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Unseen Walls in Academia: Does Epistemic Exclusion Mediate Inclusive Climate and Societal Marginalization?

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Abstract

This study investigates the mediating role of epistemic exclusion between inclusive climate and societal marginalization in Turkish Universities. In plural and complex university settings, it may be that traditional assessment metrics and hierarchical relationships across disciplines sometimes devalue certain research contributions—potentially giving rise to epistemic exclusion. Such exclusion might, in turn, play a role in broader processes of scholarly marginalization within society. Using a correlational design and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), a heterogeneous sample of 382 academic personnel of several public and private Turkish universities was collected. Inclusive Climate Scale, Epistemic Exclusion Scale and Societal Marginalization Scale were used as perception measures. The main findings indicate that inclusive climate is a negative predictor of societal marginalization and formal and informal epistemic exclusion. Furthermore, both informal and formal epistemic exclusion predicted societal marginalization specifically. Demographic features of th academics also appear linked to experiences of formal epistemic exclusion and social marginalization, including factors such as academic field, seniority, administrative role and gender. These results indicate that structural barriers inherent in formal institutional routines such as scholarly recognition procedures and assessment criteria are core perpetuators of academic marginalization, even in settings committed to inclusivity.

Introduction

Higher education institutions include people having diverse identity characteristics, thereby these institutions openly represent the diversity of an increasingly globalized world. Diversity has generally been associated with race, gender, and culture. However, recent literature suggests that diversity also includes a wide range of characteristics such as age, sexual orientation, ethnic and religious background, socioeconomic status, place of birth, socio-economic status, work experience, education and training etc. (Phillips, 2019). In this sense, diversity represents a mixture of qualities that make an individual or agroup different than others (Cross, 2004). Ensuring that any kind of diversity in higher education institutions are represented without becoming becoming a factor for discrimination or superiority, has become even more important in the context of increasing globalization and internationalization needs.

Equal representation of any kind of diversit in higher education institutions not only increases the institution's visibility and reputation but also contributes to the integration of the society by improving emphaty abilities of students (Gurin et al., 2002; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Van Vught, 2008). Transforming higher education institutions into environments that can inspire the rest of the society for diversity representation, equity, and pluralism can only be achieved with creating inclusive climate. In an inclusive organizational climate, diversity is seen an asset, individuals of various backgrounds are valued equally and can participate in decision-making processes (Ashikali et al., 2021; Mor Barak et al., 2016; Shore et al., 2011). In such organizations, integration of underrepresented or minority groups are supported by both the formal and informal structures of the institution (Dwertmann et al., 2016). Accordingly, it can be said that in higher education institutions which do not have an inclusive climate, individuals or groups who are seen different from the majority may face exclusion.

Exclusion of some identity groups which are diversity in higher education institutions may lead to the societal marginalization of individuals who are accepted as different pf minority (Settles et al., 2024). In this context, the phenomenon of societal marginalization in organizations means restriction of certain individuals or groups from accessing to organizational resources, exclusion of them from decision making processes and ignoring them systematically (Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Perry & Perry, 2012). This kind of exclusion makes people feel “othered” and these people experience the disadvantages that come with such exclusion (Fluit et al., 2024). The possible consequences of societal marginalization are decrease in self-confidence, feelings of anger or depression, and a withdrawal from social life (Hutchison et al., 2007; Lee et al., 2024). These outcomes also affect the professional life of these excluded individuals since they can experience stress and anxiety at work (Ertop & Erdoğan, 2023; Hitlan et al., 2006). In this respect, identifying preventive strategies against societal marginalization within institutional settings is considered crucial for both individual and organizational well-being.

To minimize the effects of societal marginalization, it is essential to clearly identify the variables that lead to it. While doing that, unique characteristics of the institution must be taken into account as well as creating an inclusive climate. In the case higher education institutions, due to the nature of academic work, individuals who are not recognized or valued because of the the value assigned to their workmay become subject to epistemic exclusion. Epistemic exclusion refers to the devaluation, or marginalization of the work and contributions of individuals or groups in academic life systematically (Dotson, 2014; Scheidecker et al., 2024). This form of exclusion may stem from being a woman or a member of a minorty group who is often overlooked and deemed as in significant (Dieleman, 2012; Dotson, 2012, 2014). However, epistemic exclusion is not limited to women or minorities and can be rooted in disciplinary hierarchies and biases (Jones et al., 2025).

In academia, accepting certain academic fields as dominant or mainstream, while seeing others as peripheral or insignificant is the primary reason of disciplinary based epistemic exclusion. The literature points out that natural sciences often constitute the dominant disciplines while the social sciences are more vulnerable to epistemic exclusion in this process (Nyssa et al., 2024). A relevant example from Türkiye is the distribution of university rectors’ undergraduate degrees. Almost half of them are from faculties of Engineering or Medicine (Council of Higher Education, 2025). Another major indicator of epistemic exclusion in higher education is the criteria used for academic performance evaluation (Catala, 2024; Jones et al., 2025; Vaditya, 2018). Evaluation systems which are in favor of quantity in terms of publication numbers may devalue research that does not use the methods of dominant fields and lead to decline in performance of excluded academics (Robinson-Garcia & Ràfols, 2020; Settles et al., 2022). Moreover, epistemic exclusionmay also have negative effects on social relationships among academicians.

One of the key institutional characteristics that may decrease epistemic exclusion andsocietal marginalizationis the inclusive institutional climate (Mor Barak, 2015; Settles et al., 2024; Shore et al., 2011). In this regard, epistemic exclusion in higher education institutions can be seen as an outcome of a non-inclusive climate and the reason of societal marginalization. While the literature emphasizes that marginalized groups are more likely to experience epistemic exclusion due to identity-based biases (Settles et al., 2024), it has paid less attention to whether discipline based epistemic exclusion creates societal marginalization among academics or not. Yet, in cases where scholars' scientific contributions and knowledge production are ignored because their disciplines, these individuals may feel isolated institutional communication networks. When the relationships between inclusive climate, epistemic exclusion, and societal marginalization in higher education institutions are considered together, an important question arises: What role does epistemic exclusion (EE) play in the relationship between inclusive climate (IC) and societal marginalization (SM) among academics?

Literature review

Epistemic exclusion (EE)

EE results from skewed peer review and socialization that excludes marginalized scholars (Van Buren et al., 2024), restricting the scholarly canon to the hegemonic perspective and excluding knowledge (Dotson, 2014). It also restricts knowledge production for scholars of color, women, and non-Eurocentric scholars (Dotson, 2014; Go, 2020; Ray, 2019). Dotson (2014) cites bias and limited conceptions of "rigor." Gatekeeping through editorship, peer review of grants, and hiring influences legitimacy schemas that determine who is a "knower" (Posselt et al., 2020).

EE operates in both formal and informal ways. *Formal epistemic exclusion (FEE)* regulates the structuralized and institutionalized exclusion of the ability to produce knowledge. Examples are exclusion from editorial boards, conference panels, grant reviewing panels, or what papers to write. As enshrined into formal organizational policy and procedure, it frequently downplays or undervalues the epistemic contribution of various groups—most frequently women, ethnic minorities, or Global Southern scholars (Settles et al., 2020; Dotson, 2014). *Informal epistemic exclusion (IFEE)*, on the other hand, does the same through the working of daily interactions and informal conventions. Examples are eye-rolling at a colleague's ideas in meetings, microaggressive remarks, which undermine the intellectual ability of the speaker, or the daily ignoring of a particular theoretical perspective when discussing papers. Though not as prominent as the formal system, IFEE is as problematic because it destroys a perception of scholarly belonginess and cognitive legitimacy (Dotson, 2012; Posselt et al., 2020).

Inclusive climate (IC)

Inclusive educational and organization environments embrace underrepresented and diverse groups. They not only promote cultural diversity and self-expression (Bodla et al., 2018; Nishii, 2013; Douglas et al., 2024), but they also enhance commitment, job performance, and satisfaction while reducing turnover and burnout (McKay et al., 2007; Parker et al., 2003; Douglas et al., 2024). In academia, inclusivity encompasses open labs, mentorship, funding, and a welcoming environment. It transcends diversity, with an emphasis on belonging and equitable treatment (Mor Barak et al., 1998; Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013). It has a bearing on research groups and departments, informing scholarship and belonging norms (Douglas et al., 2024).

Societal marginalization (SM)

IFEE is the systematic process of pushing certain individuals or groups to the periphery of communities. Unfortunately, this severely diminishes access to resources, professional acknowledgement, and career development. The causes of marginalization are typically rooted in identity characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Moreover, it is perpetuated by deeply entrenched structural processes in organizations and through daily interactions (Douglas et al., 2024; Mor Barak et al., 1998). In academia, indications of IFEE are the absence of particular groups in high-level positions, experiences of invisibility or hyper-visibility for individuals, few opportunities for voices to be heard in decision-making, and systemic obstacles that prevent recognition and mobility up the academic hierarchy (Dotson, 2014; Ray, 2019). Marginalization results in career problems such as higher resignation, burnout, disengagement, and job dissatisfaction (Douglas et al., 2024; McKay et al., 2007).

The relationship among EE, IC and SM

IC battle EE by expanding methodologies and raising the voices of the excluded. Furthermore, policymaking expanding representation of the excluded scholarship helps break exclusionary forms (Douglas et al., 2024; Posselt et al., 2020). Such inclusive practices have a virtue of securing psychological protection as well as space for diversified scholarship (Bodla et al., 2018; Nishii, 2013). Surface-level diversity programs, however, do not nullify exclusion without a total reconstruction of the way things are produced as knowledge as well as what gets counted as proper (Nishii, 2013). Until we intentionally shift the epistemic center—rethinking what knowledge is, as well as what/whom a valid source holds—exclusion may continue despite seemingly inclusive organizations. Also, ICs decrease social exclusion considerably. Those institutions which employ different lenses are effective when their members have a feeling of fairness and belonging (Douglas et al., 2024; McKay et al., 2007). Then, ICs are found to decrease turnover intentions and burnout while increasing career commitment, for the most part, among the excluded scholars as well as the first career professionals

(Douglas et al., 2024; Parker et al., 2003). Conversely, exclusion of different voices when arriving at a decision enables the continuation of unchecked exclusion (Van Buren et al., 2024).

What's more, various scholars contend that women scholars are downvalued in university studies, a situation known as EE. Agreeing with the view of Settles et al. (2020), such structural downvaluation of a broad spectrum of scientists as illegitimate or less valid forms EE. Such exclusion, consequently, extends through disciplinary conventions to institutional downvaluation of the subject and method of a broad spectrum of scholars (Dotson, 2014; Settles et al., 2020). Under these circumstances, structural forces are able to illegitimate knowledge provided by disenfranchised peoples (Dotson, 2014). Thus, EE becomes a justification for the lack of women and ethnic minority scholars as full-time tenurers (Gold, 2021). Furthermore, it insinuates itself into the measure of the work of scientists, evoking dominant knowledges about the character of the related virtue and scholarly validity (Posselt et al., 2020). Principals affiliated with dominant approaches accordingly have much greater epistemic authority and institutional authority through the scholarly system (Settles et al., 2020). Additionally, discipline-based biases continue to buttress EE as it becomes the dominant knowledges about 'good science' and 'valid scholarship.' Third, the marginalization occurs as a result of structural disadvantage, a first-hand consequence of EE (Douglas et al., 2024). Furthermore, misrepresentation sustains other marginalization (Prasad, 2005). Misrepresentation includes distorted or incorrect concepts regarding social practice, identity, sex, ability, class, culture, and the way of life of the marginalized (Chowdhury, 2023). That frequently finds a conclusion into epistemic insensitivity. According to Medina (2012) through arguing, such insensitivity arises as a consequence of the inability to know the needs and experiences of the others. When scholars are insensible through the same manner, the consequence includes inadequate representation of the voices of the marginalized through scholarly work (Chowdhury, 2023).

The mediating role of EE between IC and SM

Research identifies EE as a chief generator of IFEE, even of apparently inclusive institutions, as it forestalls the full participation of excluded scholars in the production of knowledge (Dotson, 2014). For instance, Douglas et al. (2024) revealed how an inclusive work culture can prevent disengagement and burnout by celebrating a plurality of knowledges. Thus, the correction of EE forms a sine qua non of the process to neutralize IFEE. As a correction, a re-definition of evaluative terms, broadened representation of editorial and peer-review panels, and an embracing of methodological plurality are crucial moves toward the construction of real inclusion and forestall persistent exclusion (Posselt et al., 2020). Lacking such structural revamping, initiatives to promote inclusion risk remaining tokenistic, as EE continues to forestall the engagement of the excluded.

Moreover, EE not only restricts individual researchers but also marginalizes entire domains of inquiry. Ray (2019) argues that dominant epistemologies suppress alternative voices, thereby reinforcing structural injustice and exacerbating gaps in scholarly knowledge. This dynamic generates what Posselt et al. (2020) describe as a "cycle of homogenization and stratification," which ultimately obstructs epistemic justice and impedes authentic scientific advancement. When inclusion efforts fail to address the mechanisms of exclusion, they result in what Lorde (1984) called "tokenistic inclusion"—a performative recognition of diversity that lacks meaningful engagement or transformation.

The aim of the study and the hypotheses

The aim of the study is to analyze the mediating role of EE between IC and IFEE. The suggested model is presented in Fig. 1.

The hypotheses proposed aimed to examine both direct and indirect relationships, particularly focusing on the mediating role of EE. Regarding the model, the hypotheses tested were as follows:

H1

IC negatively predicts SM.

H2

IC negatively predicts FEE.

H3

IC negatively predicts IFEE.

H4

FEE positively predicts SM.

H5

IFEE positively predicts SM.

H6

FEE mediates the relationship between IC and SM.

H7

IFEE mediates the relationship between IC and SM.

Methodology

Design

This study employed a correlational design using structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships among IC, EE (FEE and IFEE), and SM.

The main purpose was to test a mediation model in which IC serves as the predictor variable, SM as the outcome variable, and EE as the mediating variable. Based on this model, seven hypotheses were proposed to assess both direct and indirect effects of IC on SM through EE. Relational research designs are appropriate for investigating the degree and direction of relationships between latent variables without manipulating them (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Participants and Procedure

Firstly, ethics committee approval was obtained from the first author's institution for the research. The study was found to be in compliance with scientific research and publication ethics, as confirmed by decision number 38 from the Ethics Committee meeting held on XXX (Meeting No. XXX).

In the study, 382 academic staff from private and public universities in Turkey were reached through convenience sampling. In order to reflect the heterogeneity of Turkish higher education, 750 academic staff from different regions, universities and disciplines were sent the online questionnaires via e-mail. Of the 750 questionnaires sent by e-mail, 382 were accepted as valid and included in the study. This corresponds to a return rate of approximately 50.93%. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional ethics board, and informed consent was secured from all respondents.

57.6% of the participants were male (n = 220) and 42.1% were female (n = 161). Regarding the academic ranks of the participants, 9.2% were research assistants, 7.9% were lecturers, 8.1% were research assistants/lecturers with PhD, 24.1% were lecturers with PhD, 26.4% were associate professors and 24.3% were professors. 29.3% of the participants held administrative positions, while 70.7% did not hold any administrative position. When the professional fields of the participants are examined, it is seen that 9.4% of the participants are in science and mathematics, 24.1% in social sciences and humanities, 8.6% in fine arts, 12% in sports sciences, 26.7% in engineering and technical fields, 10.7% in educational sciences and 8.4% in health sciences. The range of academic experience at the university is 1 to 42 years (X = 14.97) and the age range is 19 to 77 years (X = 44.14).

Measurement Instruments

The first part of the online questionnaire included information about the purpose of the study and its conductors, participant consent form and demographic informations (gender, rank, administrative position, professional fields, academic experience, and age), followed by the IC, EE, and IFEE scales respectively. All scales were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never to 5 = always).

The English version of the scales was translated into Turkish using the translation and back-translation method within the framework of cross-cultural adaptation (Beaton et al., 2000; Sousa & Rojjanasrirat, 2011). Permission for adaptation was granted by the author(s). Proposals from eight bilingual experts in the domain field were averaged and this composite version was blind back translated into English by six different translators who had no prior knowledge of the scale. After establishing conceptual equivalence, content validity was assessed through expert interviews and a small representative pilot study, followed by the described evaluation procedure. Incorporating all recommended changes, the Turkish version of the scale was created.

Inclusive Climate Scale. Perceptions of institutional inclusivity were measured using the Inclusive Climate Scale by Nishii (2013), comprising eight items across two dimensions: integration of differences (ID) (five items) and inclusive decision-making (IDM) (three items). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.936.

Epistemic Exclusion Scale

Perceptions of exclusion were measured using the two-component Epistemic Exclusion (EE) Scale developed by Jones et al. (2025). The first component is Formal Epistemic Exclusion (FEE) comprising 21 items across two dimensions: Criteria Exclusion (FEE-CE) (nine items) and Application Exclusion (FEE-AE) (12 items). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.944 for the formal epistemic exclusion. The second component is Informal Epistemic Exclusion (IFEE) comprising 20 items across two dimensions: Legitimacy Exclusion (IFEE-LE) (12 items) and Comprehension Exclusion (IFEE-CE) (eight items). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.935 for the IFEE.

Societal Marginalisation Scale.

Perceptions of IFEE were measured using the Societal Marginalisation Scale by Bollwerk et al. (2021), comprising 15 items across three dimensions: economic marginalisation (SM-E) (five items), cultural marginalisation (SM-C) (five items) and political marginalisation (SM-P) (five items). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.965.

Analysis

Data analysis commenced with missing data assessment, outlier detection, and normality checking within SPSS 26 and Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach through the Smart-PLS 24 software. Univariate normality was computed by means of skewness and kurtosis with a range of ± 1 (Hair vd., 2010) which is consistent with conventional criteria. The Mardia coefficient was used for assessing multivariate normality and no considerable cape deviation was found (Mardia, 1970). Moreover, multivariate outliers were assessed through Mahalanobis distance and where the calculated values were significant yet remained within the χ^2 cut off value ($p < .001$) (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). These results confirmed the absence of significant multivariate outliers in the dataset.

Descriptive statistics were computed, alongside Cronbach's alpha values to establish internal consistency reliability for all scales. Construct validity was assessed using factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion. Bias-corrected bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) was utilised to estimate the significance of indirect effects, enhancing accuracy under non-normal distribution conditions (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Common method bias assessment

In this study, inner Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were examined using the PLS-SEM approach to assess common method bias. The results indicated that VIF values ranged from 1.16 to 3.20, remaining below the recommended threshold of 3.30 proposed by Kock (2015). These findings suggest that common method bias is unlikely to pose a significant threat to the validity of the results.

Measurement Model Assessment

Composite Reliability (CR) scores exceeded 0.70 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). Cronbach's alpha values were robust across all scales, confirming strong reliability and validity for each construct measured: IC (CR = 0.947, AVE = 0.691), FEE (CR = 0.950, AVE = 0.482), IFEE (CR = 0.944, AVE = 0.480), and SM (CR = 0.969, AVE = 0.674). If the AVE is below 0.50, it is considered that the error variance exceeds the explained variance. However, Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest that even if the AVE value is below 0.50, convergent validity can be maintained if the CR value is above 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1982). Although some AVE values are below the threshold value in the analyzed model, high CR values indicate that there is no significant problem in terms of convergent validity. These values are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Results of the Measurement Model Assesment

Variable	Item	SFL	t-Value	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Inclusive Climate	**IC-ID1**	0.789	36.287	0.936	0.947	0.691
	IC-ID2	0.811	42.283			
	IC-ID3	0.865	66.919			
	IC-ID4	0.770	31.862			
	IC-ID5	0.809	37.813			
	IC-IDM1	0.856	59.328			
	IC-IDM2	0.872	65.637			
	IC-IDM3	0.871	65.856			
Formal epistemic exclusion	**FEE-CE1**	0.561	12.176	0.944	0.950	0.482
	FEE-CE2	0.489	10.536			
	FEE-CE3	0.594	11.962			
	FEE-CE4	0.660	15.539			
	FEE-CE5	0.682	17.357			
	FEE-CE6	0.777	28.252			
	FEE-CE7	0.674	17.263			
	FEE-CE8	0.711	23.155			
	FEE-CE9	0.736	24.363			
	FEE-CE10	0.522	10.575			
	FEE-CE11	0.676	18.405			
	FEE-CE12	0.423	7.769			
	FEE-AE1	0.821	35.998			
	FEE-AE2	0.796	31.801			
	FEE-AE3	0.652	16.487			
	FEE-AE4	0.784	34.335			
	FEE-AE5	0.769	28.330			
	FEE-AE6	0.783	31.904			
	FEE-AE7	0.762	28.815			
	FEE-AE8	0.772	31.220			
	FEE-AE9	0.762	31.692			
Informal epistemic exclusion	**IFEE-LE1**	0.769	23.810	0.935	0.944	0.480
	IFEE-LE2	0.703	16.728			
	IFEE-LE3	0.611	17.746			
	IFEE-LE4	0.822	32.417			
	IFEE-LE5	0.811	30.044			
	IFEE-LE6	0.346	5.726			
	IFEE-LE7	0.528	11.181			
	IFEE-LE8	0.401	7.302			
	IFEE-CE1	0.388	6.604			
	IFEE-CE2	0.667	14.946			

Notes: n = 382. SFL, standardised factor loading; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted; α, Cronbach's α

Variable	Item	SFL	t-Value	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
	IFEE-CE3	0.802	28.824			
	IFEE-CE4	0.845	42.657			
	IFEE-CE5	0.821	31.951			
	IFEE-CE6	0.182	2.747			
	IFEE-CE7	0.650	18.964			
	IFEE-CE8	0.717	21.463			
	IFEE-CE9	0.658	14.012			
	IFEE-CE10	0.836	37.592			
	IFEE-CE11	0.877	55.671			
	IFEE-CE12	0.867	46.059			
Societal marginalization	**SM-E1**	0.752	32.397	0.965	0.969	0.674
	SM-E2	0.860	50.857			
	SM-E3	0.861	56.671			
	SM-E4	0.867	46.758			
	SM-E5	0.834	44.070			
	SM-C1	0.754	32.697			
	SM-C2	0.891	66.060			
	SM-C3	0.842	48.215			
	SM-C4	0.840	43.571			
	SM-C5	0.764	29.409			
	SM-P1	0.789	27.906			
	SM-P2	0.815	29.593			
	SM-P3	0.820	30.066			
	SM-P4	0.840	36.530			
	SM-P5	0.776	24.029			
Notes: n = 382. SFL, standardised factor loading; CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted; α, Cronbach's α						

HTMT criterion was applied to measure discriminant validity. As noted by Henseler et al. (2015), the HTMT value must be less than 0.90 for closely related constructs and less than 0.85 for further apart constructs. Looking into the HTMT coefficients, it is apparent that the values are beneath the mentioned threshold limits. Thus, discriminant validity has been confirmed. Discriminant validity results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Discriminant validity (HTMT0.85 criterion)

IC	FEE	IFEE	SM
	0.487	**0.340**	**0.402**
FEE		0.832	0.466
IFEE			0.306

In terms of overall model fit, the value of the standardised root-mean-square residual (SRMR) was below the cut-off point of 0.08, while the normed fit index (NFI) was greater than the cut-off point 0.90, as recommended by Hair et al. (2022).

Findings

This section presents findings from the study investigating the relationships among IC, formal and informal EE, and IFEE within higher education institutions in Türkiye.

The results are organised into two main parts: descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing using structural equation modelling (SEM).

Descriptive Results

Descriptive analyses initially explored differences among demographic groups regarding perceptions of IC, EE, and SM. Gender did not significantly affect perceptions of IC (t=-0.43, p>.05), FEE (t=-1.37, p>.05), IFEE (t = 0.02, p>.05), or SM (t=-1.22, p>.05).

However, administrative responsibilities significantly influenced perceptions of IC (t = 3.07, p<.05), FEE (t=-2.18, p<.05), and IFEE (t=-2.20, p<.05), but not SM (t = 0.52, p>.05). Faculty with administrative roles reported higher perceptions of IC (M = 2.99, SD = 0.93) and lower FEE (M = 2.44, SD = 0.95) and IFEE (M = 1.78, SD = 0.66) compared to faculty without such roles (IC: M = 2.66, SD = 0.99; FEE: M = 2.67, SD = 0.91; IFEE: M = 1.97, SD = 0.82).

Academic ranks significantly influenced perceptions of FEE (F = 3.34; p<.05) and IFEE (F = 3.49; p<.05). Professors perceived less FEE (M = 2.28, SD = 0.82) and IFEE (M = 1.67, SD = 0.67) compared to other academic ranks. However, academic rank did not significantly affect IC (F = 1.55; p>.05) or SM perceptions (F = 0.60; p>.05).

The professional fields significantly affected perceptions of FEE (F = 3.38; p<.05), with social sciences and fine arts reporting higher levels than natural sciences and engineering. Academic fields did not significantly impact perceptions of IC (F = 1.01; p>.05), IFEE (F = 0.91; p>.05), or SM (F = 1.11; p>.05). The result of these analysis are represente din Table 3.

Table 3
The results of analysis for differences among demographic groups regarding perceptions of IC, EE, and SM

Professional fields	M	SD	F	p	Post-Hoc
1- Natural Sciences and Mathematics	2,42	0,87	3.38	.003	1–2
2- Social Sciences and Humanities	2,80	0,95			1–3
3- Fine Arts	2,97	0,85			2–5
4- Sports Sciences	2,58	0,98			3–5
5- Engineering and Technical Disciplines	2,35	0,94			5–6
6- Educational Sciences	2,80	0,92			
7- Health Sciences	2,54	0,91			

Pearson correlation coefficients indicated significant negative relationships between IC and FEE (r=-0.45, p < 0.001), IFEE (r=-0.32, p < 0.001), and IFEE (r=-0.38, p < 0.001). FEE positively correlated with IFEE (r = 0.45, p < 0.001), as was IFEE (r = 0.30, p < 0.001).

Pearson correlation coefficients results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Pearson correlation coefficients results

1.		M	ss	IC-ID	IC-IDM	IC	FEE-CE	FEE-AE	FEE	IFEE-LE	IFEE-CE	IFEE	SM-E	SM-C	SM-P
	IC-ID	**2,97**	**,97**												
2.	IC-IDM	2,41	1,10	,774**											
3.	**IC**	**2,76**	**,96**	**,963****	**,917****										
4.	FEE-CE	2,75	,91	-,437**	-,382**	-,439**									
5.	FEE-AE	2,43	1,18	-,411**	-,321**	-,397**	,713**								
6.	**FEE**	**2,61**	**,95**	**-,458****	**-,380****	**-,452****	**,927****	**,923****							
7.	IFEE-LE	1,91	,85	-,350**	-,187**	-,301**	,407**	,480**	,479**						
8	IFEE-CE	1,95	,81	-,313**	-,242**	-,301**	,498**	,537**	,559**	,729**					
9	**IFEE**	**1,92**	**,78**	**-,359****	**-,223****	**-,322****	**,474****	**,538****	**,546****	**,959****	**,893****				
10	SM-E	3,52	1,17	-,388**	-,329**	-,386**	,416**	,447**	,466**	,299**	,310**	,325**			
11	SM-C	3,42	1,20	-,388**	-,329**	-,385**	,427**	,447**	,472**	,292**	,320**	,325**	,920**		
12	SM-P	3,95	1,16	-,292**	-,300**	-,312**	,331**	,276**	,328**	,176**	,174**	,188**	,790**	,794**	
13	SM	**3,63**	**1,11**	**-,377****	**-,338****	**-,383****	**,415****	**,414****	**,448****	**,272****	**,285****	**,296****	**,958****	**,960****	**,912****

Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Structural equation modelling (SEM), using partial least squares (PLS-SEM), was employed to test the study's hypotheses. The model demonstrated an excellent fit to the data, as indicated by the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR = 0.038). The results revealed significant support for six hypotheses except for H7. First, **H1** was supported, showing that an IC negatively predicted IFEE (β = -0.387, t = 8.295, p < 0.001), suggesting that more inclusive environments are associated with lower levels of marginalisation. In addition, **H2** was supported, indicating that an IC negatively predicted FEE (β = -0.513, t = 16.260, p < 0.001). Similarly, **H3** was supported, as IC also negatively predicted IFEE (β = -0.347, t = 9.189, p < 0.001), reinforcing the role of inclusivity in reducing both structural and interpersonal exclusion. Furthermore, the findings confirmed **H4**, with FEE positively predicting IFEE (β = 0.465, t = 12.677, p < 0.001), and H5, where IFEE also positively predicted IFEE (β = 0.329, t = 9.020, p < 0.001).

The mediation analysis indicated that FEE partially mediated the relationship between IC and IFEE, supporting **H6** (indirect effect β=-0.179, t = 6.492, p < 0.001). However, IFEE did not significantly mediate this relationship, thus **H7** was not supported (β = 0.064, t = 1.302, p > 0.05).

Variance explained by the model was moderate, with IC and EE collectively accounting for 25.2% of the variance in IFEE (R^2=0.252). Furthermore, IC significantly predicted both FEE (R^2=0.235) and IFEE (R^2=0.111), indicating substantial predictive power for formal exclusion. Results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 5.

Effect size analysis (f^2) showed moderate effects for IC on FEE (f^2=0.307) and IFEE (f^2=0.124), and a moderate effect of FEE on IFEE (f^2=0.083). However, IC's direct effect on IFEE was small (f^2=0.045, p > 0.05), and IFEE's effect was negligible (f^2=0.004, p > 0.05). The effect sizes of variables are presented in Table 6.

Table 5
Results of the hypothesis testing

Models			Standardized coefficient β1	β2	Standard deviation	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	Bias	Lower bound (2,5.0%)	Upper bound (97,50%)	P value
Model 1		IC -> SM	-0.387	-0.392	0.047	8.295	-0.005	-0.474	-0.289	0.000
Model 2		IC -> FEE	-0.513	-0.520	0.032	16.260	-0.007	-0.568	-0.444	0.000
Model 3		IC -> IEE	-0.347	-0.358	0.038	9.189	-0.012	-0.408	-0.262	0.000
Model 4		FEE-> SM	0.465	0.471	0.037	12.677	0.006	0.382	0.527	0.000
Model 5		IEE-> SM	0.329	0.339	0.036	9.020	0.010	0.248	0.390	0.000
Model 6	Total direct effects	**IC -> FEE**	-0.484	-0.488	0.039	12.346	-0.004	-0.554	-0.398	0.000
		IC -> IEE	-0.333	-0.340	0.043	7.799	-0.007	-0.404	-0.233	0.000
		IC -> SM	-0.211	-0.210	0.057	3.683	0.001	-0.324	-0.101	0.000
		FEE -> SM	0.324	0.326	0.059	5.464	0.001	0.196	0.430	0.000
		IEE -> SM	0.064	0.067	0.049	1.302	0.003	-0.035	0.158	0.193
	Total indirect effects	**IC -> FEE ->SM**	-0.179	-0.181	0.027	6.492	**-0.003**	**-0.231**	**-0.123**	0.000
	Total effects	**IC -> FEE**	-0.484	-0.488	0.039	12.346	-0.004	-0.554	-0.398	0.000
		IC -> IEE	-0.333	-0.340	0.043	7.799	-0.007	-0.404	-0.233	0.000
		IC -> SM	-0.389	-0.391	0.047	8.201	-0.002	-0.479	-0.293	0.000
		FEE -> SM	0.324	0.326	0.059	5.464	0.001	0.196	0.430	0.000
		IEE -> SM	0.064	0.067	0.049	1.302	0.003	-0.035	0.158	0.193

Table 6
The effect sizes of variables (f^2 Values)

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	P values
IC -> FEE	**0.307**	**0.319**	**0.067**	**4.569**	**0.000**
IC -> IEE	0.124	0.134	0.037	3.329	0.001
IC -> SM	0.045	0.049	0.026	1.736	0.083
FEE -> SM	0.083	0.088	0.035	2.397	0.017
IEE -> SM	0.004	0.006	0.007	0.565	0.572

These findings substantiate the central role of ICs in mitigating IFEE, highlighting the critical mediating role of FEE. The limited mediation role of IFEE suggests the necessity for deeper institutional interventions targeting formal academic processes and evaluation criteria to foster genuine inclusivity.

Discussion

The results indicates that the gender does not affect perceptions of IC, FEE, IFEE, or IFEE. This result differs from studies which highlight how the studies of women and specific minority groups are systematically overlooked, their ideas and contributions are perceived as insignificant (Dieleman, 2012; Dotson, 2012, 2014). The findings of this study, on the other hand, may be interpreted as indicating that perceptions of inequality regarding the

concepts examined in this study may in fact be independent of gender. Thus, this result can be related with the discipline-based epistemic exclusion which is more closely related to the field of study, or methodology rather than gender (Jones, 2025; Settles et al., 2020; Settles et al., 2024)).

Descriptive analysis shows that academics who have administrative roles reported higher perceptions of an IC and lower levels of formal and IFEE compared to others. From the lens of Social Identity Theory, this situation arises from the assumption that as a person's status and power within the group increase, their level of identification with the group also increases (Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2002; Korte, 2007; Rovetta et al., 2025). Furthermore, in higher education institutions, administrative roles are often shaped through appointments made by the rector, particularly for positions such as directors and deans. This increases the likelihood that academics who have administrative roles are those who have close ties with upper management and the institution. From the perspective of organizational justice, this may make other academics, particularly those who believe that they deserve these administrative positions based on their experience, academic title, or contributions to their field, feel excluded (Lee et al., 2021). Consequently, those without administrative roles may develop more negative perceptions toward the institution and its implementations.

The field of academic study significantly affected perceptions of FEE. Accepting certain academic disciplines as mainstream while viewing others as insignificant may be the primary reason for this result (Nyssa et al., 2024; Settles et al., 2024). Although Turkish universities are affiliated to a central authority—namely, the Council of Higher Education and its governing law—they are relatively autonomous in processes such as faculty recruitment, promotion, and performance evaluation. This autonomy generally makes these processes dependent on administrators, which may lead to the perception of discipline-based exclusion. For example, the performance evaluation criteria applied to academics are predominantly quantitative in nature which includes number of published research in high-indexed journals (Jones et al., 2025; Vaditya, 2018). This creates a disadvantage for academics in social sciences, where publishing research often requires a longer time due to data collection and interpretation processes. Likewise, making the academics in fine arts feel unvaluable since their work do not meet standard academic publication criteria, even not officially applying these standards, can be another reason.

Another factor that affects perceptions of both formal and IFEE is the academic rank. Professors perceived lower levels of both formal and informal exclusion compared to other academics. This can primarily be interpreted as a result of the rise of a performance-driven culture driven by neoliberal education policies has brought a 'publish or perish' culture, which significantly increases pressure on academics who are at early stages of their academic career (Holywood et al., 2020; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2012). Another factor that reinforces this pressure is that academic positions other than professor and associate professor are contractual in Turkish Higher Education System. Renewal of contracts requires meeting the frequently updated promotion and appointment criteria. This situation can increase feelings of exclusion, especially among those who prioritize depth, interpretive and critical inquiry over quantitative output compared to those who quickly adapt to performance-based evaluation systems.

This study empirically explored the relationships among IC, epistemic exclusion, and IFEE in higher education, focusing on the mediating role of epistemic exclusion. This research confirms the significance of an inclusive organizational climate as a main driver of employees' social life and a protection against marginalization (H1). IC is one of the major predictors of IFEE according to various theoretical and empirical studies on diversities. IFEE constitutes a condition of exclusion of people from common resources as well as access to various spheres (Levitas et al., 2007). Various studies have been showing that ICs insulate against previous ones by creating feelings of belongingness among entire working populations, especially under-represented (Shore et al., 2018), and by creating safety spaces in generating equality. Roberson (2006) and Nishii (2013) respectively illustrate that ICs foster employee attachment and organizational identification as well as minimize marginalizing effects. Moreover, these climates foster multiple knowledge systems recognition and epistemic exclusion aversion, damaging particularly in knowledge-based systems (Dotson, 2014; Posselt et al., 2020).

An IC predicts formal and IFEEs and their effects on marginalization (H2-H3). Researches show that inclusivity reduces exclusions' practices (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2011; Mor Barak et al., 2016; Settles et al., 2020), and it also enhance transparency, fairness, and diverseness work organizations' respect and fairness (Shore et al., 2011). Perceptions on inclusiveness reduce the risk of FEE, (Nishii, 2013; Settles et al., 2020). Mor Barak et al. (2016) believe that ICs reduce discrimination among people that is a causative agent of informal exclusions in most contexts. This benefit predominantly accrues to work organizations' marginalized members with no explicit norms on diverseness (Janssens & Zanoni, 2014). These findings confirm that ICs have a tendency to affect exclusion dynamics (Randel et al., 2018).

The results confirm informal and FEE as main drivers of societal marginality, according to organizational and social identification theories (H4-H5). FEE involves intentional omission from conferences, leadership, or resources, constructing inferiority as well as isolation (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Informal episemic exclusion uses implicit signals such as neglect, further harming a sense of belonging and self-esteem (Sue et al., 2007; Settles et al., 2020). In-group and out-group procedures, as identified by Williams and O'Reilly (1998), propagate these divisions throughout organizations. Moreover, epistemic exclusion, according to Dotson (2014), widely marginalizes people by neglecting knowledge per social boundaries.

Hypotheses H6 and H7, which present the most critical findings of this research, provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of epistemic exclusion and IFEE. Findings reveal the strong moderating effect of IC on both formal and informal exclusion, while confirming the structural and determinant role of formal exclusion in academic marginalization.

H6 hypothesized that an IC weakens the relationship between formal exclusion and IFEE and eliminates the relationship between informal exclusion and IFEE. Results strongly support this hypothesis. An inclusive university climate was observed to significantly reduce individuals' perception of marginalization. This finding is in marked contrast to Sue et al.'s (2007) findings in the Western context that microaggressions and social neglect

cumulatively lead to marginalization. However, the fact that the IC completely eliminates informal exclusion is an important indicator of how the negative consequences of such small-scale interactions can be neutralized in a positive and supportive institutional environment.

At this point, the dominant role of managers in creating an IC should be emphasized once again. Considering the impact of managers on organizational culture (Özcan et al., 2014; Posselt et al., 2019), their leadership and internal communication strategies form the basis of an inclusive environment. For example, the adoption and implementation of procedural justice (transparency and equality in transactions) and interactional justice (treating individuals with respect and fairness) principles by managers increases employees' trust in the organization and reduces the perception of exclusion (Folger & Konovsky, 1989). In the Turkish context, cultural dimensions such as high authority of managers in appointment and promotion processes and power distance (Hofstede, 1984) may make it difficult to ensure this justice. Managers' use of this power to promote inclusion rather than power abuse (Kipnis, 1972) has the potential to moderate formal exclusion. In this context, it can be concluded that policies similar to affirmative action are necessary within the organization.

Hypothesis H7 claimed that FEE acts as a structural bottleneck that prevents the IC from translating into epistemic inclusion and recognition. Findings of present study support this hypothesis by confirming the direct and strong effect of formal exclusion on IFEE. This result is fully in line with Dotson's (2014) argument that epistemic injustice is perpetuated by institutional structures, namely peer review processes, publication metrics and appointment standards.

The unique structural dynamics in the Turkish academic system further accentuate the impact of formal exclusion. In contrast to studies in the Western context (Sue et al., 2007; Settles et al., 2020), the strong emphasis on formal performance metrics (e.g. publication numbers, impact factors) in Turkiye (Demir et al., 2017; Demirbilek & Çetin, 2022) leaves less room for informal networks to play a decisive role in career progression. This supports our finding that in a system where formal gatekeeping mechanisms are dominant, the impact of informal exclusion on social positioning may be overshadowed (Özcan et al., 2014).

Thus, these findings strengthen the argument that unless institutions question how they define and reward the legitimacy of knowledge, ICs risk remaining rhetorical rather than transformative. It is essential that universities review their performance evaluation systems to recognize diverse epistemologies and methodologies, especially in areas such as social sciences, arts and interdisciplinary research (Nyssa et al., 2024). This policy need becomes even more urgent in Turkiye, given the strong influence of the Council of Higher Education and the centralized standardization of academic merit. Formal practices such as rector appointments (Battal & Arastaman, 2024; Baştürk, 2011; Erdoğmuş & Esen 2014), distribution of TUBITAK funds (Satıcı & Akkuş, 2019; Satoglu et al., 2021), and differences in promotion criteria (Demir et al., 2017; Demirbilek & Çetin, 2022) contribute to FEE in Turkey.

Implications

From a practical perspective, the results of this research argue for institutions to go beyond mere diversity discourse and interpersonal training to address the roots of epistemic injustice within formal structures (evaluation metrics, hiring and promotion criteria, and publication practices). It is also clear that leadership needs to proactively diversify editorial boards, funding panels, and hiring committees to prevent FEE from perpetuating marginalization.

Conclusion and Future Study Recommendations

These findings highlight the central role of structural and institutional factors in combating academic marginalization. The strong influence of an IC and the structural bottleneck of formal exclusion suggest that universities need to focus not only on interpersonal interactions but also on key evaluation and reward mechanisms. The most pertinent suggestion for future research is to explore the question of why informal exclusion is so easily tolerated by Turkish academics through qualitative studies. Factors that make academics powerful, such as selected loneliness, job security, lack of economic consequences, the idea that it will not have a strong impact on their institutional or academic reputation, self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy, are critical to understanding the underlying reasons for this tolerance. The role of the concept of "academic narcissism" in this context should also be explored.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate: This study was approved by Kocaeli University Institute of Social and Human Sciences Directorate Ethics Committee with the decision dated 10/04/2025 and numbered 2025/04. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Ethics Declaration: The authors confirm that all procedures performed in this study were in accordance with ethical standards.

Consent for publication: Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials: The raw data underpinning the findings of this article can be provided upon request.

Competing interests: The author declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential competing interest.

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Figures

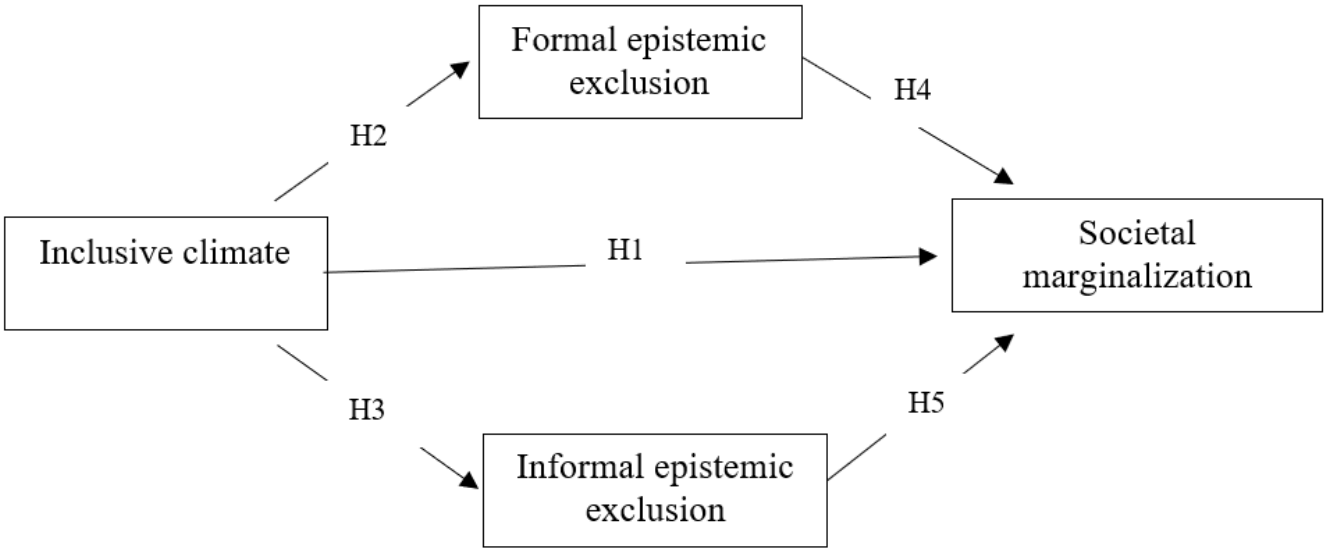


Figure 1

The research model