Fostering Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Learning and Teaching of Digital Business and Management Education

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ABSTRACT: This paper aimed to explore the importance, benefits, and challenges of the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) framework in learning and teaching (LT) within digital business and management education (DBME). DEI components were found to be indispensable for crafting sustainable, effective, and socially responsible learning and teaching spaces in business schools across major academic disciplines, including digital business, marketing, entrepreneurship, human resources, tourism, hospitality, public relations, events management, accounting, finance, international business, and general management education. A notable gap existed among academics, practitioners, and policymakers regarding the integration of DEI principles into learning and teaching environments. Specifically, the extant literature had underreported and failed to comprehensively identify the benefits of DEI in the learning and teaching of digital business and management education, as well as the challenges associated with implementing DEI within volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, disruptive, and diverse (VUCAD²) learning and teaching environments. The research method adopted was the Logic of Aggressive Synthesis (LAS). The findings demonstrated both the benefits and the potential perils of implementing a DEI framework in learning and teaching within digital business and management education. Implications and directions for future research were also discussed.

KEYWORDS: DEI, learning and teaching, digital business, management education, VUCAD2

1. Introduction

The issue of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the learning and teaching of digital business and management education in higher education business schools could not be underestimated. The implementation of DEI in learning and teaching was shown to increase awareness and reduce biases among digital business and management students in business schools. This inclusive mindset encouraged instructors and mentors to initiate mentoring programmes that provided students with opportunities to develop their careers [1]. DEI in learning and teaching also had the potential to enhance students' academic performance, future job-related capabilities, and overall well-being. In addition, DEI assisted in addressing various

challenges encountered in learning and teaching contexts related to its implementation [2]. In other words, the DEI framework could positively influence student outcomes and better prepare students to face common challenges within multicultural learning and teaching environments. According to [3], the integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion into digital business and general management education curricula in business schools promoted critical thinking, creativity, innovation, collaboration, teamwork, problem-solving, negotiation, and leadership skills among students. Furthermore, [4] argued that DEI in learning and teaching enriched student participation in classroom environments and promoted deeper engagement with, and understanding of, international and culturally diverse perspectives in business education programmes.

Nevertheless, despite the promise of DEI in learning and teaching, the execution of the DEI framework continued to face several obstacles. These included limited institutional support, resistance to change, and persistent biases among managers and policymakers responsible for implementation [5]. Against this background, the aim of this study was to identify the importance, benefits, and challenges of the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) framework in the learning and teaching of digital business and management education (DBME) in business schools. To fulfil this objective, a systematic review of prior literature was conducted using the Logic of Aggressive Synthesis (LAS) approach [6]. This study addressed one research question: What are the promises and perils of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the learning and teaching of digital business and management education? The formulation of this question was informed by the work of [7], which highlighted the salience of gender and ethnic identity in shaping attitudes toward DEI in DBME learning and teaching contexts.

2. Literature Review

This section explored diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in learning and teaching digital business, marketing, entrepreneurship, human resources, tourism, hospitality, public relations, events management, accounting, finance, international business, and general management education at business schools. Based on the growing diversity of students from different backgrounds, business educators recognized the importance of including all students as indispensable factors for academic success [8]. In the teaching and learning of DBME, [8] described diversity as the representation of individuals from heterogeneous demographic groups; examples included socioeconomic status, religion, culture, ethnicity or race, and gender. According to [9], in learning and teaching, equity dealt with promoting fair treatment, opportunities, and advancement for participating students in any academic and extracurricular events while dismantling any identified obstacles that hindered full involvement of all student group members. Moreover, inclusion referred to the practice of developing learning and teaching environments in which individuals or groups had a sense of belonging, felt respected and supported, and perceived their contributions to group dynamics as welcomed and valued [10].

2.1. Diversity, equity and inclusion in digital business and management education.

In recent times, there had been an increase in the adoption of DEI in learning and teaching due to multiple factors, including the emergence of social movements, demand from stakeholders, and demographic shifts in the education environment [11]. In learning and teaching

engagements, diversity, equity, and inclusion were regarded as critical frameworks within the dynamic and disruptive educational landscape, notably within digital business and management education. The integration of DEI in learning and teaching digital business and management education modules promoted critical thinking, creativity, leadership skills, and problem-solving skills among students from diverse social and cultural backgrounds [12]. DEI had become critical concepts in advancing digital business and management education. DEI played a significant role in transforming business schools for innovative initiatives and sustainability in business education [13]. In today's globalized and digital economy, business schools aimed to prepare students for the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, disruption, and diversity (VUCAD²) of the business environment. Aligning DEI initiatives with learning and teaching in digital business and management education at business schools had increasingly become indispensable for advancing knowledge acquisition. The next section delved into the promises and perils of DBME and suggested sustainable practices and implementation strategies for DEI to provide lifelong support for the learning and teaching of impactful knowledge and skills at business schools.

2.2. *Understanding the Importance of DEI in learning and teaching.*

The integration of diversity, equity, and inclusion in learning and teaching digital business and management education contributed immensely to the creativity, innovation, problem-solving capabilities, and leadership skills of students. These views corroborated [14]'s study, which found that in business schools, bringing together students and academic facilitators or teaching faculty members from diverse social and cultural backgrounds and experiences promoted critical thinking, teamwork, and mutual respect.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a systematic literature review and followed the logic of aggregative synthesis using the nine-quadrant protocol [6]. The literature review began with the following processes: (a) development of the research question, (b) definition of the conceptual framework, (c) identification of search criteria, (d) determination of the search strategy, (e) selection of studies, (f) manual cleaning of data, (g) review of the selected studies, (h) synthesis of findings, and (i) academic writing. This framework, developed by Newman and Gough, is illustrated in Figure 1.
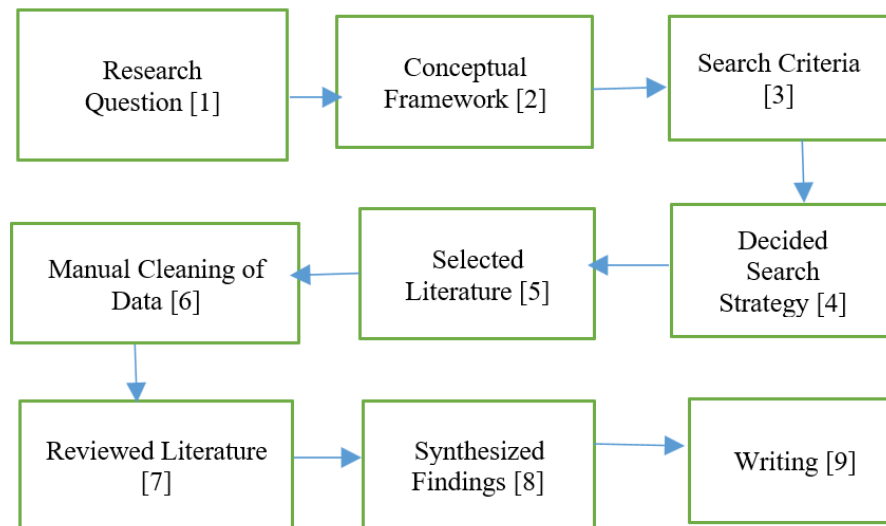
Figure 1. Nine-quadrant aggregative synthesis protocol for the systematic literature review, adapted from Newman and Gough.

These procedures were followed by the application of inclusion and exclusion criteria based on relevant keywords identified within the scope of the study title [15]. In addition, the research question was aligned with the main aim of this paper: What are the promises (benefits) and perils (challenges) of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the learning and teaching of digital business and management education? For the purpose of this study, key academic databases were explored, including ScienceDirect, the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) journal list, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. The use of these databases was consistent with prior scholarly studies employing similar review approaches [16, 17].

Content analysis was conducted on the selected literature focusing on diversity, equity, and inclusion in learning and teaching, education, digital business, and management education. Content analysis has been widely applied in social sciences and business research [17−19]. Key terms identified from the selected articles were systematically analysed and grouped into existing categorical patterns based on pre-defined themes and sub-themes [20]. Overall, 310 keywords were identified and categorised according to relevant topical areas to support the interpretation of the study's findings.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section delved deeper into the benefits, challenges, and strategies for implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the learning and teaching of digital business and management education at business schools. Findings from the content analysis highlighted critical benefits across digital business, entrepreneurship, international business, human resources, public relations, and management education.

4.1. Benefits of DEI in learning and teaching of digital business and management education.

4.1.1. Enhanced learning outcomes.

The benefits of DEI were categorised into four main thematic areas, as summarised in Table 1. Diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives supported a robust experience in the learning and teaching of digital business and management education by integrating diverse dimensions into

business school curricula. According to [3], DEI helped business students develop a wider and deeper understanding of consumer behavior from global business perspectives.

Table 1. Benefits of DEI in learning and teaching of digital business and management education.

Category	Key Dimensions
Enhanced learning outcomes	Innovation and creativity; critical thinking
Improved student engagement and satisfaction	Inclusive curriculum engagement; sense of belonging
Strategic preparation for the global workforce	Cultural competence; ethical decision-making
Institutional reputation and competitiveness	Attraction of diverse talent; enhanced competitiveness

4.1.2. Improved student engagement and satisfaction.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion in learning and teaching improved student engagement and satisfaction in digital business and management education. Student engagement and satisfaction could be viewed from two perspectives: inclusive curriculum and sense of belonging. To entrench diverse student experiences in business schools regarding the learning and teaching of digital business and management education, it was important to develop an inclusive curriculum that took DEI into consideration. Business students were more willing to be involved in course modules when their learning experiences were enriched and their interests represented [21]). One of the key promises of the DEI framework was to create a sense of belonging for business students. Academic performance improved when a sense of belonging was strongly fostered and implemented in the learning and teaching environment [22]. Notably, the inclusion of case studies and real-life business scenarios in digital business and management education ensured that business students felt valued and included in the learning process.

4.1.3. Strategic preparations for a global workforce.

Business students' involvement in cultural competence and diverse practices helped prepare them for future global and multicultural work environments with the required competencies and skills. In other words, DEI enhanced business students' employability by equipping them with the right skillsets to work effectively in diverse teams and succeed in a multicultural global business space [23]. In addition, DEI instilled in business students the qualities of responsible future business leaders, fostering ethical decision-making and the ability to address complex ethical dilemmas [24].

4.1.4. Institutional reputation and competitiveness.

Issues related to sourcing, attracting, and retaining diverse talent had attracted the attention of scholars and practitioners. Similarly, business school accreditation and ranking had always been at the forefront of issues that DEI addressed in recent years. Business schools that emphasized DEI in recruitment were more likely to attract a strong pool of digital business and management education students. Notably, this enhanced the reputation and competitiveness of such institutions [25]. DEI initiatives were considered an assessment criterion and were important for retaining accreditation and improving business school rankings, such as by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) [26].

4.2. Challenges of DEI in learning and teaching of digital business and management education.

The challenges of DEI in learning and teaching digital business and management education were categorized into five main areas, as presented in Table 2. The implementation of DEI in learning and teaching digital business and management education faced resistance from both institutional and student stakeholders [27, 28]. This resistance could originate from faculty, university administration, and students who considered DEI initiatives unnecessary or threatening to their interests, especially those unfamiliar with diverse engagement [28]. Notably, the challenges in executing DEI within the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, disruption, and diversity (VUCAD^2) of the learning and teaching environment could not be overlooked.

Table 2. Challenges of DEI in learning and teaching of digital business and management education.

Challenge Category	Key Issues
Resistance and backlash	Institutional resistance; student resistance
Barriers to execution	Resource constraints; difficulty measuring impact
Curriculum development	Integrating DEI into curricula; faculty training needs
Maintaining inclusivity	Balancing diverse needs; avoiding tokenism
Other structural challenges	Underrepresentation; lack of mentors; retention issues

DEI initiatives faced implementation constraints due to resource limitations, including time, human resources, staff training, and funding [29]. Another challenge was determining the impact and effectiveness of DEI outcomes [30]. These issues were echoed in recent studies, which reported financial constraints, outdated policies, and institutional resistance to change as major barriers to progress in business education [31]. Other structural barriers included bureaucratic bottlenecks, ineffective reward systems, and a lack of enthusiasm in promoting DEI initiatives [32]. Integrating DEI into the curriculum of digital business and management education presented challenges for business schools [33]. This also included the training needs of faculty members, which were not always readily available, affecting the successful alignment of DEI initiatives [28]. Maintaining inclusivity was another challenge in the learning and teaching of digital business and management education. It was difficult to meet the diverse needs of all business students, including those with physical challenges and students from different economic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it was important to consider the specific needs of each student to enhance an inclusive learning space [34]. Additionally, the issue of appearance over substance, otherwise known as tokenism, had to be avoided, as it could undermine the relevance and legitimacy of DEI engagement in achieving desired learning outcomes [35]. Other challenges included the lack of representation of business students and leadership within business schools, marginalization of female students, students with disabilities, lack of experienced mentors, and retention of diverse talent [26].

4.3. Developing sustainable benefits of DEI in learning and management education

The sustainable benefits of DEI in learning and teaching digital business and management education can be achieved through targeted strategies, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Developing sustainable benefits for DEI.

Strategy Category	Specific Actions
Continuous Improvement and Adaptation	Ongoing assessment; Adaptive strategies
Faculty and Staff Development	Professional development; Mentorship programs
Institutional Commitment and Support	Leadership commitment; Dedicated DEI offices

4.3.1. Continuous improvement and adaptation.

The adoption of DEI required continuous assessment to sustain the promises it set out to achieve. Specific metrics and evaluation initiatives had to be developed to track progress and implement corrective actions where necessary. Regular assessment supported the relevance of DEI by focusing attention on the needs of business students and faculty members [30]. Additionally, business schools needed to adopt flexible and adaptive approaches for DEI initiatives. This enabled DEI adoption to meet the needs of diverse business student cohorts in a dynamic global environment [29].

4.3.2. Faculty and staff development.

Continuous professional development for staff and training for business students were essential to sustaining DEI integration in learning and teaching. Business schools organized seminars, workshops, and training on cultural understanding [28], while creating awareness among students and staff ensured the successful implementation of DEI initiatives [29]. Mentorship programs were established to instill a progressive support system, improving the effectiveness of DEI activities [29].

4.3.3. Institutional commitment and support.

The sustainability of DEI initiatives required strong leadership support at both faculty and university levels. Leadership commitment was indispensable for DEI to remain relevant [34]. The establishment of dedicated DEI offices, dynamic team members, and sufficient funding ensured that DEI initiatives remained central to business school management [35].

4.4. Strategies to overcome challenges of DEI.

The challenges of DEI in learning and teaching digital business and management education required deliberate and systematic strategies to ensure successful implementation and sustainability. These strategies targeted resistance, resource constraints, curriculum integration, inclusivity, and other institutional barriers, as summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Strategies to overcome challenges of DEI in digital business and management education.

Strategic Area	Key Actions
Addressing resistance	Education and communication; alliance building
Resource allocation	Securing funding; efficient use of resources
Faculty and staff development	Professional development; mentorship programmes
Curriculum integration	Collaborative development; continuous review
Continuous improvement	Ongoing assessment; adaptive strategies
Institutional commitment	Leadership support; dedicated DEI offices

4.4.1. Addressing resistance.

Developing alliances and networks among faculty members and business students proved to be a formidable strategy for managing DEI initiatives [36]. Moreover, education and communication were essential to address resistance to DEI initiatives. The benefits of DEI had to be communicated clearly to all key stakeholders [37].

4.4.2. Resource allocation.

Providing adequate financial support ensured that relevant resources for staff and student training, as well as curriculum development, were available [38]. Likewise, the efficient utilization of available resources alleviated resource constraints and enabled business schools to sustain DEI activities successfully [39].

4.4.3. Effective curriculum integration.

Integrating DEI into the learning and teaching of digital business and management education required collaborative curriculum development [36]. Continuous curriculum review on a regular basis was essential to ensure that DEI remained relevant and aligned with evolving educational needs [38].

4.4.4. Sundry Strategies for Sustaining DEI.

Multiple additional approaches supported the sustainability of DEI in learning and teaching of digital business and management education. These included assessment and diagnosis [39], goal setting and strategy development [40], leadership and governance [41], recruitment and retention [42], curriculum pedagogy [43], and community engagement and partnerships [44]. These components were conceptualized in the framework presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Framework on strategies for sustaining DEI in DBME Sources [12, 40–44].

5. Implications

The implications of this study were viewed from five interrelated perspectives: theoretical, teaching practice, higher education policy, student development, and societal well-being. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributed to the advancement of knowledge on the role and impact of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the learning and teaching of digital business and management education. It enhanced theoretical understanding by illustrating how DEI principles could be systematically integrated into business school curricula and by highlighting the relevance of inclusive initiatives in a disruptive and dynamic global business environment. In terms of teaching practice, the study offered practical insights for educators and academic facilitators involved in digital business and management education. The findings suggested that embedding DEI principles into learning and teaching practices supported the creation of inclusive and diverse learning environments, which in turn enhanced student engagement, participation, and learning outcomes in business schools.

For higher education policymakers, the study provided evidence-based insights into both the promises and perils associated with the integration of DEI in digital business and management education. The findings underscored the importance of institutional commitment, adequate funding, and policy support to enable effective training, curriculum development, and sustainable implementation of DEI initiatives within business schools. With regard to business and management education students, the study highlighted the importance of developing a dynamic DEI framework to enhance learning experiences in digital business and management education. The promotion of diverse student populations and inclusive practices supported teamwork, collaboration, and the development of essential skills required for effective participation in global and multicultural business organisations. From a societal perspective, the findings emphasised the necessity of establishing a structured DEI framework within business schools to promote social harmony and peaceful coexistence among diverse groups. The adoption of DEI in digital business and management education contributed to the development of a more equitable society and supported the inculcation of ethical business values and responsible leadership practices.

6. Conclusion

This study contributed to the growing body of scholarship on diversity, equity, and inclusion in the learning and teaching of digital business and management education across business schools globally. The findings demonstrated that DEI was indispensable in preparing business students to navigate the complexities and disruptions of an increasingly diverse global economy. The study also highlighted the importance of faculty training, adequate resource provision, and the creation of equitable learning environments to ensure the successful implementation of DEI initiatives in business schools. While this study relied primarily on a systematic review of existing literature, it provided a comprehensive synthesis of current knowledge on the benefits, challenges, and strategies associated with DEI in digital business and management education. Future research was encouraged to adopt more robust data collection approaches, including both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, to further validate and extend the findings. Additionally, future studies could explore the application of DEI frameworks across other academic disciplines within the broader higher education learning and teaching context.

Author Contributions

Samuel Adeyinka-Ojo and Tek Yew Lew contributed equally to the conception, design, analysis, and writing of this work. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing Interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

Data Availability

All data generated or analyzed during this study are included in this published article and its supplementary information files. Additional datasets are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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