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Organizational effectiveness revisited: Integrating equity, access, and inclusion in higher education frameworks — an integrative review

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Abstract: The objective of this study was to examine how organizational effectiveness (OE) frameworks in higher education institutions (HEIs) integrate diversity, equity, and inclusiveness (DEI) in relation to student access, participation, and completion. To achieve this goal, an integrative review of 23 peer-reviewed studies published between 1978 and 2024 was conducted, applying a theory-informed thematic analysis to synthesize evidence across multiple contexts. The review identified five key dimensions through which inclusiveness is explicitly or implicitly embedded within OE frameworks: institutional performance, access and retention, cultural and social inclusion, policies for sustainability and structural inclusiveness, and faculty and leadership development. Although traditional OE models emphasize efficiency and strategic alignment, the analysis reveals a gradual shift toward equity-oriented indicators that remain inconsistently implemented and weakly institutionalized. Rather than proposing a definitive model, this review establishes a conceptual foundation for rethinking institutional effectiveness through an inclusive perspective. The findings highlight the potential of technology-enabled systems such as institutional dashboards, analytics-based quality assurance tools, and student-tracking mechanisms—to translate inclusiveness into measurable institutional outcomes, thereby strengthening the applied and policy relevance of organizational effectiveness research in higher education.

Keywords: *Access and participation, Equity in education, Higher education institutions, Inclusive effectiveness framework, Integrative literature review, Organizational effectiveness, Student inclusiveness.*

1. Introduction

Today, higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly expected to demonstrate not only academic excellence and operational efficiency but also equity, inclusion, and access to a diverse student body [1]. Traditional organizational effectiveness (OE) models primarily measure outputs, such as graduation rates, research productivity, and institutional ranking. These metrics may neglect or poorly gauge institutional support for students from marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds [2, 3]. This growing critique signals a shift from output-based evaluation toward more holistic approaches that recognize the diverse realities of students.

Cameron [4] and Cameron [5]'s seminal work on OE in education proposed a multidimensional framework that incorporates several effectiveness criteria. However, these frameworks lack an inclusive lens under contemporary research focus, which has led to the narrowing of performance indicators. In this paper, the terms "model" and "framework" are used interchangeably to reflect the terminology adopted in the reviewed literature. For consistency, we refer to them collectively as OE frameworks unless otherwise specified. Building on this theoretical base, current discussions emphasize that effectiveness cannot be separated from values of equity and social justice. As institutions increasingly rely on data for evidence-based decision-making, these values are now being translated into measurable indicators through analytics and decision-support technologies. Such advances make it possible to

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integrate inclusiveness metrics directly into performance management systems, offering a data-driven basis for evaluating organizational effectiveness [6].

Global considerations of social justice, equity, inclusion, and participation in higher education have developed an emphasis on the need to reconceptualize the HE institutional benchmarks of success [1]. This global momentum has been reinforced through regional reform agendas such as the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which call for inclusivity in systems and outcomes by the year 2020 [7-9]. However, very few OE frameworks have systematically incorporated diversity, equity, accessibility, or social justice metrics. More often than not, these dimensions are viewed as additional and not fundamental to institutional effectiveness [10, 11]. The persistence of this gap underscores the need for a more integrative conceptual framework. Despite this international momentum, scholarly inquiry has not yet consolidated these policy aspirations into coherent analytical models. Much of the existing research on organizational effectiveness remains anchored in traditional performance metrics and rarely connects institutional success with equity-driven outcomes. This conceptual and empirical fragmentation creates a need to examine how inclusiveness has been represented or overlooked within organizational effectiveness frameworks in higher education.

To address this gap, the present study formulates the conceptualization of an Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework (IEF) that integrates traditional OE metrics with inclusivity indicators such as access and retention, equity-driven initiatives, and curricular reforms. In this context, inclusiveness is defined as the institutional capacity to provide equitable access, active participation, and successful completion for all students, irrespective of their socioeconomic, cultural, or physical backgrounds [8, 10]. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) characterizes the "social dimension" of higher education as encompassing these very principles, ensuring that participation and success are not limited by social or economic barriers [7, 8]. Equity extends this notion by emphasizing fairness of outcomes rather than equality of opportunity alone, acknowledging that diverse learners may require differentiated forms of support to achieve comparable success [2, 11]. Inclusiveness, therefore, goes beyond access to learning; it entails creating supportive institutional cultures, adaptable curricula, and responsive quality assurance systems that sustain participation and enable completion [9]. Within the IEF, inclusiveness operates as a cross-cutting dimension that links performance, participation, and social justice, positioning equity as both a process and an outcome of institutional effectiveness.

This study set out to document the representation of inclusiveness in the OE frameworks employed in HEIs through an integrative review of 23 peer-reviewed studies published from 1978 to 2024.

The research is guided by two questions

- RQ1: What organizational effectiveness framework measures or indicators implicitly or explicitly capture inclusiveness in HEIs, particularly in terms of participation, accessibility, and completion among different social groups?
- RQ2: How can inclusiveness be measured and integrated into an Organizational Effectiveness (OE) framework in higher education?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to contribute to the reconceptualization of institutional effectiveness in higher education, which balances excellence with inclusion.

2. Methodology

This research examines inclusivity and how it is articulated or embedded within Organizational Effectiveness (OE) models in higher education institutions (HEIs), applying an integrative literature review approach. The integrative review method is useful in synthesizing the theoretical and empirical literature that has been written on a particular issue to create and debate new concepts [12]. Because of the intricate and changing landscape of inclusiveness in higher education, this methodology has made it possible to conduct sustained yet critical engagement with diverse OE models from studies in different countries of HEIs.

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2.1. Literature Search Strategy

A two-stage search strategy was adopted to ensure a rigorous and comprehensive review. The first stage involved a broad electronic database search using Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, and EBSCO. Keywords included:

- "Organizational Effectiveness Framework"
- "Organizational performance criteria and universities."
- "Higher education institutions AND organizational effectiveness framework."
- "Performance indicators in HEIs."

Boolean operators such as "AND" and "OR" were used to refine the search. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) peer-reviewed articles; (2) published between 2000 and 2024; (3) written in English; and (4) conceptual or empirical studies focusing on OE frameworks in HEIs. In total, **115 results**. After removing duplicates and filtering for relevance to the title, abstract, and scope, ***32* articles** were shortlisted.

2.2. Inclusion, Exclusion, and Supplementation

The second stage included full-text reading for relevance, methodological rigor, and thematic alignment with research questions. Papers were excluded if they did not concentrate on the OE framework, involved unrelated institutional types, or lacked conceptual clarity. The filtration process resulted in 16 core articles.

To strengthen the theoretical foundation, four additional studies were found by manually searching reference lists and through the coauthor recommendations. This included foundational pieces such as Cameron [4], which formed the basis for OE theorization in higher education. Furthermore, three highly cited studies from the 1990s and early 2000s were also included due to their importance in the globalization and diversification period of HEIs. In total, 23 peer-reviewed articles were incorporated into the final analysis.

2.3. Data Evaluation and Synthesis

Data evaluation focused on methodological rigor, conceptual relevance, and thematic alignment, which is within the bounds of Whittemore and Knafl [12] framework. Through a theory-driven approach, thematic coding was performed on the OE dimensions put forth in each article, which were then classified based on whether the measures of inclusiveness were explicitly stated (e.g., equity policies and support programs) or implicitly embedded (e.g., student success metrics and satisfaction surveys). This dual-layered coding strategy enabled the identification of five overarching dimensions that incorporated inclusiveness.

1. Institutional Performance
2. Access and Retention
3. Cultural and Social Inclusion
4. Faculty and Leadership Development
5. Policies for Sustainability & Structural Inclusiveness

To enhance analytical transparency, Table 1 summarizes the reviewed studies and the indicators they presented in their original form, serving as raw data extracted directly from each paper. These indicators, whether explicit or implicit, were then systematically analyzed and collapsed into broader analytical categories, resulting in a codebook (Table 2, Appendix A) that consolidates cross-study patterns and forms the empirical foundation for the thematic structure. This thematic structure forms the conceptual foundation for an Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework (IEF), which is introduced in the results and further elaborated in the discussion as a forward-looking approach for integrating equity within OE frameworks. To ensure methodological rigor, thematic coding was conducted collaboratively by both authors. The lead (corresponding) author initially developed a preliminary coding structure by closely reading and extracting data from the reviewed studies. The other coauthor reviewed the codes,

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checking their applications along with relevancy, clarity, and consistency. Conflicts in interpretation were resolved through joint discussions involving dialogue that was reflective in nature, which enhanced how trustworthy and verifiable the interpretations were.

Table 1.
Summary of the Studies 1978–2024.

	Author & Year	Country /Region	Framework/ Model Used	Type	Database/Source	Indicators Identified
1	Cameron [4]	USA	Org. Effectiveness (OE)	Theoretical + Empirical	EBSCO/JSTOR	Input-output performance, productivity, system rationality, students' satisfaction, and development.
2	Cameron [13]	USA	OE	Conceptual + Empirical	EBSCO	OE dimensions: adaptability, efficiency, goal attainment (no mention of access) - students' satisfaction and development.
3	Taylor [14]	UK	Efficiency/Eff.	Conceptual	EBSCO/ProQuest	Performance metrics, academic output, cost-efficiency (no equity lens)
4	Lysons [15]	Australia	Cameronâ€™s OE Model	Empirical	Manual/handpicked	Staff-student ratio, completion rate, resource use
5	Pounder [16]	Hong Kong	CVM	Theoretical + Empirical	ProQuest	Value creation, leadership engagement (no student background detail)
6	Shimizu et al. [17]	Japan	Univ. Governance	Empirical	Scopus	University goals vs. outcomes, no diversity dimension
7	Ojala and Vartiainen [18]	Finland	Multidimensional Evaluation	Theoretical + Empirical	Scopus	Evaluation criteria included access and curriculum reform
8	Huusko and Ursin [19]	Finland	QA/Performance Mgt	Theoretical	Web of Science	Institutional goals, QA, student performance metrics
9	Hassan et al. [20]	Pakistan	CVM + Cameron	Theoretical + Empirical	ProQuest	Student engagement programs for rural/marginalized
10	El Tahir et al. [21]	UAE	American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Core Indicators	Empirical	Manual/handpicked	Core indicators (AACC): retention, equity-focused recruitment
11	Chinta et al. [22]	USA	CIPP Model	Conceptual	Manual/handpicked	CIPP model; process and product measures, general performance
12	Moran [23]	USA	Cameron OE Model	Empirical	ProQuest	Leadership-driven OE, student throughput
13	Kallio et al. [24]	Finland	Input-Output View	Empirical	Web of Science	Input-output balance with institutional responsiveness
14	Dey and Sood [25]	India	Cameron's Revised OE	Empirical	Manual/handpicked	Social justice lens; focus on entry-level outreach programs
15	Yaakub and Mohamed [26]	Malaysia	Balance Score Card-BSC	Empirical	Scopus/WoS	Scholarship access, learning support, campus diversity
16	Ramāšio et al. [27]	Portugal	UN SDGs Effectiveness	Empirical	Scopus/WoS	Sustainability-related access equity & SDG alignment
17	Dhir [28]	India	Country Context OE	Theoretical + Empirical	Google Scholar	Institutional mission alignment, no equity indicators

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18	Gebretsadik [29]	Ethiopia	Multiple OE Factors	Empirical	WoS	Dropout prevention, access improvement indicators
19	Camilleri [30]	UK	Balanced Scorecard	Empirical	Manual/handpicked	Staff training, diversity hiring, inclusive curriculum
20	Luo and Photchanachan [31]	China	SERVQUAL / HESQUAL	Exploratory	EBSCO	Student service quality (language, background)
21	Aithal and Maiya [32]	India	TQM, Benchmarking, Theory A	Conceptual /Exploratory	Google Scholar	Quality assurance, Stakeholder feedback, Student success indicators, Institutional accountability, Learning outcomes
22	Irum et al. [33]	Pakistan	HPO-TQM framework	Conceptual	ProQuest	Student success and graduation outcomes, Continuous improvement mechanism Stakeholder involvement (including students) Equity in service delivery
23	Mokadem et al. [34]	Algeria	Governance -Culture framework	Empirical	Google Scholar	Participatory leadership and shared governance Student satisfaction and feedback mechanisms Responsiveness to student needs Organizational learning culture

This collaborative process adds a layer of interpretive validation to reduce the risk of individual bias. The analysis followed the trustworthiness criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba [35] particularly credibility, dependability, and confirmability, by grounding themes in multiple sources and maintaining an audit trail of the coding decisions. Building on this collaborative and iterative coding process, the subsequent interpretation of themes was guided by selected theoretical frameworks as suggested by Braun and Clarke [36]. Cameron [5] multidimensional model of organizational effectiveness, which encompasses goal attainment, resource efficiency, and internal process coherence, offers a foundational lens for interpreting performance-related indicators. To conceptualize inclusiveness, this review draws on Fraser [37] theory of social justice, emphasizing redistribution, recognition, and representation, and Tinto [38] model of student retention, which links student success to academic and social integration within institutions. Additionally, Sen [39] and Nussbaum [40] capability approaches contribute to understanding inclusiveness in terms of expanding students' opportunities for participation, engagement, and successful completion. These theoretical lenses collectively guide the distinction between explicit and implicit inclusiveness indicators and inform the thematic synthesis presented in the findings.

2.4. Ethical Consideration

In this study, we did not involve human participants, surveys, or primary data collection. As an integrative literature review based solely on previously published academic works, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was not required. All sources were properly cited and credited in accordance with academic integrity and ethical publication standards.

3. Results

This section presents the findings of the integrative review, synthesizing data from 23 peer-reviewed studies published between 1978 and 2024. These studies represent a diverse range of global contexts, methodological approaches, and institutional types. This review aims to identify the extent to which inclusiveness measures such as equity, access, diversity, and completion are embedded within existing Organizational Effectiveness (OE) frameworks in higher education institutions (HEIs), either explicitly or implicitly.

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A thematic analysis of these studies revealed five major dimensions through which inclusiveness manifests in OE frameworks.

1. Institutional Performance
2. Access and Retention
3. Cultural and Social Inclusion
4. Faculty and Leadership Development
5. Policies for Sustainability & Structural Inclusiveness

Each theme reflects recurring patterns of how effectiveness is conceptualized and evaluated across studies and how inclusiveness features these definitions. These dimensions are not mutually exclusive, and many studies have focused on multiple themes.

Table 1 (Summary of the studies 1978-2024) provides an overview of the studies, including authors, country of origin, primary inclusiveness focus, type of inclusion (explicit or implicit), and the thematic area(s) to which each study contributed. This structured presentation supports a comprehensive understanding of how inclusiveness-related indicators have evolved and operationalized within OE literature over time.

To enhance transparency and traceability in thematic synthesis, Table 2 (see Appendix A) presents a detailed codebook developed for the analysis. It outlines the specific inclusiveness indicators identified in each study, categorizes them as explicit or implicit, and maps them to the corresponding themes. This codebook serves as the analytical foundation upon which themes are derived and ensures the replicability of the review process.

In the following subsections, each of the five thematic dimensions is discussed in detail. Where appropriate, references will be made to the studies listed in Table 1 and the indicators coded in Table 2 (see Appendix A) to illustrate how each theme emerged and was supported across the literature.

3.1. Theme 1: Institutional Performance

Institutional performance emerged as a dominant theme across the reviewed studies, particularly within the traditional organizational effectiveness (OE) frameworks in higher education. Many foundational models have focused on measuring institutional success through input-output metrics, goal attainment, system rationality, and productivity. While these dimensions typically emphasize administrative efficiency, academic output, and strategic alignment, inclusiveness is often addressed only implicitly.

The seminal works of Cameron [4]; Cameron [13] and Taylor [14] laid the foundation for OE frameworks, emphasizing organizational adaptability, efficiency, and outcome-based performance. However, these studies have primarily focused on structural and managerial effectiveness, without direct engagement with student equity or inclusion. Similarly, Lysons [15] and Pounder [16] consider strategic positioning and value creation; however, inclusiveness remains a peripheral concern.

Several recent empirical studies have attempted to expand these models to include broader performance indicators. For instance, Moran [23] and Chinta et al. [22] evaluated institutional effectiveness using the CIPP model and quality assurance systems, which, although centered on performance outcomes, implicitly incorporated student progress and retention. However, indicators related to students' backgrounds, such as gender, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, were not disaggregated.

El Tahir et al. [21] developed a contemporary performance measurement model based on 32 indicators tested in a UAE college context. Although focused on institutional results, the model included service quality and academic support, suggesting a shift towards more student-centered evaluation, but still treated inclusiveness indicators implicitly.

Most recently, Aithal and Maiya [32] have contributed to a robust conceptual framework that emphasizes quality assurance, institutional accountability, and performance benchmarking as core to effective higher education governance. Their study highlighted how Total Quality Management (TQM) principles and stakeholder-focused metrics such as learning outcomes and student satisfaction can

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explicitly support organizational effectiveness goals. These indicators closely align with performance-based OE frameworks and broaden the scope of performance to include access and quality of experience.

In sum, while the majority of studies contributing to this theme reinforced the dominance of traditional input-output and goal attainment models, a subtle evolution is apparent. Institutions are beginning to link performance with student-centered metrics. Nevertheless, the direct emphasis on inclusiveness, particularly access, participation, and completion across diverse groups, remains insufficiently embedded in OE frameworks. This underscores the need for a broader redefinition of institutional performance that explicitly incorporates social equity and justice into higher education.

3.2. Theme 2: Access and Retention

Access and retention surfaced as a central theme across several studies that directly or indirectly addressed inclusiveness in higher education organizational frameworks. This theme captures how institutions measure, promote, and sustain equitable access for underrepresented groups and how they track student retention and progression, key markers of inclusive effectiveness.

The works of Ojala and Vartiainen [18] and Yaakub and Mohamed [26] were notable. Ojala and Vartiainen focused on improving curriculum and institutional reforms aimed at widening access for marginalized students. Similarly, Yaakub and Mohamed incorporated strategies such as scholarships, peer mentoring, and more flexible learning options to enhance access to and decrease attrition among students from low-income backgrounds.

Hassan et al. [20] and El Tahir et al. [21] defined administrative matters as performance indicators, considering retention and satisfaction metrics. With AACC's core indicators framework, El Tahir et al. did show some institutional attention directed toward inclusiveness, especially in recruitment and retention efforts, although the disaggregation analysis by social categories was not fully addressed.

Gebretsadik [29] analyzed institutional policies aimed at reducing dropout rates and enrolling students from low-income and rural areas. These policies are coded as inclusiveness indicators. With the same focus on accessibility through the social justice lens., Dey and Sood [25] suggested that endorsed pre-enrolment outreach aimed at first-generation learners and other underrepresented groups.

Aithal and Maiya [32] offered an important lens on how OE frameworks can promote accessibility and student retention. Their approach included curriculum flexibility, support systems for diverse learners, and data-driven improvement plans, focusing on the student lifecycle from entry to completion. These factors implicitly contribute to inclusion, reinforcing institutional strategies that reduce dropouts and improve academic persistence.

Recent studies followed this line of inquiry. Irum, et al. [33] used transformational leadership frameworks to examine access- and retention-embedding DEI strategies at the institutional level alongside policy-level leadership. El Tahir et al. [21] included retention, academic advice, and access-related support as part of an institutional performance framework. However, by framing these metrics as bounded, they remained implicit.

Although not all studies differentiated access by gender, disability, or ethnicity, there is an obvious movement towards understanding access and retention in relation to institutional effectiveness. This indicates a gradual shift from strictly output-based models towards more equity-oriented frameworks, albeit with varying depths and consistencies.

To summarize, this underscores the fact that, while inclusiveness is more attuned to access and retention, its embedding within OE frameworks continues to be unbalanced. Meaningful equity requires clearly defined institutional effectiveness models that incorporate underrepresented groups, with tracking mechanisms tied to progress and success [3].

3.3. Theme 3: Cultural and Social Inclusion

The theme of cultural and social inclusion addresses how higher education institutions create environments that affirm diversity, foster belonging, and support marginalized student populations.

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This extends beyond structural access by focusing on institutional values, support systems, and cultural responsiveness, all of which contribute to equitable student participation and success.

Huusko and Ursin [19] and Dey and Sood [25] addressed this aspect by proposing engagement strategies that focus on student diversity and multiculturalism, as well as culturally responsive and outreach-driven engagement. Through social justice perspectives in institutional comparisons, Dey and Sood highlighted the need for proactive social inclusion through targeted orientation, learning communities, and safe spaces for underrepresented student groups.

Ramāšio et al. [27] focused on inclusion indirectly by advocating for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) education and fostering equitable and inclusively aligned practices within education systems as a goal of the university's culture. Although framed within environmental and social sustainability, this study captured access and engagement as part of an integrated ethos of inclusion at a broader institutional level.

El Tahir et al. [21] and Hassan et al. [20] included performance metrics for community engagement and campus climate, as well as cultural inclusiveness. As noted in these studies, inclusiveness goes beyond quantitative measures to institutional culture, as it adopts a transformation that builds support for varied voices and experiences.

Camilleri [30] analyzed governance frameworks and highlighted the role of diversity training, cultural competence, and inclusive curricula in supporting student engagement and belonging. Luo and Photchanachan [31] while focusing on international student service quality, also pointed to the importance of cultural adaptation and support in enhancing student satisfaction.

Irum et al. [33] viewed from a leadership and policy perspective, cultural inclusion and DEI transformation initiatives can significantly alter organizational culture. The study emphasized that sustained leadership engagement is crucial to ensure that inclusion becomes an integral part of institutional identity rather than a peripheral concern.

Compared to access or performance indicators, cultural and social inclusion were coded more explicitly across studies. However, framework consistency and commitment still varied, suggesting that the rhetoric of inclusion might be present, but the mechanics are not in place.

3.4. Theme 4: Faculty and Leadership Development

Although faculty and leadership development may not emerge as anchor dimensions of inclusiveness, they have surfaced in several studies as critical catalysts for fostering inclusive practices in higher education. Effectiveness models of institutions that include leadership as a strategic area often correlate a leadership vision with faculty development aimed at implementing equity-centered practices.

Specifically, Camilleri [30] and Ramāšio et al. [27] underscored the impacts of institutional leadership concerning inclusive learning environments within the global and local contexts of diversity and access. The governance models associated with these studies incorporate equity, inclusion, active participation, and student-oriented service delivery, indicating that leadership influences inclusive reforms.

Irum, et al. [33] provided the most compelling associative evidence on the inclusiveness of students and development of leadership. This study examines transformational leadership frameworks that incorporate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in wider institutional processes. Faculty engagement with inclusive teaching led to administrative support for access initiatives that enhanced the retention of marginalized students.

Dey and Sood [25] advanced a similar position, arguing that, without the knowledge of identifiable structural barriers held by faculty and administrators, participation attempts may be tokenistic. Their work advocates professional development geared towards equity and diversity systems.

Recently, Aithal and Maiya [32] further discussed the role of inclusive governance and collaborative academic leadership in quality enhancement. Their argument for embedding leadership accountability and faculty engagement into continuous improvement aligns with the indicators found in

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studies such as Camilleri [30] and Kallio et al. [24], reinforcing faculty development as a strategic pillar of institutional effectiveness.

Although not the main focus of these studies, the outcomes suggest a significantly under-researched area: the relationship between access to student participation, inclusive leadership, faculty practice, and institutional capacity that drives policy development and implementation around supported mechanisms for underrepresented students.

As such, this theme plays a mediating role, facilitating the operationalization of inclusiveness within organizational effectiveness frameworks.

3.5. Theme 5: Policies for Sustainability and Structural Inclusiveness

The fifth theme focuses on how financial strategies, funding schemes, and policy frameworks enhance inclusiveness. This dimension was critical not only for ensuring access but also for enabling longitudinal engagement and successful navigation of studies among pupils from marginalized or economically challenged demographics.

El Tahir et al. [21] developed a multidimensional effectiveness model that includes the overall financial health of the institution, including service quality. Although the authors did not explicitly focus on equity, the incorporation of resource allocation and cost-efficiency dimensions implies that some level of structural planning is necessary to address a range of student needs.

Yaakub and Mohamed [26] and Gebretsadik [29] focus on institutions' attempts to make higher education accessible through financial aid in the form of scholarships, grants, and budgeting for targeted aid in underrepresented groups. These efforts were tied to increased participation and retention of rural and low-income students.

Ramāšio et al. [27] used a sustainability approach linking the equity of resources and long-term investment in an institution's sustainability to serve a diverse student body. Commitment to the integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4, which advocates equitable education, reinforces the need to treat budgeting for inclusiveness as a fundamental measure of institutional effectiveness.

El Tahir et al. [21] and Camilleri [30] identified budgeting and strategic planning as processes that include support services, infrastructure enhancement, and diversity initiatives. Although these were not always disaggregated by student demographics, they are regarded as implicit indicators of inclusive structural development.

Finally, Aithal and Maiya [32] framework incorporates systemic indicators such as stakeholder engagement, transparent planning, and quality-driven policy design. These elements support structural inclusiveness, particularly when institutions align operational planning with student-centered goals. Their conceptualization suggests that sustainable effectiveness requires the integration of equity at every planning and implementation level.

In general, the reviewed studies demonstrate a greater recognition that the financial and structural dimensions of effectiveness need to be informed by equity. Institutions that embed inclusiveness in their planning processes, whether through direct financial investments or strategic infrastructure design, tend to enhance access and completion for all students.

Building on this thematic synthesis, the five recurring dimensions of inclusiveness were integrated into a single conceptual model titled the Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework (IEF). The IEF provides a holistic representation of how higher education institutions can embed inclusiveness indicators within traditional organizational effectiveness models. It translates theoretical insights into an applied structure suitable for institutional benchmarking, analytics, and policy design.

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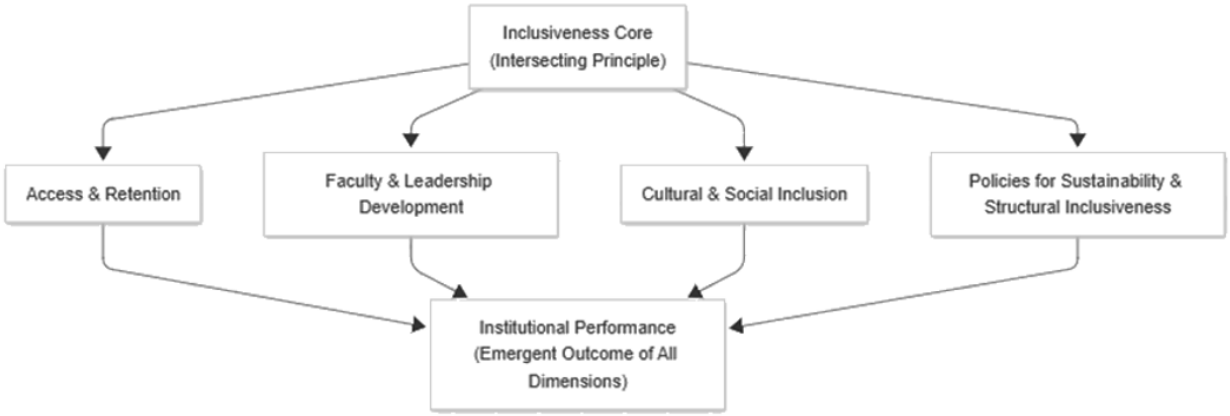

Figure 1.
Conceptual Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework (IEF) for Higher Education Institutions.

The Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework (IEF) synthesizes five interrelated dimensions: Institutional Performance, Access and Retention, Cultural and Social Inclusion, Faculty and Leadership Development, and Policies for Sustainability & Structural Inclusiveness. These dimensions integrate inclusiveness within organizational effectiveness by linking equity, participation, and performance as interdependent elements of institutional success.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the IEF positions inclusiveness as an intersecting principle rather than an independent variable. Each dimension functions both as a standalone domain of effectiveness and as an interactive component of the broader system. For instance, access and retention depend on equitable policies and faculty engagement, while institutional performance is sustained through inclusive leadership and structural planning. The model's applied potential lies in its adaptability to data-driven dashboards, quality assurance audits, and institutional reporting systems, thereby linking inclusiveness directly with measurable organizational outcomes.

The following section discusses these relationships in light of the reviewed literature, emphasizing the theoretical and applied implications of embedding inclusiveness within organizational effectiveness frameworks.

4. Discussion

This integrative literature review explores the extent to which organizational effectiveness (OE) frameworks in higher education institutions (HEIs) explicitly or implicitly incorporate measures of inclusiveness, specifically student access, participation, and completion. Through thematic analysis of 23 peer-reviewed conceptual and empirical studies spanning four decades (1978–2024), the review synthesized five interrelated themes that illustrate both the evolution and persistent gaps in aligning organizational performance with equity imperatives. The synthesis of these themes informed the conceptual Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework (IEF) presented in Figure 1, which serves as an analytical lens for the discussion that follows.

One of the most striking observations from this review is the dominance of traditional OE models that prioritize input-output efficiency, strategic alignment, and managerial control. Early foundational works, particularly those by Cameron [4] and Cameron [13] framed institutional effectiveness through dimensions such as productivity, goal attainment, and system rationality. Although useful for establishing a basis for assessing performance, these models largely omit considerations of who participates in higher education, who succeeds, and under what conditions. The focus on institutional survival and adaptability often overshadows questions of social justice or structural inequality. Even in more recent performance-centered models, inclusiveness is frequently treated as a background assumption rather than a foreground concern.

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These findings align with Cameron [5] argument that organizational effectiveness is a multidimensional and often paradoxical construct that requires institutions to balance competing goals, such as efficiency, equity, and adaptability. However, most of the reviewed OE frameworks remain anchored in structural-functionalist assumptions and underplay equity-focused dimensions. Drawing from social justice theories [37] the concept of inclusiveness in higher education must be understood through redistribution (e.g., access and funding), recognition (e.g., valuing diversity), and representation (e.g., student voice in governance). Similarly, Tinto [38] model of student retention reinforces the notion that access alone is insufficient and that students must be supported through academic and social integration. The institutional capability approach [39, 40] further underscores the importance of evaluating what students are actually able to be and do within educational environments, especially those from marginalized backgrounds. These theoretical perspectives guided the interpretation of the inclusiveness indicators in this review and helped distinguish between superficial equity gestures and substantive institutional commitments.

However, this review also highlights an important, albeit uneven, shift in how inclusiveness is framed in OE discourses. Several studies have integrated access and retention indicators into assessment frameworks. For instance, the inclusion of student retention rates, dropout prevention strategies, and scholarship schemes in studies such as those by El Tahir et al. [21], Yaakub and Mohamed [26] and Gebretsadik [29] suggests a growing awareness of the need to evaluate institutional success not just by what is achieved, but by whom. These developments align with calls for more student-centered models of effectiveness that incorporate equity into both inputs (e.g., admissions and funding) and outputs (e.g., completion and satisfaction).

However, the review also demonstrates that inclusiveness is more often implied than explicitly operationalized in most OE frameworks. In several studies, measures such as student enrollment, quality assurance metrics such as the completion rate of a course, and academic support systems were present but not disaggregated by gender, program socioeconomic background, students with disabilities, or other equity-relevant variables. This indicates a theoretical and methodological gap: the absence of equity-conscious disaggregation can render inequalities that inclusion efforts aim to address. Without such granularity, OE frameworks risk reinforcing the status quo while appearing neutral or progressive.

These findings highlight a significant gap in the conceptual integration of cultural and social inclusion into institutional effectiveness. While some studies have addressed inclusiveness through value statements or diversity initiatives [25, 30] but there lack frameworks or robust indicators that measure culturally responsive curriculum inclusivity or the social identity of students across various groups. This explains the notion that institutions portray an underlying act of embracing diversity only to lack evaluative systems, truthfully embedding inclusiveness. While claiming these goals, leadership and faculty are instrumental to committing, but often these goals come without structured systems of accountability attached to them.

It is particularly noteworthy that studies conducted in 2023 and 2024, including Irum et al. [33] and Mokadem et al. [34] point to possible changes in these trends. These recent studies add the concepts of leadership inclusivity, DEI-based transformation frameworks, and student-service integration as valid measures within the OE models. Although these studies are outliers in the overall sample, they illustrate the considerable possibility stemming from the inclusiveness – institutional effectiveness relationship, viewing these concepts not as dichotomous variables, but as interdependent frameworks. Their conclusions advocate the hypothesis that inclusiveness improves institutional legitimacy, enhances student outcomes, and increases institutional sustainable growth.

Recent conceptual frameworks, such as those presented by Aithal and Maiya [32] demonstrate growing institutional awareness of quality as an inclusive imperative. Their model bridges traditional OE mechanisms, such as benchmarking and academic outcomes, with indicators that support student-centered inclusiveness, such as accessible curriculum design, feedback integration, and a culture of continuous improvement. This hybrid model reflects the shift from narrow efficiency metrics towards a

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more integrative view of success, one that considers who participates and thrives within the institutional system. Their contributions reinforce our findings across multiple themes, particularly institutional performance, access and retention, faculty development, and structural inclusiveness. Collectively, these insights align with the dimensions outlined in the Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework (IEF), reinforcing its applicability as a synthesis of existing evidence and as a conceptual guide for future institutional design.

A critical interpretation of the review's findings also reveals a lack of geographical and contextual diversity in the definition and operationalization of inclusiveness. Although studies from North America, Europe, Asia, and Africa were included, many focused on systems with well-established QA and performance mechanisms. Fewer addressed emerging or under-resourced HE systems, where inclusiveness may be more pressing and less institutionally embedded. Furthermore, there was limited engagement with intersectionality, particularly regarding how race, gender, disability, and socioeconomic status intersect to shape students' experiences. This presents an opportunity for future research to bring more context-sensitive and multidimensional lenses to the study of OE.

From a policy perspective, this review affirms the importance of developing an Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework (IEF) that integrates performance, equity, and participation into a unified institutional agenda. Such a model would balance traditional effectiveness indicators (e.g., completion rates and resource utilization) with equity-focused measures, such as targeted support services, diverse curriculum design, inclusive faculty hiring, and disaggregated data tracking. Rather than treating inclusiveness as an add-on, the IEF approach envisions it as a core component of what makes an institution "effective," particularly in today's socially diverse, globalized education systems. In this sense, the IEF does not replace existing OE models but reconfigures them into a multidimensional architecture that connects institutional performance with equity outcomes through measurable, data-informed practices.

This review offers several implications for leadership and institutional planning. Leadership training and governance reform must go beyond compliance and performance audits to embrace the broader mission of higher education as a social transformation tool. Institutions should prioritize capacity-building in inclusive pedagogies, invest in culturally responsive student support, and align budgeting processes with access and equity goals. These shifts require not only structural changes but also a reorientation of institutional values anchored in inclusion as a principle of excellence. While this review recognizes the growing role of data analytics and technology-enabled systems in institutional assessment, these are interpreted here as supportive mechanisms rather than core outcomes. The study's findings and recommendations remain centered on conceptual, policy, and equity-oriented integration of inclusiveness within organizational effectiveness frameworks [6, 41].

Methodologically, this study also contributes to the literature by demonstrating the feasibility of using integrative and systematic review methods to derive thematic insights from diverse OE models. This shows how the qualitative coding of existing literature can generate theoretical frameworks grounded in empirical patterns. However, this study has several limitations. It focuses exclusively on peer-reviewed English literature, potentially omitting valuable regional or non-English contributions. Additionally, thematic analysis, while systematic, relies on researchers' interpretations of inclusiveness indicators, which may vary in application across institutional contexts.

Looking ahead, future research should focus on empirically exploring and validating the thematic dimensions identified within the conceptual Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework (IEF). Longitudinal and comparative studies that evaluate how inclusive OE models perform across institutional types (public/private, research/teaching-focused) and cultural contexts would add significant value. Moreover, co-creating metrics with student populations, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds, can lead to more grounded and simpler indicators of effectiveness.

In conclusion, this review demonstrates that, while the conversation around inclusiveness in higher education effectiveness is advancing, substantial conceptual, methodological, and structural work remains. Bridging the divide between equity and excellence is not just desirable but also necessary for

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HEIs to fulfill their broader societal roles. The conceptual Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework (IEF) emerging from this review is not a replacement for existing models but a call to reimagine institutional success through the lens of participation, justice, and opportunity for all [2, 42].

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explores how organizational effectiveness (OE) frameworks within higher education institutions (HEIs) integrate the principles of inclusiveness, either explicitly or implicitly. A systematic and integrative literature review of 23 peer-reviewed articles published between 1978 and 2024 revealed five prevailing themes: institutional performance, access and retention, cultural and social inclusion, faculty and leadership development, and structural and financial inclusiveness.

The review notes that although a number of organizational efficiency frameworks are still largely dominated by old paradigms centered on institutional effectiveness and productivity, there is a cautious but tangible evolution toward viewing inclusiveness as a central facet of an institution's success. In particular, studies that emerged in the last decade, especially those coming after 2018, seem to focus more on the retention of marginalized students, culturally inclusive teaching, equity-based leadership, and transformation through inclusive policymaking [35,34]. However, it should be noted that these efforts are quilted across varying contexts at the regional and institutional levels, and inclusiveness is often more prevalent as an unspoken or peripheral consideration, as opposed to a primary benchmark of institutional performance.

To address these shortcomings, this review proposes the conceptualization and advocates of a more holistic *Inclusive-Effectiveness Framework* [1, 3, 28] which, unlike traditional OE models that focus on strategic planning, goal attainment, and resource allocation, places social justice, access, diversity, and student success as foundational pillars. This approach emphasizes that inclusiveness should not be viewed merely as an indication of compliance with equity obligations but serves as a primary catalyst for institutional excellence and relevance [1, 2].

6. Key Recommendations

6.1. Redefine OE Frameworks to Center Inclusiveness

Quality assurance bodies and institutions must amend their OE frameworks to include, as indicators, the diverse representation of students, pathways that support underrepresented groups, and completion rates [2]. To uncover inequities and define precise measures for action, institutional data should be disaggregated by gender, socioeconomic status, disability, and other identity markers. Technology-enabled features can be integrated into existing institutional effectiveness frameworks such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), Balanced Scorecards, or Canvas dashboards [6] or developed through new platforms to enable inclusive data collection, analytics-driven quality assurance, and data-based student tracking mechanisms [41].

6.2. Develop and Implement Inclusive Metrics

And inclusiveness metrics should extend beyond tracking participation and retention to include student wellness, satisfaction, and a sense of belonging. The development of such metrics should involve diverse students and community stakeholders in order to ensure contextual relevance and legitimacy [28, 42].

6.3. Institutionalize Inclusive Leadership and Policy

Equity-focused stewardship is the prerogative of senior leadership. Higher educational institutions need to foster internal capacity for inclusive governance through leadership and staff training and culturally competent teaching and training policy frameworks [25, 33].

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6.4. Align Funding and Structural Planning with Equity Goals

Resource allocation models should be equity-informed. These also include funding allocation models intended to be equitable. This includes allocation toward scholarship funding, academic support, disability access, and investment in programs designed for historically marginalized groups [26, 29]. Recent initiatives highlight that data-enabled planning and analytics dashboards can further enhance such structural inclusiveness by allowing institutions to track participation, access, and completion trends among diverse groups in real time [6, 41]. These tools function as supportive mechanisms, helping leadership monitor progress toward equity goals, not replacing the human or policy dimensions of inclusive reform.

6.5. Establish Inclusive Quality Assurance Systems

For accreditation agencies and internal quality assurance mechanisms, it is essential to go beyond compliance and rankings to evaluate how effectively institutions support student diversity, engagement, and success [3, 42] which requires embedding inclusiveness into the evaluation tools, site visits, and audit frameworks.

6.6. Encourage Further Research and Comparative Evaluation

HEIs must focus on empirically testing inclusive OE models across institutional types and education systems. While frameworks such as those proposed by Camilleri [30], Ramāšio et al. [27] and Aithal and Maiya [32] provide conceptual or localized insights, few have undergone longitudinal or comparative validations. As seen in Gebretsadik [29] region-specific findings highlight the urgency of developing generalizable and equity-sensitive evaluation tools that capture student outcomes and institutional transformations across contexts.

The evolving routes leading to higher education alongside a growing and more scrutinized student population drive the need for change within higher education institutions. Their functions should go beyond meeting performance targets to include standards of equity and social justice. Therefore, in this study, a literature-informed inclusive effectiveness framework synthesized to respond to the rigid efficiency paradigm, not as a definitive model, but as an invitation to rethink institutional effectiveness in light of both outcomes and the degree of inclusion, support, and empowerment embedded in educational systems.

Disclosure of AI Use:

The authors used AI-based tools, including Grammarly for proofreading and ChatGPT (OpenAI, San Francisco, USA) for improving language clarity and coherence. These tools were employed solely for linguistic refinement and did not influence the study's conceptual development, analysis, or interpretation of results.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Table 2.
Codebook of Inclusiveness Indicators and Thematic Contributions (1978–2024) in OE framework of HEIs.

Theme	Indicators Identified	EDI-Indicator Type	Supporting Studies
Institutional Performance	Graduation rates, leadership-driven OE, institutional adaptability, outcome-based assessment, performance metrics Goal attainment, student/faculty satisfaction, institutional adaptability, stakeholder outcomes, resource utilization, benchmarking, quality assurance	Implicit	Aithal and Maiya [32], Camilleri [30], Gebretsadik [29], Irum, et al. [33], El Tahir, et al. [21], Mokadem, et al. [34], Hassan, et al. [20], Yaakub and Mohamed [26], Pounder [16] and Taylor [14]
Access & Retention	Scholarship schemes, dropout prevention, support services, flexible learning, marginalized student access policies. Student access pathways, dropout prevention, support systems, scholarships, completion tracking, flexible curriculum, outreach to marginalized groups.	Explicit/Implicit	Aithal and Maiya [32], Camilleri [30], Dey and Sood [25], Mokadem, et al. [34], Ramāšio, et al. [27] and Shimizu, et al. [17]
Cultural & Social Inclusion	Equity policies, gender inclusiveness, inclusive curriculum, cultural responsiveness, inclusive student engagement, belonging, well-being	Explicit/Implicit	Aithal and Maiya [32], Camilleri [30], Gebretsadik [29], Irum, et al. [33], Mokadem, et al. [34], Ojala and Vartiainen [18] and Shimizu, et al. [17]
Faculty & Leadership Development	Faculty diversity, inclusive governance, Quality, access, staff development, equity-oriented training	Implicit	Aithal and Maiya [32], Cameron [4], Irum, et al. [33], Kallio, et al. [24], Luo and Photchanachan [31], Lysons [15], Mokadem, et al. [34], Moran [23], Pounder [16] and Taylor [14]
Policies for Sustainability & Structural Inclusiveness	Inclusive QA systems, equitable resource planning, diversity policies, infrastructure QA and audit mechanisms, resource reallocation, long-term sustainability policy, stakeholder accountability	Explicit/Implicit	Aithal and Maiya [32], Cameron [4], Dey and Sood [25], Irum, et al. [33], Mokadem, et al. [34] and Ramāšio, et al. [27]

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