

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF BUSINESS EDUCATION IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

The globalization of industry, finance, and many professions is creating a world in which cross-cultural interactions occur more often in recent times than it ever did in the past and this cross-cultural interaction influences business education globally. Culture is fluid as such influences the things that happen in the environment where such culture is found. Universities have culture and this culture affect the business of the university. As such every facet of the courses being studied in the university is affected by culture. This paper therefore seeks to explore the cultural dimension of business education. The index of some countries based on the six cultural dimensions were assessed and their possible effect on business education in Africa were analysed. Based on the cultural dimension indices of the countries sampled in this paper, it was concluded that culture plays a crucial role in business education in Africa. It is recommended that teachers of business education should understand the cultural dimensions of their respective societies, then, structure their curriculum and lessons based on the cultural dimensions of the societies they work in.

KEYWORDS: *Cultural dimension, Business Education, higher education & Africa*

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INTRODUCTION

Globalisation and the multicultural nature of education in Africa makes it important for business education to be culturally sensitive and culturally responsive. The globalization of industry, finance, and many professions is creating a world in which cross-cultural interactions occur more often than at any time in the past (Friedman, 2007). The changing landscape for business globally brought about by improvement in technology has resulted to cross-cultural interaction between different people. This growing cultural differences in the workplace and even in educational institutions have made it necessary for business education to be culturally adaptive, which allows for the development of students and workers (Visser, 2007). A number of factors have made researchers pay more attention to examining how culture affect education amongst which are diversity in human race, unique nature of individuals, group think as a psychological concept amongst others (Parrish & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2010). The need to adapt to existing cultural differences between diverse cultures and understanding the differences in culture, perception and values are major challenges affecting businesses in the international sphere (Granell, 2000). With diversity in mind, various cultural differences are brought to the fore in businesses including education and this affects the conduct of businesses in Africa.

Culture is seen as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes people from each other (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). This definition exemplifies the peculiarity of culture as a tool that delineates people from each other. With different types of people making up a social system, they are being separated along various lines such as communication, dressing, food, housing and shelter etc. Culture is important as it influences decisions of different individuals in a class, and this may have an effect on learning. Culture plays a crucial role in the

classroom and it may affect education positively if managed properly (Jæger & Møllegaard, 2017). Africa is blessed with different culture, and this affects how education is delivered in Africa. It therefore becomes necessary to assess how these different dimensions of culture affect business education in Africa, as this knowledge is still scarce in the literature. Thus, this paper seeks to explore the cultural dimensions of business education in Africa. Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov (2010) articulated six dimensions of culture which can affect any business or wherever culture is manifested. They include individualism versus collectivism, uncertainty avoidance index, power distance index, masculinity versus femininity, indulgence versus restraint and long versus short term orientation. These dimensions of culture will be examined within the context of this paper and how they affect business education in Africa.

Individualism versus Collectivism in Business Education in Africa

It is believed that out of the six dimensions of culture developed by Hofstede *et al.*, (2010), individualism versus collectivism is the most researched construct. Hofstede *et al.*, (2010) argued that individualism versus collectivism refers to the strength of the ties people have to others in their community. A community of learning or praxis (in this case a classroom) functionality is dependent on the IDV (individualism versus collectivism). Shahzad, Luqman, Khan and Shabbir (2012) opined that individualism and collectivism are the dimensions of cultural differences that can be used in explaining cross-cultural likenesses and differences in intercultural communication. The type of individual and collective personal identities will influence communication in business education differently. This dimension refers to the degree individuals are integrated into groups (Alshahrani, 2017). It is also suggested that one's personal orientation of individualism versus collectivism may influence various classroom behaviours (Hwang, Francesco, & Kessler, 2003) and thus affects business education. Students that are collectivist, expect teachers to transfer knowledge in a clear, structured, and direct way, whereas students that are individualist, expect the teacher to make the class interactive so that they can be participants (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997; Staub & Stern, 2002). Individualism is a theory favouring freedom of action for individuals over the collective control (Atkinson, 2016). Individualism ensures students are independent and self-reliant, while collectivism regards the group as the most important thing, and individuals are expected to contribute their quota to the betterment of the group (Atkinson, 2016). Collectivism does not promote self-expression of students, thus making collectivism less competitive when compared with individualism (Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Greenfield, 2000). Spencey-Oatey (2008) argues that a high IDV score indicates weak interpersonal connection among those who are not part of a core 'family'. Such high score indicates that people take less responsibility for others' actions and outcomes. On the other hand, a low IDV which occurs in a collectivist society, people are supposed to be loyal to the group to which they belong, and, in exchange, the group will defend their interests. The group itself is normally larger, and people take responsibility for one another's well-being. Such is often the nature of businesses, as such how the individual is trained in business education would determine whether or not the students turn out to be collectivist or individualist.

Countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Libya, Lesotho, Cameroon, Togo, Benin, Senegal in Africa operate a collectivist culture (Alshahrani, 2017). Students in a collectivist culture have regard for their parents and elders, have social order, have self-discipline, are polite, they are team players, and are obedient (Ghorbani, Bing, Watson, Davison & LeBreton, 2003). Communal parenting can be likened to the collectivist culture which sees that the growing needs of the kid is met by joint effort which enriches the child at the long run. The collectivist culture takes into consideration respect and the need to foster social order and cohesion in the society. Students in these kinds of cultures are dependent on people, face strong group pressure, they value good human relations, they prefer cooperation to competition, and they emphasise

friendliness, helpfulness, hospitality, patience and brotherhood (Matsumoto, 1996; Van der Walt, 1997). South Africa on the other hand is regarded as an individualist society. Students in individualist societies feel autonomous, have more freedom, are self-fulfilled, are assertive, and have a sense of personal uniqueness (Ghorbani, *et al.*, 2003). Students in individualist societies mostly look after themselves and their immediate family. Students in individualist societies like South Africa are independent, do not actually value the opinion of groups, they value personal achievement, rights, and self-sufficiency and prefer competition (Sue & Sue, 1999). Therefore, business education in countries like South Africa, need to be structured slightly differently from collectivist societies. The cultural orientation of these societies therefore determines the kind of cultural capital they bring to class and how they engage with the same in business education. Warde (2017) argues that since cultural capital is at the heart of learning and learning is a lifelong business education should consider both the collective and the individual cultural instinct. As such experts in business education should ensure they teach students how to use their independent nature to complete organisational tasks in a timely and efficient manner. Furthermore, business education should make sure students do not become overly competitive in the workplace, as it may affect their performance. Although, students from individualist societies are regarded not to be team players, there is no way they will not work in a team or as a team when they become employees. The onus then falls on business education practitioners or lecturers as the case might be to teach highly independent students to be good team players for the overall benefits of the organisation they find themselves in. Independence and autonomy is good as it encourages self-assertion and confidence on the individual's part but having great interpersonal skills will help more in the workplace. With the individualism versus collectivism as a dimension of culture must be part and parcel of business education in Africa, if Africa will truly rise.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index in Business Education in Africa

Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) is relevant to teaching in a cross-cultural environment like Africa. Uncertainty avoidance can be defined as the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). It is how well cultures are predisposed to handling uncertainty, avoid ambiguity and engage in risky behaviour (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). It also trickles down to tension and anxiety workers encounter in the workplace. It is important to know that foreign teachers of business education in Africa are always faced with high level differences in behaviour of their students and others they have taught in their home country (Atkins, 2000). When students are faced with situations that do not appear normal to them, it will create a degree of uncertainty. What is normal to students in Ghana, may be quite strange to other students in Malawi. Atkins (2000) argued that it is a natural human instinct for students to avoid situations in which they feel uncomfortable. When students become uncomfortable in class, it will definitely impact on their learning capacity. For instance, bringing in a new concept in teaching might threaten students that are high in uncertainty avoidance and there will definitely be reactions from the students.

Students from within the same country and institution are likely to behave in a similar way, but students from different countries and institutions taking the same business education course are likely to behave very differently. It therefore becomes necessary for business education teachers to be very sensitive to the composition of their classes. This is quite critical in this era of the fourth industrial revolution where cross-border or transnational education have increasingly been on the increase and more and more degrees especially in business are offered across countries. Thus, business education teachers should always ensure they adapt their teaching methodology to better serve business education students (Lawson, 2007). Dennehy (2015) argued that there is a greater degree of tolerance of ambiguity and risk-taking in cultures

with low uncertainty avoidance. That is business education students that are from cultures in Africa with low uncertainty avoidance will be able to tolerate more uncertainties in the classroom. On the other hand, students from cultures that have high uncertainty avoidance, will not be able to tolerate ambiguities in class and do take less risks. Arino (2015) adds that countries like Cape Verde, Cameroon, South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya have low uncertainty avoidance index. That is to say, students in these countries have the capacity to tolerate more uncertainties in the classroom and they are not fazed with new changes. Students in these countries are less orderly, they keep fewer records, rely mostly on informal norms for most matters, they take less calculated risks, and they only show moderate resistance to change (Grove, 2005). Therefore, when students in these countries are faced with ambiguous or unknown situations, they have the tenacity to tolerate, endure and still perform excellently in their studies. This is manifested in the performance of students from this country when they migrate to other countries probably western countries. Students from countries with low uncertainty avoidance index performs better in other climes and they endure all the rigours associated with their learning and still perform excellently. Furthermore, business education teachers working in low uncertainty avoidance index countries as earlier mentioned, may allow their students take more risks, expose them to some form of ambiguity questions in the classrooms and allow them to take decisions on their own when in difficult situations. Students in these countries should be taught on the importance of being orderly and keeping timely records. Knowing the importance of being orderly and good record keepers when they eventually become employees. Students in these low uncertainty avoidance countries do take less calculated risks, and this may put their organisations in trouble when they become employees. Therefore, students in these countries should equally be taught on the importance of taking calculated risks and how to take calculated risks in the work place. This will go a long way in ensuring that business education thrives properly in such countries.

On the other hand, countries like Ghana, Egypt, Uganda and Tunisia have high uncertainty avoidance index (Arino, 2015). Therefore, students in these countries with high uncertainty avoidance, tolerates less of ambiguities and take less risks. They use formality when interacting with others, they are orderly, they keep meticulous records, they rely on formalised policies and procedures, they take moderate and calculated risks, and they show strong resistance to change (Grove, 2005). That is to say, business education students in these countries easily give up when in difficult situations in the classroom. It therefore becomes necessary that business education teachers in these countries with high uncertainty avoidance tailor their lessons to align with the characteristics of their students. Business education teachers in countries with high uncertainty index like Ghana, Egypt, Uganda and Tunisia, are not to expose their students to too much risks and ambiguous situations, as students in these countries do not have the capacity to withstand highly risky and ambiguous situations. To add, all of the characteristics (i.e., being always formal, being orderly, meticulous records keepers, always relying on formalised policies and procedures, taking moderate and calculated risks) in high uncertainty avoidance countries is good for business organisations. However, being resistant to change is not a good characteristic of a good business student. Therefore, it is the job of business education teachers in these countries to teach and nurture their students not to be always resistant to change, but to be able to welcome needed change that is necessary for organisational development. Business structures are not static, as times change, the business dynamic changes and what is needed is the ability to factor these changes in to the business.

Power Distance Index in Business Education in Africa

Power distance index (PDI) is the extent to which the less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal (Hofstede, 1986). To Yildirim and Deniz (2014) power distance index is related to unequal

distribution of power among the individuals and in the organizations in a society. In an educational setting, power distance is related to the power relationships between teachers and students. It is important that power distance is controlled efficiently by business education teachers for effective learning process. When there is high power distance between teachers and students, the students are not considered key elements in the teaching learning interaction and the teacher assumes an authoritative position which alienates the students from learning in the classroom. Some societies have small power distance and some others have large power distance. In a small power distance society, the gap between those in position of power and between those not in positions of power is small. This ensures fair exchange between both parties as the power complex is narrowed. On the other hand, there is a wider gap between people in power and those not in power in large power distance countries. Students in small power distance societies tend to be independent of their teachers, while students in large power distance societies tend to give maximum respect to their teachers (Bissessar, 2018). Therefore, in a business education class in a small power distance society, it is advised that a teacher teaching business education respect the independence of his or her students, while in a large power distance society, it is expected that teachers do not misuse the respect given to them by their students. In a small power distance society, business education is supposed to be student-centred, while in high power distance societies, education is teacher centred. Furthermore, in small power societies, business education teachers allow students find their own paths, allow students to speak up spontaneously in class, allow their students to criticize and contradict them. Similarly, in small power distances, teachers treat their students as co-constructors of knowledge in and out of the classroom (Yildirim & Deniz, 2014). In large power distance societies, teachers outline paths for students to follow. Students in large power societies only speak up when they are asked to, teachers are never contradicted or criticized in the classroom, teachers are also given maximum respect outside the classroom and parents always take side with the teachers (Bissessar, 2018).

Countries like Egypt, Mozambique, Libya, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Kenya and Zambia are considered to be high power distance societies (Oppong, 2013; Pinxteren, 2019). In these countries, there is a large distance between teachers and students, students value traditions, the society is hierarchical, students are governed by strict rules, students know their position in the school and they do not question it (Muscato, 2018). Students in these kind of countries may not be allowed to argue with their professors, and it may not be acceptable for employers to disagree or argue with their boss (Slavin, 2018). Having this type of interaction will influence learning processes for students. A divide between the lecturers and students will ensure that trust in the teachers to guide aright is broken and the teachers are often seen in the wrong perspective. Intimacy and shared feelings is important in education as the teacher must seek to know each student individually, understand their learning needs and capability and connect with them. In this kind of societies, students already know how to obey strict rules and regulations. So, when they become employees, they may not have problems in abiding to organisational rules and regulations. Business education students in these kind of societies will not have serious problems working in hierarchical organisations. In large power distance countries as aforementioned, teachers of business education in those countries should ensure that they always initiate communication in the classroom, outline paths for students to follow, and respect shown to them by students in and outside the class should not be taken for granted. On the other hand, South Africa and Uganda are regarded to be low power distance countries as they rank the lowest in the power distance index in Africa (Arino, 2015; Rarick, Winter, Nickerson, Falk, Barczyk & Asea, 2013). In these countries, the distance between those in power and those not in power is not as large, when compared to the other countries mentioned with high power distance. Students in these countries value equality and democracy, students and employees in lower ranks may question authority. In these kind of societies, students in schools and universities are encouraged to

express opinions freely and disagree with their professors, while decisions in organizations are often reached by taking into account opinions of all employees (Slavin, 2018). Therefore, business education teachers in South Africa and Uganda should ensure that students are the ones that initiate communication in the classroom and students should be allowed to outline lesson path for themselves. Anything contrary to this might impede students from effective learning. Based on the nature of students in these countries, it may be difficult for them to work in hierarchical organisations, where in most cases, junior staff are not allowed to disagree with their boss. Thus, business education in these countries need to take both sides of the index into consideration when engaging in teaching and learning practices.

Masculinity versus Femininity in Business Education in Africa

Masculinity versus femininity (MAS) refers to the distribution of genders in a given society. The masculinity versus femininity dimension was not totally directed at genetic differences between male and female but more traditional and socialized views on gender roles (Oppong, 2013). A country with low masculinity index and high feminine index tends to be more moderate and caring, while in a society with a high masculinity index, overall task in such societies is task oriented. Societies with large masculinity index, people are expected to be assertive, ambitious and competitive, to strive for material success, and to respect whatever is big, strong and fast (Hofstede, 1986). Women in a society with a large masculinity index, are expected to be less active and take more of caring roles. Although, in a society where there is high femininity index, the gap between the two genders is less defined. On the contrary, Gender roles are more rigidly defined in masculine societies than in feminine societies (Nyambegera, Kamoche & Siebers, 2016). In other words, a masculine society will place more emphasis on assertiveness, aggression, money and personal success, whereas in a feminine society, modesty and humility are valued (Dennehy, 2015). These masculine and feminine values in different societal set up are somewhat transferred in the classroom. The dualism between man and woman affect the dynamism in a classroom. The dynamism of a class gender-wise will affect learning process. In a business education class in a masculine society, competition between students are encouraged and highly performing students are openly praised, while, a business education class in a feminine society may not favour competition and students may not be praised openly. A feminine society will ensure students work for each other and not compete against each other (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010).

Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria are regarded as the stand out countries in Africa that have high masculinity index (Arino, 2015). Therefore, students in these countries are very aggressive, value competition, material possessions, money, are very ambitious, enjoy public praise, like success and are highly assertive (Nyambegera *et al.*, 2016). This clearly shows the masculine nature of these countries. Patriarchy which is a socio-cultural tendency to favour male domination in these countries is high and male domination is perpetuated in all facets. The narrative is being shaped now as there are calls for gender equality and equity. In these kind of countries, teachers of business education are advised to encourage competition among students, and highly performing students should be praised publicly (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010). Encouraging competition and praising students publicly in these kind of countries with high masculinity index will spur other students to study harder, so they also can be praised publicly. Among the skills necessary for businesses to thrive is persistence and resilience and countries high on masculinity index possesses such. Business education teachers should ensure they teach students on how best to use their aggressiveness in achieving organisational goals. Students should be taught how to assert their aggressiveness to achieving tasks timely in the workplace. Students should also be taught how to use their ambitious nature in the organisations they find themselves in the future to achieve organisational objectives. In as much as students in masculine societies value material possessions, business education curriculum should be structured in

a way that it will teach students on efficient ways in managing organisational resources. It is important for students in masculine societies to be taught how to manage organisational resources as they have the tendency to mismanage organisational resources due to the extravagant lifestyle of students in masculine societies.

On the other hand, Angola and Cape Verde are regarded to have high femininity index (Arino, 2015). As a result, students in these countries are less aggressive, less assertive, hate competition, and hate being praised publicly (Hofstede *et al.*, 2010). Students in feminine societies like Angola and Cape Verde see quality of life as being successful and standing from the crowd in the classroom is not admirable to students. Students in Angola and Cape Verde value social relevance, value the welfare of others, people and good relationships are more important to them than material possessions, and students in these countries are modest (Nyambegera *et al.*, 2016). As such, students from countries that have high femininity index will cherish interpersonal relationship and team bonding. By the characteristics they possess, it will make them good companions in building relationship for business processes. It is therefore important that business education teachers in these countries are expected to understand the characteristics of their students, then, tailoring class lessons and their curriculum to align with the characteristics of their students. For example, business education teachers in Angola and Cape Verde should not encourage competition among students in the classroom, teachers should not praise students publicly in the classroom, as other students in the class might feel intimidated, and this may affect them academically. Even though students in countries with high femininity index do not value material possessions, they should equally be taught extensively on how to manage organisational resources. Students in such countries should also be taught how best to use their interpersonal skills to achieve organisational objectives.

Indulgence versus Restraint in Business Education in Africa

Indulgence versus restraint (IVR) explains the extent to which individuals try to control their desires and impulses based on the way they were raised (Erdogan, Aybeniz & Gulnil, 2017). Indulgent countries have weaker controls over the activities of their citizens (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Restrained societies are regulated by strict rules and regulations. Minkov and Hofstede (2010) further opined that restraint is a conviction that basic and natural desires and enjoyment in life needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social norms, while indulgence reflects a tendency to allow the gratification of basic and natural desires and enjoyment in life. Thus, indulgence restraint is characterized by a perception that one can act as one pleases and indulge in leisurely and fun-related activities with friends or alone. On the other hand, one's actions are restrained by various social norms and a feeling that leisurely activities, spending, and other similar types of indulgences are somewhat wrong (Jie & Jing, 2015). Indulgent societies place importance on having friends, less saving, less morals, freedom of speech and maintaining order is unimportant. Whereas, in a restraint society, there is low emphasis on having friends, saving is important, high moral discipline and freedom of speech is not a primary concern (Enkh-Amgalan, 2016). Teaching in an indulgent society is different from teaching in a restraint society. Teaching business education in an indulgent environment can be fun and really exciting. Teaching in an indulgent society allows flexibility and brings in some nuances into the educational mix. On the other hand, teaching business education in a restraint environment may not be enticing as in an indulgent environment. Students in an indulgent society are always optimistic, while on the contrary, students in a restraint environment are pessimistic. Nigeria and South Africa are regarded as indulgent societies (Hofstede, 2015). Therefore, in these countries, students feel healthier, happier, optimistic, have positive attitude, value friendship, participates actively in sports and are always less moral. Thus, business education teachers should put all these into consideration, as it may affect effective learning in the classroom. Teachers of business

education in this kind of societies should ensure they make learning as fun as possible, there should be a degree of freedom in the classroom, and there should be ample time for extracurricular activities that can help develop cognitive ability in students.

On the contrary, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso and Zambia are regarded to be restraint societies (Arino, 2015; Hofstede, 2015). Students in these countries are pessimistic, they are mostly introverts, they do not value friendship, participate less in sports and have to endure stricter rules in schools. This will impact on the conduct of business education in such countries. Therefore, business education teachers should consider all these before structuring their curriculum and lessons. Sports shouldn't be made compulsory, as students may not necessarily value sports. Friendship shouldn't be forced on students by teachers as it may impede their learning processes.

Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation in Business education in Africa

This dimension came to limelight when a survey among students in 23 countries was carried out using a questionnaire designed by Chinese scholars (Chinese culture connection, 1987).

Cultural dimensions can also be in the form of long term and short term orientation. Values associated with long term orientation are thrift and perseverance, while values associated with short term orientation are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations, and protecting one's face (Hando & Ahern, 2012). Long-term orientation societies engage more in planning and lay more emphasis on long-term success, while, short-term orientation societies lay more emphasis on short-term success and gratification (Dennehy, 2015). This encourages prompt attention to details in getting project done and following it to the latter to ensure that all things are done correctly. Business education students that are part of a long term orientation society, will always focus on the 'why' question, while students from a short-term orientation society will lay more emphasis on the 'how' question (Bissessar, 2018). The 'why' question by students from a long-term orientation society explicitly show the long term thinking of the students, while on the contrary, laying emphasis on the 'how' by short term orientation students show their short-term thinking. This shows a distinction between reason and approach. Similarly, students in a short-term orientation society prefer to find one and only solution to a problem, on the other hand, students in a long-term orientation society will prefer to find different possible answers and solutions to a particular problem. Finally, short-term orientation students view stability as a virtue, while long-term orientation students view perseverance as the most important virtue (Bissessar, 2018). The differences between long-term and short-term orientation students will definitely affect their capacity to learn, which must be noted by teachers.

Namibia is an example of a country in Africa that has long-term orientation (Arino, 2015). Countries with long term orientation like Namibia have students that like to study hard and attribute failure to lack of effort (Dennehy, 2015). Students in Namibia are pragmatists, they are persistent and make good use of money and other resources without waste (Arino, 2015). Therefore, teachers of business education in countries like Namibia should ensure they give students tasks that will make their students study hard, as they enjoy such. Since students in societies like Namibia are good managers of resources, teachers of business education will do well by exposing students to more modern efficient methods of efficiently managing organisational resources so as to avoid wastage.

CONCLUSIONS

Culture is fluid and influences education from all angles. People influence and are influenced by their culture and the environment they are raised, and this necessitates cultural differences in people. These differences shaped the business

environment. The managerial approach use by an employee and how they consequently behave in the work place is influenced by culture. This paper examined cultural dimensions and its effect on business education in Africa. The different dimensions of culture were explored and the effect they may have on business education articulated. Different countries in Africa have different cultural settings and this affect business education land scape differently across the African continent. It is therefore concluded that cultural dimensions may influence business education either positively or negatively if not managed properly. It is important that culture be given necessary attention in business education. Business education teachers should understand the cultural definition of their work environment. It is important for business education teachers to clearly define their cultural settings, as this will ensure they understand the characteristics of the students they are dealing with before deciding on the teaching methods and curriculum to use. Wrong teaching methods and curriculum will affect students' learning, and thus negatively affect business education. This also brings into focus issues of diversity and inclusion. Diversity in terms of gender, disability, culture, religion, ethnicity and education must be encouraged.

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