

**Equity, Innovation, Inclusivity, Sustainability and School Leadership**

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**Abstract**

Education is a fundamental pillar of society and holds immense significance within society. Educational leaders, including principals, administrators, and instructional leaders, bear the responsibility of shaping the learning experience for students. Educational leaders, such as principals and school administrators, have the power to influence and transform educational environments. This paper explores the critical role of school leadership in promoting equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability in education. It discusses the importance of these values in creating positive learning environments and preparing students for success in a rapidly changing world. The paper highlights strategies for promoting equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability in education. It also emphasizes the importance of school leaders in setting clear vision and priorities, providing support and resources for teachers and staff, and fostering a positive school culture and community. Promoting equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability in schools requires a collaborative effort from school leaders, teachers, and the broader community. By prioritizing equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability, school leaders can create an environment that nurtures learning, supports student achievement, and elevates the overall quality of education.

**Keywords: Equity, Innovation, Inclusivity, Sustainability, School Leadership**

**Word Count: 150**

**Introduction**

In today's fast growing educational landscape, the incorporation of equity, innovation, inclusivity, sustainability and effective school leadership is indispensable for preparing students to prosper in different and complex world. Effective school leadership has a profound impact on the educational environment and the outcomes achieved by students. By providing strategic direction, fostering a positive school culture, and implementing instructional best practices, school leaders create an environment that nurtures learning, supports student achievement, and enhances overall educational quality (Johnson & Fournillier, 2023). The role of school leader goes beyond the tasks of managing and leading the school, but to excel in the entire academic programmes in order to ensure all round growth, development and sustainability for the school and entire society.

The significance of equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability in education has become increasingly recognized in recent years. School leaders play a significant role in promoting these values and creating a positive learning environment for all students. School leaders, have the power to influence and transform educational environments. One of the key benefits of strong school leadership is its impact on students' achievement and success. Research consistently demonstrates that effective leadership is positively correlated with improved student outcomes, including higher test scores, graduation rates, and college readiness. School leaders who provide clear goals, monitor progress, and support teachers in delivering high-quality instruction can significantly enhance the learning experience and promote academic growth (Sellami, Sawalhi, Romanowski, & Amatullah, 2022).

Furthermore, school leadership influences the overall quality of the learning experience for students. Effective leaders establish a positive and inclusive school climate, where students feel valued, safe, and motivated to learn. By creating a culture that celebrates diversity, fosters student engagement, and promotes collaboration, educational leaders enhance the overall educational experience, leading to increased student satisfaction and a more meaningful and holistic learning journey (Eadens & Ceballos, 2023). This paper therefore seeks examine the role of school leadership in promoting equity, innovation, inclusivity and sustainability in education.

## **Literature Review**

### **Equity in Education**

Equity in education refers to the fair and just distribution of resources, opportunities, and outcomes for all students. The phrase "equity in education" is complex and can take on many forms, making it challenging to establish a succinct definition. At its most basic, equity in education or educational equity is the pursuit of creating an educational system that serves students of all kinds and develops their educational experience accordingly. This means that no matter a student's background, language, race, economic profile, gender, learning capability, disability, or family history, each student has the opportunity to receive the support and resources they need to achieve their educational goals. Equity is essential for ensuring that all students have access to high-quality education and opportunities for success.

Eduse (2024) stated that achieving equity in education is multi-layered and will require the cooperation of governments, multinationals, social movements, academics, researchers, policy makers, and world institutions to seek innovative ways to achieve good quality education for all at the different levels of education so as to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs) In the school, promoting equity is about educators and learners choosing to embrace rather than shy away from the unique backgrounds, identities, and experiences that individual students bring to the institution.

### **Innovation in Education**

Innovation in education encompasses a broad spectrum of novel practices, policies, and technologies aimed at enhancing teaching, learning, and administrative processes, for example

nurturing and to cope with current innovations, embracing technology-based initiatives including robotics competitions, and students' utilization and engagement with artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT (AbuKhurma, Albahti, Ali & Bustanji, 2024). It encompasses both incremental improvements and transformative changes aimed at improving student engagement and educational outcomes.

Innovation in education refers to the use of new and creative approaches to teaching and learning. Innovation is important for preparing students for sensation in a fast-changing world. Innovation in education refers to the introduction of new teaching methodologies, technological advancements, and organizational strategies that enhance student learning and school operations (Serdyukov, 2017). It is a continuous process that fosters inspiration, flexibility, and problem-solving in an educational setting. The education system in the 21st century has a big focus on innovation as a tool that revamps the traditional educational system. The need for quality improvement in the curriculum and the desire to produce students with 21st century competency skills has brought innovation at the core of the educational ecosystem.

### **Inclusivity in Education**

Inclusive Education refers to the educational practice base on the philosophical belief that all learners, those with disabilities and those without, have a right to be educated together in age appropriate class groups, and that all will benefit from education in regular classrooms of community schools. Within these settings teachers, parents and others work collaboratively using appropriate and sufficient resources to interpret and enact the regular curriculum in a flexible manner in accordance with the individual abilities and needs of all learners (Sahani & Patel, 2023).

Inclusive Education is defined as a learning environment that promotes the full personal, academic and professional development of all learners irrespective of all learners, irrespective of race, class, colour, gender, disability, sexual preference, learning styles and language.” Inclusion offers a different perspective on the education of child with disabilities in ordinary schools. Inclusion means all children are welcome regardless of differences. In this system the emphasis is not on treating the deficit but on adapting the environment to accommodate the disability perceiving it as a normal difference. Within the inclusion model there is less emphasis on trying to make the child as much like a seeing child as possible. The differences are not only to be accepted and respected but also to rejoice to the fact that no two human beings are same or equal. Inclusive education means all children learn together in the same school (UNICEF, 2017).

### **Sustainability in Education**

The key to create a more sustainable and peaceful world is learning. It is the change of mind on which change towards sustainability depends; the difference of thinking that stands between a sustainable or chaotic future. The qualities, depth and extent of learning that takes place globally in the next ten to twenty years will determine which path is taken: either moving towards or further away from ecological sustainability.

Sustainability in education refers to the integration of environmental, social, and economic sustainability into teaching and learning. Sustainability is essential for preparing students to address the complex challenges facing the world.

### **Role of School Leadership in Promoting Equity, Innovation, Inclusivity, and Sustainability in Education**

#### **School Leadership Strategies for Promoting Equity in Education**

Leadership is fundamental in shaping and promoting educational equity within higher education institutions. Leaders, particularly those in administrative and executive positions, are responsible for creating an inclusive vision supporting all students' success, especially those from underserved communities. Their role in fostering equity involves setting institutional priorities and actively challenging the systemic barriers disproportionately affecting marginalized student populations. This includes addressing inequalities in access to academic resources, ensuring inclusive policies and practices, and promoting a culture that values diversity and inclusion (Ruben, De Lisi & Gigliotti, 2023).

Leaders must engage in intentional and strategic decision-making that prioritizes equity as a central element of institutional success. This requires a deep understanding of the challenges faced by underserved students, including those related to socioeconomic status, race, gender, and geographic location (Banker & Bhal, 2020). By recognizing these challenges, leaders can develop targeted strategies that aim to close achievement gaps and create pathways to higher education for marginalized students. Research by Leithwood (2021) identified leadership practices that contribute to equitable conditions and outcomes, such as providing targeted support for disadvantaged students and implementing culturally responsive teaching practices.

Moreover, fostering equity requires leaders to advocate for the necessary resources and support systems that enable all students to thrive, from academic counseling and mentorship programs to financial assistance and career development opportunities (Poekert, Swaffield, Demir & Wright, 2022). Effective leadership in this context also involves collaboration with various stakeholders, including faculty, staff, students, and external partners. By working collectively, leaders can implement comprehensive strategies that address the multifaceted nature of educational inequality. This collaborative approach ensures that efforts to promote equity are not isolated but embedded within the broader institutional framework, making equity a shared responsibility across all institution levels. Additionally, leaders must be adaptable, constantly reassessing and refining their strategies to meet the evolving needs of diverse student populations (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020).

#### **School Leadership Strategies for Promoting Innovation in Education**

Organizational resistance to innovation is a key challenge in many schools. Strict performance requirements, fear of failure, and rigid hierarchies can deter educators from trying new teaching methods (Tran & Moskovsky, 2022). To mitigate this, school leaders must establish a psychologically safe environment, where teachers are encouraged to take calculated risks without fear of negative repercussions. By fostering trust, open communication, and a shared commitment to continuous improvement, school principals can create an environment in which teachers feel confident to experiment and refine innovative approaches. Research highlights

two fundamental drivers that propel educational innovation: a culture of openness and freedom, and conscious innovation management.

Educational institutions, like other organizations, thrive on successful working relationships, where trust, collaboration, and shared vision drive performance and innovation. School principals play a pivotal role in shaping a school's culture and influencing how innovation is embedded within daily practices. Their leadership styles and decision-making strategies determine whether an innovation culture thrives or struggles to take root. A culture of innovation flourishes when school leaders prioritize openness, encourage risk-taking, and empower teachers to develop and implement new ideas (Rupp, 2016).

Effective leadership not only supports the adoption of innovation but also ensures that instructional strategies, staff training, and institutional management align with a forward-thinking vision. This requires strong coordination of collective intelligence, ongoing professional development, and an adaptive leadership approach that continuously fosters innovation in learning environments (Cros, 2018).

Vonbank (2025) indicated that schools must adopt a specific approach that integrates innovation across key action areas to achieve a unified vision of success. For example, school leaders should focus on collaboration and research instead of management control and can empower educators to embrace technology rather than see it as a barrier.

### **School Leadership Strategies for Promoting Inclusivity in Education**

Inclusive leadership practices are essential for improving access to higher education and retaining underserved students. One effective practice is the creation of equity-focused leadership positions within the institution, such as Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) or Vice Presidents for Diversity and Inclusion. These leaders are tasked with developing and overseeing strategies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion across all aspects of the institution. Their role includes monitoring progress toward equity goals, addressing any disparities in student outcomes, and ensuring that the institution meets marginalized students' needs (Washington, 2020).

Another inclusive practice is the implementation of mentorship and peer support programs. Leaders can facilitate the creation of mentorship networks that pair underserved students with faculty, staff, or alumni who can provide guidance and support throughout their academic journey (Mullen, Boyles, Witcher, & Klimaitis, 2020). These programs are particularly beneficial for first-generation college students who may lack the familial support systems that are often critical to academic success. Peer support programs, where students can connect with others who share similar backgrounds or experiences, also contribute to a sense of community and belonging, which is vital for student retention (Garza, 2020).

Flexible learning options like online courses and part-time study programs are another example of inclusive leadership practice that improve access. Many students from underserved communities may face challenges related to work, family responsibilities, or transportation, which can make attending traditional, in-person classes difficult. By offering flexible learning modalities, leaders can ensure that higher education is accessible to a wider range of students,

enabling them to balance their academic commitments with other responsibilities (Menon & Motala, 2021).

### **School Leadership Strategies for Promoting Sustainability in Education**

One effective strategy for implementing Sustainable Development Goals is through institutional leadership, where university presidents, deans, and senior administrators commit to aligning the institution's mission with the Sustainable Development Goals agenda. By prioritizing sustainability and educational equity at the leadership level, institutions can foster a culture of accountability and ensure that resources are allocated toward initiatives that support these goals (Akintayo, Eden, Ayeni & Onyebuchi, 2024).

Another strategy is incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into academic programs and research. By integrating Sustainable Development Goals into the curriculum, institutions can educate students about sustainability, global challenges, and the importance of equity. For example, courses across various disciplines can be designed to address topics related to poverty reduction, quality education, and environmental sustainability, ensuring that students are not only aware of these issues but also equipped with the skills to tackle them. Faculty can also play a key role by Sustainable Development Goals related research within their academic work, contributing to innovative solutions and practical knowledge that advance the Sustainable Development Goals agenda (Akintayo, Eden, Ayeni & Onyebuchi, 2024).

Partnerships and collaborations are also vital for implementing Sustainable Development Goals. Higher education institutions can form strategic alliances with government bodies, non-governmental organizations, private sector companies, and other academic institutions to work on initiatives that promote sustainability and equity collectively. Such partnerships can expand the scope and impact of Sustainable Development Goals related activities by pooling resources, expertise, and networks. This collaborative approach allows institutions to engage in community outreach, promoting equity and sustainable development beyond the confines of the campus and making meaningful contributions to marginalized communities

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Transformational Leadership Theory**

Transformational leadership theory was introduced by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985). It emphasizes the importance of inspiring and motivating followers to achieve their highest potential and foster significant changes in their environments. In the realm of education, particularly within school leadership, this theory plays a crucial role in promoting equity, innovation, and inclusivity. At the heart of transformational leadership in schools is the commitment to equity. Transformational leaders actively seek to dismantle systemic barriers that hinder access to quality education for all students. They strive to create inclusive environments where every student, regardless of their background, can thrive. By setting high expectations and understanding the individual needs of students, transformational leaders work to ensure that all voices are heard and valued, fostering a sense of belonging within the school community.

Moreover, transformational leaders are catalysts for innovation, encouraging creativity and new ideas while pushing educators and students alike to explore unconventional teaching methods and learning approaches. This involves fostering an environment where risk-taking is supported, and experimentation is seen as a critical part of the learning process. By empowering teachers to innovate in their pedagogical practices, transformational leaders can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes, integrating cutting-edge practices that cater to diverse learning styles. Inclusivity also stands as a cornerstone of transformational leadership. Effective school leaders recognize the importance of diverse perspectives and the need to adapt educational practices to meet the varying needs of students. This includes implementing culturally responsive teaching strategies and ensuring that curriculum materials reflect the diversity of the student body. A transformational leader embodies inclusivity by actively promoting policies and practices that support the whole child, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to contribute and succeed.

In conclusion, transformational leadership theory provides a robust framework for advancing equity, innovation, and inclusivity within school leadership. By inspiring and empowering educators and students alike, transformational leaders can create equitable educational environments that embrace innovation and foster inclusivity. As schools strive to prepare students for the complexities of the modern world, the principles of transformational leadership will be essential in shaping a more just and equitable educational landscape.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, school leadership plays a critical role in promoting equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability in education. Promoting equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability in schools requires a collaborative effort from school leaders, teachers, and the broader community. By prioritizing equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability, school leaders can create an environment that nurtures learning, supports student achievement, and elevates the overall quality of education.

### **Way Forward**

The study therefore suggests:

- i. Government should develop and implement policies and programs that promote equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability;
- ii. Government should provide ongoing professional development opportunities for school leaders and teachers to enhance their knowledge and skills in promoting equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability;
- iii. Government should provide resources and funding to support schools in promoting equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability;
- iv. School leaders should encourage community partnerships to support schools in promoting equity, innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability;
- v. School administrators should encourage collaborative curriculum planning and revisiting existing curricula to ensure alignment and relevance with the educational standards.

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