Title: Students' Perspectives on Dignity and Inclusion in Higher Education: A Concept Mapping Study

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Abstract

Recently, there has been an increase in interest by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in undertaking transformational shifts to incorporate principles of equity, inclusion, diversity and accessibility (EIDA) to build stronger student communities. Although this endeavour is welcomed, there is still a need to understand how students experience such initiatives and, specifically, their perspective on dignity and inclusion in HEI. The study aims to center students' lived experiences from a structural level by using the concept mapping study on dignity and inclusion. Concept mapping is a mixed-method participatory approach to mobilize narratives of communities. Results of the concept mapping study show that students' perspective on dignity and inclusion involves a student-centered vision which stands at the core of a circuit including basic dignity elements (e.g., respect for human rights), relational aspects (e.g., quality of relation with professors), systemic practices (e.g., lessons organizing) and enhancing students' experiences. While these results offer a first map of the elements characterizing the experience of dignity and inclusion in HEI, they also inform about possible research perspectives and actionable practices. For example, the cluster maps can be used to develop an index of EIDA of HEIs, which can be used both for research purposes but also to identify possible opportunities for organizational interventions. In the broader context, overcoming barriers to dignity-affirming and inclusive practices within the higher educational milieu will solidify a better society for all and equip students on their path to becoming global citizens.

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