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METHOD ARTICLE

REVISED Assessing universities' practices on student diversity and inclusion in higher education: The INSTADINE rubric

[version 2; peer review: 2 approved]

Hemendra Mistry, Maria Cruz Sancehz Gomez

Department of Didactics, Organisation and Research Methods, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Castile and León, 37008, Spain

v2 **First published:** 28 Aug 2025, **5**:263
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.21129.1
Latest published: 12 Jan 2026, **5**:263
https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.21129.2

Abstract

In an effort to assist higher education institutions in becoming more inclusive of all student populations, universities are continuously reviewing their practices and policies on student diversity and inclusion. The INSTADINE rubric was developed to assist universities in assessing their practices on student diversity and inclusion in the areas of philosophy and mission, strategies, teaching, research and support services, and leadership. Each of these dimensions has a scale ranging from 1 (*institutionalisation to some extent*) to 3 (*full institutionalisation*) with descriptors for each score. The INSTADINE rubric has been incorporated to help universities identify their current level of attention to student diversity and inclusion in higher education, as well as to highlight areas needing further attention. The INSTADINE rubric can be available on request at mistryhemendra2015@gmail.com.

Keywords

Diversity, Inclusion, Higher education, Assessment, University, INSTADINE, Rubric

Open Peer Review

Approval Status ✓ ✓

	1	2
version 2 (revision) 12 Jan 2026	✓ view	✓ view
version 1 28 Aug 2025	? view	? view

1. **Martin Skutil**, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Prague, Czech Republic

2. **B. Morgado Camacho**, University of Seville, Seville, Spain

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H2020 This article is included in the Horizon 2020 gateway.

This article is included in the Marie-Sklodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) gateway.

Corresponding author: Hemendra Mistry (mistryhemendra2015@gmail.com)

Author roles: Mistry H: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Funding Acquisition, Investigation, Project Administration, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing; **Sancehz Gomez MC**: Conceptualization, Formal Analysis, Project Administration, Resources, Supervision, Writing – Review & Editing

Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information: This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Sklodowska-Curie grant agreement No. [101034371].
The funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, decision to publish, or preparation of the manuscript.

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How to cite this article: Mistry H and Sancehz Gomez MC. **Assessing universities' practices on student diversity and inclusion in higher education: The INSTADINE rubric [version 2; peer review: 2 approved]** Open Research Europe 2026, **5**:263 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.21129.2

First published: 28 Aug 2025, **5**:263 https://doi.org/10.12688/openreseurope.21129.1

REVISED **Amendments from Version 1**

The only difference between this version and the earlier submitted one is the two minor changes indicated in red fonts on page 2 (last line of the abstract) and page 4 (last line of the section titled "INSTADINE rubric development process").

Any further responses from the reviewers can be found at the end of the article

Background

Higher education plays a vital role in fostering economic prosperity and social well-being, placing a social responsibility on universities to adopt policies that actively promote diversity and ensure equitable access to quality education. This involves a comprehensive review of curricula and educational systems to support a diverse student body and eliminate discrimination in academic environments (Bowles & Brindle, 2017; Dill & Van Vught, 2010; Martins *et al.*, 2018). In response, many institutions have begun implementing necessary adjustments to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds- including immigrants, students from ethnic and cultural minorities, students from low socio-economic statuses, the LGBTI community, and those with special educational needs and disabilities- ensuring their full participation in the learning process (Mistry *et al.*, 2024). This commitment aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) of the 2030 Agenda, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all (Montero *et al.*, 2019; UN, 2015). In order to promote inclusive education, it is essential that universities proactively embrace diversity and implement educational policies and practices that guarantee equality and eliminate discrimination at all levels of learning (Ainscow, 2016; Bowles & Brindle, 2017; Garcia *et al.*, 2017).

The concept of diversity in education is complex and generally understood as the need to accommodate student differences and ensure equal opportunities (Ainscow *et al.*, 2007; Shah, 2008). International frameworks, including those established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), advocate for inclusive practices that address vulnerabilities related to socio-economic status, ethnicity, disability, gender, and other aspects (Booth & Ainscow, 2015; OECD, 2018). For the purposes of this study, diversity includes students from immigrant, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic minorities; those from low socio-economic backgrounds; the LGBTI community; and students with special educational needs (Mistry *et al.*, 2024).

Inclusive education involves the removal of barriers and valuing individual differences to ensure that all students can participate and succeed (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). Based on global commitments such as SDG 4, this is an evolving process that requires institutions to continuously assess and reform their policies and practices (UNESCO, 2016). In order to ensure equal access, participation, and progress for diverse student groups, universities must adopt stratetic actions (Garcia *et al.*, 2017). Ultimately, the success of diversity and inclusion depends on institutional commitment to transforming structures, policies, and practices to support all learners equitably (Smith, 2014; Toboso *et al.*, 2019). At present, only a limited number of tools are available to evaluate the extent to which universities' address diversity and inclusion, particularly in relation to student diversity. The development of such tools would assist universities in evaluating their current student diversity practices and identifying specific areas for improvement.

The INSTADINE rubric

The INSTADINE rubric was developed in 2023 (Mistry *et al.*, 2024) and validated in 2025 (Mistry & Sanchez-Gomez, 2025) as part of the USAL4EXCELLENCE MSCA COFUND fellowship project. The literature review yielded the following question: How can universities assess the progress and growth achieved in successfully addressing student diversity and their inclusion in higher education? The objective of the research was to address this question. The literature review also revealed that most of the instruments focused on overall campus-wide diversity, with student diversity being one aspect (Mistry *et al.*, 2024).

Students are the primary beneficiaries of education, and given the absence of comprehensive tools for universities to reflect on, measure, and evaluate their efforts towards student diversity and inclusion, the INSTADINE rubric has been developed to fill this gap. The rubric has been designed to function as a self-assessment tool to assist universities in determining the effectiveness of their practices, identifying areas of significant progress, and highlighting aspects that require further development. The rubric also aims to foster internal dialogue and guide universities on their path toward becoming fully inclusive.

The INSTADINE rubric is a structured tool that enables universities to evaluate their progress in addressing student diversity and inclusion in higher education. The rubric is organised into four key dimensions: (i) the university's philosophy and mission related to student diversity and inclusion (6 components); (ii) institutional strategies aimed at student diversity and inclusion (4 components); (iii) teaching, research, and support services for diverse students (6 components); and (iv) leadership and governance for fostering student diversity and inclusion (4 components). Each component comprises three levels of institutionalisation, consisting of initial efforts, moderate development, and to full integration of student diversity and inclusion practices in higher education (Mistry *et al.*, 2024).

Universities may find some items of the INSTADINE rubric difficult to address and may need to collect data using additional methods. However, by completing the rubric, universities will be able to determine the success of their efforts to promote student diversity and inclusion in higher education and identify the areas that require further attention. Universities may also use the rubric at regular intervals and as part of their phased assessment process on diversity and inclusion. The

collection of data from university departments may be necessary for certain items, while others may be easily implemented by the university. In this sense, the rubric acts as a foundation for facilitating dialogue between the university and its departments as they advance towards the establishment of more just and inclusive environment for all students.

INSTADINE rubric development process

The INSTADINE rubric was developed as part of the USAL4EXCELLENCE MSCA COFUND research fellowship project with the aim of assisting universities in the self-assessment of their policies and practices on student diversity and inclusion in higher education. A review of the academic literature was conducted to establish the framework for the rubric's structure, design, and layout of the rubric in line with its objective of evaluating university practices and policies related to student diversity and inclusion in higher education. A self-assessment rubric was developed based on a set of four dimensions and 20 indicators, which constitute categories. The quality of the rubric was ensured by considering three criteria: detailed descriptions of each dimension, indicators, and scoring procedures (Dogan & Uluman, 2017; Gatica-Lara & Uribarren-Berrueta, 2013).

To promote inclusive education, a rubric applicable to all students, including those excluded due to their background was created. An attempt was made to construct items applicable to all categories of diversity, rather than focusing specifically on one particular diverse category. The rubric addresses the policies and practices on student diversity that encourage or require attention for their inclusion in higher education.

The rubric was designed to serve as a valuable addition to existing assessment frameworks, such as the Equity Scorecard (Bensimon, 2004) and the Inclusive Excellence Scorecard (Williams *et al.*, 2005). In the development of the new rubric, Furco's (1999) self-assessment model for institutionalising service learning in higher education has been taken into account, as well as different comprehensive assessment tools, including the New England Resource Centre for Higher Education (NERCHE) rubric (2016), the PULSE DEI rubric (Brancaccio-Taras *et al.*, 2022), adapted rubric developed at institutions such as the University of California Berkeley, the University of Colorado Denver, and the University of Michigan. However, despite the fact that these rubrics address various aspects of diversity and inclusion, they do not focus specifically on student diversity and inclusion or have a limited focus, such as race (Brancaccio-Taras *et al.*, 2022). Following the NERCHE rubric as a basis, the Institutionalisation of Attention to Diversity and Inclusive Education (INSTADINE) rubric was thus developed to help assess universities' efforts to address student diversity and inclusion in higher education. The rubric focuses on the university's mission and philosophy, institutional strategies on student diversity, inclusion and teaching-learning, and leadership.

The initial draft of the INSTADINE rubric was referred to a panel of 15 experts in the fields of equality, diversity and inclusion for their judgement on the items and comments to further improve the items in the rubric. The recommendations made by the experts resulted in the revision of the rubric items with lower validity values. Following the incorporation of the suggestions, an updated draft of the rubric was field-tested in 32 universities across four European countries. The final version of the INSTADINE rubric can be available on request at mistryhemendra2015@gmail.com for further use.

Structure and purpose of the INSTADINE rubric

As previously mentioned, the INSTADINE rubric encompasses four key dimensions: (i) mission and philosophy, (ii) institutional strategies aimed at student diversity and inclusion, (iii) inclusive teaching and learning, research, and student support services, and (iv) leadership. Due to the length of the rubric, it was not feasible to include components related to accessibility, assessment, and well-being. In addition, during the validation process of the rubric, the experts rated the four selected dimensions very positively. Each of the four dimensions was precisely defined, and the rubric was further developed using an application guide that contextualised the objective of the study, the dimensions and indicators for measuring student diversity and inclusion, and the purpose, use, and application instructions of the rubric. Each dimension of the rubric comprises four to six indicators, each targeting key aspects relevant to that dimension. Each indicator includes a detailed description of three scenarios that were established regarding student diversity and inclusion in higher education: institutionalisation to some extent, an average level of institutionalisation, and total institutionalisation. Each indicator is assigned a score on a scale ranging from 1 to 3: *Beginning* = 1, *Developing* = 2, and *Accomplished* = 3. Each performance level is accompanied by detailed descriptors that align with the context of the respective indicator. These descriptors assist universities in evaluating the current status of their efforts on student diversity and inclusion (see Table 1A).

The INSTADINE rubric requires universities to determine a consensus score for each dimension of the rubric and an overall average score for the entire rubric. The university can distribute the rubric to each department, facilitate discussions on its components to reach a consensus, and collaboratively determine an overall university score. In order to arrive at a final score, it will be necessary to collect data from departments and conversations within departments and at the university level.

INSTADINE rubric components

The following section provides a brief overview of the components within each of the four INSTADINE dimensions, along with the rationale for their inclusion in the rubric. These four dimensions are as follows: (A) the university philosophy and mission on student diversity and inclusion in higher education; (B) institutional strategies focused on promoting student diversity and inclusion in higher education; (C) Inclusive teaching, research, and student support services; and (D) leadership in advancing student diversity and inclusion. Table 1B presents a summary of the components of the INSTADINE rubric.

Table 1A. INSTADINE rubric structure.

(A) University philosophy and mission on student diversity and inclusion in higher education		
(A1) Definition of student diversity and inclusion		**Self-assigned score**
Context: This component examines whether the university has its definition of student diversity and inclusion that addresses most of the aspects of student diversity and inclusion in higher education. The definition of student diversity and inclusion in higher education is crucial for the creation of a learning environment that values all individuals and fosters the success of all students, thereby contributing to a more just and inclusive society (Dari, 2023; Hubbard & Gawthorpe, n.d.).		
A1.1	The university has an operational definition of student diversity and inclusion but it only addresses limited aspects of student diversity (such as race, culture and disability).	1
A1.2	The university has an operational definition of student diversity and inclusion, but its implementation varies and is inconsistent across different student diversities.	2
A1.3	The university has a universally accepted definition of student diversity and inclusion that addresses most of the aspects of student diversity and inclusion in higher education.	3
Comments (if any):		

Each dimension of the rubric contains an explanation of the dimension and scoring categories, 1 to 3.

Table 1B. INSTADINE rubric dimensions and components.

INSTADINE Rubric	
A	**University philosophy and mission on student diversity and inclusion in higher education**
A1	Definition of student diversity and inclusion-
A2	Strategic planning for student diversity and inclusion-
A3	Alignment with the mission of the university-
A4	Relationship between the university's organisational structure and student diversity and inclusion-
A5	Visibility of student diversity on the university campus-
A6	Incorporation of student diversity and inclusion into accreditation processes-
B	**Institutional strategies aimed at student diversity and inclusion in higher education**
B1	Awareness raising and dissemination of information on student diversity and inclusion-
B2	Collaboration with diversity organisations-
B3	Equal partnership opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds-
B4	Learning achievement of students with diversity-
C	**Inclusive teaching, research, and support services for students**
C1	Faculty knowledge and awareness of student diversity and inclusion-
C2	Curriculum and its adaptations-
C3	Inclusive teaching-learning methods and approaches-
C4	Inclusive teaching-learning resources-
C5	Research on student diversity and inclusion-
C6	Support services for student diversity and inclusion in higher education-
D	**Leadership for student diversity and inclusion**
D1	Diversity and inclusion coordination-
D2	Recognition of student diversity and inclusion by the policy-making bodies-
D3	Professional development opportunities for faculty and staff-
D4	Funding of activities related to student diversity and inclusion-

The INSTADINE rubric contains four dimensions (A to D). Each dimension has four to six components.

(A) University philosophy and mission on student diversity and inclusion in higher education

The six components of the university's philosophy and mission include the definition of student diversity and inclusion, strategic planning for student diversity and inclusion, alignment with the university's mission, linkage between the university's organisational structure and student diversity and inclusion, noticeable student diversity on campus, and incorporation of student diversity and inclusion into accreditation processes.

(A1) Definition of student diversity and inclusion

This component examines whether the university has its definition of student diversity and inclusion that addresses most of the aspects of student diversity and inclusion in higher education. The definition of student diversity and inclusion in higher education is crucial for the creation of a learning environment that values all individuals and fosters the success of all students, thereby contributing to a more just and inclusive society (Dari, 2023; Hubbard & Gawthorpe, n.d.).

(A2) Strategic planning for student diversity and inclusion

According to the Society for College and University Planning (n.d.), student diversity and inclusion planning in higher education involves intentionally building a diverse student community; empowering all members to reach their full potential by dismantling systemic barriers and addressing historical inequities; and cultivating a campus culture that values, respects, and embraces difference. The rubric scrutinises the university's strategic plans, encompassing both immediate and long-term objectives, with the aim of promoting student diversity and inclusion on campus, ensuring that all students, including those from diverse backgrounds, experience a sense of worth and inclusion in higher education.

(A3) Alignment with the mission of the university

Diversity and inclusion values are instrumental to fulfilling the strategic missions of universities (Sweet, n.d.). An analysis of the alignment of student diversity and inclusion with the university's mission is included in the rubric, as universities are required to be inclusive of all students, so student diversity and inclusion should be of primary concern and reflected in the official mission of the university.

(A4) Relationship between the university's organisational structure with student diversity and inclusion

The alignment of student diversity with the university's organisational structure involves the integration of it into all institutional elements, including the curriculum and admission processes. This approach is essential to the creation of an inclusive and equitable educational environment that supports and benefits all students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds. This component was included in the rubric because it addresses the importance of linking the university's organisational structure with diverse student bodies purposefully so that the diverse students feel represented and their voices can be heard.

(A5) Visibility of student diversity on the university campus

Universities can be considered diverse and inclusive for all students when visible diversity is present on their campuses. Diversity on university campuses encourages self-reflection, produces better results, and promotes creative thinking (Purdue Global, 2023). The representation of diverse students on university campuses is vital for enhancing learning experiences, fostering social and intellectual growth, and preparing students for a diverse and globalized world (Shorelight Team, 2023). This component examines whether the university campus represents various diverse groups and whether it has developed mechanisms for accessibility and retention that reflect the diversity of the student population.

(A6) Incorporation of student diversity and inclusion into accreditation processes

This component emphasises the incorporation of student diversity and inclusion into accreditation processes. The integration of student diversity and inclusion into accreditation processes is imperative for ensuring that institutions effectively serve all learners and prepare them for a diverse society (NASPAA, n.d.). In order to achieve this, it is essential to engage students in the accreditation process, integrate diverse perspectives within curricula and teaching practices, and adopt inclusive and equitable assessment strategies (Belhadia, 2025). Universities can use this rubric component to evaluate both their internal and external accreditation processes, taking into account student diversity and inclusion as they work toward becoming more diverse and inclusive universities.

(B) Institutional strategies focused on promoting student diversity and inclusion in higher education

The four components of assessment explored by universities include diversity awareness and information dissemination, collaboration with diversity organisations, provision of equal partnership opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds, and assessment of the learning achievements of students from diverse backgrounds.

(B1) Awareness raising and dissemination of information on student diversity

This component was included to assess the university's efforts to develop awareness programmes and to disseminate information, in both online and offline media, pertaining to student diversity and inclusion to the university community, including faculty, staff and students. In addition to the frequent organisation of awareness-raising programmes for faculty, staff and students, the adoption of consistent actions aimed at student diversity and inclusion helps the university community to become more familiar with student diversity and inclusion in higher education.

(B2) Collaboration with diversity organisations

This component enables universities to consider collaborations with governmental and non-governmental organisations to assist and address the diverse needs of the student population

on campus. This type of collaboration is important to obtain support that addresses the diverse personal and educational needs of students, which makes their higher education experience more accessible.

(B3) Equal partnership opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds

Students report feeling more included when they are encouraged and offered equal participation not just in curricular but also in co-curricular activities, leading to their increased involvement. The provision of equal partnership opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds is key to the creation of a more equitable and inclusive educational environment. It promotes a sense of belonging, encourages cross-cultural understanding, and prepares students for a diverse and interconnected world (Dari, 2023). This component examines whether students from diverse backgrounds are encouraged to participate in curricular and co-curricular activities as part of their equal partnership.

(B4) Learning achievement of students with diversity

The rubric includes this criterion to enable universities to evaluate the learning outcomes of the students with a focus on their diversity and inclusion. By examining the academic performance of diverse student populations universities can identify disparities in learning and implement tailored intervention to improve learning outcomes. Each university must disaggregate student performance data to identify any disparities in outcomes that require attention.

C. Inclusive teaching, research, and student support services for

The six components of institutional strategies for teaching, research, and support services focus on faculty members' knowledge and understanding of student diversity and inclusion, curriculum and its adaptation, teaching-learning methods and approaches, teaching-learning resources, research on student diversity and inclusion, and supporting services available for diverse students.

(C1) Faculty knowledge and awareness of student diversity and inclusion

The development of knowledge about the inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds requires an understanding of relevant terminology, the different types of student diversity, and the specific needs of these students. This can help teachers to consider diversity and inclusion in teaching-learning and assessment activities. The inclusion of this component was intended to encourage universities to reflect on their faculty members' knowledge and understanding of student diversity and inclusion in higher education. Teachers' understanding of student diversity can help them to be more effective in developing inclusive lesson plans (Østerlie & Jusslin, 2024).

(C2) Curriculum and curriculum adaptation

Curriculum adaptation involves differentiation to meet the needs of all students (Julka, 2016). Such adaptation is crucial in an inclusive classroom to ensure that all student, regardless of their individual learning needs, receives appropriate modifications to content, teaching methods, assessments, and learning environments. This, in turn, creates a more equitable and engaging learning experience for all. This component helps universities evaluate the extent to which the curriculum is accessible to all students, regardless of their diverse needs, and to identify which parts of the curriculum require adaptation to ensure the inclusion of all students, including those from diverse backgrounds.

(C3) Teaching-learning methods and approaches

Inclusive teaching and learning practices have the potential to engage all students and contribute positively to outcomes such as student retention, academic achievement, and progression (Thomas & May, 2010). This component was included in the rubric to encourage universities to reflect on the efficiency with which they are incorporating inclusive methods and approaches in their teaching, in order to meet the diverse learning needs of their student population.

(C4) Teaching-learning resources

To implement inclusive education effectively, it is essential to equip teachers with the necessary resources and support, while also providing students with inclusive learning materials that foster a sense of belonging and ensure that they feel valued and included within the learning community (College of Education, 2024). This component facilitates universities in assessing the teaching and learning resources, including teaching-learning centres and mentoring programmes, available on university campuses to support diverse learning experiences and ensure the full inclusion of students in the teaching-learning process.

(C5) Research on student diversity and inclusion

Research on student diversity and inclusion has the potential to inform best practices, improve student outcomes, and promote more equitable and inclusive learning environment (Bow, 2024; Purdue Global, 2023). Research can also facilitate the identification of gaps and address systematic biases and inequalities that may disadvantage certain student groups (Advance HE, 2018). This component was therefore incorporated into the rubric to encourage universities to reflect on their efforts, obtain feedback and identify the policy-practice gaps that affect the accommodating student diversity and full inclusion.

(C6) Support services for diverse students

Support services contribute to the creation of an inclusive environment in which students from diverse backgrounds can thrive (Halpin, n.d.). This criterion enables universities to evaluate their supporting services which cater to the diverse needs of students, including accessibility, assistive technology, and equal opportunity units, in order to make the higher education experience accessible for all students.

D. Leadership in advancing student diversity and inclusion

The four components of leadership address the diversity and inclusion coordination, the recognition of student diversity and inclusion by the policy-making bodies, the professional

development opportunities for faculty and staff, and the funding for activities related to student diversity and inclusion.

(D1) Diversity and inclusion coordination
The establishment of a formal entity to support diversity and inclusion practices within the university is crucial for the effectively coordination, promotion and implemention of diversity and inclusion policies and practices, and the tracking of their progress. The inclusion of this component in the rubric was intended to assist universities in evaluating the implementation and coordination of their diversity and inclusion initiatives.

(D2) Recognition of student diversity and inclusion by policy-making bodies
The component stipulate that universities must acknowledge student diversity and inclusion, thereby ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds are fully included in higher education by addressing relevant policies established by the policy-making bodies. This is of particular significance, given that equality and inclusion have emerged as key policy priorities due to the advancement of access and quality in the higher education system worldwide (UNESCO, 2023).

(D3) Professional development opportunities for faculty and staff
This component was incorporated into the rubric because acquiring new skills, lifelong learning and the refinement of understanding of concepts related to diversity and inclusion are important for practising inclusion and meeting the diverse needs of students in higher education (McEwen *et al*., 2025). This component enables universities to evaluate the scope of professional development opportunities offered to faculty and staff, including access to electronic and print resources on student diversity and inclusion, as well as training programmes that address relevant policies, provisions, and practices that promote student equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education (AAC&U, 2022; Centre for the Study of Social Policy, 2019). A lack of knowledge to address the diverse needs of students can lead to ineffective inclusion practices.

(D4) Funding of activities related to student diversity and inclusion
In addition to ensuring accessibility, securing sufficient funding for student diversity and inclusion initiatives in higher education is essential to guarantee that students from diverse backgrounds can fully benefits and succeed in higher education without any financial barriers (Young Invincibles, 2024). Insufficient funding can significantly hinder universities' efforts to sustain student diversity and foster inclusive environments on their campus (EUA, 2019). This component enables universities to consider the promotion of activities related to student diversity and inclusion through the allocation of sufficient funds, thereby ensuring the sustained implementation of such activities on campus.

Rubric limitations

It should be noted the INSTADINE rubric has different limitations. The focus of the INSTADINE rubric was a deliberate design decision, modelled after the approach used by NERCHE. Despite the efforts to ensure the rubric is inclusive of all students, including those from diverse backgrounds, some items may require revisions to focus on specific marginalised groups such as people with disabilities. However, the items included in the INSTADINE rubric promote inclusivity and awareness of diverse identities, as well as diversity and inclusion in general. In order to ensure that their efforts address all diverse categories or a specific diverse category, if the case may be, universities may revise or add items.

In addition, the rubric did not cover components or any items related to well-being and participation, employability and mobility, and student-centered learning. Although not exhaustive, the INSTADINE rubric is intended to help universities initiate a meaningful evaluation of their current efforts in student diversity and inclusion in higher education and guide them towards further improvement.

Finally, another limitation of the rubric is that universities require inter-departmental deliberations, which may hinder consensus. However, given the wider use of the INSTADINE rubric across universities, it is not a static instrument and will undergo revisions over time.

Future prospects

The researchers intent to further development of the rubric by collecting data from all Spanish universities to assess the efforts on student diversity and inclusion in higher education in Spain. Furthermore, the rubric intended to be developed further by the addition of the dimensions such as well-being and participation, employability and mobility, student performance and student-centered learning. This will facilitate the determination of the state of student diversity and inclusion in higher education to better serve universities and help in improving their efforts in this area.

The use of the INSTADINE rubric can serve as a valuable tool for the evaluation of universities policies on student diversity and inclusion, thereby facilitating the identification of practices that require further attention to ensure the inclusion of all students in higher education. It also supports efforts to increase the participation of diverse student groups. The use of the rubric for self-assessment purposes enables universities to monitor their progress and identify areas that require further attention. Universities that rate themselves as effective in promoting student diversity and inclusion can act as role models for other institutions both nationally and internationally.

Ethics and consent

This study was a part of an MSCA Cofund research project on the institutionalisation of student diversity and inclusion in higher education, approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Salamanca (protocol code 857, January 25, 2023). However, this method study focused on developing a rubric and did not involve collecting or analysing data; therefore, separate ethical approval and consent were not required.

Declarations

Data availability statement

The study focusses on developing a rubric and therefore does not include any primary, secondary, or supplementary data or analysis.

Acknowledgements

We are specifically thankful to the University of Salamanca for awarding the project under the European Commission's Horizon 2020 (Grant No. 101034371) USAL4EXCELLENCE MSCA COFUND fellowship awarded to Dr. Hemendra Mistry.

We are also thankful to the following experts in the fields of equality, diversity, and inclusion, listed here in alphabetical order, for their expert review, meaningful suggestions and helpful comments in developing the rubric: Antonio-Luis Martinez-Pujaltre (Spain), David Monte (Spain), Divya Jindal-Snape (UK), Emiliano Diez Villoria (Spain), Irene del Brio-Alonso (Spain), Juanjo Mena (Spain), Leena Landmark (USA), Maria Victoria (Spain), Naima Bhana (UK), Nathan K. Stevenson (USA), Ramakanta Mohalik (India), Roy Brown (Canada), S. C. Panigrahi (India), Sangeeta Ahlawat (India), and Sioban O'Brien Green (Ireland).

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Open Peer Review

Current Peer Review Status: ✔ ✔

Version 2

Reviewer Report 21 January 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.24037.r67970

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✔ **B. Morgado Camacho**
Developmental and Educational Psychology, University of Seville, Seville, Spain

I have reviewed the paper and I consider approve it for indexing.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: My experice area is about incusive education in Higher Education; inclusive metthodologies; inclusive pedagogy; barriers and aims to facilitate success of students with disability

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Reviewer Report 13 January 2026

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.24037.r67969

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✔ **Martin Skutil**
Department of Education, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Prague, Czech Republic

The issues raised in the original review have been clarified to a certain extent. For this reason, I have no further comments or recommendations.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: education; inclusive education; teacher training

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard.

Version 1

Reviewer Report 17 October 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.22855.r59501

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?

B. Morgado Camacho
Developmental and Educational Psychology, University of Seville, Seville, Spain

The paper presents an assessment scale to help universities self-assess their diversity and inclusion efforts. The scale consists of four dimensions, each of which includes four to six indicators. The study is very interesting and adequately describes the assessment tool or scale. However, more detailed information on the procedure for collecting the information needs to be included. This is so that all universities that want to use the scale to assess the status of diversity and inclusion at their university know and are clear about the steps to follow.
Likewise, they should describe how to proceed with interdepartmental dialogue to carry out the evaluation of each university (how many departments, who should participate, number of representatives from each department, etc.).

Is the rationale for developing the new method (or application) clearly explained
Yes

Is the description of the method technically sound?
Yes

Are sufficient details provided to allow replication of the method development and its use by others?
Partly

If any results are presented, are all the source data underlying the results available to ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions about the method and its performance adequately supported by the findings presented in the article?

Yes

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: My experice area is about incusive education in Higher Education; inclusive metthodologies; inclusive pedagogy; barriers and aims to facilitate success of students with disability

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 04 Nov 2025

Hemendra Mistry

Thank you for the review and providing your valuable comments. Regarding the description of process with interdepartmental dialogue to carry out the evaluation of the university (how many departments, who should participate, the number of representatives from each department, etc.), the vice-rector, EDI coordinator, or person in charge of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at the university level may contact the department-level staff engaged with EDI-related activities and gather the required information on particular aspects of the rubric which require interdepartmental deliberations. In addition, to examine available records, facilities, reports, and resources, they may conduct interviews or focus group discussions with the respective staff and verify before assigning the scores and add comments (if required).
As the current paper solely focused on the development of the rubric, all the details of the rubric is not covered. However, the full rubric manual is available open access on the University of Salamanca website (already mentioned in the abstract), which covers all the details about the rubric components and how to use the rubric.

Competing Interests: No competing interests

Reviewer Report 10 September 2025

https://doi.org/10.21956/openreseurope.22855.r59503

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Martin Skutil
Department of Education, Charles University, Faculty of Arts, Prague, Czech Republic

The submitted article constitutes an interesting and enriching contribution to the ongoing discourse on the nature of inclusive approaches within higher education. The situational context is

clearly delineated and sufficiently substantiated, drawing on current and relevant scholarly literature. On the other hand, particularly in the introductory sections, the text exhibits a certain redundancy through repeated references to the INSTADINE rubric. While it is understandable that the authors seek to underscore the importance of this rubric, such duplication appears superfluous.

For a more profound understanding of its significance, a more explicit justification of the selection and construction of the individual categories under examination would be desirable. The rationale provided remains largely descriptive, stating outcomes rather than explicating the actual process of development and selection. This limitation is further reflected in the fact that the manuscript concentrates on the construction of the instrument, yet does not include a detailed analysis of the results from a pilot study nor a statistical evaluation of its reliability and validity. The absence of pilot testing and its systematic evaluation undermines the scientific credibility of the instrument, as its generalizability cannot be assessed without empirical data.

Several further questions emerge from the text, most notably whether a more comprehensive instrument should have been developed so that universities would not be required to supplement it with their own categories. Was this an intentional decision by the authors in order to take into account local or national contexts, or was it meant to enable individual countries or regions to adapt the instrument according to their particular needs? Even within Spain, notable regional differences exist, not to mention the broader cultural distinctions across Europe and indeed the global context. These aspects would benefit from more thorough elaboration.

Another area of ambiguity concerns the actual use of the instrument within a single university. The INSTADINE rubric appears to be designed primarily for the macro-level of university institutions, as exemplified by categories such as the vision and mission of the university. At the same time, however, it inquires into teaching methods situated within the micro-level of the educational process—an area to which institutions themselves may be unable to respond adequately, apart from outlining their conceptual orientation, which does not necessarily reflect lived reality. It would therefore be valuable to provide a clearer explanation of the intended application of this instrument in practice, including a critical reflection on the potential risks associated with its implementation within the domain of tertiary education. These aspects should be further elaborated in the text, and analytical conclusions should be incorporated into the article.

After minor revisions, I recommend the article for indexing.

Is the rationale for developing the new method (or application) clearly explained

Yes

Is the description of the method technically sound?

Yes

Are sufficient details provided to allow replication of the method development and its use by others?

Partly

If any results are presented, are all the source data underlying the results available to

ensure full reproducibility?
No source data required

Are the conclusions about the method and its performance adequately supported by the findings presented in the article?
Partly

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Reviewer Expertise: education; inclusive education; teacher training

I confirm that I have read this submission and believe that I have an appropriate level of expertise to confirm that it is of an acceptable scientific standard, however I have significant reservations, as outlined above.

Author Response 04 Nov 2025

Hemendra Mistry

Thank you for your valuable comments. However, the current article is solely focused on the development of a rubric not the validation or pilot testing. The rubric has been pilot tested in four European countries, which will be discussed in separate articles that are set to be published soon and will be available open access. The goal was to develop a comprehensive rubric; however, initial deliberation with the experts in the fields of equality, diversity and inclusion, and literature review resulted in the four main dimensions. 15 experts from different countries evaluated the rubric (see in acknowledgement section) and found the rubric as valid tool. Based on the qualitative inputs of the experts and considering the length of the rubric, it was not feasible to cover many dimensions, which is already highlighted in the limitation section. As As mentioned previously, the results of the experts' validation and pilot testing will clarify further all the points raised by the reviewers. The rubric is intended to be responded by the vice-rector, EDI coordinator, or person in charge of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at the university level. However, s/he may contact the department-level staff engaged with EDI-related activities and gather the required information on the micro-level aspects of the rubric, which require interdepartmental deliberations. In addition, to examine available records, facilities, reports, and resources, they may conduct interviews or focus group discussions with the respective staff and students and verify before assigning the scores and add comments (if required). As the current paper solely focused on the development of the rubric, all the details of the rubric are not covered. However, the complete rubric manual is available for open access on the University of Salamanca website, as mentioned in the abstract, and it includes all the details about the rubric components and instructions for using the rubric.

Competing Interests: No competing interests were disclosed.