

Shantha Naidoo & Noorullah Shaikhmag

Managing Racial Integration in BRICS Higher Education Institutions

Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were developed by the United Nations in 2015 to encompass universal respect for equality and non-discrimination regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, and cultural diversity. Since 2000, Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS) have aligned with SDG 4.3 by developing higher education institutions (HEIs) which aims to “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university”. This was intended to create equal opportunities and permit full realisation and prosperity of human rights and human dignity. This paper explores the effectiveness of managing racial integration in BRICS HEIs and illustrates remarkable progress in research and policy enactment. Particular attention is devoted to the period from the mid-2000s when evidence around the globe exposed the presence of many forms of violence, which inhibit management of effective racial integration. Based on case studies from selected BRICS countries (South Africa, Russia, and Brazil), this paper explores how the management of racial integration is being addressed within these contexts.

Keywords: racial integration, management, higher education institutions, education, sustainable development

Introduction and background

The BRICS are joined by their large geographical and demographic dimensions. Furthermore, beyond the income dimension, inequality has a multi-dimensional character in the BRICS countries. This challenge is exacerbated by race, gender, ethnic, and geographic dimensions and, therefore, demands more integrated solutions. One of the problems associated with the high poverty levels and the perverse distribution of income is limited access to quality public services, such as education, health, housing, infrastructure, safety, and security. This relates to the sustainability of the current growth trajectory in terms of inequality, increasing environmental impacts, and regional and other imbalances. There have been, however, several recent changes that may open better prospects.

Such are sustainability challenges, the current paradigms and structures, as well as predominant practices in HEIs. Universities and colleges are facing this reality as they seek to meaningfully contribute to sustainability (Tilbury, 2011, p. 18). Sustainable development is not a new concept, yet it is complex and not easy to define. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development defined it in the Brundtland report as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Kibert et al., 2011, p. 11).

In 2002, the United Nations declared 2005-2014 as the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, with the objective of integrating the principles and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning, and appointed United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the lead implementing agency. One of the most important missions of the United Nations (2014) was to provide quality education, with equality identified as an indicator for sustainable development (Bontis, 2004).

Problem statement

There is undoubtedly a need for HEIs to adopt a whole-institution approach which would include transformative leadership, encourage capacity development, and require an assessment of the institution for sustainability. HEIs must engage with different types of knowledge and work with critical community groups, such as the youth, previously disadvantaged ethnicities, and the private sector, and engage with policy issues.

BRICS countries have attached great importance to collaboration in higher education. In cooperation within BRICS, certain achievements have been made. Sustainable development is the only possible basis for the description of the progress of the national economy in the context of the deepening of global human problems (Kankovskaya, 2016, p. 449). In the context of globalisation, cooperation in education plays the special function of promoting cultural exchange, economic development, and information exchange. Racial integration in HEIs has been a problem internationally as well as in South Africa.

The three countries cited above, Russia, Brazil, and South Africa were chosen because they have been characterised as nations of racial diversity. Diversity has been and continues to be enriched by indigenous Africans (Blacks) and many immigrants and refugees from countries around the world. The influx of immigrants led these countries to develop innovative practices of racial integration. The term racial integration broadly applies to the process of ending systematic racial segregation and discriminatory beliefs, actions, desires, projects, persons, groups, social institutions, and practices (Joubert & Bray, 2007, p. 20).

Theoretical perspectives

Seeking to understand the aspect of social justice, critical race theorists presume that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations in racially diverse educational institutions, in which differences are ignored. Therefore, critical race theory (CRT) supports a social justice framework and suggests an understanding of why effective racial integration is not taking place.

CRT is used in this paper to inform and expand critical approaches to racial integration in higher education institutions. Its first tenet is that society accepts racism as an ordinary and permanent fixture of life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Comparatively, in Russia, Brazil, and South Africa, racism is part of the daily landscape and forms part of the so-called normal and natural, implying that there are inequitable conditions that occur systematically at policy level as well as overt acts of racism in HEIs (Foucault, 1972, p. 4). Thus, any solution to remedy the issue of

racism comes from unmasking and exposing the true nature of racism in all its permutations.

The second tenet of CRT raises awareness of the importance of understanding the historic effects of laws and practices and the way past inequalities impact on the lives of racially diverse students. In HEIs, racism persists but most institutions are not concerned with key issues around racial integration. At present, race issues remain hidden in practices and terminology such as assimilation, anti-discrimination, and colour-blindness (Naidoo et al., 2018).

The third tenet to CRT is the use of narratives and storytelling as a way of conveying experiences of those who were oppressed (Naidoo et al., 2018, p. 4). Delgado (1995) suggests that storytelling is engaged as a way of analysing the myths, presuppositions and life experiences that form the common culture of race. In addition, Mohanty (2000, p. 32) indicates that critical race theories rely on life experiences as a valuable and valid way to interpret the use of community dialogue.

Higher education institutions in Russia, Brazil, and South Africa

Russia

Brazil, China, India, and South Africa began expanding higher education during the late 20th Century. Russia acquired a complex system of higher education from the Soviet Union that was transformed after 1990 to resemble those of other countries (Schwartzman et al., 2015, p. 16). Special institutions were established for training in diplomacy and foreign trade. Russia took an active part in the regional Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development; however, many problems arose. These included ensuring equality in opportunities for higher education, eliminating gender inequality, caring for vulnerable groups, and improving the quality of education (Yuyun, 2018, p. 397). There was, however, increasing concern about the high levels of discrimination that ethnic minority students would encounter when they studied at Russian universities, for instance, insults, beatings, and official harassment were among the complaints.

Brazil

More than 130 years after the abolition of slavery in Brazil, enormous racial imbalances exist in the country. There have been many efforts to reduce racial inequality in Brazil and, over the past decade or two, it appears to have been successful. Although racial discrimination has been considered illegal since 1890, Brazilian racism has prevailed in implicit, but unfortunately pervasive forms (Ikawa & Mattar, 2009). Since 2005, there have been many debates in Brazilian society about the adoption of affirmative action for access to HEIs. The debates revolve around reserving places by establishing quotas for certain social groups. Among those who are in favour of the adoption of quotas, some argue for social quotas that include people who have a low family income or those coming from public schools; some argue for racial quotas for black and coloured, and possibly indigenous, people; and there are those who argue for both types of quotas.

Brazil and South Africa share several similarities, with both countries among the largest multiracial societies in the world and having striking race inequalities in social and economic opportunities and outcomes (Marteletto, 2012). The racial

context of Brazil is complex and resembles a range of interactions based on skin color, which differs from dichotomous forms of racial stratification. This emphasis on skin color over racial identity is partly due to the multifaceted racial ancestry of most Brazilians.

South Africa

In comparison to Brazil, the problem of racial integration is profound in South Africa because of apartheid, which impacted on the collective and individual psyches of all South Africans, Black, White and others (Nkomo et al., 2004). The historical development of education for the integration of racially diverse HEIs in South Africa can only be effectively evaluated against the backdrop of the educational history of the country. Since 1948, segregation was severely enforced, with racial, ethnic, and geographical separations within the education system that led to the formation of separate education systems prior to 1994. These divisions within education were supported and upheld by apartheid legislation, such as the Populations Registration Act of 1950, 1953 Group Areas Act, the 1954 Native Settlement Act, and the Reservations of Separate Amenities Act No 49 of 1953, the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 (Mda, cited in Alexander, 2001). This segregated system of education, characterised by race, class, gender, and ethnic divisions, has resulted in the provision of uneven access to schools, unequal educational opportunities, irrelevant curricula, inadequate infrastructure and facilities, and an under-qualified educator component.

Educational reform since 1994 has made significant attempts to address the imbalances of the past and to bring education in South Africa in line with international standards (Engelbrecht, 2004, p. 2). The subsequent white papers of the national government set the course for the transformation of the education system from the former apartheid system based on racial segregation to a democratic system. This system was based on equal educational opportunities for all students.

Findings

Racial integration in HEIs has been a problem internationally as well as in the three countries cited above. Diversity has been and continues to be enriched by indigenous Africans (Blacks) and many immigrants and refugees from countries around the world. The influx of immigrants led these countries to develop innovative practices of racial integration. The challenges of the various racial integration approaches as they unravel in Russia, Brazil, and South Africa will be discussed in this section.

Challenges of the anti-discrimination approach

Discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnicity is a pressing problem in Russia and is one which mainly affects racial and ethnic minorities. According to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, minorities are groups with a national, racial, or ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity (United Nations General Assembly, 1993, p. 4). According to the United Nations *Durban Declaration and Plan of Action* (2001), existing laws, policies and programmes of the Russian

Government have failed to sufficiently eliminate racial discrimination against most vulnerable groups.

Challenges of the assimilation approach

The assimilation approach is to racially integrate minority groups or Black African learners into the ethos of the HEIs and the majority racial group. This meant that they had to adopt the language, culture and values of the institution while foregoing their own languages, culture and values. According to Gallagher (2004), the assimilation approach led to the inclusion of South African Black students into the way of life of the majority group but did not make any effort to engage with the minority group.

Challenges of the multicultural approach

Multicultural education did not address the issues on institutional racism (Banks & Lynch, 1986) and lacked the necessary strategies to enhance critical engagement among racially diverse groups. Gallagher (2004, p. 91) states that multicultural education did not “prevent racism but rather promoted it”, some of the aims being to make Black students politically, economically, socially, and culturally compliant (Morrell, 1991). It failed to address the principles of social justice and human value.

Challenges of anti-racist education

The failure of anti-racist education lies in its inability to cultivate critical thinking skills and openly discuss challenges of racially diverse students that could enable them to connect and belong to an education system in which social justice and effective integration are practiced. According to Naidoo (1996, p. 38) the weakness of anti-racist education is its incapacity to display an “awareness of nuances, contradictions, inconsistencies and ambivalences”.

Challenges of racial integration in South Africa

Inequality, division and segregation have been features of South Africa’s history of education. In 1997, in response to aggravated forms of racism and oppression, the ANC had the main political objective of creating a united, non-racist, non-sexist and democratic country, which was called ‘nation building’ (Rajput, 1999). According to Vorster (2005), nation building can be defined as a social process of transforming a poor, and divided society into a society within which dignity and basic human rights are practiced within different racially populated groups. Twenty years later, this era of social harmony, development and prosperity still seems far-fetched. The media frequently reports that HEIs are characterised by racial tension, ignorance, misunderstanding and aggression as a result of the poor management of diversity (Meier, 2005).

Conclusion

In conclusion, many Black minority learners’ failure or success at school is determined by their racially diverse backgrounds and a home language other than English. The paper highlighted approaches that are practiced by many educators, such as anti-discrimination, assimilation, colour-blindness, contributions, and

multicultural education. These approaches are limited and insufficient in dealing with racially diverse groups. HEIs should focus on the professional development of educators and morale about understanding the rights and responsibilities of education legislation, human rights, and democracy, as enshrined in the Constitution and legislation. The failure to address racism and other forms of discrimination will continuously undermine the intention to transform the higher education system and design if it does not relate to realities. Therefore, strong leadership and visible support are required by management structures to build momentum for change which is important for the reconstruction of systems in HEIs.

The aspects of CRT that would help in theorising the relationship between racism and racial integration include, first, the notion of effective racial integration as an ordinary, permanent fixture in society. Secondly, the historic effects of apartheid on education should be analysed in relation to creating effective racially integrated public secondary schools. Lastly, CRT needs to be used to engage narratives and storytelling to deliver the experiences of the oppressed and validate their experiences, existence, and the value they bring to their learning and others. Workshops on racial integration and social justice should be developed to debunk the myths educators have about students from racially diverse backgrounds.

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Dr. Shantha Naidoo, North-West University, South Africa

Dr. Noorullah Shaikhmag, North-West University, South Africa