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**Article**

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Article

# Racial Inclusion in Education: An Australian Context

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**Abstract:** Racism in various forms exists worldwide. In Australia, racism is inextricably linked to the history of Australian immigrants and early settlers. Although the Australian education system has adopted inclusive education, evidence shows several incidents of racial exclusion. With the public education system experiencing an increased cultural diversity in student population, schools are required to develop inclusive education policies. While policies related to disability inclusion have been in practice for many years, only recently has there been an increasing awareness of racial inclusion. This research paper explores the importance of racial inclusion in education by examining the causes and effects of racial exclusion in the Australian education context. This paper considers existing practices at the national level and in schools to explore racial discrimination. It identifies the factors contributing towards racism and proposes a framework employing key strategies at the macro, meso and micro levels to achieve racial inclusion in education. It also suggests opportunities based on research to strengthen the response against racism.

**Keywords:** education; racial inclusion; diversity; community; impact; strategies

## 1. Introduction

With globalisation, there has been more opportunities for the education systems in many countries to experience a diverse international population. This trend has resulted in an increase in research efforts in addressing numerous cases of inequity, exclusion and discrimination around the world (Thomas and Clarke 2013; Jaumotte et al. 2013). There is a school of thought that rising inequality could affect the sustainability of globalization unless it is addressed across the population of an institute, or even a country as a whole. In general, it is believed that an organisation's culture can be understood by assessing the beliefs, values, attitudes, and behavior of individuals, and how they are shared by the employees to form relationships in the workplace (UNESCO 2017). In many cases, organizational inequality and diversity influences institutions through "glass-ceiling", biased outcomes or racism (Mansouri et al. 2012). Generally, these situations are considered to be connected to the workplaces or to the politics that are related to management decisions, based on influencing factors such as profitability, leadership power, or political agenda. Yet less is known about the factors that influence social inequality, and more importantly in the education system that affects all communities (Lamont et al. 2014; Schindler and Zeller 2011).

Research studies have considered countries like Australia, Canada, and Colombia that practice inclusive education (Abawi et al. 2018). For the educational leaders of schools in such countries, inclusive schooling is considered as a continuing process. In Australia, disability-inclusive education laws have been introduced with the aim to uphold the rights of students with *disability* to access *education*. Many support mechanisms have evolved through education policies that have initial roots based on the 1992 Disability Discrimination Act and the 2005 Disability Standards for Education (Australian Government 2005). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities was ratified with the right for inclusive education (The United Nations 2006).

Recent studies in certain countries have revealed that by having legal and administrative measures for anti-discrimination, immigrant children could benefit from truancy reduction interventions (Yang and Ham 2017). There is evidence of learning success in schools that have incorporated antiracism strategies and one-on-one school-based interventions (Auld 2018; Ülger et al. 2018; Cameron and Rutland 2016). Some studies report the visibility of racism and the differences in perceptions. School leaders tend to under-acknowledge racism and overestimate the effects of anti-racism and visible differences could influence peer, teacher and school community relationships (Dunn et al. 2014; Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson 2016; Baak 2018). Hence, some studies have emphasized defining, theorizing and conceptualizing racism to bring out several differences, forms and effects of racism (Paradies et al. 2015; Ikuenobe 2010; Stein and Oliveira 2018).

Many studies report that racism is not merely an ideology or system of beliefs, rather it is a part of the social structure. In any country, everyday practice, social policy and government law form the social structure that transcend individual cognition about racism. In certain developed countries like Australia, support mechanisms based on National School Improvement Tool (ACER 2012) were introduced in Australian schools for school improvement towards inclusive education. However, the schools faced some implementation complexities due to the rising diversity of student populations (Taylor et al. 2016). Several studies (Yang and Ham 2017; Auld 2018; Ülger et al. 2018; Cameron and Rutland 2016; Dunn et al. 2014; Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson 2016; Baak 2018) have explored issues as key drivers of racism such as the lack of (i) racism awareness, (ii) antiracism strategies and (iii) administrative measures. However, these studies do not explore the dimensions of racism in depth with regard to inclusive education. This gap in literature is the motivation for this paper to explore discrimination and racial exclusion that are very much part of modern education.

The remaining paper is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the meaning of exclusion in education and racism, which forms the basis for this study. Section 3 provides the Australian context with regard to its diversity that plays a role in racism. In Section 4, we identify 8 key factors that influence racial discrimination. In Section 5, we propose strategies within an education system framework to address racism. Finally, we provide conclusions in Section 6.

## 2. Exclusion in Education and Racism

A commonly accepted definition of 'exclusion' is: "the act of not allowing someone or something to take part in an activity or to enter a place" (Cambridge Dictionary 2019). In society, exclusion happens when someone is left out of mainstream, deprived of opportunities for participation in processes or by being indifferent to their views and experiences. In an educational system, exclusion does not mean "out-of-school children" alone, it has many forms and expressions. More insights can be gained by understanding the terms 'inclusion' and 'equity' whose definitions by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2012) are given below:

"Inclusion is a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners. Equity is about ensuring that there is a concern with fairness, such that the education of all learners is seen as having equal importance."

There is tremendous pressure on schools as they face the challenge of producing high quality educational outcomes for each and every student of a diverse population. Apart from catering to special needs such as disabilities, the rising international student population require schools to provide support in English language and other migration issues. Students facing trauma or other difficulties require support systems. The absence of such support systems or measures that can positively mediate conflicts due to diversity in religious beliefs, culture, value systems and economies have resulted in racism. Although the connection between exclusion and racism cannot be easily defined, in general, we can say that decisions, policies and various social dynamics drive racism.

Racism is a global phenomenon and takes different forms in different environments. It has many forms and expressions. Racism is a belief that a particular group of people is inferior or superior to

others on the basis of race, color, descent, accent, national or ethnic origin, appearance, religion or belief (DET 2010; Paradies 2016; Forrest and Dunn 2007; Szoke 2012). In Australia, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission defines:

“Racism is an ideology that gives expression to myths about other racial and ethnic groups that devalues and renders inferior those groups that reflects and is perpetuated by deeply rooted historical, social, cultural and power inequalities in society.”

Racism in Australia is inextricably connected to the history of settlement and migrations. The colonisation practices like confrontation, forced labour and slavery, eviction from their lands had affected original residents (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) (Paradies 2016). They were discriminated against for two centuries by the British and European settlers, e.g., exclusion of non-Europeans due to the White Australia policy. The immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, Asia and Muslims countries led to the increased cultural and linguistic diversity of the Australian population (DET 2010; Forrest and Dunn 2007; Blackmore 2007) and identified as significant “Others” (Rizvi 1997). Modern Australian society is highly multicultural, but it still has Anglo (Anglo-Celtic) cultural dominance and prejudice. Furthermore, intolerance of diversity and antagonism towards some cultural groups are evident (Forrest and Dunn 2006; Haigh 2009).

In an education system, different forms of exclusion can occur at many moments and can have different effects that can lead to social exclusion. It is crucial to understand when exclusion occurs in the educational system and effectively address it. We list three different key expressions of exclusion from schools or an educational institute with suitable examples:

- A. Entry exclusion—for example, a student’s cultural attire other than the school uniform is considered against the policy and prohibited by the school.
- B. Regular and continuing participation exclusion—for example, a student is unable to attend school on specific days due to religious or life demands.
- C. Meaningful learning exclusion—for example, the language of instruction or discouraging experiences like bullying at school could make the environment non-conducive for student learning.

These forms of exclusion can occur at the start of primary level education, during primary education period, at the end of primary level schooling, at the entry point or during the course or at the completion point of secondary and post-secondary education. Exclusion is present in both formal and non-formal educational forms. Figure 1 shows different forms of exclusion experienced by the people during their course of education.

- A – Exclusion from entry into a school
- B – Exclusion from regular and continuing participation in school
- C – Exclusion from meaningful learning experiences

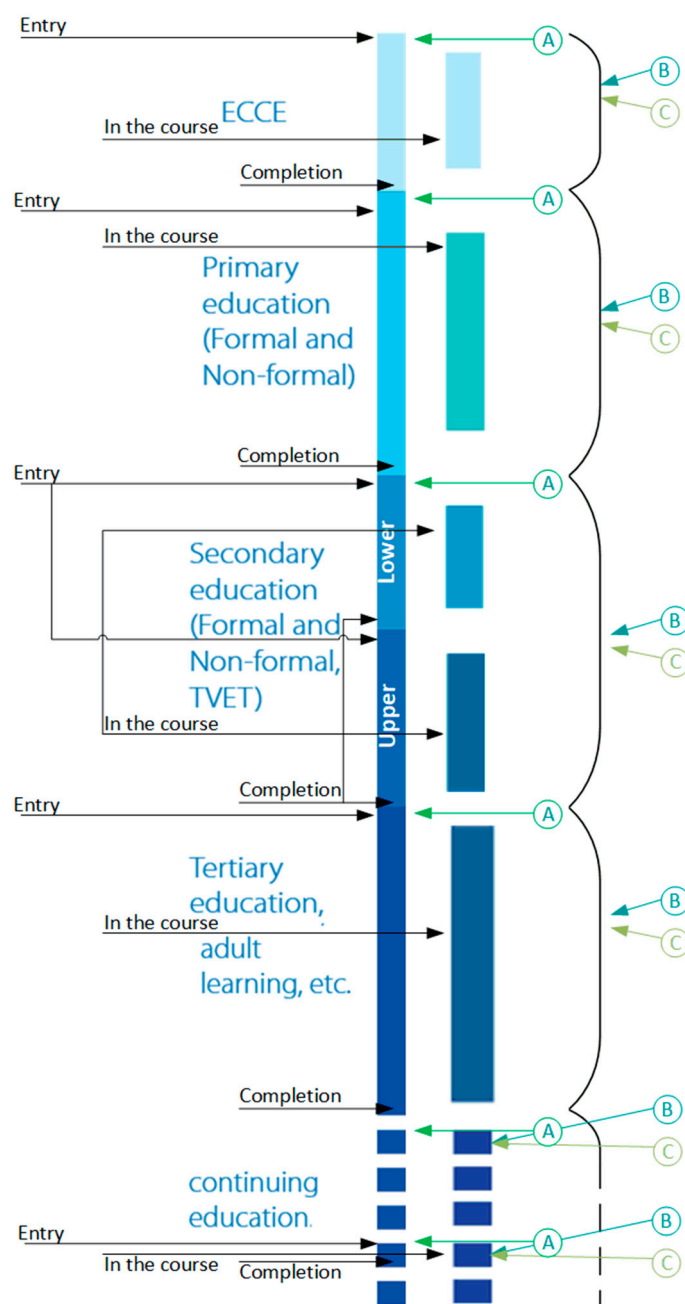


Figure 1. Forms and moments of exclusion in education.

### 3. Diversity in the Australian Context

Historical events and policies framed in various parts of the world have influenced the migration patterns in Australia. Since World War II, overseas-born migrants have contributed to the main population of Australia. Although initially most of these migrants were originating from Europe, there has been a drop shown in migrant percentage in 2016 as compared to previous years. Since 1970s, migrants from South-East Asia, and more recently from several Asian countries have been on the rise. Importantly, there has been a significant increase in migrant population from China and India. Australia is also witnessing increasing migrants from other countries outside Europe and Asia.

Figure 2 gives its population distribution based on the top five birth countries of migrants (ABS 2016). This makes Australia a hugely diverse nation, which can be a major factor for the increase in racism.

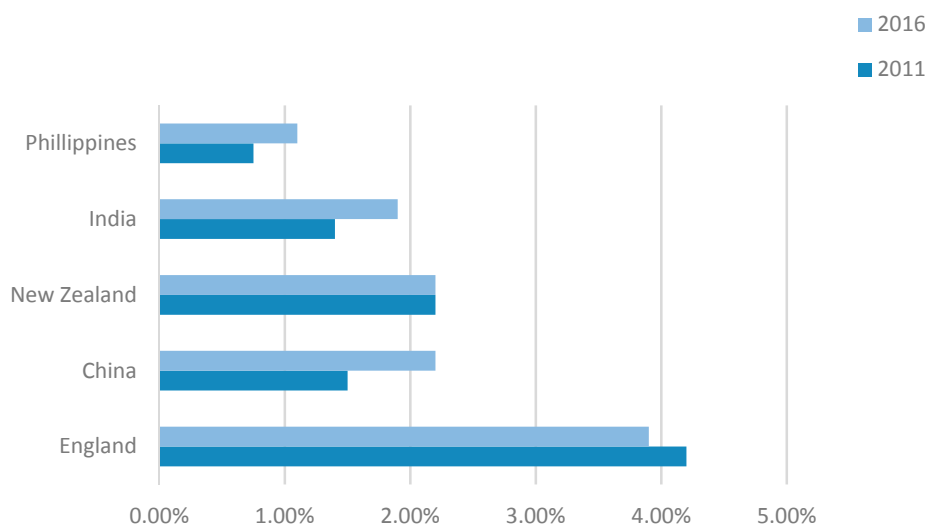


Figure 2. Top five country migrants to Australia.

Among first generation Australians, the percentage of population who spoke a language other than English was high (53%). However, it was much lower among second-generation Australians (20%) and third-generation Australians (1.6%). In the past decade, the most common languages spoken at home (other than English) were Mandarin (4.3%), Cantonese (4.2%), Italian (3.7%) and Vietnamese (3.2%). However, among the newly arrived migrants, about one-third (32.6%) aged above 5 years spoke only English at home, and other common languages spoken were Mandarin (10.8%), Punjabi (3.7%), Hindi (3.3%) and Arabic (3.0%) (ABS 2016). According to the census 2016, more than 300 languages other than English are spoken in Australian homes. The chart shown in Figure 3 provides the diversity of languages spoken by recent arrivals in Australia. Studies show that the probability of racism increases when there is an increase in the number of non-English speakers (Priest et al. 2016).

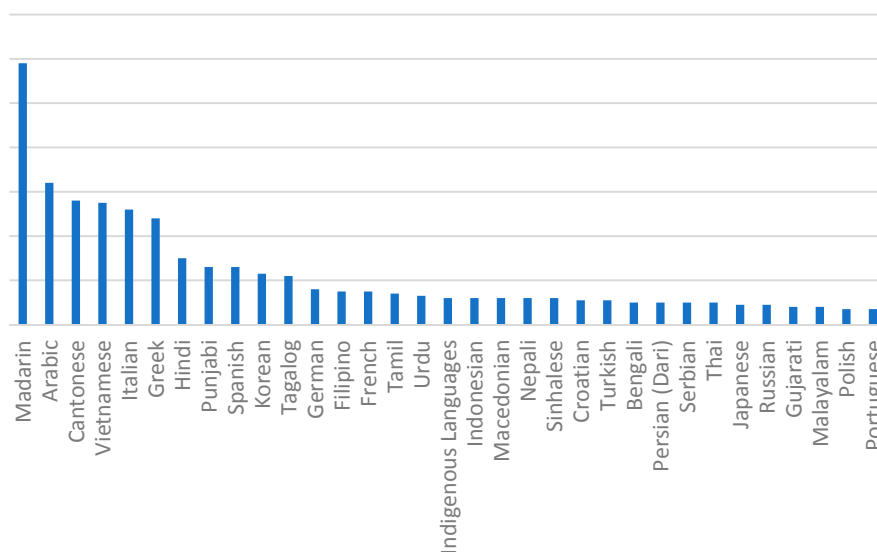


Figure 3. Languages spoken at home by recent arrivals.

Religion is another aspect that has been negatively linked with racism and has undergone much change between 1996 and 2016 in Australia, showing a considerable increase in the number of people

reporting a non-Christian faith. Christianity is still the main religion with 88.2% of the population in 1966 and 74% in 1991. However, the Christian proportion had decreased to 52% by 2016. Figure 4 shows the religious diversity in Australia (ABS 2016).

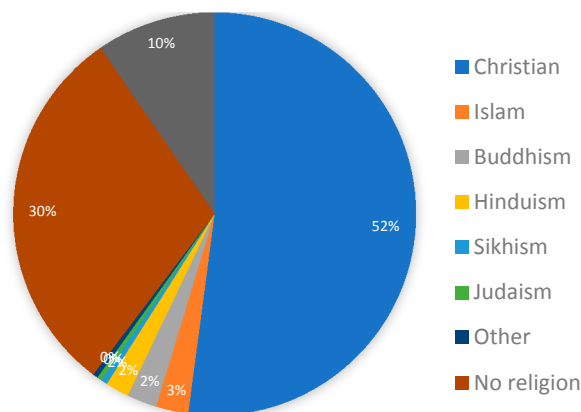


Figure 4. Religion in Australia (ABS 2016).

#### 4. Factors of Racial Discrimination

Racism can be evident in Australian schools from a variety of sources, such as educational reports, official complaint records and independent studies. Racist violence, harassment and abuse are closely related to bullying, and sometimes hard to differentiate them (Priest et al. 2016). In schools, racism can vary from ill-considered remarks, such as name-calling, injury, destruction of property, taunting or even insults and intended physical attacks causing death. Racism can directly or indirectly discriminate students from accessing facilities or services and participating in sport, learning or social activities (Priest et al. 2016; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development DEECD). In this paper, we have identified eight key factors that can directly or indirectly be attributed to racism. Table 1 provides a brief description of these factors and empirical evidences that show the occurrence of racial dominance of a certain category of students over others.

Table 1. Factors attributed to racism.

Names	Description	Experience
<b>Institutional Structure</b>	School Policies and Practices that, intentionally or unintentionally, are directly or indirectly biased.	A Sikh schoolboy was denied enrolment in a school because he could not adhere to the school uniform due to a religious rule (De Plevitz 2007).
<b>Race</b>	Student’s racial background makes them inferior/superior.	A South Sudanese student was teased and harassed at school because of the difference in background (Henrietta 2018).
<b>Colorism</b>	Whiteness is a physical descriptor and a privilege that enable whites to maintain power and control in school.	A female student was harassed by her peers for having dark skin and resulted in having no friends (DET 2010; McMahan 2007).
<b>Non-English-Speaking Background (NESB)</b>	Both NESB students and teacher observe biased attitudes about their English language competence and learning abilities, qualifications and progress opportunities.	An Afghan student was abused by a peer about his manner of speech and accent (Mansouri et al. 2012).

Table 1. Cont.

Names	Description	Experience
Religion	Student different religious beliefs mark them superior or inferior.	Female students wearing hijab are marked to be passive female due to hijab being considered as a symbol of the gender oppression (Imtoul 2006).
Social and Economic Status	Students judged by where they live, how rich they are and so on.	Any robbery incidence at school results in suspecting a black-skinned student straightaway due to their link to poverty (Mansouri et al. 2012).
Reverse racism	Students from minorities become prominent and biased against majority or other groups.	An Anglo-Saxon student in a class with a majority of Vietnamese students and teachers felt being deliberately excluded (Mansouri et al. 2012).
Lack of Knowledge	On school staff and teacher's part, lack of cross-cultural and beliefs understanding and awareness Student's lack of unfamiliarity about other races and beliefs	A Burundian black girl, felt racially humiliated and excluded when the teacher laughed with other students while reading a story book about a black man and a white woman (Mansouri et al. 2012).

The real problem is not only what causes feelings of animosity but also the terrible outcomes that are a result of it (DET 2010; VicHealth 2007). Racism is recognized to have established its root grounds due to the Aboriginal Australians' intense socio-economic and health disadvantage (Larson et al. 2007). According to 138 empirical quantitative population-based studies, racism is consistently associated with negative outcomes affecting one's mental health and other health-related behaviors, such as defensive response, anti-social behavior, psychological distress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and anger (Mansouri et al. 2012; Paradies et al. 2015; Lewis et al. 2015; Bailey et al. 2017). Based on these factors attributed to racial discrimination, in the next section we propose an education system framework that provides guidelines to address these issues.

## 5. Education System Framework to Address Racism

After neglecting the issue of racism in schools in the past, many Australian educational departments and schools are more recently focusing on dealing with the challenges posed in order to become more inclusive (De Plevitz 2007). In many countries, social group hierarchies and contextual events have helped to shape the perceptions of racism. We propose a strategic framework that contains practical steps that can be adopted at three different levels (Table 2 on next page):

- Macro-National level—involves changes in the legal and public policies,
- Meso-Organizational level—involves management strategies in various schools
- Micro-Individual level—involves approaches undertaken by the students.

The world economy is fueled by unlimited pool of labour from developing countries such as China and India due to globalisation. These trends have resulted in the stagnation, or even decline in the wages of middle and lower income workforce in developed countries (Cingano 2014). Mincer equations have suggested that the wage depends on education, and other studies have supported that education increases the average level of wages, in general (Mincer 1974; Budria 2010; Biagetti and Scicchitano 2011). However, analyses of the whole wage distribution have demonstrated larger wage dispersion with workers having higher education as compared to workers with lesser education (Biagetti and Scicchitano 2011; Martins and Pereira 2004). These studies indicate that wage inequality also depends on the structure of the labour market. Both unskilled and skilled workers are required to compete with the global workforce. These inequalities in employment opportunities is another factor



for widespread racism in developed countries. The most common area where such inequalities have an impact is in the education system of a nation.

A cycle of ongoing evaluation and strategies are required to ameliorate racial harmony issues at the mega-national level, meso-organisational level and micro-individual level in making continuous improvements. For example, although there exists extensive pressure on schools to produce anti-racism policies, not all schools have these fulfilled. In some states in Australia, despite mandatory enforcement, only 21 of the 40 schools had participated in such reforms (Szoke 2012; Syed and Kramar 2010).

**Table 2.** Strategic framework for inclusive education system.

Macro-National Level	Meso-Organizational Level	Micro-Individual Level
Australian Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA) to Elimination of all Forms of Racism	Anti-racism policy of schools as part of a general Behavior Management Policy or Discipline Policy or standalone	Student and their parents are educated to be aware of their own rights about racist acts
The Public Service Act 1999 (PSA) to manage diversity	Educational session for school staff and students - educate counter racism - attain cross-culture knowledge - get professional development	Bystander Training to behave in a supportive way to students who are being victims
National Anti-Racism Strategy 2012 and The People of Australia—Australia's Multicultural Policy should be linked to multiculturalism	Promotion of social behavior by - being role models as a Teacher and as a School - celebrating Multicultural events and encouraging participation. - giving incentives and certificates for good behavior	Assertiveness Training to respond assertively and requires the student to be respectful towards themselves and others equally
Government taking steps to eliminate racism and racial discrimination e.g., - Parliament passes legislation to recognize Indigenous people as Land owners - Apology to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander as Stolen Generations - Multicultural E-forum - Social Inclusion Week	Prevention of racial action by - designing curriculum content to develop social skills relevant to counter racism - engaging Students in constructive activities and reducing opportunities for racial behavior e.g., rigorous monitoring - using playground programs - encouraging anti-bullying committees of students - Using 'no-blame approaches'	Restorative practices to repair any harm made to relationships Students stand against the racial activities
Provision of information and resources for schools to tackle racial problems effectively e.g., video on 'Bullying—no way!'	Supporting victims provides assistance who are involved by both teachers and students e.g., Buddy systems	Encourage students who volunteer to tackle racial problems Students feel good about their racial heritage
Publicizing certain community groups that have worked with schools e.g., Buddy Bear School Program	Involving parents to counter Racism through - friendly Schools and Families program - developing policies - encouraging their children to cherish their culture and language	Involving student leaders to propagate inclusiveness

In ethnically divided communities, the government plays a major role at the national level to continuously evolve with macro-national level strategies (Mansouri et al. 2012; Frost 2008). Even leaders could take up individual initiatives to repair any harm made by their predecessors. For example, an emotional apology was issued by an Australian prime minister to Forgotten Australians

as certain British child migrants had historically suffered abuse and neglect in the country's state-run orphanages and religious institutions.

Restoring individual wellbeing is significant and everyone related to the people involved or affected by racism should be provided with necessary support and their circumstances should be monitored continuously. Teachers, staff and parents should be encouraged to voluntarily suggest improvements in the education system from time to time in order to avoid such repeated incidents (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development DEECD). The education system should be conducive for students, parents, teachers, schools and school community to consider their roles and responsibilities at the Micro-Individual level in building a racial-free school environment. Schools should work hard in developing good relationships among teachers, students and parents. Teacher-student behaviour in classrooms differs from one instance to another. Furthermore, education researchers, policy makers and practitioners often hold diverse views about the reasons for racism, and there seems to be no consensus.

There are group-based differences in the perceptions of racism and various extant research studies have explored several forms of racism (Carter and Murphy 2015; Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012). Different perceptions can lead to divergent attitudes about the prevalence of racism. Contextual influences can shape group-based perceptions of racism (Bailey et al. 2017). Many successful exemplars provide the degree of progress achieved in addressing racism (De Plevitz 2007). Studies on individual versus structural racism could demonstrate the perceptions and status of current social inequality (Correa-Montoya and Castro-Martínez 2016; Anderson and Boyle 2015). Such opportunities based on research could help strengthen the response against racism.

Even though the alignment of policies and laws with international standards has led to inclusion, different countries may use the same educational policy differently (Maclean 2017; Miškolci et al. 2016). While a shared understanding about inclusive education is available at a theoretical level, several political and policy adoption realities have an impact at the operational level subjective to different educational contexts (Jahnukainen 2015). Hence, this paper has focused on practical approaches to addressing racial inclusion, predominantly in the context of Australian education.

## 6. Conclusions

This research identified several key factors that attribute for racial exclusion in educational systems of Australia. This paper described how schools and education departments are currently viewing the problem, and the practical actions they need to take in order to address racism. Although it may not be possible to eradicate racism completely, it can certainly be diminished by leaps and bounds with the proposed strategic framework for racial inclusion. The macro, meso and micro level strategies could be adopted by school policy makers and educators who are examining how to improve systems in order to prevent or reduce incidents of racism from happening in their own schools. Although the framework proposed in this paper provided strategies relating to Australian education system, it can also be applied to other contexts with the aim of providing a practical benefit to weaken the root of racism. Future research should continue to throw light on varying perceptions of racism so as to identify ways to broaden the strategies to achieve racial inclusion in diverse contexts.

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