography, higher education, India–UK

Introduction: When 'Inclusion' Travels

In 2023, during the author's first week as an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Lecturer at the University of Exeter, a mandatory training module on 'Inclusive Teaching Practices' introduced the institution's inclusion framework. The module addressed race, disability, neurodiversity, gender identity, and socioeconomic background with considerable sophistication, offering concrete pedagogical strategies grounded in the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2018). Yet a conspicuous absence structured the entire framework: caste. Despite the university's substantial South Asian student population, and despite well-documented evidence that caste discrimination persists in the British South Asian diaspora (Dhanda *et al.*, 2014), the institutional vocabulary of inclusion had no conceptual space for what B. R. Ambedkar (1936/2014) identified as the foundational structure of Indian social hierarchy. Caste was neither named nor implied. Its absence illustrated what Sara Ahmed (2012) describes as the nonperformativity of institutional diversity commitments, whereby the naming of a commitment to diversity can stand in for, rather than bring about, the transformation it promises.

Six months later, on returning to St. Mary's College, Manarcad, an aided college affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University in Kottayam, Kerala, the author encountered a mirror-image problem. Here, the institutional discourse of inclusion, shaped by India's constitutional reservation system and Kerala's distinctive history of social reform movements (Jeffrey, 1992), was organised primarily around caste and economic disadvantage. Gender was addressed through regulations governing student hostels and dress codes rather than through feminist pedagogical practice; sexuality was effectively unspeakable in institutional space; and disability was managed through ad hoc accommodations rather than systemic frameworks such as UDL. The concept of neurodiversity, by then thoroughly mainstreamed in UK higher education, had no institutional purchase whatsoever.

These two experiences crystallised the question that animates this article: what happens to 'inclusion' when it travels? When inclusion frameworks cross the geopolitical, epistemic, and institutional boundaries between a Russell Group university in southwest England and an aided arts college in

central Kerala, what is gained, what is lost, and what new possibilities for genuinely transformative pedagogy emerge at the point of friction? The article argues that the dominant frameworks of inclusive pedagogy in higher education remain, despite their progressive intentions, epistemically bounded by their contexts of origin, and that a decolonial feminist approach, attentive to the intersections of caste, gender, and sexuality as they are locally constituted, is necessary if inclusion is to become more than what Mohanty (2003) critiques as the liberal academy's management of difference through a benign and depoliticised pluralism.

The article makes three contributions. Empirically, it offers a rare comparative account of inclusion work in elite UK and provincial Indian higher education from the vantage point of a single teacher who has worked in both. Conceptually, it brings caste into dialogue with the critical literature on diversity work and decolonising the university, a literature that has largely been framed around race and coloniality in the global North. Pedagogically, it proposes intersectional translation as a practice through which teachers and institutions can make inclusion frameworks speak across epistemic divides without collapsing difference into false equivalence.

The article proceeds as follows. The subsequent section establishes the theoretical framework, drawing on decolonial pedagogy (Mignolo, 2011; Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancıoğlu, 2018), feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 2004; Rege, 2006), and Ahmed's (2012) institutional phenomenology of diversity work, and sets out the autoethnographic method. The section that follows analyses the Exeter context, examining how UK inclusion frameworks construct their subjects and what they render invisible. The article then turns to St. Mary's College and the Kerala context, examining how caste-inflected and gendered institutional cultures shape pedagogical possibilities and constraints. The next section explores the friction between these frameworks, identifying both productive tensions and conceptual impasses. The following section proposes a decolonial feminist pedagogical practice grounded in intersectional translation. Finally, the article reflects on the limitations of the analysis and concludes by considering its implications for the UNITE consortium's European-centred vision of inclusive digital education.

Theoretical Framework: Decolonising the Inclusive Classroom

The Coloniality of Inclusion

The concept of 'inclusion' in higher education, as it has been institutionalised in the global North, is entangled with what Walter Mignolo (2011) terms the colonial matrix of power: a set of assumptions about whose knowledge counts, whose categories are universal, and whose

experiences constitute the normative centre from which 'difference' is measured. Bhambra, Gebrial and Nişancıoğlu (2018) argue that the university is a colonial institution not merely in the sense that it historically served colonial projects, but in the deeper sense that its epistemic structures continue to reproduce hierarchies between Western and non-Western knowledge. Inclusion frameworks, despite their emancipatory aspirations, are not exempt from this coloniality. They define the categories of difference that 'matter', establish the vocabularies through which disadvantage is recognised, and set the terms on which marginalised subjects are invited to participate, always on the institution's terms.

This is not to suggest that inclusion frameworks are without value. The development of UDL (CAST, 2018), the recognition of neurodiversity as a spectrum of cognitive difference rather than deficit (Walker, 2014), and the institutionalisation of anti-racist pedagogy in UK higher education (Arday and Mirza, 2018) represent genuine gains with material consequences for marginalised students. The argument here is more specific: these frameworks become colonial when they travel as universals, that is, when categories forged in the particular social histories of the United States and Western Europe are exported to contexts with radically different configurations of power without undergoing the epistemic translation that genuine decolonisation requires. Stein (2019) describes this as the tendency of the global higher education system to imagine its own futures through the extension of existing institutional forms, rather than through engagement with knowledge produced elsewhere.

Caste as the Missing Category

The most consequential absence in globalised inclusion frameworks is caste. As Guru and Sarukkai (2012) argue, caste is not simply an 'Indian version' of race or class but a distinctive system of graded inequality that structures access to education, knowledge, ritual status, and social mobility through mechanisms that cannot be reduced to Western sociological categories. Ambedkar (1936/2014) demonstrated that caste operates not merely as economic stratification but as a system of enclosed groups that regulates marriage, commensality, occupation, and, crucially for education, the very right to learn. The historical exclusion of Dalit, Bahujan, and Adivasi communities from literacy, Sanskrit learning, and formal education was not incidental to caste but constitutive of it (Paik, 2014).

When UK inclusion frameworks address 'international students' or 'cultural diversity', they typically flatten these distinctions into a homogeneous category of 'South Asian' experience, rendering caste-based discrimination invisible within the very institutional structures designed to address

inequality. A socio-legal review commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission found evidence of caste-based discrimination and harassment in Britain across employment, education, and the provision of services (Dhanda *et al.*, 2014), and Dhanda (2015) has argued that caste in Britain should be understood as an aspect of race, operating through descent-based hierarchies that existing equalities categories struggle to name. Yet British institutions continue to organise their diversity categories around race, religion, and ethnicity rather than caste. Although the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 required the government to add caste to the Equality Act 2010 as an aspect of race, the government subsequently decided not to do so; this exemplifies the epistemic erasure of caste at the legislative level (Waughray, 2022).

Feminist Standpoint and Autoethnographic Method

This article draws methodologically on feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 2004) and autoethnographic practice (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). Standpoint epistemology holds that knowledge is always situated: it is produced from particular social locations that shape both what can be known and how it is known. Sharmila Rege (2006) extends this framework into the Indian context by arguing that a Dalit feminist standpoint offers a vantage point from which the entanglements of caste, gender, and sexuality become visible in ways that dominant-caste feminist analysis obscures. The author's own positionality, as a woman scholar educated in India and the UK, teaching across both contexts and navigating the expectations and constraints of institutions shaped by different but interconnected colonial histories, produces a particular form of situated knowledge that the autoethnographic method is uniquely equipped to articulate. This positionality also carries limits. The author writes from within the Indian academy rather than from a Dalit standpoint, and the analysis that follows draws on Dalit feminist scholarship as a corrective to, rather than a substitute for, the author's own location.

Autoethnography, as Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis (2015, p. 1) define it, uses 'personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience'. In this article, the experience of teaching across the India–UK divide is offered not as anecdote but as evidence of how inclusion frameworks operate differently in different institutional ecologies, and of the epistemic labour required to navigate between them. Following Boylorn and Orbe's (2014) framework of critical autoethnography, the article attends to how the author's pedagogical experiences are structured by larger systems of power: colonialism, caste, patriarchy, and the global political economy of higher education.

The analysis draws on the author's reflective recollection of teaching and institutional encounters across the two settings during 2023–2026, read alongside publicly available institutional policies and training materials.

These materials were revisited iteratively and organised around recurring moments of dissonance, in which an inclusion category that was self-evident in one setting proved unavailable or unintelligible in the other. Because autoethnography inevitably implicates others, the article follows the principle of relational ethics (Ellis, 2007). No students or colleagues are named, classroom episodes are described at the level of pattern rather than individual incident, and details that might identify particular individuals have been omitted. Autoethnography makes no claim to statistical generalisability. Its value lies instead in what Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis (2015) describe as resonance: the capacity of a carefully situated account to illuminate structures that others recognise in their own institutional lives.

The Exeter Context: Inclusion as Institutional Performance

The University of Exeter, a research-intensive member of the Russell Group, presents an instructive case of how inclusion is institutionalised in elite UK higher education. During the author's tenure as an EAP Lecturer in the 2023–2024 academic year, the university's inclusion infrastructure was extensive: dedicated disability services, an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) team, mandatory staff training modules, and a publicly stated commitment to the Athena SWAN Charter for gender equality in higher education. The institutional vocabulary was fluent in contemporary inclusion terminology: neurodiversity, intersectionality, decolonising the curriculum, belonging, and inclusive assessment.

Yet, as Ahmed (2012) observes in her study of diversity work in universities, institutional commitments to diversity can operate as non-performatives, statements that name a commitment without bringing into effect what they name. The author observed several mechanisms through which Exeter's inclusion framework, despite its genuine commitments, reproduced particular epistemic boundaries. First, the framework's primary categories of difference (race, disability, gender identity, and socioeconomic background) were drawn from UK equalities legislation and Anglophone social science, with limited engagement with non-Western frameworks for understanding inequality. In classroom discussions of 'positionality' and 'privilege', the conceptual vocabulary available to students was overwhelmingly derived from critical race theory of US origin and from UK equalities discourse; caste, communalism, and the specific dynamics of postcolonial inequality were not part of the institutional repertoire.

Second, the EAP classroom, designed to support international students' transition to UK academic conventions, occupied an ambiguous position within the inclusion framework. On the one hand, EAP teaching is a paradigmatic inclusion practice: it provides linguistic and academic support to students whose first language is not English, enabling their

participation in degree programmes. On the other hand, EAP provision has often been structured by a deficit model that constructs international students as lacking competencies that 'home' students are assumed to possess (Wingate, 2015). Indian students in particular navigated a double bind. They were expected to acquire UK academic conventions (critical thinking, argumentation, and referencing) while simultaneously being positioned as bearers of 'cultural difference' that the inclusion framework sought to accommodate rather than learn from. Their knowledge of multilingual communication, of navigating multiple epistemic traditions, and of the cultural politics of English in postcolonial India was rarely recognised as pedagogically valuable.

Third, the framework's treatment of gender, while sophisticated in its engagement with trans and non-binary identities, operated within an implicitly secular liberal framework that struggled to address the specific ways in which gender, religion, caste, and sexuality intersect for South Asian students. A Dalit Christian woman from Kerala and a dominant-caste Hindu woman from Delhi are both 'South Asian women' in the university's diversity categories, yet their relationships to gender, education, and institutional power are structured by radically different social histories. The framework's categorical apparatus had no mechanism for making these differences visible, let alone pedagogically actionable.

The Kerala Context: Caste, Gender, and the Politics of the Aided College

St. Mary's College, Manarcad, offers a strikingly different institutional ecology in which to examine inclusive pedagogy. As an aided college affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, it occupies a distinctive position in Kerala's higher education landscape, a landscape shaped by the state's history of social reform movements, communist governance, near-universal literacy, and the powerful role of Hindu, Christian, and Muslim community organisations in educational provision (Jeffrey, 1992; Devika, 2007). Aided colleges in Kerala are managed by private bodies, often religious denominations, but receive government funding and are subject to government regulation of admissions, reservations, and fees. This institutional hybridity creates a specific set of tensions around inclusion.

Kerala's inclusion framework, such as it is, operates primarily through the constitutional reservation system: the policy of reserving seats in educational institutions and government employment for Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). This system, which draws on Ambedkar's (1936/2014) vision of state action against caste inequality, is among the most extensive affirmative action programmes in the world, and it has also reshaped how dominant castes imagine themselves as an unmarked 'general category' (Deshpande, 2013). At St. Mary's College, reservation ensures that Dalit

and Adivasi students are present in the classroom, a significant achievement in a state where, despite progressive social indicators, caste continues to structure educational access, social interaction, and cultural capital (Osella and Osella, 2000).

However, the author's experience at St. Mary's revealed that the presence of marginalised students does not, in itself, constitute inclusion. Reservation addresses access but not pedagogy: it ensures that Dalit students enter the classroom but does not transform the Savarna-centric cultural assumptions embedded in the curriculum, classroom dynamics, or institutional culture. The undergraduate and postgraduate English syllabi at Mahatma Gandhi University, though periodically revised, remain substantially organised around British and American literary traditions, with Indian writing in English occupying a supplementary position and Dalit, Adivasi, and other marginalised literatures appearing, if at all, as optional or additive elements rather than as constitutive parts of the curriculum. This pattern is consistent with broader analyses of English studies in Indian higher education, which document the persistence of a colonial canon alongside uneven and often cosmetic curricular reform (Gupta *et al.*, 2015). The pedagogical implications are significant: Dalit students encounter a curriculum that marginalises the knowledge traditions and literary histories of their own communities, while the institutional framework treats their presence as evidence that inclusion has been achieved.

Gender operates differently in the Kerala aided college than in UK higher education. Kerala's high female literacy and relatively high female participation in higher education are often cited as evidence of gender equality (Sen, 1999). Yet, as Devika (2007) and Eapen and Kodoth (2003) have shown, this narrative of 'Kerala's women' masks persistent patriarchal structures: domestic violence, dowry-related harassment, limited participation in governance and public life, and a moral economy that polices women's mobility, sexuality, and self-expression in the name of 'culture' and 'tradition'. In the classroom, female students, who constitute the majority of English literature enrolments, were articulate and academically accomplished yet operated within a carefully circumscribed discursive space. Discussions of sexuality, desire, bodily autonomy, and queer identity, which were routinely and productively engaged in the Exeter EAP classroom, were effectively foreclosed by a combination of institutional conservatism associated with denominational management, social expectation, and students' own negotiations of what could be said and by whom.

The gender framework of the aided college was also, in a telling way, a framework about women alone. Institutional measures such as the regulation of student hostels, dress codes, and curfews addressed women as subjects to be protected, while the men in the classroom were left

outside the frame of gender altogether. Yet masculinities in Kerala are themselves formed through caste, class, and migration, and they are performed and contested in everyday institutional spaces (Osella and Osella, 2006). Research elsewhere in South India has shown that dominant-caste and Dalit masculinities are produced in competition with one another, and that the policing of women's sexuality is central to that competition (Anandhi, Jeyaranjan and Krishnan, 2002). An inclusive pedagogy that treats gender as a synonym for women cannot see these dynamics, and it therefore leaves unexamined one of the principal mechanisms through which caste and patriarchy reproduce each other in the college: the regulation of who may associate with, marry, and speak to whom (Chakravarti, 2018; Connell, 2005).

Sexuality constituted the most striking absence. In Exeter's inclusion framework, LGBTQ+ visibility was actively promoted through institutional infrastructure: pronoun policies, Pride events, LGBTQ+ staff networks, and curriculum content addressing queer theory and trans studies. At St. Mary's College, despite the Supreme Court of India's decriminalisation of consensual same-sex relations in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India* (2018), queerness remained institutionally unspeakable. The author's attempts to introduce queer literary criticism into the classroom, through texts such as Ismat Chughtai's 'Lihaaf' (1942) and selections from Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai's *Same-Sex Love in India* (2000), were met not with hostility but with a carefully managed silence that spoke volumes about the institutional and social boundaries of pedagogical possibility. This silence was not uniform. Some students sought out the author privately to discuss queer identity, revealing a gap between the institutional performance of heteronormativity and students' private negotiations of desire and identity that any meaningful inclusion framework must address.

Friction: What Happens When Frameworks Meet

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's (2005, p. 4) concept of friction, defined as 'the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference', provides a productive lens for understanding what happens when UK and Indian inclusion frameworks encounter each other through the embodied experience of a teacher who has worked in both contexts. Friction, for Tsing, is not merely resistance or incompatibility; it is generative, producing new knowledge, new questions, and new possibilities that neither framework could generate alone.

The first friction is categorical. UK inclusion frameworks organise difference primarily through identity categories derived from equalities legislation: race, disability, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and age. Indian institutional frameworks organise difference primarily through caste and economic status, mediated by the

constitutional reservation system. Neither framework adequately addresses what lies at the intersection: the Dalit trans student, the Muslim woman with a learning disability, the Adivasi student navigating both caste stigma and the invisibility of tribal identity in Kerala's social landscape. As Crenshaw (1989) demonstrated in the US context, single-axis frameworks of discrimination inevitably marginalise those whose experiences are constituted at the intersection of multiple systems of power. The friction between UK and Indian inclusion categories makes this intersectional failure visible in both directions.

The second friction is epistemic. UK inclusion frameworks, particularly those informed by UDL, operate within a largely cognitivist epistemology that understands learning as an individual process that can be supported through the design of multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression (CAST, 2018). Indian pedagogical traditions, including both dominant-caste traditions such as the *guru–shishya parampara* and emancipatory counter-traditions associated with Jotirao Phule and Ambedkar, understand learning as a fundamentally social and political process embedded in relationships of power, obligation, and community (Kumar, 2005). The friction between these epistemologies raises productive questions. Is inclusion a matter of designing better learning environments, as the UDL approach suggests, or of transforming the social relations within which learning occurs, as an Ambedkarite approach would insist (Ambedkar, 1936/2014)? Can these approaches be synthesised, or do they represent genuinely incommensurable commitments?

The third friction is affective. Teaching across the India–UK divide involved navigating radically different affective economies of the classroom. At Exeter, the institutional culture promoted a specific affective register: critical distance, analytical detachment, and the capacity to discuss difficult topics such as sexual violence, racial trauma, and colonial atrocity with scholarly objectivity. At St. Mary's, the classroom's affective register was shaped by relationships of care, respect, familial obligation, and religious sensibility that made certain topics approachable only through indirection, humour, or literary mediation. Neither affective regime is inherently superior; both enable and constrain pedagogical possibility in different ways. The inclusive pedagogy that this article advocates attends to these affective dimensions, recognising that what can be taught, and how, is shaped not only by curriculum design but by the emotional textures of institutional life.

Towards Intersectional Translation: A Decolonial Feminist Pedagogical Practice

The concept this article proposes, intersectional translation, draws on Spivak's (1993, p. 180) understanding of translation as 'the most intimate

act of reading' and extends it into pedagogical practice. Intersectional translation, as theorised here, is the critical labour of making inclusion frameworks legible across epistemic divides without collapsing difference into false equivalence. It involves three interconnected practices.

First, **categorical interrogation**. Rather than importing categories wholesale from one context to another, for example by applying 'race' to caste, or 'neurodiversity' to Indian classrooms without attention to local configurations of cognitive difference and institutional support, intersectional translation begins by interrogating the genealogies of inclusion categories: where they come from, whose experiences they render legible, and what they obscure. In practice, a pedagogy informed by intersectional translation would not simply 'add caste' to existing UK diversity frameworks or 'add neurodiversity' to Indian institutional structures, but would ask what new categories might emerge from attention to locally situated experiences of marginalisation. Yengde's (2019) account of how caste reproduces itself across class, diaspora, and elite institutions, and Goyal's (2017) analysis of how disabled women in India are denied recognition as sexual subjects, indicate the kinds of analytical innovation that become possible when inclusion categories are generated from, rather than imposed upon, specific social contexts.

Second, **curricular reciprocity**. The flow of pedagogical knowledge between the global North and the global South has historically been largely unidirectional, from UK and US institutions to their 'international' counterparts, through mechanisms such as curriculum export, quality assurance frameworks, and faculty training programmes (Stein, 2019). Intersectional translation demands reciprocity: the recognition that Indian pedagogical traditions constitute genuinely valuable pedagogical knowledge that UK institutions need, rather than 'cultural context' to be accommodated. These traditions include Ambedkar's (1936/2014) vision of education as a means of annihilating caste; the mass literacy campaigns led by the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which drew on Paulo Freire's (1970) pedagogy of conscientisation and used learners' everyday lives as the material of instruction (Tharakan, 1990; Franke, 1999); and the feminist pedagogy developed in the women's studies programmes of SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, and Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. The author's experience suggests that UK EAP classrooms would benefit greatly from engaging with multilingual pedagogy as practised in Indian institutions, where students routinely move between three or more languages, a competence that monolingual UK academic norms tend to render invisible rather than recognising as a sophisticated intellectual skill.

Third, **affective attunement**. Inclusive pedagogy cannot operate solely at the level of policy, curriculum, and institutional design; it must attend to the affective dimensions of teaching and learning, including the shame,

anger, silence, humour, solidarity, and vulnerability that structure classroom interactions in ways that institutional frameworks rarely acknowledge. In the Kerala context, this means creating pedagogical spaces where caste shame can be named without being reproduced, where sexuality can be discussed without requiring disclosure, and where students' multilingual and culturally plural identities are treated as resources rather than obstacles. In the UK context, it means moving beyond the 'safe space' model of classroom dialogue. Leonardo and Porter (2010) argue that appeals to safety in discussions of race frequently protect the comfort of dominant groups rather than enabling marginalised students to speak. Their critique points instead towards what Arao and Clemens (2013) call 'brave spaces', which acknowledge risk and discomfort as necessary conditions for transformative learning.

The author's own pedagogical experiments at St. Mary's College offer tentative examples of intersectional translation in practice. In designing the English Department Association's programme of events for 2025–2026, the author deliberately curated activities that addressed caste, gender, and digital culture, including sessions on Dalit literature, feminist film criticism, and artificial intelligence and language, using formats such as competitions, workshops, and film screenings that could be accommodated within the institutional constraints of a denominationally managed college. These were modest interventions, operating within significant institutional limits. They nonetheless indicated that inclusive pedagogy in the Indian aided college does not require the wholesale adoption of Western frameworks. What it requires is the creative translation of inclusion's core commitments (access, recognition, participation, and justice) into locally legible institutional practices.

Limitations

The claims advanced here are bounded by the article's method. As a single-author autoethnography spanning two institutions, the analysis offers depth rather than breadth, and the experiences it describes cannot stand in for those of students, who were not interviewed, or for the variety of practices across UK universities and Indian colleges. The comparison is also asymmetrical: the author held a fixed-term teaching role in one institution and a permanent faculty position in the other, which shaped what could be observed and attempted in each. Future research might extend this inquiry through student-centred and participatory designs, through comparison across several institutions in each country, and through explicit attention to how Dalit, Adivasi, queer, and disabled students themselves articulate the meanings of inclusion.

Conclusion: Inclusion Beyond the UNITE Framework

This article has argued, through autoethnographic reflection on teaching across the India–UK divide, that dominant inclusion frameworks in higher education remain epistemically bounded by their contexts of origin. The UK framework's sophistication on race, disability, and gender identity coexists with a structural inability to address caste. The Indian framework's attention to caste-based reservation coexists with institutional silences on gender, masculinities, sexuality, and disability that render large areas of student experience invisible. Neither framework, on its own, constitutes genuine inclusion; each reveals the other's exclusions.

The concept of intersectional translation proposed here, comprising categorical interrogation, curricular reciprocity, and affective attunement, is offered not as a solution but as a practice: an ongoing, situated, and necessarily incomplete labour of making inclusion frameworks speak across epistemic divides. It is, in Spivak's (2003) terms, an exercise in planetarity, an attempt to think beyond the nation-state, and beyond the global North, as the container of both knowledge and justice.

For the UNITE consortium and its Erasmus+ partners, the implications of this article are direct. An inclusive and digital education initiative centred on European universities in Czechia, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain necessarily operates within a particular epistemic geography. The inclusion challenges of European higher education are real and urgent; they are not, however, universal. If UNITE's vision of inclusive education is to avoid the coloniality that Mignolo (2011) identifies in universalising Western frameworks, it must actively engage with non-European experiences of inclusion and exclusion, not as exotic case studies but as epistemically equal sources of pedagogical knowledge. Concretely, this might involve co-designing inclusion training with partners in the global South, incorporating caste and other locally specific forms of inequality into diversity monitoring and staff development where student populations warrant it, and recognising multilingualism as an academic asset in digital learning design. The author's experience across the India–UK divide suggests that such engagement would not dilute the UNITE agenda but deepen it, revealing dimensions of inclusion that European-centred frameworks currently cannot see.

As hooks (1994, p. 12) reminds us, 'the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy'. If that possibility is to be realised, not only in Russell Group seminar rooms or Erasmus+ partner institutions but also in aided colleges in Kottayam and government schools in Wayanad, then inclusion must be decolonised: not as metaphor, but as practice.

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