Embedding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in International Business Education

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Aušrinė Šilenskytė, Ph.D.

Programme Manager (Bachelor in IB) & Post-Doctoral Researcher

Strategic Business Development Research Group

School of Management, University of Vaasa, Finland

Matevž (Matt) Rašković, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Int. Business & Strategy

Department of International Business, Strategy & Entrepreneurship (IBSE)

Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Abstract

Addressing the disconnect between the rhetoric and implementation of diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), and belonging within business education, this chapter delves into integrating DEI principles within international business (IB) education. Inspired by an OECD framework advocating inclusive education within diverse societies, we analyse DEI- and belongingness-enabling actions at institutional, study programme, course, and individual levels tailored to business schools. While our recommendations hold relevance for broader business education, we posit that IB, given its inherent appreciation for geographical, cultural, and institutional diversity, stands as a vanguard for instigating the requisite transformation embedding DEI in business education. Our proposals inherently bolster the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) as business schools educate future leaders who can lead the change and role-model organisational work environments.

Keywords

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), Belonging, International business education, Social sustainability, Curriculum development

1 Introduction

The necessary shift from rhetoric to implemented action is still largely missing when embedding diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)[1] in higher education (Burrell Storms et al., 2020). Education is a transformative vehicle for DEI *and* belonging[2] (Slee, 2019; Williams, 2013), which can address contemporary political, social, and technological trends (OECD, 2023). With the global moral landscape in flux (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023), the slow-paced nature of the academic sector (Burrell Storms et al., 2020) holds the sector back from contributing to a fairer and more just society through DEI-informed education and curricula (Smith & Schonfeld, 2020). Business schools play a particularly pivotal role in addressing the societal grand challenges (Aragon-Correa et al., 2017; Sewchurran, 2022) operationalised through the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). This role is not limited to UN SDG 4 (Quality Education) but underpins *all* 17 SDGs (Tonegava, 2022), each requiring a separate elaboration. In this chapter, we elaborate on UN SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Regarding SDG 8, international business (IB) and its education with embedded DEI can make a wide-ranging positive social impact that requires talents capable of leading the "Decade of Action" (Van Tulder et al., 2021), thereby ensuring a socioeconomically sustainable future for all.

We discuss *how* to embed DEI practices and principles in IB education with relevance to SDG 8. The literature on *actions* for embedding DEI into IB education remains scant compared to those related to management or marketing (e.g., Riedel et al., 2023), despite 50 years of research on DEI that has advanced our understanding of it within IB (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). To narrow the rhetoric-vs-action gap, we draw on the conceptual framework of promoting inclusive education for diverse societies, provided by Cerna and colleagues (2021). In particular, we utilise their original framework to discuss (1) programme and/or course curriculum design and (2) classroom interactions through which IB educators can help their students understand both the business case for DEI *and* its moral imperatives (i.e., the social justice perspective) (Ely & Thomas, 2020).

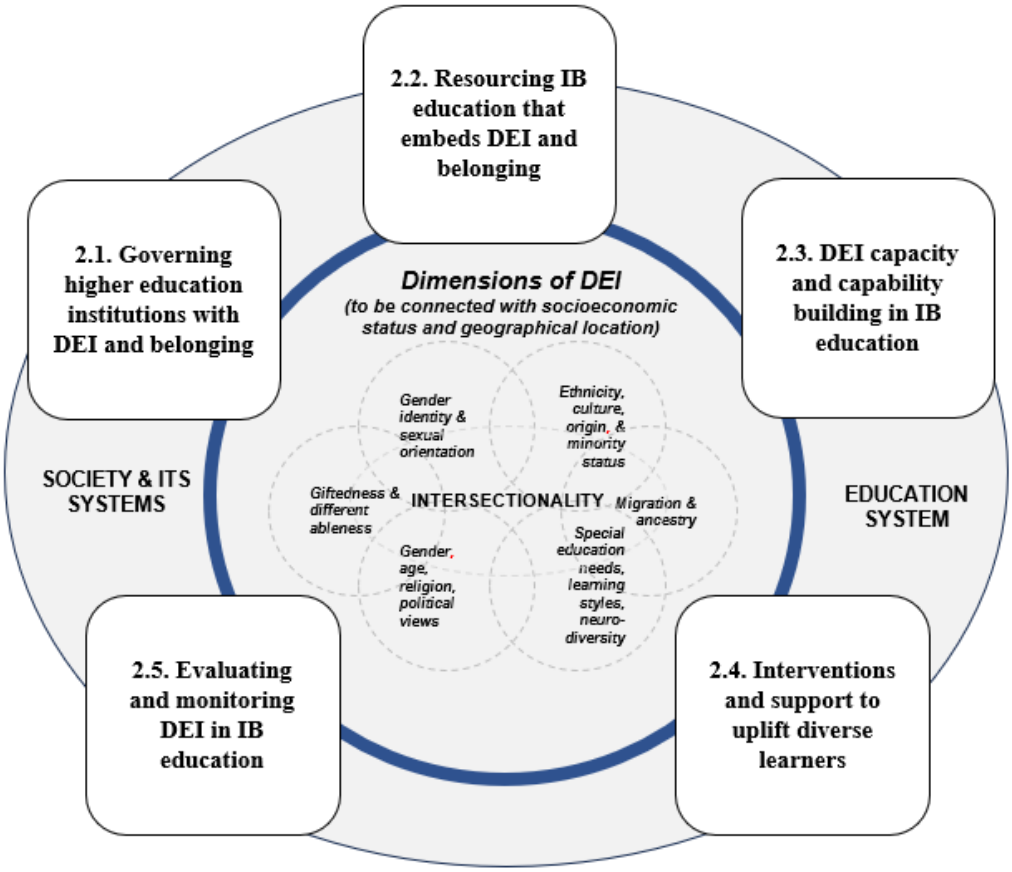
[1] We see *diversity* as the degree of representation of different sociodemographic categories (visible and invisible), *equity* as the provision of tailored opportunities and support, and *inclusion* as the process of accepting and valuing diversity.
[2] "A feeling of safety, acceptance and being valued" in a specific social or work setting (AACSB, 2021).

2 Promoting inclusive education for diverse societies: A framework

The "wicked" nature of today's global issues (Rašković, 2022) is closely intertwined with the UN SDGs (Van Tulder & Van Mil, 2022). Trying to tackle the complex nature of DEI, Cerna et al. (2021) developed the OECD framework for fostering inclusive education for diverse societies. Inclusivity, in their framework, refers to "the extent to which they [education systems and actors] promote the inclusion of diverse learners" (Cerna et al., 2021, p. 6). Inclusivity is fostered within the context of a particular society, its systems, and the education system within which the higher education institution (HEI) operates.

To achieve inclusive education for diverse societies, Cerna et al. (2021) suggest five steps: (1) governing, (2) resourcing, (3) developing capacity for managing, (4) promoting HEI-level interventions, and (5) evaluating and monitoring diversity. We have adapted their framework, simplifying it (see Figure 1). Additionally, we have (1) incorporated the concept of belonging (AACSB, 2021), which directly relates to the UN SDG 8 context, and (2) slightly expanded the definition of diversity dimensions to make it more representative of the contemporary IB context. We structure our chapter around the five elements (2.1-2.5) in Figure 1. Examples provided in each section below support bridging institutional-level policy actions with those taken at the business programme, course, and individual level (by educators). We argue that IB educators, who effectively bridge the distance-diversity nexus (Doh, 2021) and can leverage IB's history of theorising about the diversity of cultures, institutions, and firm unit roles in cross-border operations (Roth & Kostova, 2003; Rousseau & Fried, 2001), are particularly well-positioned to imbue IB education with DEI (Dieleman et al., 2022). Nonetheless, we hope our suggestions speak to business educators across disciplinary silos.

Figure 1: A framework for inclusive international business education for diverse societies



Source: Adapted from Cerna et al. (2021).

2.1 Governing HEIs with DEI and belonging

The role of (supra)national institutions is critical for promoting an education system that adheres to the DEI philosophy (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Supranational institutions, such as organisations behind university ranking lists (i.e., QS World University Ranking, Times Higher Education, Financial Times ranking) or specialised accreditation bodies (i.e., AACSB and EQUIS/EFMD), set global standards, including those used for addressing societal grand challenges. For example, AACSB, the premier business accreditation body from North America, has in 2020 included "Diversity & Inclusion" as core values in 66% of its accreditation standards, despite DEI principles already being incorporated into 40% of the accreditation standards previously (AACSB, 2020). When such a stimulus occurs at the supranational level, national higher education accreditation agencies typically follow suit. For instance, the national accreditation agency in Slovenia - NAKVIS - has moved from its

primary quality assurance role to include a broader mandate focusing on social impact, touching on inequality and inequities.

While institutional standards may ensure adherence to the DEI philosophy out of compliance, in the long term, the bottom-up approach, which enables the uncovering of the meaning of DEI at multiple levels (Sippola, 2007), is desired. This means that the institutional-level DEI actions are expected to shift from a *discrimination-and-fairness paradigm* in administering DEI (i.e., affirmative action) to an *access-and-legitimacy paradigm* (i.e., the DEI business case), and then, to a *learning-and-effectiveness paradigm* (i.e., diversity as a strategic asset)[3], penetrating business education to programme, course, and individual levels.

Following what is stipulated through compliance or going beyond it, the universities adopt governance mechanisms that instigate DEI in education at multiple levels. Such mechanisms may include *formal DEI-advocating positions*. For example, Grace and Ammerman (2022) advocate the establishment of a cross-functional DEI office at a strategic level (with strategic authority), which is appropriately supported by resources and staff (including learning designers). Along these lines, UC Davis in California, which has one of the most diverse student bodies of all the US universities, has a *DEI office* sitting under the Vice-Chancellor and focusing on fostering belonging; the office supports the integration of DEI goals within faculty, study programme, and course learning goals.

Promoting a DEI-supportive *organisational culture* is the other frequently adopted governance mechanism typically enacted through communication. For example, when presenting the university's values, the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) (in Peru) defines itself as a plural and tolerant academic community. The University of Vaasa (in Finland) emphasises that faculty and students, regardless of nationality, belong to the university's community, even if some countries are currently at war (UVA, 2022). These actions directly support the implementation of SDG 8 at HEIs because they lead to the establishment of youth employment, education, and training (SDG 8.6), protection of labour rights, and the ensuring of a safe work environment regardless of background (SDG 8.8) (*8 Decent Work and Economic Growth*, n.d.).

[3] Please see Ely and Thomas (1996, 2020).

2.2 Resourcing IB education that embeds DEI and belonging

Every strategic vision or communicated preference must be supported by appropriate resources (e.g., economic-financial, technological, human, time) vital for their implementation (Riccò & Guerci, 2014). At the HEI level, such an approach is consistent with AACSB's *global* philosophy of fostering DEI and belonging (AACSB, 2021). For faculty members, the availability of needed resources may increase flexibility (Cerna et al., 2021). Table 1 illustrates different kinds of resources and briefly explains how they may support embedding DEI and belonging in IB education.

Table 1. Examples of resources necessary for IB education with DEI

Resources	**Ways in which they support DEI and belonging in IB education**
Infrastructure and space	Designing teaching and learning spaces that cater to diverse learners is essential (Sanger, 2020). For instance, classrooms friendly to neurodiverse learners may include flexible furniture, physical elements that allow shelter, and building a sensory-friendly space (i.e., colours and soundproofing). The importance of space extends beyond the classrooms (i.e., gender-neutral or designated bathrooms, special spaces for child care, etc.).
Resources for different formats of learning	The face-to-face learning format benefits some, but not everyone. Learning in class may be challenging for students with caregiving responsibilities, socioeconomic constraints, or neurodiverse students. Virtual or hybrid learning can help address those needs.
Tools for learning	Employing different tools for learning helps address diverse learning styles and caters to neurodiverse students. For instance, the podcast format supports neurodiverse learners (Listenwise, 2021) and allows the introduction of marginalised, especially indigenous, voices (UBC, 2020). The use of diverse teams for group work (Hawkins & States, 2021), storytelling (Rezvani & Gordon, 2021), role-playing, and simulations, especially around global issues (Lutterman-Aguilar, 2003), have all been found to be effective tools in "preparing students for diversity".

Diverse learning and teaching materials	DEI and belonging can only be created with learning and teaching materials that reflect different identities, views, voices, and beliefs. For instance, case studies (Hawkins & States, 2021), different types of media, and newspaper articles (beyond Western media) can help highlight issues in different (local) environments. Considering socioeconomic diversity when selecting learning resources (preferably open-source, free-of-charge materials) helps ensure access to learning for everyone.
Time	Developing DEI-related competencies for the faculty may take time. Moreover, designing learning activities that allow students to reflect on DEI typically requires personalised feedback and individual attention (Šilenskytė, 2022). Providing sufficient time that supports both students and faculty in enabling needed reflections and considerations of alternative views, or simply for performing deeper discussions, is vital, especially in culturally and ethnically diverse classrooms.

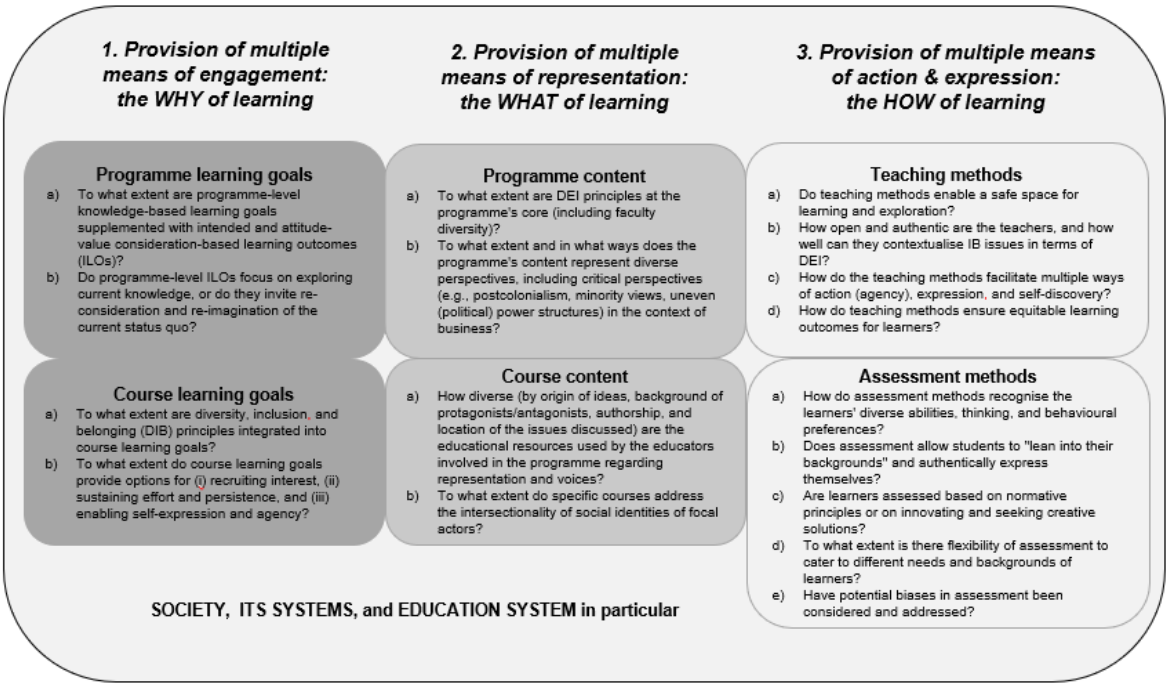
Creating teaching and learning environments enabled by diverse resources leads to better educational outcomes since education is tailored to individualised needs and engagement through belonging(ness). However, additionally, such environments role-model how graduates can resource and shape their organisations, leading IB to become a decent, home-like workspace that celebrates growth (as a return on their DEI investments).

2.3 DEI capacity and capability building in IB education

Directing study programmes to grow their DEI capacity and helping the faculty develop their DEI capabilities is essential in order for IB education to become truly inclusive. For this, we need both specialised DEI-focused courses and the integration of DEI principles across the regular curriculum (Hawkins & States, 2021). Figure 2 summarises how such two-pronged DEI in education can be achieved. Figure 2 is based on the Inclusive Pedagogy and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, comprising (1) providing multiple means of engagement ("*why*" of learning), (2) providing multiple means of representation ("*what*" of learning), and (3) providing multiple means of actions and expressions ("*how*" of learning) (CAST, n.d.). Discussing the questions suggested in Figure 2 (designed based upon a large body of research aiming to address DEI and DEI in education) within each of the three listed

domains supports educator teams with spotting actions for DEI development and, thereby, allows them to foster belonging(ness) at the programme and course levels. Such discussions are most effective when they incorporate the context of the relevant society and education system.

Figure 2: DEI checklist for (IB) programme managers and educator teams



Source: Authors' own work based on the UDL principles.

It is essential to acknowledge that, while the three domains and the questions under them are presented as separate, they are all highly interlinked and affect each other. For example, embedding DEI at either the programme or course level relies on what Garcia and colleagues (2020) call the inclusion-exclusion paradox. The paradox relates to the performativity of choices regarding "what to include or exclude in our conversations about equity and diversity (as educators)" (Garcia et al., 2020, p. 37). The inclusion or exclusion in learning conversations relates to every part of the curriculum: the learning goals, content, teaching methods, and assessment.

Thus, having one of the learning goals be aimed at uplifting DEI, educators will employ teaching content and methods that recognise the need to hear, respect, and encourage

a variety of voices and opinions, including opposing ones (Šilenskytė, 2022). Since the opposition will likely be expressed differently in culturally and otherwise diverse classrooms, educators ought to consider providing various venues, forms, and cues so that opposing views might be expressed in very open but also indirect and subtle ways. As a result, the opposing views may be invited through class discussion and anonymous online voting. Students could also be informed about potential biases they may expose when working in diverse teams (Tavoletti et al., 2022). Case studies and role-playing may be adopted as a "safe way" to explore opposition or build compassion through "stepping into someone else's shoes". Educators should adopt specific behaviours that support the appropriate handling of opposing views: acknowledging the conflict, managing it constructively, diffusing it, and turning it into a valuable learning moment through debriefing and guided (self-)reflection (Bernardo, 2017). Learners who are provided with such role models will be able to manage conflicts in the (future) workplace and create a feeling of respect for their counterparts, regardless of any opposing opinions.

The loop of developing a curriculum with embedded DEI is likely to be closed with the deployment of assessment methods that consider potential biases in the assessment process and allow the evaluation of student learning despite students possibly having different views from those of the educator. Educators may share their power with students by inviting them to select an essay topic or case to be analysed instead of providing them to the students. Educators are encouraged to be open and upfront about their potential and implicit biases (Šilenskytė, 2022). For example, in New Zealand, in front of indigenous students, a *pākehā* (white) educator should be open about their background and *whakapapa* (genealogy) and acknowledge the colonial biases in the IB discipline.

2.4 Interventions and support to uplift diverse learners

The DEI issues in higher education are *glocal* by nature. Glocal thinking helps to design effective interventions in HEI. The interventions designed with such thinking combine specific local, cultural, and historical needs with the global realities in the contemporary HEI context (AACSB, 2021). However, finding the right glocal balance in the interventions is difficult. For example, DEI initiatives in a North American HEI context predominantly focus on gender and racial diversity (Grace & Ammerman, 2022) but might be less sensitive to the linguistic diversity of non-native-speaking learners. In New Zealand, on the other hand, the

primary focal areas are usually ethnicity (not race), ancestry/genealogy, and indigeneity – the latter set against a decolonisation context.

The disbalance in the DEI agenda and its interventions, like the ones mentioned above, could be noticed and addressed through business-school-wide discussions or other activities. Self-reflective exercises can be elevated to the institutional level. For instance, Bentley University carried out such an institutional-level exercise. The racial justice task force at Bentley University engaged *all* of its employees in a comprehensive discovery process focused on cultural barriers to racial equity (Grace & Ammerman, 2022). Understanding what DEI means in the context of a business school within a specific location and the context of a diverse student/faculty body within IB education is a first step in bridging actions at the institutional and individual levels.

After establishing general links between institutional-level actions and student/faculty bodies within the business school, the next step in universal learner-centred equity-focused approaches would be to embed the DEI and belonging principles within every kind of course (Hawkins & Staats, 2021) by utilising a bottom-up approach (Sippola, 2007). There needs to be a strong "people and culture" focus across levels and functional areas, capturing inclusive structures, processes, and investment beyond the corporate slogans mentioned in Section 2.1. There also needs to be a strategic commitment to move from diverse faculty representation (usually achieved through targeted hires) to having diverse academic departments or schools with clear leadership and employee pipelines (Wingfield, 2020). Recruitment of faculty needs to be informed by the value of representation (Hawkins & States, 2021) and based on specific skills (i.e., communication) and capabilities (i.e., compassion).

Language and framing play pivotal roles in making DEI initiatives actionable. Hence, adopting an inclusive language policy (i.e., gender-neutral pronouns and non-gender role descriptions) is usually the central step to ensure DEI integration in education (Market Research Society, 2022). Once such language policies are established at the institutional level, they set the guidelines for inclusive practices in every classroom and lecture. Educators typically role-model specific behaviours to students. Thus, staff guidance through policies and training in inclusive language and DEI is critical.

Interventions would be even more powerful if a whole-of-learner approach, which captures not just the learners themselves but also their social support system or lack of it (i.e., family, friends, and community), were adopted. An example of this would be adopting a

whānau[4]-informed approach to assessment deadlines in New Zealand, recognising the competing demands indigenous student learners face in prioritising family (members') needs.

2.5 Evaluating and monitoring DEI in IB education

Evaluation and monitoring are essential for DEI principle implementation as they ensure accountability and the possibility of improving the system, actions, and practices even further (Riccò & Guerci, 2014). While regular monitoring of "standard" social-category-type metrics usually happens periodically at most HEIs, more holistic evaluations occur less regularly/frequently. They are often driven by external accreditation bodies (i.e., AACSB, EQUIS/EFMD). In some cases, they can also be prompted by external DEI audits for various reasons, including legal actions.

At a system level, Grace and Ammerman (2022) point to a necessary move from static DEI key performance indicators (KPIs) associated with various types of visible or invisible diversity (in isolation) towards a dynamic and integrated system that is clear, transparent, and active. For example, Stanford University's interactive diversity dashboard is based on its IDEAL DEI survey, which enables users to interact with DEI data in their preferred way, capturing intersectionality, i.e., interactions of different diversity dimensions.

At the programme level, a holistic well-being approach could also be adopted. Such an approach addresses not just typical academic achievement outcomes (i.e., completion rates and learning outcomes across social categories) but a variety of physical, social, psychological, material, and spiritual learner outcomes with intersecting social identities. Diverse outcomes could be compared across institutional, programme, and/or course levels.

At the individual staff member level, group and peer evaluations are common but insufficient to embed DEI and achieve belongingness. To foster inclusivity, handle difficult situations, encourage diverse voices, and promote respect despite opposing views, staff should engage in frequent self-reflection and continuous self-development, including mentoring and shadowing others. As Ravitch (2021) suggests, self-development takes time and is difficult. Educators could allocate time (and be provided with time resources, as indicated in Section 2.2) for self-reflection, monitoring their thinking and biases, envisioning their actions in difficult situations, developing their awareness about sensitive, DEI-related issues, and learning communication techniques that support conversation based on mutual

[4] *Whānau* refers to a community connected through common heritage and ancestry (*whakapapa*). It is a flexible and multi-layered concept built on a tribal worldview with physical, socioemotional, and spiritual meaning.

respect and trust (Ravitch, 2021). Peer interactions and support are also central to these efforts.

When educators engage in self-evaluation and continuous self-development, they can avoid significant interaction pitfalls, such as escalating conflict (due to the inability to manage opposing views in the classroom), unjust evaluations (e.g., due to biases regarding someone's verbal communication abilities or accent), or unnecessary misjudgments (e.g., due to erroneous assumptions about a learner's gender or ethnic origin based on their name, that is likely to create painful reactions and feelings of exclusion for those erroneously identified). To ease unwanted reactions when such mistakes happen (and they will happen because we can never reach perfection in DEI issues), educators are encouraged to adopt a life-long learning attitude in their teaching and self-evaluation, showing their humanistic side to the learners (Šilenskytė, 2022).

At the individual student level, students ought to be exposed to evaluating and assessing various DEI-related issues within their business school, IB (Sinkovics et al., 2022), and society. When considering course content, educators may think about integrating the successful examples of multinational corporations from both the Global North and South, having different gender identifications featured in the teaching cases, and having both mainstream (e.g., internationalisation theory or Hofstede dimensions of culture) and critical (e.g., post-colonial theory or critical realist identity theory) perspectives included in the curriculum. Different sources, e.g., The Economist and Al Jazeera, can be used to represent diverse evaluations of the same global issue. Naturally, business courses could integrate DEI-related thematic assessment assignments that point to pressing social challenges, such as modern slavery (Nagar & Hurd, 2020), discrimination, under-representation, social "washing" (e.g., Newburry et al., 2022), pre-judgment and social identities (Raskovic & Takacs-Haynes, 2021; Šilenskytė et al., 2022), human rights (Ruggie, 2007), global versus indigenous views (Salmon et al., 2022), and similar.

Students' evaluations assessing not their views or ability to replicate an established theory, perspective, or viewpoint, but their ability to evaluate critically diverse views and respectfully argue and effectively defend their chosen perspective, would further enliven DEI principles. Students' abilities to evaluate DEI and belonging(ness) in various contexts could also be further enhanced through experiential (Beckem II & Watkins, 2012; Viswanathan et al., 2022), self-directed (Šilenskytė, 2022), and radical or critical (Lyons & Tarc, 2022) teaching approaches. The underlying moral questions behind global wicked problems, which

are often driven by diverse needs, preferences, and perspectives of various societal stakeholders (Rašković, 2022), could also be evaluated by observing the phenomenon-oriented nature of IB (Doh, 2015).

3 Conclusion

We have aimed to provide some of our considerations regarding how IB education may support SDG 8 implementation by embedding DEI and belonging principles at various levels of its activities, driven by the motivation that "*business schools occupy a pivotal role in the movement toward a more equitable, just, and inclusive economy. They educate students who enter the global talent market and therefore have the potential to be change agents*" (Grace & Ammerman, 2022, p. 2). We suggest that the rhetoric-vs-action gap can be narrowed by embedding DEI and belonging perspectives within HEIs, study programmes, course design, and the individual level. Utilising the OECD framework developed by Cerna and colleagues (2021), we have elaborated on the specific actions at each level. While some suggestions in our chapter are applicable to business schools in general, we have mainly focused on IB-specific examples. We hope our work sparks discussion and inspires IB educators and education leaders to shift from lofty aspirational rhetoric on DEI and belongingness to implemented actions.

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