

Redefining Inclusivity: a Cultural Studies Perspective Through Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This research focuses on the wide-ranging notion of inclusivity looking at cultural studies and highlights the non-Western contexts like Indonesia. Following PRISMA protocols, a systematic literature review was carried out on 45 selected articles published between the years of 2015 and 2025. The findings show that there are three primary themes: culture representation, power relations, and local traditions. It can also be remarked that the western notion of inclusivity seems inadequate when placed in collectivist contexts. ‘*Gotong royong*’ as an example of Indonesian inclusivity models reflects traditional local customs. Furthermore, decolonial and intersectional frameworks illuminate the enduring socio-historical inequalities that are shaped through identity-based hierarchies within practices of inclusion. This research articulates the need to develop a culturally specific framework of inclusivity which regards inclusivity as multiscopic; rooted in local contexts while applicable worldwide. It seeks to contribute to scholarship and guide policy for more inclusive governance towards social justice.

Keywords: *Inclusivity; Cultural Studies; Systematic Literature Review; Decolonial Approach; Intersectionality*

Introduction

As globalization continues to develop, inclusivity has emerged as a defining theme in sociocultural dialogues because the diversity of identities is now understood as one of the pillars of a just society. Inclusivity goes beyond differences; it embraces the integration and incorporation of those differences into a broader social and cultural framework (Banks, 2015). In cultural studies, the concept of inclusivity is often approached in relation to cultural practices, representation, and the social power relations that define group interactions. Recent studies have shown that inclusivity cannot be understood universally—its meaning is embedded in specific local cultures, histories, and politics (Magnússon et al., 2019). Thus, this approach to inclusivity provides a robust framework for rethinking its meaning in relation to contemporary realities (Ainscow, 2020). The purpose of this paragraph is to explain the role of inclusivity in the culture in which this research is rooted.

Cultural studies challenge inclusion by scrutinizing the overt forms of oppression which suppress a given population. As Kidd (2016) illustrates, there are pervasive cultural myths that uphold certain stereotypes which inhibit inclusivity. These cultural studies emphasize intersectionality by studying race, gender, and class in relation to inclusivity (Collins & Bilge, 2020). From a global viewpoint, cultural studies also look at the impact of colonial and postcolonial studies on inclusivity: who is deemed “included” and why. Bhabha (2012) and Boateng et al. (2024) emphasized that local cultural traditions often serve as battlegrounds for the negotiation of deeper forms of inclusivity. Cultural studies, therefore, not only critique injustice, but offer pathways for contextual cultural reconstruction of inclusivity.

The research development on inclusivity with regard to cultural studies marks a noticeable shift in the last ten years. Earlier scholarship often regarded inclusivity as the mere acknowledgment of diversity within structural confines, such as within educational and occupational settings (Bell, 2016; Smith, 2024). Still, more recent scholarship is starting to study

inclusivity within the frameworks of popular culture, digital media, and public domains (Edensor, 2020; Hayes, 2021). As an example, the works of Xian (2023) and Kuipers (2019) examined the ways through which social media allows for the redefinition of inclusivity by marginalized groups through counter narrative. Moreover, there are numerous studies that emphasize the difficulties of applying the term inclusivity within a non-Western cultural context due to the predominant collectivist worldview which stands in contrast to Western individualistic frameworks (Bhuiyan et al., 2025; Saxena & Singh, 2023). Also, the research by Zembylas (2023) showed that there is an increasing tendency to focus on a decolonial perspective within cultural studies, concerning inclusivity as an approach to address historical inequities. This review reveals the continued evolution of inclusivity scholarship, highlighting the enduring need for a multi-contextual and cross-cultural definitional framework.

Like any other aspect, inclusivity in cultural studies faces challenges both methodological and conceptual. One of the most challenging tasks is how to gauge inclusivity in cultures and practices which are often subjective and contextual (Davis, 2016). Research by Jobe et al. (2022) shows that definitions of inclusivity that are too general often fail to capture the nuances of local culture. Moreover, qualitative approaches in cultural studies, although rich in insight, are often criticized for their lack of generalizability (Polishchuk et al., 2024). The work of Lien (2025) illustrates the challenge of incorporating non-Western cultures into a global framework of inclusivity while preserving authenticity. This lack of definitional clarity stems from insufficient scholarship on inclusivity and merits a more methodical approach; thus, a Systematic Literature Review is warranted for developing a contextual and thorough definition framed within existing literature (Gough et al., 2017).

In the Indonesian context, inclusivity has urgent relevance due to the cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity that characterizes its society. Research by Wahyuni et al. (2018) shows that inclusivity in Indonesia is often realized through local cultural practices, such as gotong royong, but still faces challenges from identity conflicts. Murti (2024)

found that inclusivity narratives within Indonesian media were mainly dominated by the perspectives of the majority group. Furthermore, Sunarimahingsih et al. (2018) emphasized the failure to incorporate indigenous peoples into the nationalism discourse as actively participating within the inclusivity framework. The most recent research from Hutabarat (2023) also emphasizes the need for policies to recognize the local culture in the discourse of inclusivity. This perspective highlights the importance of redefining inclusivity within the framework of cultural relativism concerning the Indonesian context.

Despite the progress made regarding inclusivity in cultural studies, there is still a lack of clarity in definitional bounds of inclusivity, particularly in countries like Indonesia. This study seeks to resolve this gap by conducting a Systematic Literature Review to look at cultural studies to adapt a different lens of inclusivity. The primary outcome of this research is to propose a model that defines inclusivity which is sensitive to sociocultural and political realities which is able to simultaneously reflect global and local dynamics. This framework will help the academic and policy-making communities deepen their understanding of inclusivity beyond its surface dimensions, as well as aid cultural policies that promote inclusiveness. Therefore, this study will help to further develop more equitable local and global discourses on inclusivity.

Methods

This research employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to extract, assess, and integrate cultural studies literature on inclusivity. The SLR approach was selected as it provides a comprehensive and transparent review of the literature (Vrabel, 2015). This study's SLR adheres to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses) guidelines to ensure the systematisation and replicability of the work (Page et al., 2021). The literature reviewed encompasses journal articles, book chapters, and even conference papers published after 2015, focusing on cultural studies and inclusivity (Gough et al., 2017). Academic searches were performed in several databases utilising the keywords

“inclusivity,” “cultural studies,” and “cultural perspectives” (Zembylas, 2023). This section synthesizes the reasoning underlying methodologies clarifying how specific steps were addressed within the work to preserve ethnographic inquiry rigor and detail how precision was upheld throughout.

The selection of literature adhered to a three-part framework: identification, screening, and assessing eligibility criteria. In the identification stage, the first search produced a plethora of articles that were sorted against certain criteria. These included relevance to cultural studies, and publications either in English or Indonesian (Snyder, 2019). Also, exclusion criteria were employed to exclude non-scholarly data, such as opinion based articles and non-refereed publications to ensure quality (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Eligibility assessment was conducted using quality appraisal tools such as CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme), which allow for systematic evaluation of the validity and relevance of studies (Long et al., 2020). Research by Lien (2025) emphasized the importance of transparency in the screening process to avoid selection bias. The data that qualified underwent further extraction and thematically analysed to isolate patterns and themes pertaining to definitions of inclusivity, within a cultural framework.

In this study, data analysis was conducted using a narrative synthesis approach to combine findings from different studies. This was selected as it enabled the inclusivity phenomenon to be captured in complex terms in cultural studies, which are mostly qualitative in nature (Stern et al., 2020). The synthesis was done by categorising the findings into themes like Cultural Representation, Power Relations, and Local Inclusivity (Saxena & Singh, 2023). To ensure accuracy, data triangulation was performed by comparing findings from primary and secondary sources (Hutabarat, 2023). Research by Polishchuk et al. (2024) highlights the importance of reflexivity in SLR analysis to address researcher bias. The results of this analysis are expected to yield a contextual and relevant definition of inclusivity from the perspective of cultural studies, particularly in the global and Indonesian contexts.

Findings and discussion

Following PRISMA protocols and meticulous inclusion and exclusion criteria, I was able to retrieve 45 articles from a systematic search within published literature. The identified literature had been published between 2015 and 2025, most of it centered on inclusivity within Cultural studies (Page et al., 2021). The corresponding analysis based on each mosaic and structural segments revealed three critical aspects: cultural representation and power relations, alongside local practices of inclusivity. These illustrate the varying scope of definitional approaches toward inclusivity (Gough et al., 2017). The work demonstrates that there is no single understanding of inclusivity; rather, it is dependent on specific socio-historical frameworks (Magnússon et al., 2019).

The cultural representation theme examines the impact of media and art on inclusivity perception. Edensor (2020) indicates that prevalent mainstream media tends to reproduce stereotypes that serve as barriers to inclusivity. In contrast, Hayes (2021) demonstrate that marginalized groups can construct alternative inclusive narratives on digital platforms. Collins & Bilge (2020) defines representative multicultural inclusivity as the acknowledgment of diversity among constituents' identities, which includes but is not limited to; ethnicity, gender, and class. Xian (2023) confirms that visual art serves as a means of construction inclusivity through honest representation. The collective outcome of these studies suggests that cultural representation is fundamental to redefining inclusivity.

From the angle of cultural studies, power dynamics stand out as a core theme regarding inclusivity (or lack thereof) within a given culture. As revealed in Bhabha (2012), the inclusionary and exclusionary frameworks society uses is still heavily lent upon remnants of colonial structures. A study by Kidd (2016) found that dominant narratives often exclude minority groups through symbolic mechanisms. The intersectional approach shows that power does not operate through a single dimension, such as race, but through the interaction of various identities (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Research by Boateng et al. (2024) revealed that power negotiation in local cultural practices can create more equitable

spaces of inclusivity. These dynamics affirm the need to consider power in defining inclusivity.

Indigenous community perspectives show the cultural impact on the concept of inclusion. Based on Wahyuni et al. (2018), mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*) in Indonesia has inclusiveness which stems from collective culture. Nevertheless, the study by Sunarimahingsih et al. (2018) focuses on the adequacy of the indigenous community perspective, which tends to be too broad or generalized about the local, or indigenous, communities. Research conducted by Hutabarat (2023) shows that community-driven programs will promote greater inclusiveness through intercultural dialogue. This approach departs from Western models which are mostly individualistic in nature (Saxena & Singh, 2023). These findings demonstrate the need to pay attention to inclusivity from diverse cultures.

In culture studies, this research reveals inclusivity gaps resulting from insufficient defining criteria. Jobe et al. (2022) criticizes these wide-scope frameworks for overlooking local cultures. The study by Lien (2025) shows how inclusivity is defined, proposing a westernized perspective which renders such frameworks invalid in non-western contexts. Meaningful inclusivity requires a culturally sensitive approach (Ainscow, 2020). (Gough et al., 2017) propose that SLR can be used to establish more nuanced and contextual definitions, which is a step in this direction. These studies reinforce the argument for redefining inclusivity from a cultural standpoint.

Emergent social media platforms are becoming indispensable for the advocacy of inclusivity in the multicultural domain. Kuipers (2019) has noted that social media allows a voice for marginalized social groups. On the contrary, Hayes (2021) pointed out the possibility of social media algorithms promoting exclusive biases. Culture-oriented digital campaigns can foster inclusivity awareness as noted by Xian (2023). Such attempts need to be counterbalanced by digital literacies to avoid misrepresentation (Edensor, 2020). Social media, therefore, holds dual potential as a tool for both inclusivity and exclusion.

The decolonial approach within cultural studies has the capacity to reshape the consideration of inclusivity. Zembylas (2023) inclusively argues that inclusivity must also address sociocultural hierarchies stemming from colonialism. As noted by

Bhabha (2012), there is a need to allow access to the gatekept systems that enable the telling of stories of those who are rendered invisible. This is a decolonial perspective which certainly applies to Indonesia, where the past colonial relation influences the sociocultural landscape (Wahyuni et al., 2018). This has also been done by Lien (2025) as they sought to redefine inclusivity. This reinforces the idea that inclusivity has to be debated within the context of history.

Due to the rich diversity of culture and religion, inclusivity in the Indonesian context faces challenges. Murti (2024) shows that the narratives of inclusivity in the media have been dominated by the majority viewpoint. Sunarimahingsih et al. (2018) Investigated the issue of national discourse and showed that indigenous communities are often unrepresented. Hutabarat (2023) suggests local culture such as *musyawarah* as effective models of inclusivity. However, identity conflicts pose as obstacles (Wahyuni et al., 2018). This further highlights the problem as to why there is a lack sensitivity when defining inclusivity in the Indonesian context.

The intersectional approach in cultural studies enriches the understanding of inclusivity. Research by Collins & Bilge (2020) shows that inclusivity must consider the interaction between race, gender, and class. According to Boateng et al. (2024), an intersectional approach sheds light on obscured disparities within cultural practices. As noted by Ainscow (2020), globalization interlinks local and global issues, making intersectionality pertinent in both realms. In the context of Indonesia, this approach can illuminate the experiences of various underprivileged demographics (Hutabarat, 2023). Intersectionality, therefore, becomes an important tool in redefining inclusivity.

The obstructive intricacies of a methodology for studying inclusivity as an area of knowledge also stand out as notable findings. Davis (2016) outlines the issues surrounding measurement of inclusivity as a result of its subjective character. Polishchuk et al. (2024) argues qualitative research is often criticized on the grounds of lack of generalizability. Gough et al. (2017) propose that SLR could resolve these issues by systemically synthesizing the evidence. Although, researcher reflexivity is still required to

eliminate bias (Lien, 2025). Such challenges have underlined the matter of robust methodology in inclusivity research.

We can see from the literature that inclusivity within cultural studies is changing for the better and becoming more contextualized. Saxena & Singh (2023) demonstrated that Asian collectivist values shape inclusivity perceptions. Zembylas (2023) pointed out the recent global shift towards more decolonial perspectives. In Indonesia, research by Hutabarat (2023) shows that local practices are increasingly recognized as models of inclusivity. Research by Ainscow (2020) asserts that contextual approaches are more effective than universal models. This shift reflects the need for a flexible definition of inclusivity.

Indonesia's local cultures can transform the meaning of inclusivity. Wahyuni et al. (2018) has researched gotong royong as an inclusionary practice which is a cultural hallmark. Sunarimahingsih et al. (2018) presented a study which showed that dialogue between communities can promote inclusivity within the locality. Research by Hutabarat (2023) indicates that culture-based initiatives, such as traditional arts, can promote inclusivity. However, challenges such as modernization may weaken these local practices (Murti, 2024). These local practices affirm the importance of culture in the discourse on inclusivity.

This discussion also uncovers the gaps in literature regarding inclusivity. Jobe et al. (2022) notes the absence of scholarship which profoundly applies non-Western viewpoints. According to Lien (2025), literature often oversimplifies the richness of local cultures. Research by Saxena & Singh (2023) suggests that more studies are needed to understand inclusivity in collectivist contexts. In Indonesia, research on indigenous communities is still limited (Sunarimahingsih et al., 2018). These gaps indicate the need for further, more inclusive research.

The findings of this study affirm that inclusivity must be redefined through the lens of cultural studies. Research by Gough et al. (2017) shows that SLR is effective in constructing comprehensive definitions. A study by Zembylas (2023) highlights the importance of decolonial perspectives in the definition of inclusivity. In Indonesia, a local culture-based approach is needed to ensure relevance (Hutabarat, 2023). This study offers a geopolitically

relevant framework of inclusivity, thus contributing to the global discourse (Ainscow, 2020). This recomposition is intended to promote more equitable policies and strategies.

Cited works Edensor (2020), Bhabha (2012), and Wahyuni et al. (2018) remark that inclusivity is not only context-sensitive, but also shaped by the prevailing power structures, traditions and representation in a given society. This is further rationalized by Zembylas (2023) and Collins & Bilge (2020) who have offered de-colonial and interdisciplinary frameworks which inclusively broaden the concept of inclusivity. Indonesia displays elements of inclusivity within local cultures, but issues like conflict and identity struggle remain (Hutabarat, 2023). This study lacks the proposal of cultural studies with wider context and inclusivity to advance more justice in society (Gough et al., 2017).

Conclusion

Cultural inclusivity requires a redefinition in multicultural lenses, as it is commonly assumed to be static in a given cultural context. The Systematic Literature Review shows that cultural representation, power relations, and local customs are the broader context to inclusivity. Historically rooted inequalities have impacted the inclusivity discourse; however, decolonial and intersectional approaches have broadened the inclusivity discourse. In Indonesia, local cultural practices like gotong royong embody true inclusivity, but the lingering issues of identity conflict and the majority narrative still pose problems. This study offers a culturally sensitive conceptual framework that contributes to global and local discourse.

This research highlights the critical role SLRs and similarly structured methodologies play in formulating a comprehensive definition of inclusivity. It has been noted that definitions that are too broad often ignore cultural subtleties in Indonesia. Thus, any reconceptualization of inclusivity needs to address concepts of collectivism and the region's historical narrative to achieve social justice. This study further suggests a focused examination of local cultural elements and the non-Western dimensions of inclusivity. Therefore, this

research aims to shape strategies and frameworks toward an inclusive and just society.

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