THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGERS IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' INCLUSIVENESS IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OF ETHIOPIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the role of higher education managers in improving disability inclusion in public universities in Ethiopia. Inclusiveness in Higher Education aims to cater for diverse learners' needs by promoting culturally relevant pedagogy and reducing negative stereotyping, and by ensuring equal opportunities for students with disabilities. Ethiopia's higher education system faces challenges such as accessibility for disabled students, physical barriers, inadequate materials, and rigid assessment procedures, which hinder poverty reduction and sustainable development. Despite global and national commitments to inclusive education, there is an implementation gap in higher education, particularly regarding the role of university managers in promoting inclusion. Although previous research focused on inclusive curricula and student experiences, there is limited empirical analysis of how managers in Ethiopian public universities perceive and enact inclusiveness. This study provides evidence on the relationship between managerial perceptions and institutional practices, highlighting how leadership attitudes can facilitate or hinder inclusive outcomes in low-resource contexts. The study used a mixed-method design that combined quantitative and qualitative data, inclusive education theory, and system and contingency theories to analyse the inclusion of students with disabilities. Mixed-method research employs pragmatism, a flexible paradigm that integrates quantitative and qualitative data, aiming to provide practical outcomes and solutions for a comprehensive understanding of the real world. The study examined a sample comprising ten public universities in Ethiopia, including two university presidents, two deans, two disability center coordinators, fifty department heads, one hundred and twelve faculty members, and one hundred and sixty-two students. The selection process used simple random, systematic and quota sampling techniques to ensure representative participation among the specified groups. Data were collected using multiple instruments, including questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis, to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. The study used SPSS Version 26 to analyze quantitative data through questionnaires, frequency distribution tables and cross-tabulations, while qualitative data was examined using thematic analyses supported by ATLAS.ti 24 for a comprehensive investigation. This study highlights that inadequate perceptions of disability inclusion in Ethiopian public universities hinder inclusive education and academic success. It emphasizes the necessity for effective inclusive policies, highlighting gaps in both commitment and implementation due to governance issues. The study identifies that Ethiopian public universities face challenges in providing inclusive education due to a lack of staff awareness and misconceptions. It advocates institutional reform, increased funding, improved support systems, and stronger advocacy for inclusion. Recommendations include regular assessments by the Ministry of Education on disability and inclusion, the establishment of dedicated units for accountability, and the alignment of university policies with ministry frameworks. Adequate funding and prioritizing disability-focused strategies are essential for managing ongoing challenges in inclusive education.

Keywords: Higher Education; Inclusive Education; Inclusive Education Management; Students' Diversity; Students' Disability

Manweledzo a Ṱhoḓisiso (Tshivenḓa)

Tsedzuluso iyi i sengulusa mushumo wa vhalanguli vha pfunzo ya nṱha kha u khwinisa u katelwa ha vhaholefhali kha yunivesithi dza nnyi na nnyi ngei Ethiopia. U katelwa kha Pfunzo ya Nṱha zwi sedza kha u ṱhogomela ṱhoḓea dza vhagudi vho fhambanaho nga u ṱuṱuwedza phedagodzhi yo teaho mvelele na u fhungudza u ḓihudza hu si havhuḓi, na nga u vhona uri matshudeni vha re na vhuholefhali vha na zwikhala zwi linganaho. Sisṱeme ya pfunzo ya nṱha ya Ethiopia yo sedzana na khaedu dzi ngaho u swikelelea ha matshudeni vha re na vhuholefhali, zwithivheli zwa muvhili, zwishumiswa zwi songo eḓanaho, na maitele a u ṱola o khwaṱhaho, zwine zwa thithisa u fhungudzwa ha vhushai na mveledziso i bveledzaho. Naho hu na vhuḓikumedzeli ha ḽifhasi na ha lushaka kha pfunzo yo katelaho, hu na tshikhala tsha u thomiwa kha pfunzo ya nṱha, nga maanḓa malugana na mushumo wa vhalanguli vha yunivesithi kha u ṱuṱuwedza u katela. Naho ṱhoḓisiso dzo fhiraho dzo vha dzo sedza kha kharikhuḽamu dzo katelaho na tshenzhemo dza matshudeni, hu na tsenguluso ya empiriki yo linganelaho ya nḓila ine vhalanguli vha yunivesithi dza nnyi na nnyi dza Ethiopia vha dzhia ngayo na u vhea mulayo wa u katela. Ngudo iyi i ṋea vhuṱanzi nga ha vhushaka vhukati ha nḓila ine vhulanguli ha dzhia ngayo zwithu na maitele a tshiimiswa, i tshi sumbedza nḓila ine mavhonele a vhurangaphanḓa a nga leludza kana u thithisa ngayo mvelelo dzo katelaho kha nyimele dzi re na zwishumiswa zwiṱuku. Ngudo yo shumisa ngona dzo ṱanganaho dza u ḓivhadza dzine dza ṱanganya data ya khwanthithethivi na data ya khwaḽithithethivi, theori ya pfunzo yo katelaho, na theori dza sisṱeme na dza zwiwo u itela u sengulusa u katelwa ha matshudeni vha re na vhuholefhali. Tsedzuluso ya nḓila dzo ṱanganaho i shumisa vhungoho, paradigimu i tendelanaho ine ya ṱanganya data ya tshivhalo na ya vhuimo, yo sedza kha u ṋetshedza mvelelo dzi shumaho na thandululo dza u pfesesa ho fhelelaho ha shango ḽa vhukuma. Ngudo yo ṱola sambula yo vhumbwaho nga yunivesithi dza mveledziso dza fumi ngei Ethiopia, hu tshi katelwa phuresidennde mbili dza yunivesithi, vhadiini vhavhili, vhadzudzanyi vhavhili vha senthara dza vhuholefhali, ṱhoho dza mihasho ya mahumi maṱanu, miraḓo ya vhagudisi vha ḓana na fumimbili, na matshudeni vha ḓana na mahumi maṱanu na vhavhili. Maitele a u nanga o shumisa thekhinikhi dza u dzhia sambula dzo leluwaho dza tshayandivhiswa, dza sisṱeme na dza khoutha u vhona uri hu na u shela mulenzhe ha vhaimeleli vhukati ha zwigwada zwo bulwaho. Data yo kuvhanganywa hu tshi shumiswa zwishumiswa zwinzhi, hu tshi katelwa na mbudziso, inthavhiyu, na tsenguluso ya maṅwalo, u itela u wana data ya tshivhalo na ya vhuimo. Ngudo yo shumisa SPSS Sia ya 26 u sengulusa data ya khwanthithethivi u ya nga kha mbudziso, thebulu dza u phaḓaladza frekwensi na thebulu dzo fhambanaho, ngeno data ya vhuimo yo senguluswa hu tshi shumiswa tsenguluso dza thero dzo tikedzwaho nga ATLAS.ti 24 u itela ṱhoḓisiso yo fhelelaho. Ngudo iyi i sumbedzisa uri mihumbulo i songo teaho ya u katelwa ha vhaholefhali kha yunivesithi dza mveledziso ya Ethiopia i thithisa pfunzo yo katelaho na u bvelela ha zwa pfunzo. I ombedzela ṱhoḓea ya mbekanyamaitele dzi katelaho dzi shumaho, i tshi sumbedzisa zwikhala kha vhuḓikumedzeli na u thomiwa nga ṅwambo wa mafhungo a vhuvhusi. Ngudo i sumbedza uri yunivesithi dza nnyi na nnyi dza Ethiopia dzo sedzana na khaedu kha u ṋetshedza pfunzo yo

katelaho nga ṅwambo wa u sa ḓivha ha vhashumi na mihumbulo yo khakheaho. I tikedza tshanduko ya zwiimiswa, u engedzwa ha masheleni, u khwiniswa ha sisṱeme dza thikhedzo, na u tikedza ho khwaṱhaho ha u katelwa. Themendelo dzi katela tsedzuluso dza tshifhinga tshoṱhe nga Muhasho wa Pfunzo kha vhuholefhali na u katelwa, u thomiwa ha yuniti dzo ḓikumedzelaho kha vhuḓifhinduleli, na u ṱanganya mbekanyamaitele dza yunivesithi na mihanga ya muhasho. U ṋetshedzwa ha masheleni o eḓanaho na u vhea phanḓa zwiṱirathedzhi zwo sedzaho kha vhuholefhali ndi zwa ndeme kha u langa khaedu dzine dza khou bvela phanḓa kha pfunzo yo katelaho.

Maipfi a ndeme: Pfunzo ya Nṱha; Pfunzo yo Katelaho; Ndangulo ya Pfunzo yo Katelaho; U Fhambana ha Matshudeni; Vhuholefhali ha Matshudeni.

IQOQA (IsiNgisi)

Lolu cwaningo luhlola indima yabaphathi bezikhungo zemfundo ephakeme ekuthuthukiseni ukufakwa kwabantu abakhubazekile emanyuvesi kahulumeni ase-Ethiopia. Ukubandakanywa emfundweni ephakeme kuhlose ukubhekelela izidingo zabafundi abahlukahlukene ngokukhuthaza izindlela zokufundisa ezihambisana namasiko abo, ukunciphisa imibono engemihle kanye nokubeka abafundi abakhubazekile ethubeni elilinganayo lokuthola imfundo. Uhlelo lwemfundo ephakeme e-Ethiopia lubhekene nezinselelo ezifana nokufinyeleleka kwezinsiza kubafundi abakhubazekile, izithiyo ezakhiweni nasezindaweni zomzimba, ukushoda kwezinsiza-kufunda, kanye nezinqubo zokuhlola ezingaguquguquki, okuphazamisa ukunciphisa ubumpofu kanye nentuthuko esimeme. Yize kunezibophezelo zomhlaba wonke nezezwe zokweseka imfundo ebandakanya wonke umuntu, kusekhona igebe ekusetshenzisweni kwalezi zibophezelo emfundweni ephakeme, ikakhulukazi mayelana nendima yabaphathi bamanyuvesi ekukhuthazeni ukubandakanywa kwabafundi abakhubazekile. Nakuba ucwaningo lwangaphambilini lugxile kakhulu ezinhlelweni zokufunda ezibandakanya wonke umuntu kanye nasezimweni abafundi abadlula kuzo, kunokuhlaziywa okunomkhawulo okusekelwe ebufakazini mayelana nokuthi abaphathi bamanyuvesi kahulumeni ase-Ethiopia bakubona kanjani ukubandakanywa kwabafundi abakhubazekile nokuthi bakusebenzisa kanjani ezikhungweni zabo. Lolu cwaningo lunikeza ubufakazi ngobudlelwano obukhona phakathi kwemibono yabaphathi kanye nezinqubo ezisetshenziswa yizikhungo, futhi luveza ukuthi izimo zengqondo zobuholi zingasiza noma zivimbele imiphumela yokubandakanywa kwabafundi ezimweni lapho izinsiza zincane. Ucwaningo lusebenzise indlela exubile, ehlanganise imininingi ucwaningozinombolo kanye nemininingo yekhwalithethivu, kanye nethiyori yemfundo efaka wonke umuntu, ithiyori yezinhlelo kanye nethiyori yezimo, ukuhlaziya ukubandakanywa kwabafundi abakhubazekile. Indlela yocwaningo exubile isebenzisa injulalwazi yokungenzeka, okuwuhlaka lokucabanga oluguquguqukayo oluhlanganisa imininingo yocwaningo zinombolo nemininingo yekhwalithethivu, ngenhloso yokuthola imiphumela nezixazululo ezingasetshenziswa, kanye nokuqonda okuphelele kumhlaba wangempela. Ucwaningo lwahlola isampula efaka amanyuvesi kahulumeni ayishumi e-Ethiopia, okubandakanya omongameli amabili bamanyuvesi, amadini ababili, abaxhumanisi bezikhungo ezibhekele abantu abakhubazekile ababili, izinhloko zeminyango ezingamashumi amahlanu, amalungu obuhlakani bezemfundo ayikhulu neshumi nambili, kanye nabafundi abayikhulu namashumi ayisithupha nambili. Inqubo yokukhetha ababambiqhaza yasebenzisa izindlela zokuthatha isampula ngokungahleliwe, ngokohlelo oluthile, kanye nokuthatha isampula ngokwesabelo, ukuqinisekisa ukuthi amaqembu okuyiwona abebhekiwe amelwe ngendlela efanele. Imininingo yaqoqwa kusetshenziswa amathuluzi ahlukene, okubandakanya uhlu lwemibuzo, inhlolovo, kanye nokuhlaziywa kwemibhalo, ukuthi imininingo yocwaningo zinombolo kanye nemininingo yekhwalithethivu. Ucwaningo lusebenzise i-SPSS Version 26 ukuhlaziya imininingo yocwaningo zinombolo ngohlwi lwemibuzo, kusetshenziswa amathebula okusabalalisa ajwayelekile kanye namathebula okuqhathanisa imininingo ngezigaba, Imininingo yekhwalithethivu yahlaziywa kusetshenziswa ukuhlaziywa kwezindikimba nohlwi lwemibuzo, kwesekwa uhlelo, i-ATLAS.ti 24, kwenziwa uphenyo oluphelele. Lolu cwaningo luveza ukuthi

ukuqonda okunganele mayelana nokubandakanywa kwabantu abakhubazekile emanyuvesi kahulumeni ase-Ethiopia kuyisithiyo ekuthuthukiseni imfundo ebandakanya wonke umuntu kanye nempumelelo kwezokufunda. Lugcizelela isidingo sezinqubomgomo ezisebenzayo zokubandakanya wonke umuntu, futhi luveza ukuthi kukhona izikhala phakathi kokuzibophezela kanye nokusetshenziswa kwalezi zinqubomgomo ngenxa yezinkinga eziphathelene nokuphathwa nokubuswa kwezikhungo. Ucwaningo luthola ukuthi amanyuvesi kahulumeni ase-Ethiopia abhekene nezinselelo ekunikezeni imfundo ebandakanya wonke umuntu ngenxa yokuntuleka kolwazi nokuqwashisa kwabasebenzi, kanye nemibono engaqondile. Lolu cwaningo lukhuthaza izinguquko ezikhungweni, ukwandiswa kwezimali, ukuthuthukiswa kwezinhlelo zokweseka abafundi, kanye nokuqiniswa kwemizamo yokumela nokukhuthaza ukubandakanywa kwabantu abakhubazekile. Izincomo zifaka phakathi ukuthi Ongqongqoshe Bezemfundo Benze ukuhlolwa okujwayelekile mayelana nokukhubazeka kanye nokubandakanywa kwabantu abakhubazekile, kusungulwe uphiko olukhethekile olunomthwalo wemfanelo wokuqinisekisa ukuziphendulela, kanye nokuqondanisa izinqubomgomo zenyuvesi nezinhlaka zongqongqoshe. Izimali ezanele kanye nokubeka phambili amasu agxile kubantu abakhubazekile, okusemqoka ekubhekaneni nezinselelo eziqhubekayo emfundweni ebandakanya wonke umuntu.

Amagama asemqoka: Ezemfundo Ephakeme; Imfundo Ebandakanya wonke umfundi; Ukuphathwa Kwezemfundo Ebandakanya wonke umfundi; Ukwehlukahlukana Kwabafundi; Ukukhubazeka Kwabafundi.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AHRQ	Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
BCE	Before the Common Era
BPR	Business Process Reengineering
CBM	Christian Blind Mission
CRB	Community Based Rehabilitation
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DPA	DisabIed People's Association
EFA	Education for All
EPU	Ethiopian Public University
ESDP	Educational Sector Development Program
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FMoE	Federal Minister of Education
FMOLSA	Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
GEQIP	General Education Quality Improvement Program
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRC	Human Right Commision
IASC	Inter Agency Standing Committee's
IDA	International Disability Alliance
IE	Inclusive Education
MoE	Minister of Education
MoSHE	Ministry of Science and Higher Education
NCIE	National Center on Inclusive Education
ODR	Office of Disability Rights
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PUE	Public Universities of Ethiopia

PWDs	Person with Disabilities
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SNE	Special Needs Education
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UCL	University College London
UK	United Kingdome
UN	United Nation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNISA	University of South Africa
WBG	World Banck Group
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction and Background of the Study

The concept of inclusiveness can be viewed in varying ways by different people. In Higher Education (HE), inclusion is the ongoing and transformative process of improving education systems to meet everyone's needs (GovNet-Education, 2020). It is seen as a process of responding to the diverse needs of all learners through increased participation in learning, cultures, and communities and, eventually, reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in contents, approaches, structures, and strategies with a common vision that covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (UNESCO, 2005). Inclusivity is to be attentive to the impact of social identities and to place the most disadvantaged members of the community at the center of design and planning (University of London, 2020). Consequently, creating an inclusive education system, which, according to GovNet-Education, (2020), involves not only creating the conditions for inclusivity, but also actively challenging the reproduction of inequality, is a necessity. Therefore, there has been an increasing focus on inclusion within HE being influenced by increased globalization, connectivity, and interdependence between cultures, ideas, and economies, as well as the democratization of HE.

The concept of inclusive education is globally supported as an instrument to eliminate participation barriers (UNESCO, 2024); it faces substantial debate, especially when contrasting with regional and national policy frameworks. In the Global North, the QAA's Inclusive Higher Education Framework emphasises holistic alterations to attain inclusion (Hubbard & Gawthorpe, 2025). In contrast, resource-limited environments like South Africa, during the post-apartheid Education White Paper 6 was introduced, to bridge the policy-practice gap, resulting in delayed organisational changes (Rinquest & Simba, 2024). Opponents contend that prevailing Eurocentric replicas do not resonate with local conditions, prompting scholars to suggest an inclusion prototype built on African epistemologies like Ubuntu, emphasising interdependence and human dignity rather than rights-based approaches (Masuku & Khumalo, 2024). Thus, the understanding of an inclusive situation is dynamic, influenced by how institutional governance balances global principles with local educational realities.

Inclusion is a hot topic right now, more than ever (Grissom, 2018). Many campus administrators agree on the need for structural reforms, and current institutional engagement with diversity and disability is characterized by separate initiatives that are inadequately linked to the core academic mission and insufficiently coordinated across different parts of the academy (Budiwati & Sulistyorini, 2018). Disability is an intrinsic part of life (Kumar, 2025). It refers to long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which, in interaction with various barriers, can hinder people's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (CRPD, 2006). Disability is a cross-cutting issue that must be addressed by all managers of all organizations. Consequently, higher education institutions' managers have a role to play in the mainstreaming of disability issues. But the lack of disability inclusion in the HE curricula is one such restriction that perpetuates stigmatization of and discrimination against disabled person (Wudneh, 2022). Similarly, HE managers' failure to include students who have a disability and need special support in their plans causes severe inequity in access to services. Therefore, disability issues need to be accommodated and incorporated in both the HE curricula and strategic and operational plans.

Accommodating students with disability should be seen as an issue of importance to all actors, that is, lower, middle, and higher managers along the continuum (Jan et al., 2024). Management and accommodations for students with disabilities include the acquisition and modification of equipment and devices, as well as any training required to adapt to the learning environment and their education (Kim & Aquino, 2017). The extension and adaptation of culturally relevant pedagogy to include disability are natural (Kim & Aquino, 2017; Prayitno et al., 2024). Culturally relevant pedagogies have led to strategies that have reduced negative stereotyping and secured students in an academic domain where they are valued, challenged, and supported. This new framework for culturally relevant disability pedagogy can bring theory and practice together to support the success of students with various disabilities in higher education (Kim & Aquino, 2017). However, students with disabilities are still out of the university in large numbers (Dolmage, 2017). Despite the decrease in risks such as harassment, students with disabilities continue to face discrimination in higher education (Fleming & Grace, 2016). Programmes and initiatives developed in the name of diversity and inclusion have not yet fully addressed the discrimination inherent in higher education. However, universities and colleges that recognize the presence of

students with disabilities are a promising market (Dolmage, 2017) and the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms has become the norm (Dolmage, 2017).

Many colleges and universities have acknowledged the vital role of disability support services in facilitating the transition from secondary school to college life, eliminating the barriers these students face and providing equal opportunities within inclusive and supportive campus environments (Kim & Aquino, 2017). Protection of the rights of students with disabilities in higher education institutions and making education accessible to them through such academic adjustments as providing course substitutions, adapting instructional methods, and modifying the length of time allotted for the completion of requirements (Kim & Aquino, 2017) are given due attention in HEIs. This could continue when faculty are continuously made aware of the impact of disability on learning and design inclusive instruction that is inclusive for all students (Kim & Aquino, 2017). To this end, educational policymakers and HE managers must recognize the need to create equal opportunities for students with disabilities and take measures to resolve discrimination by realizing inclusivity as their main role (Deuchert et al., 2017). Rwanda, Ethiopia, Malawi, and Tanzania have projects that exist to develop awareness of inclusive education, build schools that are adapted for children with disabilities, support relevant teacher training, and develop textbooks in braille (UNESCO, 2014). Ethiopia has developed a Special Needs and Inclusive Education Strategy based on the Salamanca Statement (Harber, 2017) aware of the fact that every child has a right to learn differently and that teaching must take into account differences.

Organisational support structures, such as centers and units for disability, have become a foundation of inclusive higher education; however, their functioning differs significantly across institutional and national perspectives. While these units perform a critical role in supporting students with disabilities, structural and systemic barriers, including inaccessible physical infrastructure and a lack of empathy and understanding among academic staff, often limit their influence (Gonzo & Gonzo, 2025). Rural universities, for example, often are inadequately furnished even when policies advocating for inclusion exist, pointing out that the mere existence of a disability unit does not promise equitable access; instead, an all-inclusive approach incorporating infrastructural adjustments and faculty sensitisation is compulsory (Gonzo & Gonzo, 2025). Furthermore, the success of these centers is greatly reliant on how leaders hypothesise disability and their future commitment to authorising teams, as a lack of reliable leadership

provision can directly challenge the integration of support facilities into the broader academic setting (Gonzo & Gonzo, 2025). These conclusions stress the need for organisational reforms to move beyond inactive compliance toward proactive, leadership-driven approaches that infuse all levels of university manager for disability centers and units to achieve their mandate.

Consequently, Ethiopia's Minister of Education for more than two decades has consistently been mentioned as a role model in terms of its efforts to strengthen and incorporate special needs and inclusive education at all levels, from kindergarten to university education, by developing a national special needs education programme strategy (Yorke et al., 2022). It was underscored that this instance should be outdone by all other divisions of government and non-governmental organizations and develops a comprehensive and coherent disability-inclusive poverty reduction strategy (PRS) in Ethiopia (Melese et al., 2019). However, addressing this programme is not as simple as it appears on paper, as Ethiopia has so far been poor compared to other African countries whose economies have improved quite a lot (Teka, 2021). This may have contributed to the inability of managers at all levels, including HE managers, to satisfactorily accommodate the needs of students with disabilities. Therefore, this thesis attempts to analyze the role of managers in improving student inclusion in Ethiopian public universities.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The researcher, as an instructor in a higher education institution, acknowledges that incorporating students with disabilities is one of the top priorities. As a member of Ethiopian society, where person with different disabilities live, the researcher has witnessed the difficulties experienced by these students. Students with disabilities frequently complain that higher education administrators disregard disability-related concerns, even as they face the social stigma associated with disability. As a result, the researcher has a keen interest in examining "The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia," because the country's development would be unfinished without thoroughly considering persons' with disabilities, such as students with disabilities. Although Ethiopia is said to be undergoing a major social, political, and economic transformation, it is equally evident that person with disabilities (PWD) estimated to be 15% of the total population of the nation remained precluded (World Health Organization (WHO), 2001). Thus, inclusion as a national consideration is an issue that affects person with disabilities. Historically, there has been a lack of accurate and credible government

data on person with disabilities in Ethiopia, which has had significant implications for national planning, particularly concerning disability inclusion (Cathy et al., 2020). Therefore, this thesis explores the role of higher education managers in enhancing the inclusion of students with disabilities in Ethiopian public universities.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Higher education is widely recognised as a critical instrument for poverty reduction and sustainable development, necessitating the participation of all segments of society (Panduwinata et al., 2025). Ethiopia has demonstrated progressive policy commitment through the Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009, which establishes functional governing and advisory bodies, including boards, presidents, senates, and various councils and explicitly mandates that institutions make their facilities, programmes, teaching, and evaluation procedures accessible to students with disabilities (FDRE, 2009). The Proclamation further requires institutions to provide necessary academic assistance, including tutorials, educational auxiliary aids, alternative assessment procedures, extra examination time, and deadline extensions (FDRE, 2009). Despite the ostensibly inclusive composition of these management and advisory structures, their actual roles over the past fifteen years have failed to deliver the anticipated results in upholding and promoting the values of higher education institutions.

Without the support of an institutional manager and a coherent institutional policy on inclusion and equity, ongoing activities remain disconnected and unsustainable over the long term (Bunescus, 2021). Research on disability diversity management in Ethiopian public higher education institutions confirms that “the commitment of the top management at the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs towards DDM was found to be not enough,” and that “undergraduate students with disabilities were not satisfied with the DDM of their campuses” (Alemayehu and Abebaw, 2023, p. 54). However, managing higher education in a country like Ethiopia presents formidable challenges. Top-level managers devote substantial time to routine matters and unforeseen issues, leaving limited capacity to focus on strategic issues such as promoting change, organisational growth, and institutional success (Adamu, 2021). Their attention is disproportionately directed toward ensuring peace and providing basic student services related to

accommodation, health, and food, largely because they are more likely to be held accountable for these immediate concerns (Adamu, 2021).

While some initiatives focus on specific areas of difference, diversity and inclusion issues demand that managers keep the intersections of difference and identities at the forefront of their values and practice (Alshamsi, 2023), yet the reality is that institutional managers can take deliberate steps to foster inclusive campus climates for all members of their communities—students, teachers, and administrative staff alike (B. N. J. Evans et al., 2017). Research demonstrates that campus managers, including diverse faculty, play an important role in achieving inclusive institutions (B. N. J. Evans et al., 2017). Faculty members' curricular decisions, pedagogy, and interactions with students can foster inclusive environments, and students report that seeing themselves reflected in the faculty and curriculum creates a sense of belonging and inclusiveness (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Despite this evidence, students with disabilities in Ethiopian higher education institutions continue to experience limited academic and social inclusion, weak instructional support, inadequate implementation of inclusive education policies, institutional resistance, limited infrastructure, and insufficient specialised services (Easaw & Abebaw, 2023).

Students with disabilities often find higher education to be an isolating experience, feeling unwelcome and poorly treated (B. N. J. Evans et al., 2017). Alemayehu and Abebaw (2023)document numerous obstacles confronting individuals with disabilities in postsecondary education settings, including inaccessible physical environments, restricted educational resources, a lack of assistive technology and computers, insufficient curricular or material modifications, inflexible assessment methods and examination protocols, absence of support units, and inadequate staff awareness and preparation. Most institutions remain ill-prepared to provide necessary support, and even where such amenities exist, they are poor, fragmented, and in nascent stages. These challenges not only restrict students' choices but also frequently result in aversion to studying and greater social isolation (Easaw & Abebaw, 2023). Inclusive schools are places where everyone belongs, is accepted, and is supported by peers and other members of the school community in meeting their educational needs (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024). Educational managers and leaders promoting an inclusive vision must attend to the margins: students traditionally separated into special programmes, and those uncategorised yet unsuccessful in the regular classroom (Jardinez & Natividad, 2024).

Despite the acknowledged importance of managerial commitment and the persistent exclusionary practices documented in Ethiopian public universities, a critical knowledge gap exists regarding how higher education managers conceptualise, enact, and influence inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Existing research has predominantly focused on student experiences, instructor attitudes, and policy-practice gaps at the institutional level (Birhanu, 2020; Easaw & Abebaw, 2023). However, the practices and decision-making processes of managers who are positioned to drive systemic change remain insufficiently examined. Research at Bonga and Jimma University revealed that university leaders demonstrated a "low level of understanding" regarding the creation of inclusive learning environments, with a strong positive correlation between leaders' understanding and the actual implementation of inclusive practices (Debasu & Tesfaye, 2025b, 2025a). The disconnect between managerial commitment and tangible institutional outcomes raises urgent questions about the underlying factors that shape managers' approaches to inclusion. This study addresses this gap by systematically investigating the role of higher education managers in enhancing the inclusion of students with disabilities in Ethiopian public universities, thereby generating critical insights into how leadership mindsets, decision-making processes, and institutional cultures shape or constrain the realisation of inclusive education. Therefore, the researcher converted the problem statement into main and sub-research questions, as discussed in the next sections.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1 Main research question

What is the role of higher education managers in enhancing students' inclusiveness in Ethiopia's public universities?

1.4.2 Sub-research questions

- What is the perception of higher education managers about students with disabilities in public universities of Ethiopia?
- How can policies, directives, guidelines, and strategies on inclusive education enhance the inclusion of students with disabilities in public universities of Ethiopia?
- What are the factors that promote the effective implementation of inclusive education in public universities in Ethiopia?

- What are the factors that hamper the promotion and implementation of inclusive education in public universities in Ethiopia?
- How can Higher Education Managers address the challenges students with disabilities face in public universities in Ethiopia?

1.5 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to explore the role of higher educational institution managers in enhancing students' inclusiveness in Ethiopian public universities. Specifically, this study addressed the following objectives:

- Explore the perception of Higher Education Managers about students with disabilities in public universities in Ethiopia
- Explore how policies, strategies, directives, and guidelines on inclusive education enhance the inclusion of students with disabilities in public universities of Ethiopia.
- Determine factors that promote the effective implementation of inclusive education in public universities in Ethiopia.
- Identify factors that hamper the actual promotion and implementation of inclusive education in public universities in Ethiopia.
- Determine how Higher Education Managers address the challenges students with disabilities face in public universities in Ethiopia.

1.6 Hypothesis for the Quantitative Data Collection Sections

The researcher could apply the two sample hypotheses listed below for the quantitative data collection portion of the study on inclusive education in Ethiopian public universities.

H_1: There is a significant correlation between the level of managerial commitment and the effectiveness of inclusive education in Ethiopian public universities.

H_2: Adequate institutional support services significantly increase the academic participation of students with disabilities in Ethiopian public universities.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study provided a fundamental awareness of the roles of managers and the inclusion of students with disabilities in Ethiopian public universities (PUE), as well as a significant insight into existing systems and practices. It also aimed to inform the Ministry of Education of the universities' concerns about the development and implementation of policies, guidelines and strategies for inclusive education, diversity management, and disability inclusion. The study also improved the understanding among managers, academics, staff in administrative positions, and stakeholders about the necessity of developing inclusive perspectives. The authors highlighted important enabling variables, persistent problems, and institutional constraints, emphasizing the importance of holistic methods to address these concerns. The findings provide institution-specific insights into the barriers and facilitators of inclusive education from a managerial perspective, offering a foundation for targeted interventions.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks in social sciences involve the use of various theories from various sources, allowing for a diverse understanding of the topic (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Waldt, 2024). Using multiple theories doesn't necessarily mean creating a new model, but rather conceptualizing reality as a social construct (Borsboom et al., 2021; Reeves et al., 2008). Researchers choose to use multiple theories as their lens, and applying different theories can enhance research, answer questions more robustly, and explore philosophical underpinnings. In this study, both inclusion and management theories are used in theoretical frameworks.

1.8.1 Theoretical framework of inclusion

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's "theory of inclusion" is a widely applicable and useful theory in education (Bourke, 2007; Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). It is divided into special education theory and inclusive education theory (Hornby, 2015). Inclusive education theory combines inclusive philosophy, values, and practices with the needs of disabled students (Hornby, 2015). It aims to simplify the provision of effective education for all students with diversity, special educational needs, and disabilities.

1.8.2 Theoretical framework of management

Management science, founded in the late 19th century, has developed various approaches to organizations, including classical, neoclassical, human behavior, and modern approaches (Saitis & Saiti, 2018). This study focuses on contemporary managers of educational institutions, focusing on organizational management theories and human factor related theories from the modern approach, such as contingency/situational and social system theory.

Systems theory, which has been used in natural and physical sciences for many years, views organizations as a whole, focusing on the association among technical and social variables within the system (Mullins, 2012; Nassou & Bennani, 2024). This approach emphasizes the importance of the social system in achieving school effectiveness. It promotes working environments with defined reward structures, supervisory practices, work policies, and supportive management structures (Dahiru et al., 2018).

Contingency or situational theories, an extension of systems philosophy, suggest that organization theory should not advocate the best way to structure or manage organizations but offer insights into situational and relative factors that dominate management decisions (Mullins, 2012; Nassou & Bennani, 2024). Contingency management consists of providing alternatives that reward efforts to carry out extra or more difficult work (Maisyaroh et al., 2019). Contingency theory proposes that the success of the manager and leader depends on both the style of management and situational features (Maisyaroh et al., 2019). Managers can be relationship-oriented or task-oriented, and situations should be changed to fit their effectiveness (Maisyaroh et al., 2019). The situational leadership model has several views on the leadership style that a leader can use to control members and their organizations to achieve goals (Maisyaroh et al., 2019). Implementing situational management and leadership in education must balance the various possibilities facing managers and their organizations.

1.9 Review of Related Literature

1.9.1 Historical basis of inclusive education

Inclusive education has its roots in special education and has evolved over time, addressing the needs of children with disabilities and students with learning difficulties (UNESCO, 2005). It has

been a part of a wider struggle against human rights and discrimination, aiming to ensure social justice in education (Yvonne, 2008). Inclusion has been indirectly encouraged since the United Nations Declaration in 1948 and has been mentioned in various UN Declarations and Conventions (UNESCO, 2005). However, existing strategies and packages have not been adequate to meet the needs of children and youth susceptible to relegation or exclusion. In many countries, children and adults are omitted from formal education, leading to the development of two separate schemes of education: regular and special education (UNESCO, 2005). The philosophy engrained in the field of disability has had a significant influence on special education and regular education practices. In 2015, countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasizing the importance of inclusive, quality education for achieving all SDGs (UNESCO, 2017).

1.9.2 History of higher education in Ethiopia

Before September 1950, Ethiopian students were sent abroad for higher education, mainly to Great Britain (Hapte, 1961; Molla, 2018). In 1950, Ethiopia added two additional secondary schools in Addis Ababa, and the government began providing higher education in Ethiopia. The University College of Addis Ababa was officially inaugurated in February 1951, marking the beginning of higher education in Ethiopia's educational history (Hapte, 1961; Molla, 2018). The Ethiopian Higher Education System has undergone several changes under different political regimes, including The Genesis of Modern HE (1950-1960), the consolidation of the 'National University' (1961-1974), Incremental Progress under a State of Hardship (1974-1990s), and Extensive Expansion and Restructuring (late 1990s-2010s (Molla, 2018). Currently, Ethiopia's Higher Education Institutions (HEs) are in a decisive phase of reform and expansion, with 45 institutions. The government has introduced new education and training policies, education sector development programs, and the HE Proclamation (No. 650/2009) to address challenges such as lack of clarity, poor quality, low enrollment rates, and high inequality of access (Molla, 2018).

1.9.3 Higher education managers in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is rapidly transitioning from an elite to a mass public sector higher education system, with the number of students in each university doubling and expected to do so again (Ashcroft, 2010; Tareke et al., 2024). The Ethiopian government has passed legislation to give universities more

autonomy, making management more accountable and reducing the role of a manager (Ashcroft, 2010; Tamrat, 2022; Tareke et al., 2024) . Poor leadership and management in the higher education system has resulted in disappointing performance, with issues such as poor resource mobilization, high unit costs, poor supervision, misuse of personnel, inappropriate resource utilization, and the absence of an information system (Tamrat, 2022). To address these issues, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MoSHE) has endorsed a new transparent, participatory, and merit-based strategy for selecting and appointing higher education managers and leaders, known as the 'Directive on selection and appointment of leaders and managers in higher education institutions in Ethiopia 002/2017' (Adamu, 2019). This move is seen as a positive step toward the overall well-being of institutions and the higher education system in general, as it encourages diverse individuals, professionalizes higher education managers and leadership, and promotes transparency in the selection process (Adamu, 2019).

1.9.4 Educational managers perception about disability inclusion

Inclusive concepts and principles have been incorporated into compulsory education throughout the world, but their application is complex (Valle-Flórez et al., 2021). Inclusive practices in higher education are challenging due to gaps in understanding disability and misperceptions of students with disabilities (Makuve, 2024). To address these barriers, higher education must establish an inclusive culture, practice, and policy that values variety and equality (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Universities are integrating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their plans and creating diversity and inclusion plans specific to their communities (Jorgensen & Claeys-Kulik, 2018). Institutions must offer systematic support and targeted continuing education to address diversity (Maria et al., 2020).

1.9.5 Educational managers knowledge about disability models

Inclusive education faces challenges in developing positive attitudes towards students with disabilities due to inexperienced management and faculty (Papadakaki et al., 2022). Disability models, although often viewed with skepticism, provide a foundation for understanding disabilities and perspectives (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). Traditional and radical ideologies impact these models, but researchers should examine them to understand social perceptions and potential future models that empower individuals with disabilities (Williams et al., 2017).

1.9.6 Education management attitude towards disability

The management mindset and system are crucial for developing an inclusive institution for students with disabilities (Zhang et al., 2018). A comprehensive management support system is essential for monitoring research and instruction, effective transition procedures, and support systems to manage issues related to impaired students in higher education (Mcginty, 2016). Despite shortcomings in past research, educational managers at all levels of education, particularly in universities, need to revisit studies on educators' attitudes toward applying universal design principles and making adjustments for students with disabilities (Mcginty, 2016). Attitude is the most significant factor affecting managers in accommodating students with disabilities (Edna, 2016). Attitudes affect behavior in specific circumstances, and person with disabilities function within three social circles: inner, middle, and outer. Schools play a vital role in serving as mediators between students and the community, and their attitudes can have an adverse effect on inclusive programs (Patel et al., 2024; Tait & Purdie, 2000).

Stigmatization plays a crucial role in promoting the full inclusion of persons with disabilities, as it reduces the likelihood of registering and retaining disabled students who will perform well in their academic work (Rizky & Hadi, 2021; Rogers & Kim, 2011). Management must take this opportunity to make educational institutions centers of excellence for special needs education, shaping a positive attitude toward disability (Getachew, 2014; Wang et al., 2025). This can be achieved by facilitating suitable infra structures and accessing teaching learning resources (Alnahdi, 2014; Rahayu & Fitria, 2024).

1.9.7 Educational management sensitivity to disability inclusion

Professionals, including educational managers, must be sensitive to persons with disabilities to function effectively in daily interactions (ODR, 2021). Interactions should include asking before helping, making them independent, treating them respectfully, and judging them based on their capabilities (ODR, 2021). However, students with disabilities still face negative attitudes and stereotypes in the education system (Salinger, 2020). This lack of knowledge and understanding can hinder equal access to educational services. Managers in educational institutions should receive training in disability awareness and sensitivity to combat prejudices, promote an inclusive learning environment, and foster empathy (Pretorius, 2020).

1.9.8 Educational managers reaction to disability inclusion

Inclusiveness in educational institutions is crucial for students with special needs, particularly those with disabilities (Yaz, 2021). Educational managers must adopt an accepting and supportive attitude towards these students and their parents. Inclusiveness has become a strategic issue for universities and higher education institutions, impacting learning, research, and institutional cultures (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019). Education managers and leaders must be educated in teaching and have a deep understanding of pedagogy and social relationships (Hunt, 2021). They should develop five pillars: implementing a vision of inclusion, emphasizing learning, building full participation, promoting respect for diversity, and promoting co-management (Hunt, 2021).

1.9.9 Ethiopian education procedures on inclusion

Ethiopia's higher education policy since 1991 aims to address shortcomings in previous education systems and promote social justice, economic efficiency, and wealth distribution (Tena & Motuma, 2024). The country has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter of Human and Peoples Rights, recognizing the rights of disabled people to equal treatment (Tamrat, 2019). The Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamation (2009) mandates accessibility to facilities, programs, and evaluation procedures for the disabled, and establishes special admissions provisions for disabled and disadvantaged students (Ecaterina, 2013).

1.9.10 Educational policy overview about special need and inclusive education

Successful education reform in Africa requires sound policy design, political commitment, and effective implementation capacity (WBG, 2018). Ethiopia's transitional government implemented educational reforms after 1991, including a new education policy, decentralization of administration, new school curricula, and the use of national vernacular languages as media of instruction (Mebratu, 2011). However, the Education and Training Policy (Tena & Motuma, 2024) lacks clarity on special needs and inclusive education and has not included them in the Educational Sector Development Programme (FMoE, 2010). The policy also does not consider the needs of children and students with disabilities or learning difficulties. Despite the commitment to support inclusion, many countries have not shifted from a segregated education model (Tamrat, 2019).

Ethiopian institutions lack comprehensive disability policy statements and struggle to verify insights and administrations for students with disabilities (Tamrat, 2019).

1.9.11 Educational directives overview about special need and inclusive education

The Ethiopian Constitution acknowledges the treatment and adaptation of persons with disabilities, with educational proclamations and decrees promoting their inclusion (Tamrat, 2019). The Education Sector Development Program IV (2010-2014/15) focuses on inclusive education, with the aim of increasing the participation of difficult-to-reach groups and addressing the diverse needs of all learners (FMoE, 2010). This includes changes in content, approaches, structure, and procedures to address various needs (FMoE, 2010). The program aims to address limited understanding of disability, negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities, and resistance to change in the school environment (FMoE, 2010). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the UN, Humanitarian Disability Charter, Disability Inclusion Strategy, and Guidelines for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action all emphasize Ethiopia's commitment to improving inclusivity (IASC, 2019; IDA, 2019).

1.9.12 Inclusive education overview

Inclusive education strategies aim to protect the rights of learners with disabilities at the national level (Tiruneh, 2019). They include strategies such as teacher training, centralized resource centers, parent motivation, and Community Based Rehabilitation (Mattingly & McInerney, 2011). The Ministry of Education adopted the inclusive education strategy in 1999 to ensure quality education for marginalized children (Jote & Tekle, 2022). Countries can support the implementation of inclusive education by strengthening information systems, promoting curricular flexibility, and promoting inclusive societies and economies (Schuelka, 2018).

1.9.13 Implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopian universities

The Ethiopian government is working on inclusive education principles, particularly in higher education, to ensure equal access and quality education for all learners (Birhanu, 2020; Hankebo, 2018). However, the implementation of inclusive education is not as widespread as it should be (Tiruneh, 2019). Ethiopian universities have not adequately trained university teachers in inclusive principles and practices, requiring support from peers, administrators, parents, and special

education teachers (Solomon, 2013). Effective implementation requires competent teachers who manage resources, adapt to new teaching methods, and are familiar with materials (Hankebo, 2018).

1.9.14 Inclusive education implementation approach

The Ethiopian Ministry of Education's SNE/IE Strategy outlines three approaches to implementing inclusive education: universal support for all children, increased support for at-risk students, and intensive support for students with severe learning impairments and disabilities (MOE, 2012; Vitthalrao Aneraye et al., 2023). The universal support approach involves regular teachers providing cross-school and cross-class support (Schuelka, 2018; Vitthalrao Aneraye et al., 2023), while the increased support approach involves consultation with teachers, additional classroom support, and monitoring learning risks related to gender and classroom organization (Keanon, 2022). The intensive support approach involves teaching in small groups by specially trained teachers and cluster centers, with one child receiving their first education in the special school (CPBIS, 2020).

1.9.15 Disability students challenges in higher education

Disability students in higher education face numerous challenges, including negative attitudes, accessibility issues, and inadequate equipment and materials (Jaafar et al., 2020). The Commission on Human Rights has identified a lack of accommodations, support, services, funding, dispute resolution, and special education and disability support as challenging issues (Kabuta, 2014; Rufo & Emma, 2012). Inclusive education faces several challenges, including poor institutional planning (Abduwani, 2017), lack of infrastructure (Abduwani, 2017), slow decision-making (Divjak & Ređep, 2015), and inadequate service provision (Walelign, 2018).

1.10 Research Design and Methodology

1.10.1 Research approach

This study used a mixed methods research approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative research components to improve credibility, context, illustration, utility, confirm, discover and diversity of views on the topic (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of complex research questions and enables researchers to explore

diverse perspectives and uncover relationships between multifaceted questions (Shorten & Smith, 2017). The mixed methodology was used for empirical data collection, using numerical and verbal data to gather reliable data (Cohen et al., 2018). The approach also provided opportunities for participants to have a strong voice and share their experiences, enriching research evidence, and answering questions more deeply (AHRQ, 2013). The mixed methods approach facilitated greater academic interaction and enriched researchers' experiences, making it an essential tool in educational and social science research (Shorten & Smith, 2017). The results from one method were used to enhance, augment, and clarify the results from the other (David et al., 2010).

1.10.2 Research design

This research utilised a concurrent triangulation type of mixed-method research design, which involves collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously (Creswell, 2009; Tepetepe, 2022). The theoretical perspective used was inclusive education theory to identify disability students' inclusiveness, while system and contingency theories were used to distinguish roles of higher education managers (Tepetepe, 2022). This design provides multiple perspectives, a holistic picture, and mitigates flaws associated with mono or purist methods and philosophical positions (Dawadi et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2017). The concurrent triangulation design (QUAN + QUAL) was chosen for its one-phase design, which allowed concurrent collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative method was used to gather opinions on the roles of managers, disabled students, and inclusive education practices in higher education institutions (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). However, qualitative data was used to capture participants' experiences, personal perspectives, meanings and beliefs about the role of managers in improving students' inclusion in Ethiopian higher education (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). The concurrent triangulation design was also important for the research timeframe, as it allowed for the collection of data sooner and resulted in valid and well-substantiated conclusions about a single phenomenon (Bell et al., 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2017).

1.10.3 Research paradigm

The research paradigm refers to the perception of the world of a researcher, while quantitative and qualitative refer to data types (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Mixed-method researchers can use a combination of both to answer their questions (Mertens, 2015). Pragmatism is a preferred paradigm for mixed-methods research due to its flexibility in method choice (Brierley, 2017). Pragmatists focus on workable outcomes or solutions to problems, rejecting the idea of a single scientific method (Parvaiz et al., 2016). They believe that knowledge can be acquired through various approaches (Parvaiz et al., 2016). The pragmatist paradigm is concerned with applications and what produces solutions to problems, making it a more suitable approach than other research philosophies (Sol & Heng, 2022). This approach allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the real world and provides a more flexible approach for researchers (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

1.10.4 Population and sampling

The sample size was established based on the expense of data collection and adequate statistical power (Eid & El-Gohary, 2013). The sample size for this study consisted of ten universities selected by means of a simple random sampling technique, namely Jimma, Hawassa, Ambo, Wolkite, Wollega, Mettu, Selale, Bonga, Gambela, and Wolayita Sodo. Two presidents, two deans, and two directors of disability centers were included in the sample through convenience sampling for interviews. Convenience sampling is often used to address many of the limitations that research studies can have (Taherdoost, 2018). A total of 50 department heads, 112 teachers and 162 students with disabilities were selected to complete a questionnaire using simple random sampling methods.

The selection of 50 department heads, 112 instructors and 162 students as responders were justified by the need to obtain a representative and balanced sample of important stakeholders within the organization. These responders were selected to consider administrative, instructional, and experiential viewpoints on management. This sample allows for relevant analysis and is manageable for data collection. The sampling itself comprises 10 public universities out of 45 in order to extract a variety of opinions. The chosen figures ensure a variety of perspectives, enhance reliability, and provide sufficient data to identify patterns and develop reliable inferences for the institutions.

1.10.5 Instruments and data collection method

This study utilised questionnaires, interviews, and document review to gather quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaires were prepared in English and had closed and open ended items, aimed at obtaining information from respondents about the role of higher education managers in improving the inclusiveness of students. Interviews were conducted with higher education management presidents, college deans, and coordinators of inclusive education and disability center programs. Semi-structured interviews were the most frequently used type, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the topics covered. The documents were reviewed and analysed to gain insight into policies, directives, guidelines, and strategic intentions regarding the role of higher education managers in improving the inclusiveness of students.

The tools used in this study included a formal request for permission to carry out research in the public institution target in Ethiopia (Appendix G) and a corresponding permission letter granted to the respective universities for data collection (Appendix I). All participants provided their informed consent using a form (see Appendix J). A semi-structured interview guide was used to obtain qualitative data (Appendix C), while structured questionnaires were distributed to department heads, instructors, and students to collect quantitative data on the research topic (Appendices A and B). Additionally, a document analysis checklist (Appendix E) was utilized. These methods facilitated excellent communication and collaboration between the researcher and Ethiopia's public colleges, allowing the identification and recruitment of prospective participants. Informed consent documentation described the study's objectives, duration, protocols, and ethical protections. A participant information document (Appendix K) was included with the consent form, which required participants to indicate written agreement on the response section of the informed consent letter (Appendix J) before completing a biographical questionnaire.

1.10.6 Data analysis and interpretation

The study aimed to analyze the distribution of cases using frequency distribution tables (Cárdenas, 2019) and cross-tabulation using descriptive and inferential statistics. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Program version 26 was used to code, enter, and analyze the acquired data. The researcher prioritized understanding and analysing the data, considering the ranges of means obtained from the 5-point Likert scale.

Qualitative data were using thematic data analysis, which aims to understand the core of a lived experience by investigating participants' viewpoints and discovering repeating themes and structures (Gill, 2020). Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes or topics in the data. The interview transcripts were transcribed, coded, and analysed thematically, supplementing the interview data to give meaning to the qualitative part of the study (Gill, 2020). Qualitative data analysis involves interpretation and creativity but is less mysterious than hard and sometimes tedious (Dey, 2005; Nihr, 2009).

1.10.7 Reliability and validity check

A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability and validity of a baseline questionnaire for quantitative data collection. The questionnaire was developed by a researcher using the literature and the assistance of academic experts and statisticians. The final version of the data collection tool reflected the comments of these experts. Mixed methods research is more complex than single methods (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011), and the researcher considered the rationale and purpose for mixing quantitative and qualitative approaches. The trustworthiness of the data collected during the interviews was ensured through credibility, content analysis, dependability, conformability, transferability, and authenticity. The study aimed to test the internal validity and credibility in the data collection process.

1.10.8 Research ethics

Ethics in research involves beliefs, trustworthiness, and the implementation of procedures (Dooly et al., 2017). Researchers must consider the human component and protect participants' feelings, welfare, and rights (Akaranga & Makau, 2016; Dooly et al., 2017). This study ensured ethics by maintaining honesty, confidentiality, and privacy. Ethical considerations included permission, confidentiality, privacy, voluntary participation, and informed consent. The researcher also dealt with people with respect, informed consent, and fairness. It was crucial to use these as the foundation for the ethics of the research endeavor, as will be discussed below, when taking scholars' viewpoints into account.

Informed consent: Informed consent is a fundamental ethical principle in research in a variety of settings, requiring participants to be fully informed about the study's objectives, methodologies,

potential risks, and expected benefits prior to their voluntary involvement (Rogti, 2024). This technique safeguards participant autonomy by allowing for informed decision-making, thus reducing coercion or misunderstanding (Rogti, 2024).

Integrity and honesty: Research integrity requires accurate data representation without manipulation or intentional omission, as well as accurate and transparent study implementation. In terms of research, analysis, and dissemination, scholars must maintain integrity, revealing all positive or negative results without modifying findings to fit preconceived notions (Ali & Ndubuisi, 2025).

Confidentiality and privacy: In human subject research, researchers have an ethical obligation to protect participants' private information. This is known as confidentiality and privacy. To prevent possible harm and preserve participant confidence in the research process, this protection is essential. Protect sensitive data, employ anonymisation or pseudonymisation methods, and enforce rigorous access controls for data storage (Das et al., 2025).

No harm: To avoid harm in educational research, a review is essential to minimize negative impacts and warn participants of potential hazards. However, it is not feasible to predict all harm, whether psychological, emotional, physical, economic, reputational, legal, or related to the validity of a study (Gençten, 2021). To maintain ethical integrity and protect the participants in this study, all forms of harm must be contextually evaluated.

Additionally, the researcher presented the ethical clearance application to the College Research Ethics Committee by outlining every step taken as a pillar of this study to respect and meet the necessary criteria. Ethical approval was granted by the University Of South Africa College Of Education Research Ethics Committee.

1.11 Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

1.11.1 Limitation of the study

During data collection, some complications occurred. As is known regarding the questionnaires, some respondents, especially teachers, were unwilling to return on time. To overcome the limitation, the researcher visited and discussed extensively with them to collect the questionnaires on the list without delay. Some students returned unfilled questionnaire sheets. To manage this

issue, the researcher/data collector checked, informed, and provided them again to respondents to fill with a great commitment. Another limitation was the inconvenience of university presidents and college deans in their offices to conduct an interview. The researcher maintained continuous communication with the participants prior to arranging interviews or discussions to mitigate the adverse effects of scheduling difficulties. In the cases where face-to-face meetings were impossible, alternative approaches such as telephone calls, WhatsApp messages, email, and other social media platforms were used, with the consent of all participants. This adaptable methodology guaranteed accessibility, reduced delays, and reinforced the reliability of the data collection process.

1.11.2 Delimitation of the study

The delimitation describes the scope or limits of the study (Coker, 2022). To make the study manageable for the researcher, this study was limited to the following: The purpose of the study was to explore the role of higher education managers in enhance student inclusion in public universities in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, there are 45 public universities that provide teaching, learning, research, and community services throughout the country. These universities are classified according to their foundation first, second, and third. Of these universities two, three, and five universities are chosen as a sample consecutively by using a probability or a simple random sampling technique. The populations included in the sample are university presidents, college deans, disability center directorates or coordinators, department heads, teachers, and students with disabilities.

1.12 Definition of Key Concepts

The concepts that follow are important for the study and are defined below.

1.12.1 Higher education

Higher education is a public service institution (Easaw & Abebaw, 2023). Higher education institutions must be socially responsible in all aspects of their business and give due respect to the concerns of societies and, at times, take the risk of seeing ways of anticipating and taking the initiative to meet some of society's pressing demands (Padayachee et al., 2021). In this study, higher education means an institution that provides training and educational programs to students

who have successfully completed postsecondary education to become well-adjusted and efficient members of the community.

1.12.2 Inclusive education

The term inclusive education refers to an educational system that is open to all learners, regardless of poverty, gender, ethnic background, language, learning difficulties, and disabilities they have. Inclusion emphasizes that all children and students can learn (Svendby, 2024). It requires identifying barriers that hinder learning and reducing or eliminating these barriers in schools, vocational training, higher education, teacher education, and education management. The educational environment must be adjusted to meet the needs of all learners (UNESCO, 2005, 2017b, 2021). The definitions of inclusive education and special education must incorporate all the concepts of the UNESCO definition. In this study, inclusive education entails providing equal access to education and services for students with and without disabilities. The approach prioritises meeting their diverse requirements and guarantees that their interests are taken into account in all teaching, learning, and administrative choices.

1.12.3 Inclusive education management

The management of inclusive education includes two main points: the school/institution management, which is the area and responsibility of the manager, and classroom management is the area and responsibility of the classroom teacher (Yusuf et al., 2017). Inclusive education management is referred to as a school/institution and classroom management system in a regular school with an inclusive perspective, from planning, organizing, implementing, and controlling by involving all learners with disabilities and non-disabilities (Güner-Yıldız et al., 2021). In this study, inclusive education management refers to the management of education for students with disabilities that is based on the notion that one of them is capable of learning and developing if appropriate learning opportunities are offered.

1.12.4 Students diversity

Student diversity refers to differences among individual students based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographic area (Clark, 2011). Therefore, in the educational environment, especially in the

classroom, identify and describe the diversity of different students in terms of their strengths, weaknesses, aspirations, limitations, and special needs (Güner-Yıldız et al., 2021; Johnson, 2014). Today's educational environment must celebrate diversity due to the number of students who have different backgrounds. This study defines student diversity as the diverse differences that exist among university students.

1.12.5 Students with disability

Students' with disability means that a student has mental retardation, a hearing disability (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as emotional disturbance), an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness or multiple disabilities, and who, due to them, needs special education and related services (Hornby, 2014; Wearmouth, 2016). In this study, it refers to having a student significantly greater difficulty in learning than their peers or a disability that hinders them from using educational facilities and the necessary services that are normally available in educational institutions.

1.13 Chapter Overviews

The outline of the research report consists of six chapters organized as follows.

Chapter one: Introduction and background

This chapter is devoted to the introductory part of the research, which constitutes the background of the study, the rationale of the study, the problem statement, the basic research questions, the objective and objectives of the study, the limitation and delimitation of the study, and the definition of key concepts. This chapter describes all the problems to be studied.

Chapter two: Review of the relevant literature

This chapter deals with the literature review, which comprises different empirical studies of inclusive education contexts and describes the development and policies and practices of inclusive or special-need education, the challenges and prospects in the last few decades, and the current status of Ethiopia with respect to international declarations and laws. The main elements and

assumptions of management theories, namely, system and contingency theories, are also discussed. The review will be organized conceptually or thematically, establishing a framework for the investigation.

Chapter three: Theoretical frameworks

This chapter presents an outline and discussion of the conceptual framework used in the study. The chapter draws on the literature on the theoretical frameworks of inclusive education. It focusses on the arguments raised within and between special education and the theory of inclusive education and educational management theory, namely system and contingency theories, are also discussed. Then it proceeds to discuss the models of disability called the medical or individual model and the social model of disability.

Chapter four: Research design and methodology

In general, this chapter clarifies the arguments regarding the use of the mixed-method research design for this study. And specifically, it presents the research approach, design, and methodology, providing scientific justification for all steps and procedures of the research methods, sampling techniques, research instruments, data analysis, and ethical issues and ensuring the validity and reliability of the instruments.

Chapter five: Data presentation, analysis, and discussion

Provides empirical findings based on questionnaire, interview and document review analyses and interpretation of data. All data acquired by using different instruments are presented, analysed, interpreted, and discussed in light of the reviewed literature, policies, strategies, directives, and guidelines.

Chapter six: Summary, conclusions, and recommendations of the study

This chapter concludes the study with a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations. It includes parts of the research report in which the researcher reflects on his view of the research findings. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher develops a conclusion and forwards the recommendation to relevant bodies about the problems.

1.14 Summary of the Chapter

In higher education (HE), inclusion is a transformative process that seeks to increase participation in learning, cultures, and communities to accommodate the different needs of all students. With a shared vision that encompasses all children in the appropriate age range, it involves adjustments to materials, approaches, structures, and techniques. Managers of all organisations must face the cross-cutting issue of disability. Higher education institution managers have a responsibility to combat discrimination and general disability problems.

Lower, middle, and upper managers must make accommodations for students with disabilities. In an academic setting where students face challenges, culturally relevant pedagogy can help protect students and reduce negative preconceptions. Discrimination is not adequately addressed by programs and initiatives created in the name of diversity and inclusion, and many students with disabilities are still not enrolled at the university. Equal opportunities for students with disabilities must be established, and discrimination must be addressed by educational policymakers and HE managers. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore the role of higher education institution managers in improving student inclusion in Ethiopian public universities. This chapter builds on the introduction and background outlined in Chapter One, providing a review of relevant research to establish a foundation grounded in evidence for the study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Contrary to being just a summary of the available scholarly materials, a literature review is an analytical, systematic and integrative framework that situates the research within the broader intellectual discourse by revealing gaps, tensions and contradictions that require further exploration (Chigbu et al., 2023). In a thesis, the literature review serves as an introductory chapter that provides not only the conceptual background but also the intellectual foundation for the research conducted. The chapter critically engages with the relevant literature at the local, national and international levels to determine the scope of the study and establish its theoretical and empirical foundations in the investigation of the role of higher education managers in creating an inclusive environment for students with disabilities in Ethiopian public universities. Having methodically evaluated a wide range of academic sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, dissertations, theses, working papers, official decrees, and policy documents, the researcher aims to provide an exhaustive, procedural analysis of the issue. All these academic sources allow one to define the research questions, introduce important concepts and acknowledge the important role of institutional managers in implementing inclusive practices for disabled students.

One of the main goals of the present chapter is not only to report on what is known but also to critically analyse the current body of literature, identifying degrees of agreement, disagreement, and important omissions. An efficiently conducted literature review reduces several aspects of the research problem through providing a historical context, describing the state of knowledge currently known, justifying the purpose of the research, revealing gaps in the literature, and suggesting useful theoretical concepts (Snyder, 2024). In addition, it helps the researcher understand how to apply appropriate methodological procedures as well as observe comparative studies that aid in the analysis and interpretation of the findings (Bauske, 2021). The structure of the present chapter is thematic, and the following subtopics will be explored in relation to the literature review: the history of higher education and managerial roles; perceptions of disability and inclusion in higher education managers; policies in Ethiopia regarding inclusivity; inclusive education practices in higher education institutions of Ethiopia; and the challenges faced by

students with disabilities.

2.2 History of Higher Education and Higher Education Managers

It is clear from the historical path taken by higher education that there is an intricate relationship between institutional development, colonial experience, and contemporary management issues that relate to the inclusion issue. Even though higher education can be viewed as the most rapidly growing industry on a global level (Verger et al., 2017), the roots of higher education go way back and include non-European centres of learning as well. As was mentioned by Sintayehu (2018), the centres of learning in ancient India, China, Africa, and the Middle East were operating as higher education institutions providing knowledge and training civil servants for their societies. However, the colonial era completely changed this picture, substituting indigenous educational institutions with European models, which, according to Sintayehu (2018), made modern African higher education institutions "imperfect clones of universities in Europe." The problem here is the fact that such a colonial heritage poses serious problems for management in the current situation since the post-independence states face the challenge of "Africanizing" the universities, developing the philosophy of education based on the history and culture of the continent (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Sintayehu, 2018). This historical dilemma of conflicting imposed institutional form and local educational purpose becomes a major issue that influences managerial decision-making concerning inclusion in Ethiopian public universities.

Professionalisation in educational management appeared to be a separate field, mostly due to the challenges of the era of industry, where the principles of scientific management by Frederick Taylor were applied to the field of educational administration already in 1911 (Kohnová & Salajová, 2019). According to Steffes (2022), the advocates of educational efficiency, who are represented by such a person as Ellwood P. Cubberley, considered the development to be revolutionary for school administration. In addition, it should be acknowledged that the existing managerial framework, which originated from the efficiency of the era of industry and not equality, focused on effectiveness instead of inclusiveness regarding the different student populations. Consequently, the ideological challenge that modern higher education managers face concerns balancing management traditions associated with the era of industry and the ethical issue of inclusion. According to Aga (2024), the extent and scope of activity of institutions aimed at

satisfying diverse students' needs prove the fact that the problem of diversity dynamics is beyond demography for higher education institutions. The management system in universities needs to include a wide variety of limitations and developments, which makes it necessary for them to have a highly complex management approach (Nurhikmah, 2024)

The case of Ethiopia represents a good example of this broader conflict situation, where the managers experience pressure both for achieving the necessary institutional efficiency and being responsive to their community. While general management processes can both help and interfere with the efficient performance of a university (Wang et al., 2025), it should be noted that the distribution of responsibility and authority in the organisational structure remains with the administrators (Aga, 2024), Most importantly, it is essential to note that the way educational goals are set and achieved varies significantly depending on the system, level of education and educational culture (Al-Ababneh & Alrhaimi, 2020). The history of higher education and its management in Ethiopia shows that, although there are native educational traditions in the country, public universities use a framework of institutions that were developed under colonial and post-colonial influence and are not sufficiently responsive to marginalised students' needs. Post-colonial models that may not adequately address the needs of marginalised students.

It is thus evident from the above history that the function of management in universities in relation to inclusiveness cannot be separated from the context within which such decisions are taken, and thus it becomes necessary to look into the issue of the perception and practices of managers as key elements for inclusiveness.

2.2.1 Evolution of education management from its origins to the present day

The development of educational management as an academic field throughout history has presented itself as problematic, lacking attempts at combining theoretical principles of management with education, which led to fragmentation of the discipline, moving away from administration towards management and then towards leadership (Eacott, 2015). Despite changes in terminology, however, there is a strong continuity in that all three iterations focused on managerial aspects at the expense of educational. Crucially, educational management as a discipline is undergoing unprecedented criticism due to the commercialisation of the educational management industry through selling products that promise personalised management to solve

institution-related problems (Berkat et al., 2025). It raises the question of the appropriateness of using concepts related to business management in educational establishments whose mission is based on equity and human development. Mixing educational management and management science (Eğitim et al., 2022) may lead to ignoring the special social justice implications inherent in educational leadership compared to administration in business.

The broadened scope of education management in the contemporary world, covering curriculum design, financing, accountability, human resource management, and adaptive leadership skills (Al-Ababneh & Alrhaimi, 2020), is indicative of the increasing complexity of operations and raised expectations from educational managers. Significantly, in the 21st century, there has been an establishment of strong ties between the two aspects as far as success in educational matters goes, with governments expecting universities to supply their countries with human capital that will allow them to be competitive in the international market environment (Kapambwe & Sohawon, 2019). In turn, such economism does not seem to correspond well with the inclusivity agenda, as far as the focus of educational managers is concentrated mainly on the achievement of tangible results and competitive indicators rather than on the often difficult and hard-to-measure process of promoting inclusion of students with disabilities. At the same time, according to Adams and Kutty (2017), the task of educational management is to help the institution absorb the rapidly increasing amount of knowledge; still, technicism and scientism are hardly conducive to such processes.

To overcome the challenges mentioned above, current management research is calling for competencies like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability (Achmad et al., 2019). Visionary and situational leadership, along with new uses of artificial intelligence, are presented as a way to apply such competencies (Achmad et al., 2019). Nevertheless, this framework of competencies, despite its importance, fails to speak about the dispositions and behaviours needed for inclusive leadership in higher education institutions. The managers at Ethiopian public universities face a twofold challenge as a result of the past prevalence of management approaches focused on efficiency and of a colonial background of organisational forms. They have to consider traditional concerns about effectiveness as well as take into account ethical requirements for the inclusivity of people with disabilities. It is clear from this analysis that the evolution of education management has not paid enough attention to the issue of the intersection of management practices and inclusive education, which makes the purpose of this

study justified.

2.2.2 History of higher education in Ethiopia

The birth of higher education institutions in Ethiopia is inextricably connected with the political development of the country and its involvement with Western approaches to education. Before the year 1950, Ethiopian students who wanted to get higher education had to go abroad, mostly to Great Britain, because the country only had one secondary school that could produce qualified candidates for further studies (Hapte, 1961; Molla, 2018). The creation of the University College of Addis Ababa, which was founded in December 1950 and formally opened in February 1951, is considered the beginning of modern higher education in Ethiopia (Molla, 2018). However, at the same time, the emergence of this institution established a model of dependency that was to be characteristic of Ethiopian higher education all the way until today. It should be emphasized that the university is an educational institution that was not created indigenously but rather imported, which raises questions concerning whose knowledge systems and pedagogical tradition became dominant in Ethiopia. This is a critical legacy that influences current inclusion discussions in terms of how the structure and organisation of Ethiopian public universities did not take into account the needs of diverse students, especially disabled ones.

According to Molla (2018), there are four clear periods within the development of higher education in Ethiopia: the Genesis of Modern Higher Education (1950-1960), the Consolidation of the 'National University' (1961-1974), Incremental Development under a State of Hardship (1974-late 1990s), and Extensive Expansion and Restructuring (late 1990s-2010s). It is evident from this system-wide and national political transformation-based periodisation that higher education has always been affected by the needs of the country's political situation rather than its educational goals. It is important to mention that the expansion period, which started from the late 1990s, saw an increase in the number of higher education institutions to 45, mainly due to the needs of national development and economy (Tamrat, 2022)

Reform efforts in the Ethiopian higher education system, as captured by the Education and Training Policy, Education Sector Development Programme, and Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009, directly address issues of relevance, quality, accessibility, and inequality (Molla, 2018). According to the Proclamation, educational institutions enjoy considerable freedom in

determining internal operations, including educational, financial, and human resource management; therefore, institutional managers become key agents of change. On the other hand, as Molla (2018) posits, there is a significant gap between policy intentions and implementation, especially as far as structural inequalities in the higher education system are concerned. While the higher education system has generally improved in terms of student services and accessibility, students with disabilities still continue to lag because their challenges have remained mostly the same (Department of Special Needs Education, 2014). The ongoing inequality poses important questions about the involvement of institutional managers in implementing policy commitments to create an inclusive environment. Having evolved under the impact of colonialism, political changes, and expansive reforms, the Ethiopian higher education system faces the challenge of redressing historical wrongs through managerial initiatives.

2.2.3 Higher education managers in Ethiopia

The shift in Ethiopia from a higher education system of elite to one that is mass and has grown from just two public universities to 45 public universities with rapidly growing numbers of students has imposed new challenges on management (Ashcroft, 2010; Tareke et al., 2024). There have been financial limitations and declining study environment (Tamrat, 2022); however, management has been poorly regarded in terms of career prospects with monetary incentives based on teaching and research and not effective management (Tareke et al., 2024). The challenge of undervaluing management poses many questions regarding the type of leadership that will be available to meet the inclusion requirements since managerial skills are key in delivering quality education. As Retnawati (2023) says, without good and efficient leadership systems, there can be no quality education; bad management in Ethiopian higher education is caused by the limitations of resources and inadequate supervision and lack of management information systems (Aga, 2024; Nurhikmah, 2024).

However, the transition from collegial to outcome-focused Business Process Reengineering (BPR) in 2008 was a huge management change that has been compromised by employee resistance, unrealistic reporting, insufficient training, and lack of technical skills (Sibhato & Singh, 2012). The most critical aspect of this management change which is based on efficiency principles, is that the connection between it and the issues of equity and inclusiveness goals has not been made,

implying that the main managerial paradigm of higher education in Ethiopia continues to be focused on management effectiveness rather than on real efforts to break the obstacles for disabled students. In an effort to overcome management problems, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education came up with the 'Directive on selection and appointment of leaders and managers in higher education institutions 002/2017' that set up transparent, participative and merit-based process of selection (Adamu, 2019a). Though it is a positive move towards professionalization and accountable governance and a good chance to attract different managerial staff (Adamu, 2019a), the capability of the directive to develop inclusive management approach should still be studied empirically.

2.2.4 Benefits of disability inclusion in higher education

Conceptualized as a system in which all people learn and flourish together despite their differences (Kathy Cologon, 2019), inclusive education is the approach aimed at integrating people previously excluded from the process, considering diversity as the key element instead of the secondary one (Florian, 2019). Inclusive education helps students become ready for their participation in the professional sphere and community through the development of their skills and knowledge, and the research proves its significant positive impact on all learners (Shaewitz & Crandall, 2020). According to Vitthalrao Aneraye *et al.* (2023), inclusive education contributes to the formation of the feeling of inclusion and belonging among all students as well as improves the academic performance of students with disabilities because they demonstrate higher results in the inclusive environment than in segregated one. In addition, it encourages tolerance, empathy, and understanding and makes it possible to communicate with diverse people. Though such benefits are well-documented, the implementation of the concepts of inclusion is reliant on the support of the institution's administration and management, as well as the creation of conducive campuses. This highlights the need to explore the way in which university managers view themselves in relation to the implementation of these concepts, since their decisions influence whether these benefits will be achieved.

2.3 Higher Education Managers Perception of Disability Inclusion

The adoption of inclusive values in the sphere of higher education is quite a new thing and is applied to a lesser extent than in compulsory education, which creates many difficulties for

managers (Valle-Flórez et al., 2021). Several studies have shown that higher education managers tend to consider disability as a personal issue, which requires some special help instead of adjusting educational settings to meet the needs of disabled people (Culduz, 2024; Papadakaki et al., 2022). This approach implies the absence of fundamental knowledge of the concept itself, as there is an obvious lack of knowledge among the teaching staff in universities and colleges concerning disability, along with wrong attitudes towards the students with disabilities (Papadakaki et al., 2022). These perceptions are quite important, as those organizations which cannot create the culture of respect for diversity will never achieve inclusion (Makuve, 2024).

Analysis of the research literature concerning disability inclusion shows that managers' perception of disability includes several factors such as legal issues, organizational pressures, and societal values. Contemporary universities are obliged to respond not only to legal issues but also to an increase in the number of disabled students (Maria et al., 2020). Nevertheless, managers experience difficulties in their efforts to become inclusive, which is not limited to mere physical access but also concerns psychological barriers affected by paradoxical nature of modern society in terms of its competitive, individualistic, and communal logic (Maria et al., 2020). Most importantly, managers' perception of students with disabilities includes discourse of education being a right of everybody; nevertheless, this value has been increasingly undermined in its support of students with disabilities (Fovet, 2020). Thus, there arise important questions concerning perceptions of disability among higher education managers of Ethiopia.

In order to overcome these barriers, higher education institutions need to create an inclusive culture, practice, and policy (Lockmun-Bissessur et al., 2024). An inclusive culture involves positive attitudes towards disability on behalf of students and employees, while inclusive practice means adapting educational context to the needs of students (Echeita et al., 2016). The most recent examples of institutional response include implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in university strategy development, as well as creating diversity and inclusion strategies for the respective institution community (Jorgensen & Claeys-Kulik, 2018). Nowadays, higher education managers see inclusion as recognition and accommodation of student diversity which is determined by their ethnic background, economic status, disabilities, and health problems (Ainscow, 2020a; Nīmante et al., 2021). Nevertheless, in spite of all mentioned above, inclusion

in practice depends on managerial engagement that makes empirical research relevant in terms of understanding disability perceptions of Ethiopian higher education managers.

2.3.1 Higher education managers' knowledge about models of disability

However, people managing faculties in academic institutions exhibit lack of experience and negative attitudes towards models of disability despite knowledge and awareness of disability models being important for formation of positive attitude towards disabled students (Papadakaki et al., 2022). Though disability models have been criticized for their ambiguity and limited perspective, they provide a good base for learning about challenges associated with disabilities and perspectives of their developers (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). The models highlight how the society permits or denies access to people with disabilities for work, services, economic and political power (Simpson, 2018). There exist two major ideological paradigms - traditional and radical that determine the models; while the former regards individuals with disabilities as socially dependent (possibly leading to discrimination), the latter considers them to be consumers of society's services and goods with emphasis on autonomy and human rights (Lawson & Beckett, 2021). Importantly, no one model is capable of guiding inclusion processes; therefore, multiple models should be included in the policy for inclusion of students with disabilities regarded as positive diversity.

The use of disability models in the administration of higher education has far-reaching implications on the way that institutional administrators understand their obligations towards disabled students. In this regard, models have various important roles: defining disability, making attributions regarding causation and responsibility, policy development and implementation, affecting the self-conception of people with disabilities and eliminating discrimination and prejudice (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). Given that disability models evolve with society, at the same time different actors within institutions may be following different models, which can result in a contradiction in their actions (Berger, 2021). For higher education managers in Ethiopia, the choice of models poses a challenge, since they have to balance the medical model, which understands disability as a deficit of an individual, with the social model, which views disability as something created by the environment and attitudes of other people. Therefore, it is vital to understand which models

underlie managerial practice because it will have direct influence on the nature of institutional reforms.

There are several unique models that include the medical model, the charity/tragedy model, the social model, the expert/professional model, the rights-based model, and the religious/moral model. Each one provides a unique perspective on how the issue of disability can be viewed (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). For Ethiopian public university managers, the dominant model adopted would have a substantial effect on resource distribution, policy application, and prioritization of accessibility efforts. It is evident from this analysis that it is crucial to investigate the models of disability that guide the managers' perceptions because it is from these models that inclusion will be considered either as charity work addressing individual deficiencies or systemic work eliminating obstacles to participation.

2.3.1.1 Medical model

Medical Model of Disability is the model of disability that evolved with the development of medical research since the mid-19th century and has been replacing the moral and religious approaches through viewing disability as a functional restriction of a person regardless of any social and environmental issues (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). From this perspective, disability can be viewed as illness or some deviation from the norm that should be treated (CBM, 2023; Massoumeh & Leila, 2012). According to this model, there is a problem with the patient, and solving the medical problem will solve all difficulties (Amponsah-Bediako, 2013). Such perception of disability results in a wrong assumption that all students having the same health problems require the same help, thus, leading to low expectations and undermining autonomy, freedom of choice, and empowerment of people with disability (Wilson, 2018). From this perspective, the managers of higher education will view disability as a personal problem to be addressed in a special way.

The medical model of disability faces numerous criticisms which are particularly important to consider for higher education management practice. It adopts a paternalistic attitude which uses care as a justification for institutionalization and segregation, which, in its turn, constrains the decision-making and self-reliance of disabled individuals (Amponsah-Bediako, 2013). Moreover, it encourages discriminatory attitudes as the model makes people believe that disabled individuals are less productive because of their medical condition, making it discriminatory and constraining

their full social participation (Amponsah-Bediako, 2013). In addition, instead of putting attention to needs of the individual, it puts it on what is wrong with the individual, thereby making institutions blame individuals and avoiding necessary changes (Wilson, 2018). In Chile, "a person with a disability" is considered to be an example of the medical model since it implies that the individual carries his/her disability rather than it is constructed socially (Gatta et al., 2024). Such a view is very important for the management practice in Ethiopia as it defines what approach managers will choose to create inclusive campuses – to find solutions for individuals or to make structural changes.

2.3.1.2 Charity-based model

The Charity Model of Disability was created as an extension of the Medical Model, based on the idea that disability is something that needs to be treated and eventually removed (Ralph, 2017). The Medical Model sees medical practitioners as the experts when it comes to disability, while the Charity Model regards non-disabled people as saviors who see persons with disabilities as victims of their own disability (Retief & Letšosa, 2018). In this paradigm, people with disabilities are viewed as helpless beings who depend on other people and need someone to look after them. They are regarded negatively which reduces their autonomy (Tsai & Ming-sho, 2010). This model views able-bodied people as having a civic duty to help people with disabilities, but it does not promote independent life, equal access to jobs and social activities (Ralph, 2017). In case with higher education managers working with this model, students with disabilities are seen as passive objects of kindness.

These limits of the charity approach are serious and are closely connected with inclusive education. In this case, people with disabilities are perceived as tragic or unfortunate persons who require caring; it is assumed that society is obliged to organize all services for those vulnerable people and decide about the best way for them (CBM, 2023). Such an approach leads to dependency but not empowerment, and the lives of people with disabilities are seldom considered happy or fulfilled but rather seen as problems that need solving (Ralph, 2017). In the community of people with disabilities, the charity approach is often considered negative because it contributes to the existence of harmful stereotypes and does not encourage the idea of inclusion as a right (Tsai & Ming-sho, 2010). What is important, the charity approach encourages the managerial approach to

concentrate on accommodation as an act of kindness but not on overcoming barriers as a problem of justice.

2.3.1.3 Social model

The social model of disability was formulated in the United Kingdom during the 1960s and 1970s as a reaction to the individualized nature of the charitable and medical models (CBM, 2023). This approach revolutionizes the very notion of disability, which does not reside in individual impairments but, rather, is caused by social attitudes, inaccessible surroundings, discrimination at work, and segregation within the educational system (Mole, 2016). Under this approach, those individuals with impairments only become disabled in terms of encountering various barriers from society, like stairs without ramps and inaccessible digital materials, which prevent full participation (Macmbinji, 2023). Thus, any solution should target social changes and not the personal readjustment of an impaired person because disability, as understood by this model, is a socially constructed problem, which prevents people with disabilities (Wilson, 2018). Notably, although UK universities claim to follow the social model of disability, the need for medical certification in order to get appropriate adjustments shows that the university system is actually based on the ideas of the medical model of disability (Mole, 2016; Wilson, 2018).

The social model poses drastic implications for managers of higher education institutions. It implies moving away from the practice of individual accommodation toward systemic efforts to remove barriers (Mole, 2016). The social model states that by removing institutional, physical and attitudinal barriers, one can give people with disabilities the same opportunities as others, which will result in an inclusive society in which disability is not disabling anymore (Mole, 2016). There are several challenges faced by the social model. Firstly, the growing number of elderly makes the adaptation of the society more difficult. Moreover, it is hard to persuade committed professionals working in the spheres of charity and rehabilitation that instead of treatment or care, their main duty should be help to disabled persons to take control of their life (Papadakaki et al., 2022). Finally, the social model is criticized for its inability to deal with all aspects of disability, which includes not only social attitudes and environment but also feeling of physical and mental limitations (Williams et al., 2017). Still, the focus on social change, barrier removal, awareness, attitude change, practice and policy change (CBM, 2023) is a valuable tool for the efforts of

Ethiopian higher education managers toward inclusion. However, the prevalence of medical and charity models among managers of universities makes this task very difficult and necessitates empirical research about which models shape managerial decisions.

2.3.1.4 Expert or professional model

The expert/professional model, with roots in the medical model of disability has provided a very 'mainstream' approach to problems with disability where expert practitioners assess deficits and corresponding limitations of functioning, in order to `prescribe treatment for passive recipients of help' (Amponsah-Bediako, 2013). This sets up an unequal relation framing it as one where the professional is a fixer and the client the fixed thereby fundamentally hindering real collaboration by prohibiting client exercising basic human rights over decisions regarding their lives (Amponsah-Bediako, 2013). Within this paradigm, service providers prescribe solutions and act on behalf of passive recipients, reinforcing professional authority while systematically excluding persons with disabilities from decisions about their own needs (Brokaw, 2019). When higher education managers adopt this framework, students with disabilities are positioned as passive recipients of expert intervention rather than active agents in shaping their educational experiences. This dynamic profoundly shapes how institutional support services are designed and delivered, embedding professional authority into the structure of support itself.

The limitations of the expert/professional model are directly relevant to inclusive education and managerial practice. While professionals may be well-intentioned, imposing predetermined solutions often proves counterproductive: when "experts" render unilateral judgments, clients are deprived of meaningful choice and autonomy in directing their own affairs (Amponsah-Bediako, 2013). This approach reinforces marginalisation by denying persons with disabilities the opportunity to participate in everyday decisions affecting their lives, eroding dignity and fostering dependency rather than empowerment (Amponsah-Bediako, 2013). Such paternalism fundamentally undermines the autonomy and self-determination essential to inclusive education. Furthermore, the model positions disability-related matters as the exclusive remit of specialist professionals including therapists, social workers, psychologists, and counsellors fragmenting responsibility across disparate roles and obscuring the institutional accountability necessary for genuine inclusion (Brokaw, 2019). This delegation of expertise may explain why Ethiopian public

universities, despite formal policy commitments, frequently fail to translate inclusive principles into practice. By deferring to specialists rather than assuming direct leadership for systemic change, institutional managers perpetuate a culture in which disability remains a specialised concern rather than an institutional priority.

2.3.1.5 Human rights based model

The human rights approach to disability, which has been set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Sherlaw & Hudebine, 2015), is based on the basic principles of human rights. This approach sees disability as a natural part of the variety of human nature and states that persons with disabilities have the same rights as all other individuals within society (Rice, 2021). Despite the opinion of some researchers who consider the social and human rights approaches to be basically the same, there are important differences between them according to Degener (2017) the human rights approach offers a theoretical model that explicitly takes into consideration human dignity; it includes not only civil-political but also economic, social, and cultural rights; it recognizes that people with impairments may suffer from their condition; it leaves room for the identity of minorities and cultures; and it develops practical solutions that help to enhance the quality of life. Being based on the principle of inherent equality, the human rights approach implies that people with disabilities should act as an active group within society to fight against discrimination (Amponsah-Bediako, 2013).

Human rights approach has transformative implications for management in higher education institutions and requires that the management re-conceptualizes the institutional responsibility towards students with disabilities. Based on the notions of justice, equality, and absence of intimidation, harassment and discrimination, the human rights approach recognizes persons with disabilities as part of the human diversity (Rice, 2021). In this case, managers are supposed to protect the rights of the students and respect their agency instead of imposing the paternalistic approach or viewing inclusion as charitable (Amponsah-Bediako, 2013). Importantly, the approach goes beyond the limits of the medical and charity paradigms as it sees persons with disabilities as rights-holders having the right to participate and not as recipients of the care and expertise of others. Besides, it addresses some limitations of the social approach because it does not pay enough attention to the suffering experienced by persons with disabilities and is not

focused on identity politics (Degener, 2017). Therefore, implementation of this approach by the managers of the Ethiopian public universities would require dismantling the structural obstacles, providing universal access, and treating students with disabilities as full members of the university community. To what extent Ethiopian managers adopt this paradigm in practice needs to be studied as it is necessary to see what disability paradigms influence their perception.

2.3.1.6 Religious or moral model

This religion/morality model is one of the oldest paradigms that can be found in many religious doctrines whereby disability can be viewed as the result of a sin committed by the individual or the family member as a form of divine punishment or, on the contrary, as a sign of endurance, belief or glory indicating divine trust in him/her (Amponsah-Bediako, 2013; Retief & Letšosa, 2018). In this model, people who have disabilities tend to experience stigma, shame, and disgrace and, at times, entire families may be shamed because of it, making them experience social discrimination and a downward social status change (Tan et al., 2020). Some of the behaviours exhibited by individuals are explained through evil spirits, especially in the case of mental illnesses; the punishments vary from exorcism to persecution (Michail, 2015). For university management following this paradigm, students with disabilities may be seen from the angle of religion and not as students with rights to education.

Persistence of the moral/religious model in certain societies has considerable implications for inclusive education and management. Disability can be seen as something that should be tolerated in exchange for spiritual rewards, as well as being an impediment to fitting into the family unit (Rodat, 2020). Such beliefs can serve as additional social obstacles on top of organizational obstacles, because students with disabilities can experience discrimination based on religious and cultural beliefs that are held by other parties outside the organization, including managers. This model is widely spread among the societies which struggle with poverty, illiteracy, fear, and prejudices (Michail, 2015). Hence, one can assume that Ethiopian managers of higher educational institutions will have to deal with opposition towards inclusiveness from employees, students, and people in the community, who interpret disability using religious and moral beliefs. Importantly, such perceptions about disability that are formed by managers based on the moral/religious model can prevent inclusive policies from being implemented, because managers will perceive disabled

students as religious subjects rather than human beings whose right is to participate in the process equally. Knowing about the type of beliefs concerning disability that is shared by Ethiopian managers' religious/moral, medical, charitable, expert, social, or human rights is necessary for designing the intervention.

2.3.2 Higher education managers attitudes to disability

The element that is most important for developing an inclusive institution for students with disabilities is the management mindset and system (Mcginty, 2016; Zhang et al., 2018) proposed a comprehensive management support system that would monitor research and instruction, effective transition procedures, and support systems for the administration of issues related to impaired students in higher education. It is evident that the administrative management system constitutes a large part of the entire system for persons with disabilities. A variety of shortcomings in past research on educational administration are listed by (Lombardi et al., 2013), including faculty attitudes and viewpoints on issues such as impairments. These comprise a concentration on particular categories of disability, as well as a brief review of inclusive education strategies and universal design concepts. Despite its shortcomings, educational managers at all levels of education, particularly in universities, need to review studies on educators' attitudes toward applying universal design principles and making adjustments for students with disabilities (Mcginty, 2016).

One of the most distressing challenges for young persons with disabilities is equality and participation in any level of education, including higher education (Mcginty, 2016). Some literature describes disabilities and attitudes toward person with disabilities into three categories: the situation of students with disabilities in higher education, managers' attitudes toward making accommodations for person with disabilities in higher education, and attitudes toward students with disabilities in teaching colleges (Edna, 2016). All these indicate that the variable called attitude is the factor that most affects managers in accommodating students with disabilities.

There is a long history of theoretical and empirical research on attitudes and behavior relating to each other. According to a review by (Pham, 2022), the basic objective of attitudes is to permit evaluative assessments on attitude objects. Such evaluative conclusions have behavioral repercussions as a result because attitudes affect behavior in specific circumstances (Pham, 2022).

The way people interact with one another within their external networks may be impacted by attitudes in addition to how they affect direct contacts. In this sense, it has been noted that persons with disabilities function within three social circles: an inner circle (family, friends, and peers); a middle circle (rehabilitation professionals, including schools); and an outward circle (the general public) (Patel et al., 2024; Tait & Purdie, 2000). One of a school's duties is to serve as a mediator between members of these other social groups and the disabled pupils in the lesson, if necessary. The importance of educators serving as liaisons between students and the community has increased with the introduction of policies to support opportunities for inclusive education. The normalising school of thought was in favour of the deinstitutionalisation agenda. College attendance is a requirement for community integration, which also includes social integration (Patel et al., 2024; Tait & Purdie, 2000).

Due to this connection, managers' viewpoints on persons with disabilities are significant, even though attitudes vary. Interactions occur between attitudes and the conduct of managers/leaders, the general public, teachers, and persons with disabilities. The notion that unfavourable managers' or instructors' attitudes toward children with special needs are probably going to hurt the outcomes of inclusive programmes is extremely important to managers, teachers, parents, and students alike (Patel et al., 2024; Tait & Purdie, 2000).

In some professions, stigmatisation plays a crucial role in the process of promoting the full inclusion of person with disabilities (Rogers & Kim, 2011). This stigma connected with a disability or mental illness may be more prevalent at all levels of educational organisations (Kim et al., 2011). These attitudes reduce the likelihood of registering and retaining disability students with disabilities who will perform well in their academic work (Rizky & Hadi, 2021; Rogers & Kim, 2011). Therefore, stigma, that is, unfavourable attitudinal perceptions regarding a disability, handicap, and mental illness, causes discrimination or unjust treatment of the underrepresented group.

Management must take this opportunity to make the educational institution, that is, the college or university, the center of excellence, at least for special needs education, in shaping a positive attitude towards disability. This was possible if management was able to take the following measures such as: facilitate suitable infra structures (classroom, building, and road) when the

initiative came from different stakeholders (e.g., special needs department) and facilitating ways to access different teaching and learning resources (hearing aid, slate, stylus, etc.). (Getachew, 2014). In contrast, special education institutes do not provide students with disabilities with a variety of educational placements, necessary services, or sufficient support (Alnahdi, 2014; Awais & Ameen, 2015).

2.3.3 Higher education manager sensitivity to disability inclusion

Every professional, including educational managers of any level, must be aware of and sensitive to person with disabilities to function effectively in daily interactions (ODR, 2021). Some of the things that human beings sense and take into account when interacting with people who have disabilities include the following: always ask before you help, make them independent and treat them with respect, be respectful when making physical contact, stop and think before you speak to them, speak directly to them, and judge them based on what they are capable of doing on their own (ODR, 2021).

Today, students with disabilities continue to face negative attitudes and stereotypes in the education system. Lack of knowledge and sensitivity to disability issues on the part of some educator staff and students can make it difficult for students with disabilities to access educational services equally (Salinger, 2020). Negative attitudes often result from a lack of knowledge and understanding of how to accommodate someone different. The world is full of sorrow, but, as Helen Keller noted, "it is also full of the overcoming of it" (Pretorius, 2020). Millions of people around the world live with a disability of some kind, whether it is physical or mental, acquired at birth or later. The person's physical handicap is often their only restriction. The organisation may not be accessible to person with disabilities, even if they may still have the mental or intellectual capacity needed to complete their respective tasks. Therefore, educational institution managers should receive training in awareness and sensitivity of disabilities to combat prejudices, promote an inclusive learning environment, and foster empathy (Pretorius, 2020).

2.3.4 Higher education managers' perspectives on disability inclusion for students

For successful inclusion, all academic staff, particularly educational managers, must adopt an accepting and supportive attitude toward students with special needs, mainly disabilities. Special-

need students and their parents frequently interact with school principals, guidance teachers, specialist teachers, public servants, and other staff when they register (Yaz, 2021). Therefore, it can be argued that achieving genuine interaction, effective cooperation, and meaningful inclusion of diverse groups depends significantly on the approaches adopted by university managers, as well as the quality of their managerial knowledge and skills (Yaz, 2021).

At the same time, inclusion has become a strategic issue for several universities and higher education institutions, with an impact on learning and education, research, and institutional cultures. Many of them have taken steps to find new ways to allow individuals from traditionally less represented backgrounds to find their place in higher education (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019). When persons with disabilities had access to school, this was traditionally done in isolated environments, from residential schools to special schools to special classes in ordinary schools (Hunt, 2020).

Education managers and leaders are vital to fostering inclusiveness and maintaining diversity. Managers or leaders of education should be educated in the teaching profession and have a deep understanding of pedagogy and social relationships to be able to support students with diversity and school environments to develop around five pillars: how to act to implement a vision of inclusion?; how to emphasize learning?; how to build full participation and a shared sense of responsibility?; how to promote respect of diversity and people?; how can co-management be promoted? (Hunt, 2021).

Management for inclusiveness in an educational institution must be present at the various levels of the systems: governmental (to ensure cross-collaboration and adequate policy development); ministerial (to ensure the adequate implementation of policies and the human and financial resources to carry out the vision); region or local institutions (to support in contextualizing the central plan into a locally relevant one); school level (to support the day-to-day operationalization of education plans); and at the classroom level (where teachers engage in negotiating, strategising, and making things happen daily) (Hunt, 2020).

2.4 Ethiopia's Higher Education Procedures on Inclusivity

The policy framework of Ethiopia that advocates inclusion in higher education consists of several different instruments. The government of Ethiopia has endorsed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2015). It has included the principles of inclusivity in its Education and Training Policy, the Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (MoE, 2012), and the Education Sector Development Programs. The Higher Education Proclamation No. 650/2009 explicitly required institutions to ensure "the accessibility of facilities, programs, and teaching and assessment procedures to the disabled" and also "offer academic assistance in terms of tutorial support, auxiliary services, alternative assessment, extra examination time, and extended deadlines." The Revised Higher Education Proclamation No. 1152/2019 "included the right to inclusive higher education for students with disabilities." However, according to Asres (2025), although there is an advocacy of inclusive education through policies and laws, "it is not implemented because it is defined from pre-school to universities," indicating a basic inconsistency between policy formation and practice in institutions.

Ethiopia's policy strength can be attributed to the progressive normative obligations and compatibility with international human rights treaties. The special needs/inclusive education strategy (MoE, 2012) sets out detailed objectives related to access, capacity building, curriculum development, support, and research. Nonetheless, weaknesses greatly hinder the achievement of effective policy implementation. The special needs/inclusive education strategy implementation evaluation noted continuous challenges such as "lack of awareness and commitment of the educational leadership at all levels," unsuitable learning environment, and inadequate training of teachers. Most importantly, Article 41 of Proclamation No. 1152/2019 provides a qualification which requires institutions to provide accommodations "to the extent possible". This is a limitation to the right to inclusive education because it is not an unconditional legal obligation but dependent on the institution's choice. The study by Assefa (2025) confirms that there is a disparity between the policy and practice regarding inclusion in Ethiopia's higher education. The research results show significantly lower perceived inclusion in public Ethiopian higher education institutions. From the perspective of higher education management, there is room for action and change despite the existing policy weaknesses.

2.4.1 Overview of educational policy

The Ethiopian post-1991 educational reform measures, which included a new education policy, decentralisation of management, and use of vernacular languages in instruction, were all major innovations compared to former systems (Tesaka et al., 2024). The Education and Training Policy stipulates that there should be increased access to quality education by all and "the physical and mental development and problem-solving capabilities of individuals, including those of children and youth with special needs, based on their potentials and needs" such that disadvantaged groups would receive "special attention in education" (MoE, 2016). Yet, the policy does not specify anything about special needs and inclusive education, and hence, these issues were never incorporated in the Educational Sector Development Programme (FMoE, 2010). In addition, there had been no reliable data on whether or not disadvantaged groups were included, since planning, statistics, and data collection never considered disabled students (Tamrat, 2019).

The strength of the policy in relation to its normative value of inclusion and alignment with international mechanisms like the Salamanca Statement (Singh & Rinkey, 2021) is evident. Nevertheless, there are considerable weaknesses that hamper its implementation. The policy is not clear, lacks strategic planning, prioritisation, and assignment of duties (Debub University, 2013). Importantly, while all the other policies have their definitions of inclusion, the policy does not have such definitions. In addition, the policy does not assign any duties to anyone in terms of its implementation, which results in ambiguity of the situation and creates room for managerial inaction. Notably, unlike the national Education and Training Policy, none of the Ethiopian public or private institutions has any disability policy statement (Gull et al., 2025). While Ethiopian higher institutions have been increasing their enrollment rates, students with disabilities are disadvantaged because institutions keep struggling to check the insights and accommodations for students with disabilities (Wudneh, 2022). For higher education managers, these policy deficiencies present great challenges because they do not have any institutional disability policies and thus no framework that would allow them to implement national policy in the context of the institution. As asserted, according to Lockmun-Bissessur, Samy and Peeroo (2024), such measures should be able to improve disability advocacy through cooperation with teaching institutions, students' bodies, and disability advocacy bodies. Since such institutional structures do not exist in Ethiopian universities, the responsibility of inclusivity falls entirely in the hands of the managers

in terms of both their discretion and their commitment.

2.4.2 Overview of educational directives and guidelines

The legislative and constitutional context of Ethiopia offers some basic commitment towards people with disabilities, with Article 41 of the 1995 Constitution providing for the rights to be treated and adapted (Gull et al., 2025). The constitution has been put in place through a series of legal instruments. Proclamation No. 568/2008 ensures that people with disabilities have the right to employment and protection against discrimination; Proclamation No. 515/2007 gives preference in hiring, promotion, and deployment in public service; Directive 36/98 (as revised as Directive 41/2008) allows free tax importation of mobility aids; and Decree No. 624/2009 ensures improved accessibility in buildings. The National Plan of Action of Persons with Disabilities (2012–2021) is another effort that has come out of these commitments (FMoLSA, 2012). Overall, there is a strong legal architecture here that, if well implemented, could achieve a lot towards achieving inclusion. However, such legislation has limitations as its implementation is not consistent and it lacks proper enforcement. Most importantly, Assefa (2025) shows that, despite all these efforts, the sense of inclusivity in the public higher educational institutions of Ethiopia has been significantly low.

Ethiopia's Education Sector Development Programme shows that while inclusive education is moving forward, the process has been inconsistent. Early on, in ESDP I and II, there was very little focus on children with disabilities. This changed with ESDP III, which began to look at expanding opportunities for students with special needs. By ESDP IV, the government made specific commitments to reach groups that are usually left out and defined inclusive education as a way to support all types of learners (FMoE, 2010). ESDP V focused on girls and people with special needs, and ESDP VI tried to fix the funding gap between general schooling and higher education. Even with these policy changes, putting them into practice remains a struggle. Research suggests that because inclusive education is defined so broadly, covering everything from preschool to university, it has not been effectively implemented on the ground (Asres, 2025).

Ethiopia also follows several international standards, such as the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. One major set of guidelines, the IASC Guidelines, was even developed with the help of people with disabilities, which was a significant

step (IASC, 2019). For those managing universities, having all these different policies can be helpful but also overwhelming. While the policy framework covers a lot and follows international human rights standards, it has major flaws. Policies are spread across too many different documents, there are no real ways to enforce the rules, and data is often missing (Gull et al., 2025). Additionally, most Ethiopian universities do not have their own specific policies for disability. Because of these gaps, making education inclusive often depends on whether individual managers decide to make it a priority. This is why it is important to look at how these managers actually view and handle their responsibilities in making education more inclusive.

2.4.3 Educational strategy overview

Ethiopia's Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (2012) stands as the core policy for inclusion across all educational levels. It lays out a clear set of objectives: expand access, build capacity, develop curricula, strengthen support systems, foster partnerships, and push for research (MoE, 2012). Alongside it, the Master Plan for Special Needs Education/Inclusive Education in Ethiopia (2016–2025) aims to serve as a full policy guiding special needs education and ensuring all children with special needs benefit from accessible, high-quality, and suitable inclusive education. Yet, Tiruneh (2019) notes a critical weakness: the national inclusive education strategy "appears to imply a less responsive learning environment for the inclusive higher education system," showing a central flaw. While the strategy covers a lot on paper, it doesn't really tackle the unique and complex challenges found in higher education.

To overcome these issues, researchers have suggested more robust education management information systems, flexible curricula, and building more inclusive societies and economies (Schuelka, 2018). The IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action (IASC, 2019) also offer frameworks for crisis settings. Still, for Ethiopian higher education managers, the main hurdle is turning policy promises into actual practice at their institutions. The Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (2012) lays out broad goals but doesn't provide tools to monitor managers, ensure accountability, or guarantee specific resources for higher education. This gap between what policies says and what happens in reality puts the weight of inclusion directly on each manager's judgment and effort. It makes clear why closely examining how higher

education leaders in Ethiopia view and carry out their roles on inclusiveness is not just important it's essential.

2.5 Inclusive Education and Its Impact on Student Learning

Inclusion is a dynamic process that is constantly developing, according to the contextual needs and culture of the reference group, while being part of a strategic system of promotion and construction of inclusive societies (Denisa, 2013). Inclusive education has a major impact on education systems in all developing countries, regardless of educational tradition. This is not only the process of including learners with disabilities, but also the process of tailoring the program to the needs of individual learners, regardless of their level of psychological, physical, social or cultural development (Ecaterina, 2013).

2.6 Inclusive Education Implementation in Ethiopian Higher Education

The Ethiopian government has planned and performed several possible actions and ways out through the principles of practising inclusive education in general and the inclusive higher education system in particular (Birhanu, 2020). Starting from the enrollment rates and their ups and downs, activities to allow all children with disabilities to attend school have been thoroughly mentioned in the program (Birhanu, 2020).

Inclusive education has become an essential approach to ensure equal access and quality education for all learners in developing and developed countries, from primary to higher education (Hankebo, 2018). As a country, in current Ethiopian higher education, the adaptation and adoption of inclusion for higher education students can be ideologically seen as a universal educational law going forward (Tiruneh, 2019). In fact, inclusion as the most important issue has emerged as an entirely new coaching method in various educational and research institutions, especially Ethiopian universities, but it is not practiced as much as it should be (Tiruneh, 2019).

Before including students with disabilities in education, university teachers were trained in the principles and practices of inclusion relevant to general education. They need the support of their peers, administrators, parents, and most importantly the help of the facility's special education teachers (Solomon, 2013). Effective implementation of inclusive education requires competent

teachers who manage resources and classrooms, adapt to new teaching methods, and are familiar with the materials (Hankebo, 2018).

2.6.1 Inclusive education implementation approach

Inclusive education was developed and implemented in educational settings before higher education (Birhanu, 2020). However, for some years, inclusive principles and practices have made inroads into university agendas, policies, and teaching and learning practices (Moriña, 2017). In the context of higher education, there is still a long way to go before we can claim full inclusion, and many challenges must be addressed to align educational practices with the principles of inclusive education (Moriña, 2017). Inclusive education can provide a variety of academic and social benefits for students with disabilities (Jan et al., 2024), such as higher achievement in language and mathematics, improved graduation rates, and more positive relationships with students with disabilities (Hehir et al., 2016; Jardinez & Natividad, 2024) (Hehir et al., 2016; Jardinez & Natividad, 2024).

In relation to the approach to the implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopia, as outlined in the SNE/IE Strategy, students will be supported in three ways. The first is universal support for all children. The second is increased support for students at risk. The third is intensive support for students with severe learning impairment and disabilities (MoE, 2012). The Policy on the Implementation of Strategies for Special Needs and Inclusive Education in Ethiopia, prepared by the Ministry of Education, describes this approach as follows:

2.6.1.1 The universal support approach

In the universal support approach, the majority of students receive support from regular teachers in regular schools (Schuelka, 2018). Therefore, support for all children is cross-school and cross-class. It also helps learners with SNE and disabilities teach a variety of children how to teach effectively, and learn new ways to teach all children, including teaching large classes and peer support systems in the classroom (Schuelka, 2018). It also includes teacher support for resource teachers with knowledge of these approaches, which can be a valuable resource for mainstream teachers working in large classrooms with diverse children (MoE, 2012).

2.6.1.2 The increased support for students at risk approach

On the other hand, increasing support for at-risk learners in mainstream classrooms could require consultation with teachers, additional support in the classroom, increased monitoring of learning or risks related to gender and classroom organisation (Keanon, 2022). Again, knowing the best special educational needs and comprehensive educational interventions will help resource teachers and mainstream teachers find the best solutions to remove barriers to learning in the classroom (Keanon, 2022; MoE, 2012).

2.6.1.3 The intensive support for students with severe learning impairment approach

Last but not least, intensive support approaches for learners with severe learning disabilities or disabilities usually involve teaching in small groups by specially trained teachers and cluster centers (CPBIS, 2020). Although the role of the special school is to develop into a resource center and mentor learners in nearby mainstream schools, a child in the department receives their first education in the special school (CPBIS, 2020; MoE, 2012).

2.6.2 Facilitating inclusivity for students with disabilities

Promoting and facilitating the academic inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education is the challenge of today (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). Building a culture of learning and thinking about disability inclusion should take place at all levels of the classroom, school and service (DFAT, 2019). These arrangements tended to encourage student participation, autonomy where possible, and support where needed (Kurth et al., 2015). Therefore, the role of relevant agencies in promoting and fostering respect for the inclusion of persons with disabilities is described below.

2.6.2.1 Role of governments

All human rights and fundamental freedoms are being increasingly recognised at local, national, and global levels by governments and other decision-makers and enacted in laws, policies, and programs that are transforming the way their perspectives are incorporated into services (IDA, 2019). Furthermore, governments at all levels are critical to improving their resources and capacity to implement policies and standards to facilitate the provision of accessible infrastructure for inclusion purposes (ICEDF and UK Government, 2019). Furthermore, governmental and nongovernmental constitutions are changing the self-image of students with disabilities by

building the capacity of special and inclusive education professionals and providing different training at different times (Solomon, 2013). Governments can also help families keep their children in school, reduce social inequalities through inclusive education, and largely ensure quality education for all students (Curtis, 2022). Inclusive education faces many challenges that frustrate the efforts of governments around the world. Achieving inclusive education as a means of increasing access to quality education for all citizens is advocated by formal and legally established government agencies (Parveen & Qounsar, 2018).

2.6.2.2 Role of higher education organisation

Higher education plays a broad role in the production of knowledge and encompasses teaching, learning, research and community service (Thompson, 2020). Fundamentally, universities have an important mandate to conduct research related to inclusive education through appropriate research methods to find relevant research findings on issues of inclusion (Ntombela, 2019). Higher education is essential to address social inequalities and develop an academic environment that helps find solutions to global challenges such as disability inclusion (Thompson, 2020).

2.6.2.3 Role of higher education managers

University presidents and vice-chancellors serve many roles, including academic leaders, business executives, spokespersons, fundraisers, and advocates for higher education. They must be results-focused and capable of accountability as a means of working towards improving organisational service performance (Salmi, 2009). Currently, university managers must manage their facilities against a multitude of pressures to achieve four goals: increase revenue, reduce costs, improve quality, and enhance reputation. In doing so, excellent leaders place their hopes for the future based on what they have judged from experience (Shrestha, 2009).

Good management at all levels of an educational organisation supports and promotes good teaching and improves learning opportunities (Tomlinson, 1996). Responsible educational management plays a key role in adapting learning environments to specific student mixes and making them more inclusive (Širca et al., 2018). Inclusive education managers are prepared to serve students with disabilities and support general and special education teachers to improve learning outcomes (Connally, 2020). They create an excellent learning environment at their

institution for all students, regardless of background. It also provides the controls and resources necessary to support and retain effective teachers of students with disabilities (Connally, 2020).

Primary to tertiary inclusive education administrators establish data management systems and processes to provide all educators with meaningful information on access to effective instruction for students with disabilities (Connally, 2020). However, when it comes to managers, the work and dedication of middle and direct managers and teachers will be diminished or dissatisfied if managers are not knowledgeable, dedicated, and energetic in providing excellent student service. Evidence from across the education sector confirms that this causes learning difficulties (Tomlinson, 1996). Inclusive education is characterised by assumed competencies, actual membership, full participation, mutual social relationships, and high learning levels of all students with disabilities in the classroom. Managers therefore support students with disabilities and teachers who they believe are successful in learning and teaching (NCIE, 2011). Individuals with disabilities may have difficulty learning and performing employment skills without the support or guidance of their supervisors, coworkers, or coaches; manager attitudes have an impact on the support or guidance of persons with disabilities (Paez & Arendt, 2014).

2.6.2.4 Role of academic professionals of higher education

Academic professionals play an important role in the promotion of inclusive education. This is because it is often the link between learners with disabilities and their families and schools. With the right skills and experience, professionals can support both families and learning providers to build confidence in opportunities for learners with disabilities (Lockmun-Bissessur et al., 2024). The success of inclusion has led to a professional understanding of teachers, not just teachers of children with disabilities, but teachers of all students (NCIE, 2011). The role of teachers, especially in the implementation of inclusive education, is diverse and challenging. They must understand their contribution to helping each student become a better person through an inclusive education system (Parveen & Qounsar, 2018).

Teachers in academic professionals should have positive attitudes and beliefs to ensure the success of inclusive practices for students, especially students with disabilities. This is because teachers are the cornerstone of effective inclusion (Hettiaarachi, Ranaweera, Walisundara, Daston-Attanayake, Das, 2018). To achieve what is expected of them, teachers must work closely with all

available support staff to help students with disabilities reach their full potential. When teachers and support staff work together, problems related to students with disabilities are reduced (Hettiaarachi et al., 2018). Therefore, teachers must have an affirmative attitude towards the inclusion of learners with disabilities, as the success of inclusion depends on their cooperation, commitment, and participation.

Most academic professionals believe that a major challenge in working with students with disabilities is the lack of the knowledge and skills necessary to understand the cognitive development and behavioural needs of students with disabilities (Parveen & Qounsar, 2018). Perceptions and attitudes of academic professionals are determined by factors such as education level, experience, years of teaching practice, etc. and play a fundamental role in the success or failure of all students, especially students with disabilities (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2021). Michelle Hawkins has argued that the perceptions and attitudes of academic professionals can be more influenced by the nature of students' disabilities than the rest suggested by different scholars (Michelle Hawkins, 2021). The inclusion of students with disabilities does not depend on a university professor's many years of professional experience. The commitment to inclusion is more prominent among career-building professors (Valle-Flórez et al., 2021).

The role and responsibility of academic professionals is to ensure that all educational programs integrate holistic ideas, policies, and approaches into their curricula, organize training in inclusive education methods and strategies for all faculties, raising awareness of disability inclusion issues, organizing resources on inclusion issues, organizing resource centers and facilities appropriate facilities for students with disabilities, develop innovative disability inclusion policies and practices, conduct research to raise public awareness of disability, propose budgets to implement mechanisms disability inclusion in each educational institution (MoE, 2012).

2.6.2.5 Role of administrative staff of higher education

Higher education administrative staff are employees of an organisation employed to perform administrative and business activities in management, accounting, catering, maintenance, security and services (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Higher Education Proclamation, 2009). Without the work of technical, secretarial, accounting, financial, and maintenance staff, higher education institutions could never succeed (Strajeri, 2009). In higher education institutions, the

sole duty of administrative personnel is to facilitate and improve the work of all teachers and the services provided to all students (Edmund, 2019). It is a special function of administrative staff in an educational institution, with an overarching view of all departments, to ensure that all activities are properly managed and grouped to achieve maximum efficiency for the whole operation (Edmund, 2019).

Universities need administrative staff more than ever for a variety of reasons related to the growing number of students with diverse backgrounds and general needs (Strajeri, 2009). Several actors are involved in the development of inclusive higher education. One of these groups is the administrative staff responsible for student satisfaction, along with the academic staff (Moriña, 2017). These administrators acknowledged that many students with disabilities are still studying at the university. They have some experience with students who are physically, deaf, and visually impaired, but have little or no experience with other types of disabilities (Nīmante et al., 2021).

Members of the university's administrative team are aware of diversity in a broad sense: religion, ethnic origin, socioeconomic background, disability, health status, refugee status, immigrants, and asylum seekers. For them, this awareness of diversity is an important prerequisite for creating a university environment that supports all students, especially those with disabilities (Roberts, 2021). Therefore, the administrative staff of the higher education institution considers the inclusion of students as a general principle throughout their life at the university.

2.7 Challenge of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

Today, students with disabilities face many challenges and difficulties in adapting and absorbing the current context of educational institutions, including both physical and non-physical aspects (Jaafar et al., 2020). Many students with disabilities still study under difficult conditions even though they try not to give up on the challenges they face. The challenges they face include negative attitudes, accessibility issues, and lack and/or inadequate equipment and materials (Tungaraza, 2010). At all levels of school organisation, the Canadian Commission on Human Rights recently identified a lack of accommodations and support for persons with disabilities; lack of services and funding; ineffective dispute resolution; and a lack of special education and disability support as challenging issues (Rufo & Emma, 2012).

The challenge of inclusive education can come from many different directions, such as attitude factors, resistance to change, rigid school systems and learning environments, lack of clear educational strategies, lack of educational materials and tools and lack of budget (Mitiku et al., 2014). As Kabuta points out and summarises in her research, the biggest challenges facing students with disabilities in higher education are poor institutional planning, lack of infrastructure, slow decision-making, and provision of poor and inadequate service (Kabuta, 2014). Therefore, the following are discussed as follows:

2.7.1 Challenges in planning inclusive educational settings

Inclusive education is evident in the overall policy and strategic planning of a country in serving students with disabilities in the implemented education system (Hayes & Bulat, 2017). The plan should include a statement of current performance, annual educational goals, short-term goals, a statement detailing the special services to be provided, and the average level of classroom inclusion (Mitiku et al., 2014). The presence of a good long-term plan and implemented policies should be used to create different means and strategies that will open the possibility for many physically and mentally disabled students to transfer from a lower level of education to a higher level (Kabuta, 2014). Inclusive education plans at all levels of the institution should identify five key areas of inclusive education for persons with disabilities: policy, curriculum development, human resource development, infrastructure development and awareness about inclusion (Grimes et al., 2021). However, not all levels of the organisation attempt to plan in the same way due to the identified and undefined challenges occurring inside and outside the organisation (Grimes et al., 2021).

Higher education, academia, and university management still have shortcomings and challenges that need to be overcome. These issues are primarily related to planning for strategic issues such as services, access to technology, finance, hiring the right educators, and interpersonal conflicts (Jaafar et al., 2020). Therefore, to make inclusive education a reality, government and educational institutions need to think holistically, improve the planning of the education sector and educational institutions, and apply a systems approach to create cultural change (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2020).

2.7.2 Learning environments related challenge

The diversity of students and staff creates a rich learning environment by contributing and sharing ideas. Universities, employees, and students therefore have an equal responsibility to mitigate inequalities (Abduwani, 2017). Students with disabilities cannot access the physical and social environment of educational institutions without the active support of the caregiver, classmates, and instructors (Deneke, 2020). All higher education institutions should have a plan for all buildings and infrastructure, such as classrooms, dormitories, canteens, restrooms and playgrounds, that takes into account the disabled, such as arranging ramps, bumps and lifts in taller buildings so that each student, despite their condition, can easily move and use any environment equivalent to their needs (Kabuta, 2014). Many students with disabilities have faced challenges due to the educational institution's inability to meet their individual disability needs. In schools, stairs, doors, toilets, seating arrangements, and classroom layouts are not made according to the needs of students with disabilities (Tugli, 2013).

A supportive environment is essential for a truly inclusive school. Currently, the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesia is mainly focused on the accommodation and inclusion of persons with disabilities, and the regulations require that all children with disabilities can study together with students without disabilities. However, the limited number and quality of inclusive schools and teachers remain a major challenge (Hata et al., 2021). A difficult learning environment has arisen due to an insufficient budget. Due to a lack of funding, poor infrastructure design has occurred. It can also affect organisations and learners in terms of supportive environments, accessible and equitable services (Tugli, 2013). One of the challenges to SWD success in postsecondary education, according to the OECD, is a lack of funds (OECD, 2014). Higher education institutions need specialised financing and support to further the disability inclusion agenda, even in the face of limited resources (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2019). Education administrators creating environments that enable inclusion therefore encompass the interrelated conditions that enable or facilitate the development of inclusive education systems for persons with disabilities (Grimes et al., 2021). There is still a dearth of resources, uneven training, and inadequate coordination even though more SWDs are being admitted to numerous higher education institutions (Tirussew & Mesfin, 2021).

2.7.3 Decision-making-related challenge

Working with children and young persons with disabilities requires a grasp of certain basic principles (DCP, 2023). The practice of decision-making (decision-sharing), especially for cases involving adolescence and early childhood, is the foundation throughout life. It is essential to realise that children and young people are diverse and that what works in one situation may not work in another (Eden-Mann, 2020). The main factors that make decision-making more difficult in higher education are complexity, weak structure, and interdependence, and decision-making at several levels in the hierarchy (Divjak & Rađep, 2015). When decisions are made, it is important to fully involve children with disabilities, their families and their representatives in the decision-making process at all levels, from schools to policy-making at the national level (Grimes et al., 2021).

Most educational institutions lack participation in decision-making; that is, they are careless. There is no denying that the governing and operating agencies face challenges in managing organisations successfully and effectively; thus, one of the great challenges of higher education. Institutions, to face this challenge, need better managers who will be able to make collective decisions and who can provide academic freedom to staff and students (Abduwani, 2017). The decision-making process in higher education is more complex than in any other institution due to the nature of the higher education system and its role in the development of each student (Divjak & Rađep, 2015). To overcome this challenge, the decision-making approach in higher education uses the following basic steps: 1) Select the most appropriate multi-criteria decision-making method according to the characteristics of the problem, 2) Improve multi-criteria decision-making criteria, and 3) model the decision support system (Divjak & Rađep, 2015).

2.7.4 Service provision-related challenge

The provision of support services is vital to the academic success of students with disabilities. Therefore, students with disabilities must receive various support services from the institution to develop their social and academic abilities (Walelign, 2018). The challenges faced by students with disabilities include the lack of good physical infrastructure, educational materials, easy access to classrooms, and other services (Kiyuba & Tukur, 2014). However, the biggest challenge at the university in providing services is knowing how to help students with disabilities succeed in school

and in life (Piyarat et al., 2020). Services are provided upon request by students with disabilities, and their staff will assist them in accordance with the reasonable support policies of each university in a reactive rather than proactive approach (Piyarat et al., 2020). Improving disability support services is the responsibility of university managers. They must be involved in policy changes related to administration and ensure that the services that are critical to student achievement are provided (Piyarat et al., 2020).

Many countries around the world cannot effectively use existing educational resources to improve the quality of service in their educational institutions because they may not have the capacity to manage finances, procurement, and manage to do it properly. As a result, spending on higher education does not always translate into more learning and improved human capital. Overcoming these challenges requires work at all levels of the system of education, central, regional and local (Thys-Clément & Wilkin, 2010; WBG, 2018).

2.8 The Professional Development of Education Managers

Education institutional managers comprise top and middle university administrators who are responsible for core managerial duties, as well as guiding and inspiring staff to achieve the institution's goals and objectives, all while continually developing their professional expertise (Mohamed Jais et al., 2021). Effective professional development is achieved when a comprehensive approach is taken, and guiding principles of adult learning theory inform the development of academics (Solomon et al., 2023). Studies on the professional development of higher education administrators show a worldwide trend towards greater professionalisation, despite significant disparities (Harris-Huemmert et al., 2022).

High-ranking officials, including presidents and rectors, often deal with progressively complex management duties without having formal training; therefore, they rely heavily on practical experience (Harris-Huemmert et al., 2022). In Italy and other contexts, educational managers are viewed as hybrid professionals whose positions are becoming increasingly intricate, requiring networks, expertise, and a well-defined persona within a highly intricate higher education landscape (Harris-Huemmert et al., 2022). Professional development in higher education is largely driven by individual effort rather than well-established organisational structures (Solomon et al., 2023), which raises concerns about strategic capability and the long-term sustainability of effective

management practices (Harris-Huemmert et al., 2022). Therefore, managers continually update their skills through professional development, allowing them to support colleagues, shape workplace policies, and improve organisational performance (Mohamed Jais et al., 2021).

2.9 Recruitment Drive for Education Managers

Higher Education institutions must address internal challenges in their manager recruitment process, including meeting quality standards, adhering to government regulations, catering to student requirements, maximising resource efficiency, minimising disruptions to core functions, attracting top students, generating revenue streams, working with key stakeholders, and promoting academic excellence (Gupta, 2022). In Ethiopia, higher education institutions often face criticism for their unfair and biased staff recruitment procedures, which lack standardised criteria. Academic staff positions are frequently assigned based on criteria not related to individual merit and qualifications (John & Yadessa, 2016).

A clear and effective job description is crucial when recruiting managers, as it outlines the necessary qualifications, skills, and experience, thus helping potential candidates understand the role (Murfat et al., 2025). The success of recruitment policies in drawing in and keeping experts, such as managers, highlights the importance of a comprehensive strategy that puts staff involvement and long-term employee retention at the top of the agenda (Murfat et al., 2025). Educational managers use job and role design within the education sector as a critical tool to ensure efficient operations and seamless functioning of schools and higher education establishments (Fabunmi et al., 2022). Educational managers are driven by the drive, desire, and aspirations that underpin an individual's performance, and these are often motivated by prestige, rewards, or incentives that satisfy their personal wants in life (Fabunmi et al., 2022).

2.10 Types of Disabilities in Higher Education Context

Research involving 12,202 students with disabilities from higher education institutions globally, covering 133 studies from 2017 to 2022, discovered that more than half of these studies involved students with multiple disabilities, whereas the remainder concentrated on students with single disabilities, including physical disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum condition, learning disabilities or specific learning

difficulties, medical conditions, and mental health conditions (Bartolo et al., 2023). Higher education institutions must establish appropriate frameworks and procedures to meet the varying requirements of students with disabilities, allowing them to participate fairly in tertiary studies (Accardo et al., 2019; Bartolo et al., 2025).

Students' perspectives from around the world will be combined, including findings from research on student aspirations, calls for reform in higher education systems, and demands for personal modifications (Bartolo et al., 2023). Students with disabilities see university as a chance for personal growth, but encounter obstacles in a society that is biased towards able-bodied individuals (Bartolo et al., 2025). They advocate for an improved teaching system, student participation in facilities, and tailored support to ensure equal participation, necessitating reduced administrative processing and negotiation (Bartolo et al., 2025). Universities can help students with various disabilities by providing self-advocacy training, encouraging participation with advocacy groups, allowing students to contribute to curriculum design, and soliciting feedback on facilities and procedures (Bartolo et al., 2023, 2025).

2.11 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter investigated managers' participation in fostering student inclusivity in Ethiopian public higher education institutions by reviewing pertinent literature. It discussed important topics such as the development of higher education, how managers view disability inclusion, national legislation, how inclusive education affects student achievement, how it is implemented in Ethiopian higher education, and the difficulties faced by students with disabilities. As a result, it established managers' roles and student inclusivity as the primary aspects of the research and the chapter's major conceptions. Furthermore, the researcher suggests the overview as a core reference to guarantee conceptual accuracy, methodological rigour, and thorough coverage throughout the research process, and its dependability strengthens the remaining chapters. The following chapter in the study focused on the theoretical framework of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

3.1Introduction

Theoretical frameworks build the foundation for solid research. They connect concepts, definitions, and statements so researchers can describe relationships between variables and predict outcomes (Kivunja, 2018; Sandberg, 2021). When a theory is well-developed, it doesn't just improve predictions; it sharpens understanding, clarifies purpose, and pushes research forward (Fried, 2020). Constructing a good theoretical framework means weaving expert ideas and theories into an argument. This gives substance to data analysis and interpretation, proves scholarly expertise, and moves the work beyond simple reporting into careful, cognitive analysis (Salcedo et al., 2022). By using such a framework, researchers focus on specific variables, clarify their viewpoint, and test or challenge theoretical ideas (Kandiero et al., 2023). For this study, a strong theoretical framework links the research objectives to recognised theories, backs up the chosen methods, and places the results in a larger academic discussion to strengthen their validity.

3.2 Justification for the Existence of Multiple Theories in Research

Using multiple theoretical perspectives in one research project isn't just methodologically sound it makes sense, especially when tackling complex, multi-layered topics like those in doctoral research (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Kivunja, 2018). In this study, I draw on two complementary frameworks: Inclusive Education Theory and Education Management Theory, focusing on systems and situational approaches. This combination helps reveal the many sides of inclusive education in Ethiopian public universities. By weaving these perspectives together, the research takes in everything from institutional leadership and resource allocation to policy implementation and student support systems (Hamann et al., 2021; Seeber, 2019). Bringing in multiple theories fits particularly well because attitudes and practices around inclusion connect philosophy, institutional governance, and organisational behaviour; a single theory just can't cover everything. Kivunja (2018) points out that today's educational challenges are so complex, you need theoretical pluralism to grasp all the variables at play.

There's more to using multiple theories than just deeper analysis; it also boosts credibility and practical value. Combining perspectives gives the study a sturdier framework by opening up

different ways to interpret the data, which helps avoid bias from sticking to just one theoretical viewpoint (Chukwuere, 2021; Ngoc et al., 2022). This kind of theoretical triangulation lets researchers cross-check findings, spot contradictions, and pull out richer, more nuanced meanings from what they observe (Ngoc et al., 2022). On top of that, a multi-theoretical approach makes the research outcomes more applicable and meaningful; it connects better with the varied goals of the project and captures the difficult realities of public university settings in ways a single theory can't. As Kivunja (2018) argues, deliberately bringing together and defending a blend of theories doesn't just strengthen the analysis; it amplifies the study's contribution to both academic scholarship and the practical realities of managing higher education.

At the same time, using more than one theory calls for careful integration, or else things risk getting scattered and incoherent. The researcher has to clearly show how these two theories support, challenge, or build on each other in answering the research questions. Here, Inclusive Education Theory lays out the values and standards of what real inclusion looks like and the principles that should steer universities. Education Management Theory, on the other hand, offers the practical tools to see how managers actually put those inclusive ideas into action inside complicated organisations. This complementarity really matters for studying public university managers in Ethiopia, who juggle both their drive for inclusion and the very real resource limits of fast-growing institutions. The reasons for choosing this multi-theoretical blend are discussed in the next section, where I outline the theoretical frameworks, their history, and how they fit the goals of this research.

3.3 Inclusive Education Theory

The evolution of inclusive education theory marks a significant shift, especially with the move from "integration" to "inclusion." This change picked up steam in the 1970s, when people in special education pushed back against keeping students with disabilities separate from everyone else (Haug, 2017). Early figures like Jean-Marc Itard, Maria Montessori, and Lev Vygotsky helped shape the field, but most scholars point to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as having the greatest impact on how we now think about inclusion (Rosenqvist & Magnusson, 2020). Critical disability studies expand the conversation further, pushing us to consider the historical, cultural, and social forces that shape education for students with disabilities (Clark, 2024). Even so, as Hornby (2015) points out, the most productive approach isn't to set special education and inclusive education

against each other; it's to develop an integrative framework, or inclusive special education theory, that draws from both. This combined approach is useful for studies looking at how higher education leaders manage the need for specialised support while also pursuing truly inclusive campuses.

Since the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), Inclusive Education Theory has changed a lot. Now, it's a multidimensional framework that emphasises difference and diversity, human rights, social justice and equity, and a social model of disability (Hornby, 2015). The heart of the theory is simple: schools and universities have to change to fit all learners, not the other way around. This concept guides this study, which looks at Ethiopian public university managers and how their ideas about disability- whether they lean toward the social model or still rely on deficit-focused medical and charity models- shape whether they work toward real systemic change or just provide individual fixes. According to Namanyane and Shaoan (2021), inclusive education theory gives us the vision and the practical guidelines needed for policies, procedures, and teaching methods that help students with all kinds of special educational needs and disabilities succeed. This theory guides the research's focus on how managers define their own responsibilities toward students with disabilities, and whether their actual practices match up with inclusive ideals. Yet, it's important not to ignore the theory's limitations: most of its core ideas come from Western contexts, and they don't always address Ethiopia's specific cultural realities, resource challenges, or educational history (Assefa, 2025).

Inclusive Education Theory isn't just a set of abstract ideas; it gives concrete tools for interpreting the data by laying out clear standards for evaluating how managers think and act. Its focus on knocking down barriers, ensuring accessibility, and maximising participation offers real criteria for judging if leaders see inclusion as a foundational value or if they're stuck in old, deficit-based ways of thinking (Ainscow, 2020b). Using this lens, the study can spot gaps between what managers say about inclusion and what they actually do, especially when their actions still exclude students with disabilities. The theory's multidimensional aspects cultural, policy, and practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), also make it possible to analyse how different institutional factors affect managerial choices. As Valle-Flórez *et al.* (2021) explain, inclusive ideas have made their way into higher education later and less thoroughly than in compulsory schooling, which is why a strong theoretical foundation is so valuable for understanding the hurdles Ethiopian managers face.

The theory, then, gives this study a clear analytical roadmap for investigating how leaders in higher education view disability, implement inclusive practices, and balance their policy promises with the institutional challenges they encounter in Ethiopian universities. Even so, the theory's direct application needs some adjustment Ethiopia's limited resources, cultural beliefs, and shifting institutional pressures mean that putting inclusive ideals into practice can be tough, and these limits are exactly what this study's empirical investigation aims to shed light on.

3.3.1 Foundation and characteristics of inclusive education theory

Inclusive Education Theory stands on strong philosophical foundations: everyone gets access to opportunities, there's acceptance of disability and diversity, no one faces inequality, and all learners are encouraged to participate fully (Regmi, 2017). For more than thirty years, this theory has shaped global debates about education. People now see inclusive schools as the key to helping young people with disabilities get involved in, learn from, and give back to their communities (Jarvis et al., 2020). The Salamanca Conference (UNESCO, 1994) was a turning point; after that, inclusion wasn't just a policy ideal, but a human rights and ethical matter, crucial for building a more inclusive society (Dreyer, 2017). Stubbs (2002) makes it clear: inclusive education isn't just a tool for one group, but an ongoing process that brings a certain quality of education to everyone. It calls for new ways of thinking about how to bring all learners into one system and encourages lifelong learning and a sense of belonging. In this study, these principles set the standards for judging how Ethiopian higher education managers think about and handle inclusion. They reveal if their strategies match the values of inclusion or if they still see disability through a deficit-based lens. Still, applying this theory in Ethiopia requires a careful approach. Resource shortages and the history of its institutions get in the way of turning inclusive ideals into reality.

3.3.2 Limitations of inclusive education theory

As appealing as it sounds, Inclusive Education Theory comes with major limitations, and it's important to spell these out for an honest analysis. Suleymanov (2015) breaks the obstacles into four areas: clashes in values, struggles over power, limits on practical action, and psychological resistance. These are central to understanding why some managers resist inclusion. Not every student flourishes in a fully integrated classroom, and general education settings often lack the ability to personalize instruction (Ludago, 2020). Sometimes student behavior disrupts learning,

and the idea that every student with special needs should be in mainstream classes just doesn't line up with reality (McCarty, 2006). When inclusion is pushed on everyone without nuance, it can actually lead to chaotic classrooms, plans that don't work, and hesitation from both students and teachers to bring in students with disabilities (IvyPanda, 2020). For higher education managers in Ethiopia, these problems are practical and urgent: balancing the promises of inclusion with too many students in one class, limited resources, and poor infrastructure is a daily struggle. These limitations make it clear that managers' views often sit between policy ideals and what's actually possible in practice. They face all these challenges when making decisions. The empirical work in this study will show how these managers try to bridge the gap between what inclusive education theory promises and the tough realities of running institutions in Ethiopia.

3.3.3 Significances of inclusive education theory for disability accommodations

Inclusive Education Theory brings a major shift; it tells educators to stop blaming individual deficits and instead look at the systems that create barriers, arguing that educational institutions need to change to fit every learner (Hornby, 2015; Namanyane & Shaoan, 2021). What makes this theory especially important is how it recognises that inclusion reaches beyond disability, connecting with all parts of identity and their intersectionality (Boyle & Anderson, 2020). Those pushing for education reform see it as one of the most important changes worldwide, laying the groundwork for lifelong learning and justice (Imaniah & Fitria, 2018; Tshering et al., 2023). The theory pushes schools and universities to root out exclusion, whether it's driven by prejudice or simply by ignoring differences in race, money, class, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, or ability (Imaniah & Fitria, 2018). For the aims of this research, the theory acts as a measuring stick showing whether Ethiopian higher education managers see disability accommodation as charity for individuals or as something everyone has the right to expect. The focus on participation and power (Stubbs, 2008) shapes the main research questions, pointing out that true inclusion means more than just physical presence; it's about active participation and real change in institutions. This framework will help the study unravel whether these managers stick to fixing individual student deficits or work to transform the system to remove barriers altogether.

3.4 Education Management Theory

Historically, management science was founded at the end of the 19th century. This management science developed theories on organisations, which are the classical approach, the neoclassical approach, the approach to human behaviour, and the modern approach (Saitis & Saiti, 2018). For this study, the focus would be on the theories and approaches that have been developed recently and are exercised by contemporary managers of every educational institution. Therefore, to address the important theories which support the role of higher education managers in enhancing inclusiveness, due emphasis is given to the many organisational management theories and to the human factor-related theories from the modern approach, i.e., the contingency/situational and the social system theory. The reason for aiming at these theories is that they clearly describe the role of managers in managing both organisational and human factors comparably.

3.4.1 Systems theory

Systems theory, widely used in both natural and physical sciences, describes organisations as complex social systems that respond to change more easily than rigid, mechanical setups (Mullins, 2011). This approach looks at organisations within their wider context, focusing on multiple ways they interact with the environment and examining how technical and social factors connect within the system (Vinesh & Satheesh, 2019). The central idea is that when you change one part of the system, technical or social it doesn't just stop there; those changes ripple out, affecting other parts and the system as a whole. That's why you need a holistic view. Saitis and Saiti (2018) describe organisations like schools as social systems that rely on their environment just as much as their environment relies on them; both sides influence each other. Modern theory pushes this further by describing organisations as adaptive, meaning they have to change when their environment does, and their different pieces work together toward set goals (Ahmad Ishaq et al., 2023). In the context of this study, systems theory is essential for seeing Ethiopian public universities as complex social systems where the success of inclusive education depends on the ongoing interaction among subsystems like management decisions, institutional culture, resource allocation, and external policy.

Systems theory doesn't focus on what individual members do, but on how groups behave, emphasising organisational behaviour and the difference between open and closed systems (Saitis

& Saiti, 2018). In today's organisations, the theory is crucial for making sense of complex relationships, improving how things run, and identifying key pieces and how they connect (Ahmad Ishaq et al., 2023; Lai & Lin, 2017). In this research, systems theory offers a way to interpret data by framing the link between what managers believe and how inclusion works as something rooted in the system itself. The theory holds that managers' ideas about disability don't come from nowhere; they grow out of larger institutional systems policy, resources, culture, and history- and they're not separate from them. By using this lens, the study can trace how shifting one part of the system, say managerial attitudes, sets off changes in other parts like institutional culture, resources, or student outcomes. This helps get a sharper picture of why some inclusion efforts succeed, and some fail in Ethiopian public universities. Still, critics say systems theory sometimes leans too heavily on the idea of stability and misses the conflicts, power struggles, and competing interests inside organisations. That's a real concern in this study, since Ethiopian public universities aren't perfectly ordered; they're filled with conflicting demands, where managers balance efficiency against fairness, and where inclusion policies meet ongoing battles over resources and cultural pushback. By bringing in Inclusive Education Theory, which is grounded in ideas of equity and justice, the analysis isn't just about the system's structure it also takes these core values into account and offers a more critical and meaningful perspective.

3.4.1.1 Historical basis and features of system theory

Systems theory got its start in the late 1800s, when Herbert Spencer approached society with an evolutionary lens. Then, in the 1930s, biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy laid the groundwork, and after that, people like Ashby, Boulding, and Wiener saw that the growing complexity of the world demanded an approach that no single field could cover alone (Banathy, 2001). The theory took shape as a way to look at human behavior in its psychosocial context, bringing together all the variables that drive organizational performance and digging into human systems' complexity (K. Adams et al., 2013). A central feature of systems theory is circular causality all the parts in a system affect each other at the same time, and actions have roots in many factors that work together as a network (Edubirdie, 2022).

In this study, systems theory serves as a key lens for looking at Ethiopian public universities: complex social systems where inclusive education depends on the ever changing interplay between

managerial choices, university culture, funding, and outside policy demands. Its focus on connections and mutual influence pushes the research to frame managers' perceptions and actions as outcomes of several interacting subsystems, including policy directions, the university's history, and cultural attitudes about disability instead of seeing these as isolated events.

3.4.1.2 System theory in the management of educational institutions

When you look at the quality of university education, general systems theory fits right in. University education's "production function" from the people and buildings to the methods, procedures, and processes all combine to create the desired results (Mwambi, 2020). Social systems theory has a big influence on how schools and universities perform: clearly defined roles, good supervision, shared decision-making, professional interactions, and solid teamwork all make a difference for effectiveness and outcomes (Dahiru et al., 2018). Education systems set out to meet goals, but they don't work in a vacuum. They're influenced by the wider society, and inside the system, you have interconnected subsystems, like management, instruction, and administration, all relying on each other to achieve set aims (Bhaskar & Lajwanti, 2019). In this study, systems theory is the tool for analysing how Ethiopian higher education managers operate inside these subsystems: policy, institution, culture, and resources that all shape inclusive education.

The theory shows that managers don't make decisions in isolation; their choices are shaped, and sometimes limited, by the interaction between subsystems. For inclusive education, Rapp and Corral-Granados (2021) argue that systems theory helps us understand how students end up included or excluded through different kinds of communication. That idea matters here, because it means inclusion isn't just about one manager's choice; it's built from the patterns of communication, the way resources move, and how policies are actually carried out. Still, while the theory highlights interdependence, we have to remember Ethiopian public universities operate in strict, hierarchical, resource-limited settings, and top-down decisions can override the participatory approaches that systems theory tends to value.

3.4.1.3 Limitations of system education theory

Even with all it offers, systems theory has shortcomings you can't ignore. The theory assumes that

just having some influence means you control the whole system, and that at any moment this influence can have a major impact an idea that doesn't always hold up in complex, layered organisations (Karim, 2009). People also criticise the systems approach for being too abstract for real-world use, not universal enough, and for having principles you can't just apply everywhere (Hussain, 2021). Looking at systems from the angle of complex explanatory models can help, but it doesn't always get to the heart of individual situations, so sometimes you need traditional psychological methods too (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021).

Another issue: it's hard to move from identifying problems to actually solving them in systems analysis; diagnosing is easier than fixing (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021). For this study, these weaknesses are front and center. The theory's abstractness might miss certain dynamics of Ethiopian public universities, where limited resources, cultural attitudes, and unique histories bring challenges that broad systems principles don't always address. And since systems theory makes it tough to turn analysis into concrete action, that's why this research looks so closely at how managers see their own roles and duties because the way they understand their jobs is at the heart of building better approaches that fit the local context. Given these limits, it makes sense here to combine systems theory with inclusive education theory. This blended framework captures both the big picture system dynamics and the commitment to equity that the study aims to support.

3.4.2 Contingency theories

Contingency theory builds on the systems approach but rejects the idea that a single best management structure exists. Instead, it argues that organisational effectiveness relies on matching structures and practices to specific situational and contextual factors (Lartey, 2020; Mullins, 2011). The theory insists that the right structure and system of management depends on the nature of tasks, environmental pressures, and the unique circumstances facing each organisation (Shala et al., 2021). Organisations aren't static; they're complex systems made up of interconnected parts, all influenced by external forces, uncertainty, and the need for rational decision-making (Lartey, 2020). Contingency theory considers a mix of factors such as environment, goals, technology, and people and recommends that managers adjust their styles based on the situation at hand. In this study, contingency theory serves as a key lens for examining how managers at Ethiopian public universities work, recognising that outcomes in inclusive education are shaped by context things like institutional resources, cultural norms, policy frameworks, and history all of which differ from

place to place and over time.

The heart of the theory is clear; organisational effectiveness depends on how well institutions align with their environments (Saitis & Saiti, 2018). This idea shapes the study's focus on how Ethiopian managers adjust inclusive practices to fit their particular settings. Rather than pushing a one-size-fits-all model, contingency theory provides a structure for tailoring management approaches to the actual demands managers face (Shala et al., 2021). For this research, the theory points out that we can't judge managers' efforts at inclusion by universal standards alone; we have to look at their own institutional contexts, their resources, and what stakeholders expect. As Saitis & Saiti (2018) point out, every organisation is unique; there's no single best way to plan, lead, organise, or control. This is especially true for Ethiopian public universities, which operate in diverse regions with different resources, attitudes, and histories. But there's a drawback; if taken too far, contingency theory risks excusing inaction. Managers might point to contextual constraints as enough reason not to implement inclusive practices, justifying exclusion as inevitable. It's important to strike a balance between the theory's flexibility and the firm commitments to equity, justice, and universal human rights found in inclusive education theory.

Applying contingency theory to educational management means that what works depends on each situation (Saitis & Saiti, 2018). In this study, the theory helps us interpret data by showing how the link between what managers believe and actual inclusive outcomes hinges on many factors: policy, resources, staff attitudes, student populations, and outside pressures. This makes it possible to dig into why inclusion efforts succeed in one institution but struggle in another, or why managers with similar intentions wind up with different results. By using contingency theory, the research uncovers how Ethiopian higher education managers handle the push and pull between institutional limits and the drive for inclusion, showing exactly which contextual factors help or hinder putting inclusive policies into action. The theory's focus on context speaks directly to the research questions about how managers see their roles in inclusion, because those views are shaped by the realities of their settings. But the application of contingency theory needs a critical edge: while managers might need to adapt their approaches to local realities, the basic rights of students with disabilities don't get put on hold. Managers still have a duty to pursue inclusion, even when conditions aren't ideal.

3.4.2.1 Contingency management theory foundation

Fred Fiedler introduced contingency theory in 1958, arguing that a leader's effectiveness depends on how their leadership style interacts with their control over situational factors (Shala et al., 2021). The theory arose out of the realisation that a single organisational structure can't fit every business or situation. Instead, what works depends on variables like organisational size, technology, leadership approach, and the organisation's capacity to adapt to strategic changes (Appell, 2011). Fiedler's framework identifies two main leader types: relationship-oriented and task-oriented. A leader's effectiveness comes down to the context, leader-member relations, the structure of the task, and the leader's positional power (Bertocci, 2009). This study uses contingency theory as a lens for analysing how Ethiopian public university managers practice inclusion. It assumes that leadership for inclusion must fit the unique context: resource levels, cultural attitudes, policies, and institutional histories all shape what strategies actually work. The core idea that there's no universal best way to organise and that not all approaches work equally well shapes the research questions. Managers at different Ethiopian universities need different strategies to achieve inclusion, based on their specific circumstances.

3.4.2.2 Importance of contingency management for education

Applying contingency theory to educational management means recognising that leadership success depends on both leadership style and the situation. Managers are usually either relationship-oriented or task-oriented (Bertocci, 2009). Relationship-oriented leaders emphasise strong interpersonal connections, while task-oriented managers excel when handling complicated assignments where relationships aren't as crucial. Fiedler also believed that managers can't easily change their style; instead, the environment should be adjusted to suit the manager, or managers should be placed where their style fits best (Bertocci, 2009). For this study, the theory shapes how data are interpreted by framing inclusive outcomes as directly tied to how managers' styles interact with their institutional context.

Managing in educational settings means juggling many factors: the leader's personality, the traits of subordinates, organizational structure, vision, values, policies, technology, and even external influences (Maisyaroh et al., 2019). For Ethiopian public university managers, this is especially important, since their ability to promote inclusion depends on navigating complex constraints

limited resources, unclear policies, and cultural views on disability. The theory suggests that effective inclusive leadership means adapting approaches to fit the actual circumstances of each institution, rather than enforcing a one-size-fits-all plan.

3.4.2.3 Limitations of contingency theory in the management of education

Even though contingency theory is a useful tool for analysis, it has some major limitations in education. The theory argues that there's no one perfect way to manage; management has to match the context (Abdel-Kader, 2014). One problem is that measuring management style isn't easy, and it's not clear that Fiedler's tools actually measure what they're supposed to (Huihui, 2018). The theory also falls short when faced with unexpected or rapidly shifting situations, because its framework might not account for new or changing conditions (Omazić et al., 2023).

These drawbacks directly affect this study. Difficulty in measuring manager style makes it harder to analyse how Ethiopian managers' approaches influence inclusive outcomes. Additionally, since contingency theory stresses doing what fits the context, managers might rationalise not taking action on inclusion, claiming the context justifies inaction, which can further exclude students with disabilities. This makes it essential to pair contingency theory with Inclusive Education Theory's commitments to equity and human rights. That way, adapting to the situation doesn't become an excuse to ignore inclusion. In this study, applying the theory means being careful that managers can adapt to their context, but the rights of students with disabilities are absolute, and inclusion remains a must, even when conditions aren't ideal.

3.5 Employing Theory Throughout the Research Process: From Review of the Literature to Presentation of Results

3.5.1 The use of theory in literature review

Theory and theoretical frameworks form the core of dissertation research. They shape the rationale, problem statement, research objectives, and questions, and they anchor the literature review and methodology (Grant & Osanloo, 2014; Jinbao et al., 2025). Developing theory works through four main approaches: inductive logic, modification, refinement, and extension. Each one pushes knowledge forward by creating meaning, changing concepts, exploring relationships between constructs, or bringing in theories from outside (Jinbao et al., 2025; Turner et al., 2018). Using theory in a deliberate way turns the literature review into more than just a summary it becomes a

critical, analytical tool that strengthens reliability and inspires fresh thinking by challenging established ideas (Ebidor & Ikhide, 2024; Turner et al., 2018). In this study, the literature review draws on Inclusive Education Theory and Systems/Contingency Theory, guiding a close look at how managers in Ethiopian public universities perceive and handle inclusion. This theoretical lens keeps the review sharp not just telling what's known, but evaluating policy commitments, managerial attitudes, and institutional practices from multiple angles. These theories help spotlight what's missing in how managers understand disability and inclusion, setting up the need for the study's fieldwork.

3.5.2 Theories and research design and methodology

Strong research stands on theory. Theoretical predictions shape research design and direct the methodology (Köhler et al., 2025; Schantz & Lindeman, 2019). Theories carve out what counts as a researchable problem, set underlying assumptions, and guide every step, defining the problem, collecting data, and analysing it all to keep the work sound and consistent (Riyaz Ansari et al., 2022a). Methodology puts theory into practice, giving structure for generating knowledge and letting researchers sharpen what's already known (Adeoye, 2024). Here, inclusive education theory offers standards for judging managerial perspectives, and systems and contingency theories supply tools for exploring how institutions operate and adapt. These theories lay the foundation for the study's qualitative and quantitative methodology, influencing how survey questionnaires are developed, how interviews are framed, how documents are analysed, and how observations are made. The theoretical framework tightly defines the study's focus on how managers view disability and inclusion and keeps the methodology in sync by matching how data is collected to the theories in play. This ensures the study digs deeply into how policy becomes practice, making the findings useful both for theory and for practical policy in Ethiopian higher education.

3.5.3 Theories and data collection and analysis

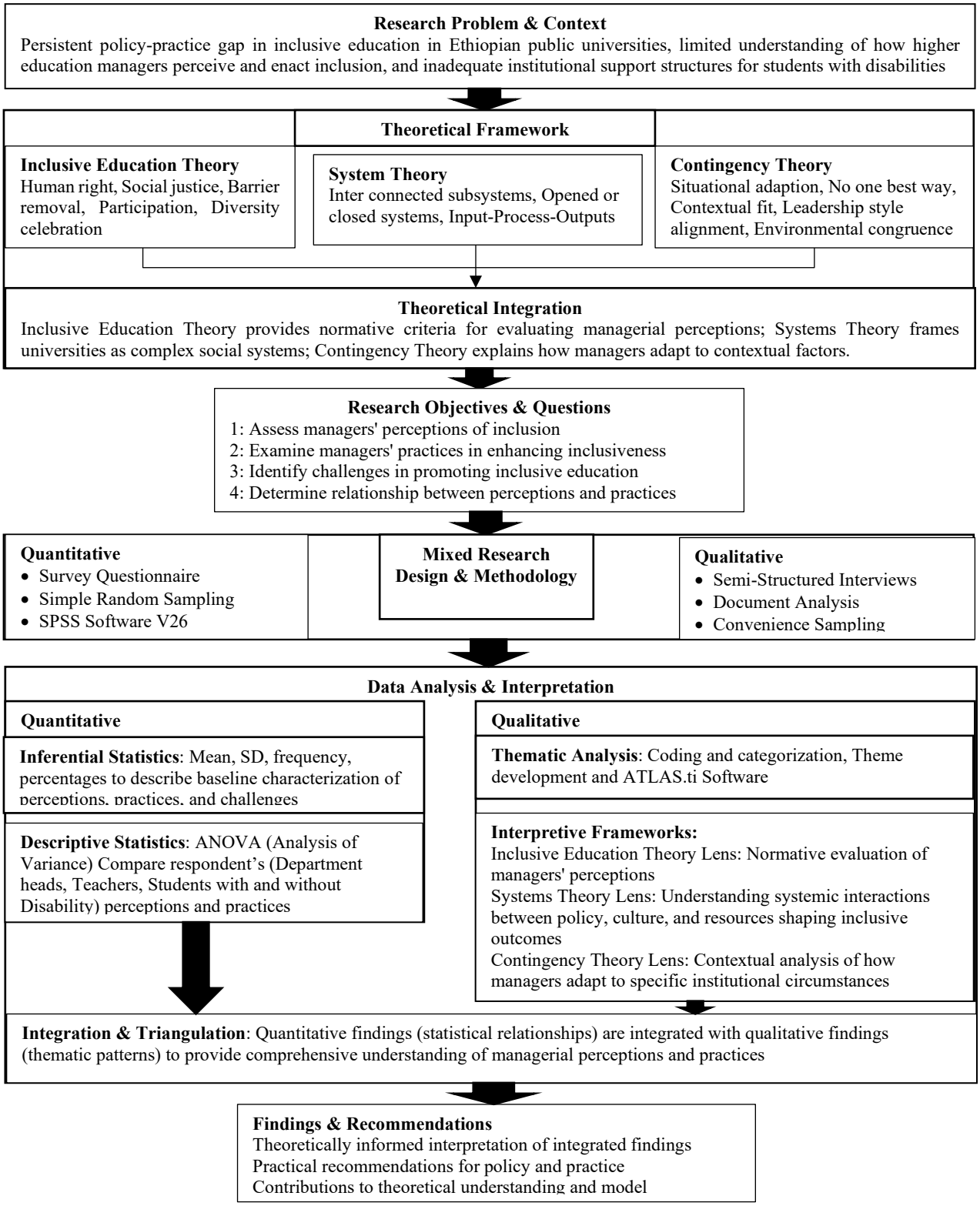
A solid theoretical framework connects research questions to data collection, analysis, and interpretation, helping researchers make sense of social realities and make sound choices throughout their work (Ghanad, 2023; Waldt, 2024). Theories steer which data collection methods and sampling strategies the study uses (Ghanad, 2023). In analyzing data, theoretical frameworks drive the process and guide choices about modeling and testing the theory (Pigott, 2017). For this study, inclusive education theory frames data collection, setting the standard for inclusion across

culture, policy, and practice. Meanwhile, systems and contingency theories direct attention to institutional structures, environmental influences, and how organisations adapt. Using these theories together ensures analysis goes beyond description, digging into how managers' perspectives are shaped and rooted in their wider institutional systems. Theory helps identify patterns, tensions, and inconsistencies in the data from interviews and documents, making it possible to interpret how Ethiopian managers balance policy, resources, cultural attitudes, and their own organisational expectations. This kind of theoretical foundation gives the findings analytical weight and pushes understanding of inclusive higher education management in limited resource settings.

3.5.4 Theory and presentation of findings

Theory should shape research findings, and methodological rigour makes them valuable to the academic community. Theories not only inform the research questions but also guide data collection and provide perspective for interpreting results (Kandiero et al., 2023; Omotayo & Falana, 2025). Strong research matches theoretical predictions, aligns data collection with theory, and presents results clearly and persuasively (Omotayo & Falana, 2025). Theory turns raw information into insights researchers can use and builds the bridge between findings and broader theoretical debates (Taherdoost, 2020). In this study, the findings follow the theoretical structure, making sure that results are always linked back to the principles of inclusive education theory and the analytical frameworks of systems/contingency theory. Managerial perceptions are interpreted in the context of disability models, showing whether managers in Ethiopia rely on deficit views or inclusive approaches. Institutional practices are assessed through systems and contingency perspectives, clarifying how context steers decision-making. The conclusion pulls together these contributions, showing how the study broadens the understanding of inclusion in non-Western contexts, tests existing theories in resource-limited settings, and offers policy recommendations based on solid theoretical analysis. Altogether, this approach strengthens both the theory and practical policy in Ethiopian higher education.

Figure 3.1: Theoretical Framework for Investigating the Role of Higher Education Manager in Enhancing Students Inclusiveness in PUE (Mixed-Method Design)



This figure lays out the theoretical framework for the mixed-methods study, showing the flow from the research problem, through the theoretical foundations, research objectives, mixed-methods design, and finally, integrated data analysis. The framework brings together three main theories: Inclusive Education Theory, which sets the standards for judging managerial perceptions (Hornby, 2015; UNESCO, 1994); Systems Theory, which sees universities as complex social systems made up of interconnected subsystems (Saitis & Saiti, 2018); and Contingency Theory, which explains how managers adjust inclusive practices to fit their specific contexts (Shala et al., 2021). Together, these perspectives shape the research objectives, influence methodological choices, and support both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. In the quantitative phase, the study uses descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequencies, to map out how managers see, practice, and confront challenges with inclusion. Inferential statistics like one-way ANOVA for group comparisons. The qualitative part relies on thematic analysis with ATLAS.ti software to pull patterns, themes, and context from semi-structured interviews and document analysis. By integrating and triangulating both quantitative and qualitative results, the research offers a full picture of how Ethiopian higher education managers view and carry out inclusive practices, maintaining both methodological rigour and theoretical consistency across the study.

3.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter explores three key theoretical frameworks that shape how this study approaches its analysis: inclusive education theory, rooted in Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Rosenqvist & Magnusson, 2020); systems theory, created by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1945) and Bertalanffy (1969); and Contingency Theory, developed by Fred Fiedler (1967) (Shala et al., 2021). Together, these theories offer a solid conceptual foundation for examining how higher education managers in Ethiopia view and implement inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Inclusive education theory lays out core principles of equity, participation, and breaking down barriers. Systems and contingency theories, on the other hand, give us tools to analyse how institutions work, how context matters, and how adaptation happens in different situations.

Bringing these perspectives together pushes the study to move past just describing what's happening; it encourages a critical look at the complicated relationship between managers' views, institutional structures, limited resources, and policy settings that shape inclusion. Using this

theoretical mix strengthens the research by guiding every step how the literature is analyzed, how the study is designed, how data gets collected and interpreted making sure the research truly tackles its goals and contributes to what we know about managing inclusive higher education, especially where resources are scarce. Finally, this theoretical framework sets the stage for the methodological choices discussed in the next chapter, including the research design, how participants are selected, the tools for gathering data, and how the analysis will be handled as the study digs into the practices and perspectives of managers at Ethiopian public universities regarding disability inclusion.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on the theoretical framework of the research. This chapter also discusses the methodology used in this study. The overall objective of this study was to explore the role of higher education institution managers in enhancing students' inclusiveness in public universities in Ethiopia. The focus of this chapter was mainly on the design and method of research. Most importantly, the chapter presents the research approach, study design, research paradigms, population, sample size, and sampling techniques, data collection instruments, validity and reliability checks, data collection procedures, research ethics, and data presentation, analysis, and interpretation to address the following research questions, aim, and research objectives.

4.2 Research Questions

The main research question for this study is the following. What are the role of higher education managers in improving student inclusion in Ethiopian public universities? On the basis of this question, the sub-research questions below have been formed to address the problem.

- What is the perception of higher education managers about students with disabilities in public universities of Ethiopia?
- How can the policies, directives, guidelines, and strategies on inclusive education enhance the inclusion of students with disabilities in public universities of Ethiopia?
- What are the factors that promote the effective implementation of inclusive education in public universities of Ethiopia?
- What are the factors that hamper the promotion and implementation of inclusive education in public universities of Ethiopia?
- How can Higher Education Managers address the challenges students with disabilities face in public universities of Ethiopia?

4.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to explore the role of higher educational institution managers in improving student inclusion in Ethiopian public universities. Specifically, this study addressed the following objective:

- Explore the perception of Higher Education Managers about students with disabilities in public universities in Ethiopia
- Explore how policies, strategies, directives, and guidelines on inclusive education enhance the inclusion of students with disabilities in public universities of Ethiopia.
- Determine factors that promote the effective implementation of inclusive education in public universities in Ethiopia.
- Identify factors that hamper the actual promotion and implementation of inclusive education in public universities in Ethiopia.
- Determine how higher education managers address the challenges students with disabilities face in public universities in Ethiopia.

4.4 Research Approach

This study used a mixed-methods research approach, which means it brought together at least one qualitative and one quantitative component. The decision to use this method had several reasons: it strengthened the credibility of the findings, offered context by validating broad relationships among variables, illustrated points clearly, improved the practical usefulness of the results, allowed for both confirmation and discoveries, and revealed a range of perspectives from the research participants (Dawadi et al., 2021). The process involved constantly moving back and forth between data and theory, an essential part of the approach (Tepetepe, 2022). Mixed methods gave the study deeper insights, as one method built on and complemented the other, making the complicated questions clearer and the problems easier to understand. By using mixed methods, the researcher sharpened their own understanding of the subject matter.

Adopting mixed methods research meant that methods had to be deliberately integrated throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This integration helped address complex research questions that a single method couldn't adequately answer (Ngulube, 2020). Having more than one method painted a fuller picture of human behavior and experience, which meant the research

moved forward more quickly and thoroughly (Mckenney & Reeves, 2020). This approach fit questions that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods could handle alone (Kelle et al., 2019). It also let the researcher explore different perspectives and discover connections between the complex parts of the research questions (Shorten & Smith, 2017). Empirical data collection relied on both numerical and verbal data to gather solid, reliable evidence (Cohen et al., 2018).

The reason for using mixed methods was to better grasp the links or contradictions between the qualitative and quantitative data (Seppa, 2021). This way, participants had a real voice and could share their experiences during the study. The combined approach opened up new paths for exploring research evidence and allowed for deeper, more meaningful answers to the study's questions (Kelle et al., 2019). It also encouraged richer scholarly exchanges and enhanced the researchers' own experiences, since diverse perspectives brought new light to the issues under study. So, in educational and social science research, using mixed methods was vital for this study. The results from one method served to strengthen, supplement, and clarify the findings from the other (Ngulube, 2020).

The mixed-methods approach fits this study well because it lets us look at higher education managers' views and practices around disability inclusion in Ethiopian public universities from more than one angle. Trying to capture this complex issue with only one method wouldn't go far enough. With quantitative surveys, we can map out how widespread certain attitudes are and spot their patterns. Qualitative interviews then dig deeper, showing the institutional cultures, context, and individual experiences behind those attitudes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Having both types of data makes sense here, especially for exploring why there's still a gap between policy and practice in Ethiopian higher education. Quantitative data highlight where managerial traits connect with inclusive practices. Qualitative insights help explain why these gaps continue to exist and reveal how managers balance conflicting demands within their institutions (Bettencourt et al., 2022). Recent work in educational leadership and inclusion shows that mixed methods let us triangulate our findings by drawing on surveys, interviews, and documents to boost our conclusions' credibility and transferability. This way, we don't just show measurable outcomes; we also capture the subtle meanings managers attach to their roles and responsibilities in encouraging inclusive environments (Dewsbury et al., 2022; Laufer et al., 2021). Combining scope and depth like this

means our results aren't just statistically robust. They're also grounded in context, so our recommendations reflect what actually happens in Ethiopian public universities.

4.5 Research Design

A research design is a broad strategy that outlines the methodology of the study (Creswell, 2018). Research study design is a structured approach to executing studies, guaranteeing thorough investigation, reducing bias, increasing reliability, and achieving the best possible efficiency, even in situations where resources are limited (Riyaz Ansari et al., 2022b). The researcher uses a mixed research design for this study. The mixed research approach comprises three research designs: the convergent parallel mixed method, which gathers both quantitative and qualitative data concurrently, the explanatory sequential mixed method, which undertakes quantitative research first, and the exploratory sequential mixed method, which begins with qualitative research and then conducts quantitative research (Barnes, 2019; Maarouf, 2019)

This study used the mixed convergent parallel method, selected from three research designs: convergent parallel, explanatory sequential, and exploratory sequential. The convergent parallel mixed method is a research design that combines quantitative and qualitative data for comprehensive analysis (Barnes, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Maarouf, 2019). It can take two forms: concurrent triangulation design, which uses two methods to confirm each other's findings, and concurrent nested design, where one method is used for different purposes (Barnes, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2017; Maarouf, 2019).

This study used a concurrent parallel mixed methods research approach that incorporated triangulation methods. Quantitative and qualitative data were mainly collected and evaluated concurrently (Dawadi et al., 2021), before being combined during the data interpretation phase to establish convergence, discrepancies, and integrations (Creswell, 2009; Tepetepe, 2022). To compare individual results or obtain an extensive understanding of a phenomenon, a concurrent design entails gathering and evaluating both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time (Dawadi et al., 2021). The theoretical perspective adopted for this study must involve the use of induction (discovery of patterns, insights, and new theories) and deduction (testing theories) (Tepetepe, 2022), i.e., inclusive education theory to identify disability students' inclusiveness on

the one hand and system and contingency theories to distinguish roles of HE managers on the other hand which was complex and built upon multiple perspectives in education.

This was done to give a complete understanding of the phenomenon. Concurrent triangulation provides multiple perspectives, a holistic picture, triangulation, better evidence, and mitigates the flaws associated with mono or purist methods and philosophical positions (Dawadi et al., 2021; Santos et al., 2017). This design is not only the most common and well-known, but is also used for mixed-method research (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researcher, thus, planned to use this design because it was a one-phase design, and quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses could be performed concurrently (Creswell et al., 2004). It involved the concurrent but separate collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data.

This study used the concurrent triangulation design (QUAN + QUAL), a mixed-methods approach where quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time, analysed separately, and brought together during interpretation to compare, contrast, or confirm the findings (Creswell, 2018). The concurrent triangulation design serves two main goals (Bhandari, 2025). First, it supports triangulation, the process where combining quantitative survey data and qualitative interview data leads to a deeper and more confirmed understanding of the research problem than either method could provide alone (Fetters et al., 2013). Second, it allows for complementarity, meaning findings from one method expand, clarify, or strengthen results from the other, which improves the scope and depth of the data (Gempes, 2025; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). For this study, this design fits well because it lets the researcher capture both the statistical trends in managerial perceptions about disability inclusion and the context and experience behind why those patterns exist. Collecting survey and interview data at the same time also has practical benefits, like shortening the data collection period and maximising the information gathered (Liem, 2020).

In this study, the quantitative method was used to collect opinions (by generating numerical data or data that can be turned into usable statistics) of the respondents on the roles of managers, students with disabilities, and inclusive education practices, as well as their impacts or effects on higher education institutions. However, the quantitative data may not allow deeper explanations for why a phenomenon occurred (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). Thus, this dimension requires the use of qualitative data. Consequently, the qualitative method was used to collect data that capture the

different dimensions of the experiences, personal perspectives, meanings, and beliefs of the participants about the role of managers in enhancing the inclusiveness of students in Ethiopian higher education. In addition, the qualitative method helps to obtain a deeper understanding of the issues under consideration and capture certain trends that may emerge from the data (Ugwu & Eze, 2023).

Additionally, the concurrent triangulation research design was believed to be important in terms of the research timeframe (Bell et al., 2022). Therefore, the concurrent triangulation design was used in this study, which is a single phase design and includes the quantitative and qualitative methods during the same time frame and with equal weight, was be used in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; David et al., 2010). According to this model, quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analysed separately on the same phenomenon and then the different results converged during the interpretation phase (Haq, 2014). Potentially, concurrent triangulation could enable the researcher to finish the collection of data sooner (Bell et al., 2022). The purpose of this model, therefore, was to arrive at valid and well-substantiated conclusions about a single phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

4.6 Research Paradigm

The research paradigm refers to the perception of the researcher and how they understand world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The terms quantitative and qualitative denote kinds of data, not the epistemologies, methodologies, designs, and ontological assumptions that are associated with different research frameworks (Mertens, 2015). But researchers of mixed methods could choose a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to answer their research questions (Brierley, 2017). For this study, the researcher followed pragmatism as the appropriate paradigm. This was because a pragmatic approach to mixed methods research allows flexibility in the choice of methods to answer research questions (Brierley, 2017).

Nowadays, academic researchers confidently use pragmatism for mixed methods research because it links and justifies theoretical views, which, in turn, could rationalize its use as a valid methodological approach for mixed methods research (Parvaiz et al., 2016). Pragmatists believe that one should stop asking questions about the laws of nature and reality (ontology) and theory of knowledge (epistemology) (Parvaiz et al., 2016). For pragmatists, the research question or issue

serves as the central focus (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). In the context of philosophical deliberations, pragmatic investigators give precedence to the research question (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Consequently, since the central concern of this research was 'what works', pragmatic paradigms were preferred.

According to the available literature, rather than simply asserting that pragmatists could employ both quantitative and qualitative philosophical assumptions, this contribution should be such that there be an attempt to move pragmatism from a philosophy that merely depends on epistemology and methodology to a coherent, integrated paradigm with clear philosophical stances that lie in the middle of the quantitative-qualitative paradigm continuum (Maarouf, 2019). The central principle of pragmatism is the emphasis on workable outcomes or solutions to problems that are suitable under current circumstances (Sol & Heng, 2022). Pragmatist research rejects the idea that there is only one scientific method that can provide access to the truth about the real world and maintains that knowledge can be acquired through a variety of approaches (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

Moreover, Creswell recommended the pragmatist paradigm that states a fit-for-purpose research strategy is concerned with applications, and what produces solutions to problems (Creswell, 2009). The researcher, therefore, was convinced that pragmatism has the ability not only to provide a philosophical justification for the mixed methods research approach, but also to open all possible options to researchers, which is the reason why it prevails over all other research philosophies (Maarouf, 2019). The pragmatism paradigm in educational research promotes collaboration between practicing educators and researchers by using both qualitative and quantitative methods, and increases awareness of interactions with external environments (King, 2022). To apply the pragmatic paradigm, a real-world problem must be identified, current attitudes and knowledge gaps must be examined (King, 2022), a research topic must be developed (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019), and mixed techniques must be integrated (Maarouf, 2019). Analysis focuses on knowledge that can be put to use, and iterative data collection and reflexivity are preserved. Abductive, deductive, and inductive reasoning are used to refine the results, and the findings are connected to real-world uses (Maarouf, 2019).

For the study's findings to be meaningful and applicable, mixed-method research necessitated a pragmatic approach that first involved pinpointing a real-world problem that warranted

investigation, such as organisational procedures or educational matters (Allemang et al., 2022). Following this, researchers formulated research questions intended to address the problem, prioritising those that could yield practical insights over abstract theoretical debates (McChesney, 2021). Then, a suitable mixed-methods design was chosen for the successful integration of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, such as convergent parallel, explanatory sequential, or exploratory sequential, based on its usefulness for the investigation (McChesney, 2021). Methodological decisions were evaluated without being constrained by limitations related to knowledge acquisition, with a focus on which ones could most effectively meet the study's goals (Gobo, 2023). This often involved combining methods such as surveys, observations, and interviews (Gobo, 2023). Data collection involved gathering both qualitative and quantitative information, and this process occurred simultaneously or in stages, with the approach being adapted as needed to reflect the evolving circumstances (Brierley, 2017; Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Identifying workable solutions required the analysis of data through the application of deductive, inductive, and abductive reasoning processes (Brierley, 2017). At the appropriate times, during interpretation, the findings were integrated to develop a comprehensive understanding encompassing various types of data (GmbH, 2023). Throughout the study, reflexivity was maintained, questioning the focus, target audience, and importance to align with practical notions of adaptability and social relevance (Gobo, 2023). Conclusions were drawn with a focus on warranted assertibility and transferability, linking results to practical applications rather than fixed truths (Elgeddawy & Abouraia, 2024). Finally, distribution aimed to impact practice and policy in the field under study by disseminating findings via formats such as policy briefs or workshops (B. C. Evans et al., 2011).

4.7 Population and Sampling

4.7.1 Population

A population is a fundamental aspect of research methodology, comprising a group of individuals who share common characteristics within a specific geographical or organisational context (Creswell, 2018; Willie, 2024). This enables the examination of a wide range of phenomena through an in-depth understanding of the group being investigated (Willie, 2024). The population of interest in a study comprises all individuals, pairs, groups, businesses, or other entities that the research aims to comprehend and to whom its findings can be relevant or extended (Casteel &

Bridier, 2021; Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). The population is defined based on specific requirements, which can either allow or deny individuals or entities from taking part (Creswell, 2018; Hossan et al., 2023). Therefore, the researcher's population consisted of university presidents, college deans, disability center coordinators, department heads, lecturers, students, and students with disabilities, who were selected as the participants for the study. This population sets boundaries that provide essential contextual and environmental clues for interpretation, thereby defining the study's scope (Casteel & Bridier, 2021; Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). The study included a diverse group of university presidents, college deans, disability center coordinators, department heads, lecturers, students, and students with disabilities. This population ensured the contextual relevance and transferability of findings to similar academic settings, which is consistent with the pragmatic paradigm's emphasis on actionable knowledge gained from contextually relevant populations (Creswell, 2018; Hossan et al., 2023; Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020).

4.7.2 Sampling

The researcher uses sampling techniques to select a subset of people from a larger group for research objectives. Samples are smaller, more representative subgroups of a population used to derive conclusions about larger groups (Creswell, 2018; Hossan et al., 2023). There are two types of sampling methods: probability and non-probability (Hossan et al., 2023; Willie, 2024). Probability sampling uses random selection to provide equal possibilities of selection, while non-probability sampling relies on the researcher's discretion (Hossan et al., 2023; Subedi, 2021).

- **Non-probabilistic sampling**: yields null findings, since it chooses members of the target population without using probability. It can be helpful for certain research goals, provide answers to particular concerns, and spark new ideas even when it is not generalizable (Subedi, 2021).
- **Probabilistic sampling**: uses equipment-based sampling to choose all units of the target population with a non-zero chance to take part in a study. $P = 1/N$, where P is the probability, is the formula for the odds of selection (Willie, 2024).

A well-defined method influences sample size estimation and potential selection bias. Sampling is the process of choosing persons or units from a sample frame (Subedi, 2021).

The first stage in the sampling process was to clearly define the target population (Taherdoost, 2018). Questions of sampling arise directly from the issue of defining the population on which the research focuses (Cohen et al., 2018). Therefore, in Ethiopia, there are higher education institutions that have been established to provide tertiary education by the government, religious organizations, and private owners. In terms of the sample for this study, excluding both higher education institutions founded by religious organizations and private providers, there were 45 public universities in Ethiopia. These public universities were classified into three main groups as mature (large and old), evolving (medium and young), and embryonic (small and new) (Geda, 2014). Furthermore, the FMoE classified these universities into three generations based on their times of establishment. Eight of them were relatively old and categorized as the first generation established between the years 1950 to 2000, followed by twelve public universities which were established between the years 2006 to 2009 and categorized as the second generation, whereas the remaining twenty-one were established as of the year of 2010 and categorized as the third generation. Two of the 45 public universities in Ethiopia were Science and Technology universities, while one was a Metropolitan University (Shiferaw & Cerna, 2016).

In the quantitative phase, the study focused on managers, academic staff, and students with and without disabilities from ten Ethiopian public universities. These universities were chosen on purpose, to ensure diversity in both geography and institutional characteristics. For selecting participants department heads, teachers, and students with and without disabilities the researcher used probability sampling, specifically simple random sampling. This method gave everyone in the target group an equal and known chance to be picked, reducing selection bias and making the findings more generalizable (Guetterman, 2020). Simple random sampling fit this research because it helps form a representative sample, allowing the results to extend to all Ethiopian public universities (National-University, 2026). The sample size took into account costs, how easy it was to reach participants, and the need for enough statistical power to spot significant relationships between variables (Verma & Verma, 2020). Initially, the plan was to include 50 department heads, 112 teachers, and 162 students with disabilities across the ten universities. However, with some practical hurdles the quantitative sample consisted of 50 department heads, 112 teachers, and 162 students with and without disabilities filled out the survey. This sample size was enough to support valid conclusions. Sound sample size decisions are essential when the goal is to make claims about a larger population based on the sample (Bolarinwa, 2020).

For the qualitative phase, the researcher turned to non-probability sampling, specifically convenience and quota sampling, to pick participants for in-depth interviews. These methods match standard practice in qualitative research, where understanding the experiences of specific groups or individuals is more important than statistical representativeness (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). The researcher used convenience sampling for participants who were accessible and willing, while quota sampling made sure to include voices from different managerial levels and institutional contexts. Quotas were set for two presidents, two deans, and two disability center coordinators or directors from across the ten universities, aligning with the idea that quotas are set ahead of time to ensure representation of important subgroups (Futri et al., 2022). The final qualitative sample included two presidents, two deans, and two disability center coordinators, all of whom participated in semi-structured interviews. Site selection for this phase was purposive from the ten universities three were chosen for their geographic spread, size, and how far they had come with inclusive education, ensuring a wide range of perspectives. This strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings because the sample fit the research aims (Campbell et al., 2020). The researcher also analyzed institutional policies, guidelines, and strategic plans related to inclusive education, using this document analysis to enrich and triangulate the qualitative data.

By using a simple random sampling technique, i.e. the lottery method, two, three, and five public universities were selected as a sample from the first, second, and third generation universities, respectively. Simple Random sampling, i.e. the lottery method, has the greatest freedom from bias and may represent the most costly sample in terms of time and energy for a given level of sampling error (Harris & Brown, 2019). The university presidents and college deans were included in the sample using a convenience sampling technique. Using the convenience sampling technique often helps overcome many of the limitations associated with researches (Taherdoost, 2018). For department heads and teachers, the researcher used quota sampling because quota sampling, like stratified sampling, strives to represent significant characteristics the samples in proportion in which they could be found in the wider population (Cohen et al., 2018). Regarding the selection of students with disabilities, the researcher used a systematic sampling technique. This was because this method is a modified form of simple random sampling which involves selecting participants from a population list in a systematic rather than a random fashion (Cohen et al., 2018). Using this sampling technique has an advantage of simplicity (Taherdoost, 2018) ,i.e., the selected participants' name, department and classroom were already found in the list compiled.

4.8 Instrumentation and Data Collection Techniques

The primary objective of data collection is to obtain high-quality information that supports thorough data analysis and enables the formulation of a compelling and trustworthy response to the questions posed (Goyal, 2022). Therefore, selecting and evaluating data requires careful planning, thorough effort, and the use of specific equipment, which are all essential steps in the initial research phase of data collection (Goyal, 2022). For this study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, and review of documents.

Using questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews as data collection instruments is crucial to enhance the reliability of study results. Surveys provide extensive and measurable data that effectively captures a range of perspectives (Creswell, 2018). Researchers can explore the complex experiences of individuals through interviews, which offer in-depth qualitative insights (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). Verifying conclusions against existing records through document review improves contextual understanding and increases credibility, as shown in (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). This process also yields more reliable and transferable results, which is crucial to the pragmatic approach. As a consequence, the following section provides a detailed examination of each data collection instrument.

4.8.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used as a research tool. It had several questions and prompts that were meant to get information from people who answered (Cohen et al., 2018). It has advantages over some survey forms, including being less expensive, requiring less work than telephone or spoken surveys, and frequently offering standardised responses that made data compilation easier (Cohen et al., 2018). However, the surveys were considerably limited by the need for respondents to read and reply to the items (Taherdoost, 2021). Moreover, questionnaires were commonly used because they were successful in gathering survey information by providing structured, often numerical data that could be delivered without the researcher's presence and were often simple to analyse (Cohen et al., 2018).

The questionnaires were prepared in English, had both closed- and open-ended items and were administered to department heads, teachers, and students with disabilities. For closed-ended items,

the respondents were required to choose one proper response, whereas they were requested to respond to the open-ended items in writing. For this particular study, department heads, instructors, and students completed questionnaires, including both nondisabled and disabled students. The questionnaires had two parts whereby the first part consisted of such personal information of the sex, age, education level, position, and field of specialization of the respondents, while the second part comprised items related to the role of higher educational managers in improving the inclusion of students.

The researchers started by systematically collecting data, beginning with the identification of respondents from the sampled population. Subsequently, preformatted surveys and questionnaires were created to facilitate the collection of structured data. Following the university's selection, institutional approval was sought by requesting permission to conduct the study. Subsequently, survey questionnaires and interview guides were finalised to ensure uniform data collection. Lastly, the researchers distributed the surveys and conducted interviews with the respondents to gather the necessary data.

4.8.2 Interviews

In addition to the questionnaire, the researcher conducted interviews with the presidents of higher education management, the deans of the collage, and the coordinator of the inclusive education and disability center program to collect qualitative data on the role of Ethiopian higher education managers in enhancing students' inclusion. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) argue, the use of interviews was essential for assessing or evaluating a person's intentions with some degree of respect. Using interviews in research as Siddiqui et al. (2021) stated, marked a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulatable, data as somehow peripheral to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as produced between humans, often through dialogs.

Of the three types of interviews, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews for this study. This type of interview was the most commonly used type of interview for research as compared to the rest (Kakilla, 2021). Semi-structured interviews are beneficial for in-depth discussions that reveal hidden information and allow researchers to evaluate superficial responses (Goyal, 2022; Mashuri et al., 2022). They facilitate flexible debates, provide credible analysis, and stimulate new ideas. Semi-structured interviews provide more context and are easier to understand, making them

perfect for determining location retrospectively (Kakilla, 2021; Mashuri et al., 2022). The disadvantages of semi-structured interviews include data loss caused by the use of technology that mimics the settings of face-to-face talks or limited questioning owing to language barriers; loss in translation; and a lack of understanding or poor response to the topic (Kakilla, 2021; Mashuri et al., 2022).

The interview was performed with a guide that highlighted the important subjects to be covered (Mohammadi et al., 2025; Siddiqui et al., 2021). The guide allows researchers to concentrate on certain themes without restricting their format, whereas interviewers can tailor their questions to the interview setting and participants (Mashuri et al., 2022; Mohammadi et al., 2025). Comprehensive preparation is essential to ensure the successful execution of interviews and the collection of relevant data. Developing a robust research protocol and selecting suitable participants for the study is crucial (Taherdoost, 2022).

The study used a systematic interview process to ensure efficient data collection. Before conducting the interview, the interviewer made a positive impression and informed the participants about their rights, the study objectives, and the layout of the interview session. The interviewer then took these actions after the participants' willingness had been recognised, making inquiries, investigating them, and recording the results methodically. The interviewer overcame challenges, maintained focus, and responded to the emotional signals of the participants. Following the interview, the participants were asked for their feedback, while adhering to established moral standards throughout. To boost response rates, common pitfalls were sidestepped, and appreciation was expressed.

4.8.3 Document review

Any written, illustrated, or presented information that can be verified as factual is referred to as a document (Zammataro & de Albuquerque, 2021). Strengths of research documents include historical contingency, institutional embedding, social disciplining, and material embodiment (Moilanen et al., 2022; Morgan, 2022). However, they do have certain drawbacks, such as historical variability, institutional limitations, disciplinary procedures, and perceived inertness (Morgan, 2022). Documents provide extensive data, stability, and accessibility in qualitative document analysis. However, they might also contend with prejudice, credibility, and sincerity

(Morgan, 2022). Additionally, the availability of documents can restrict the area of research, which could result in gaps or overgeneralization if not properly examined. Researchers may also have difficulty deciphering latent meanings (Moilanen et al., 2022; Morgan, 2022).

The relevant documents for this study were reviewed and analysed. Within a specific category of documents, a fundamental document analysis could examine the intended meaning being conveyed (GmbH, 2023; Kutsyuruba, 2023; Moilanen et al., 2022). Using documents as a source of data enables researchers to: 1) offer contextual information as well as historical perception; 2) help create new interview questions and participant observation occasions as long as opportunities to collect documents unravel; and 3) make available additional research data (GmbH, 2023; Kutsyuruba, 2023; Moilanen et al., 2022). Documents may well be the most effective means of gathering data when occasions cannot be experienced or when participants are unable to remember the specifics (Chanda, 2022; Moilanen et al., 2022). Therefore, the review and analysis of the documents in this study were conducted to gain insight and discover information about policies, directives, guidelines, and strategic intentions regarding the role of managers in enhancing the inclusiveness of students.

The researcher collected data necessary to understand inclusive education practices, trends and applications in Ethiopia using four documents that target students with disabilities in higher education. The strategies and guidelines included were the Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (2022/23 – 2029/30), the Jimma University Guidelines for the Inclusion of Students with Special Needs (2024), and Ethiopia's Education and Training Policy of 2015 and 1994.

4.9 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The main goal of data analysis was to appropriately depict the distribution of cases or how they were distributed over the variable's values (Cárdenas, 2019). For this study, data obtained from questionnaires were analysed using frequency distribution tables and cross-tabulation using descriptive and inferential statistics. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Program version 26 was used to code, enter, and analyse acquired data after it had been modified and cleaned to guarantee quality. With SPSS, the quantitative data were examined using both descriptive and inferential statistics, such as one-way ANOVA, frequency, mean, and standard deviation. It is particularly useful for the analysis of survey data, as it covers a broad range of

statistical procedures (Şengül, 2024). The classifications were done based on categories to reduce the volume of raw data to ensure readiness for analysis. Additionally, for ease of statistical computation, the categorised data was tabulated. Understanding and analysing the data were the main priorities of the researcher. The researcher took into account the following ranges when interpreting the continuous scores of means obtained from the 5-point Likert scale: A range of 1 to 1.80 is considered very low, 1.81 to 2.60 is considered low; 2.61-3.40 is considered moderate; 3.41-4.20 is considered high; and 4.21-5.00 is considered very high (Rose et al., 2024; Yildirim, 2021).

Furthermore, by dividing the range of a 3-point scale into equal intervals, the researcher was able to calculate the distribution of mean score intervals: first, determine the range of the scale (range=3 – 1=2), then divide the range by the number of intervals (since we have 3 points, we will consider 3 intervals. Therefore, interval-width = $\frac{range}{3} = \frac{2}{3} \approx$ 0.67), and finally identify the intervals (Interval 1: 1 + 0.67=1.67; Interval 2: 1.67 ≤ mean < 1.67 + 0.67 =2.341, and Interval 3: 2.34 ≤ mean ≤ 3). The study employed a distribution of mean score intervals, where 1 to 1.67 is considered not at all, 1.68 to 2.34 somewhat and 2.35 to 3 a great deal.

Qualitative data were analysed using thematic data analysis. The goal of thematic analysis is to grasp the core of a lived experience by investigating participants' viewpoints and discovering repeating themes and structures(Gill, 2020). The researcher used thematic analysis, a qualitative research data analysis technique, to identify recurring themes or topics in the data (Gill, 2020).

Therefore, the qualitative data collected through interviews were transcribed, coded, analysed, and interpreted thematically. The thematic approach was followed to display the analyses and findings of both the quantitative and qualitative data. The interview transcripts have been analysed for descriptions and patterns related to the basic research questions. Qualitative data analysis was the range of processes and procedures that moved from the qualitative data that had been collected into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations the researcher was investigating (Flick, 2018; Harding & Whitehead, 2013; Nigatu, 2009). Consequently, data collected through document reviews would supplement interview data to give the proper meaning to the qualitative part of the study. Qualitative data analysis, on the one hand, involves the processes of interpretation and creativity that are difficult to make explicit, and, on

the other hand, a great deal of qualitative data analysis is rather less mysterious than hard, sometimes tedious (Flick, 2018; Harding & Whitehead, 2013). When conducting the qualitative data analysis, the researcher, therefore, gave due emphasis to the results produced and tried to free them from any distortion.

4.10 Reliability and Validity

The researcher carried out a pilot study to test and refine the research tools and methods before jumping into the main data collection. This early phase mattered a lot; it let them see if the research design actually worked, tested how clear and relevant the survey questions and interview protocols were, and gave the researcher an idea of what kinds of problems might pop up during the real study (Tumla et al., 2023). The pilot involved a small group similar to the actual target population, managers like presidents, deans, coordinators, academic staff, and students both with and without disabilities, so the environment closely resembled what they'd see in the main research (Tate et al., 2023). Methodological guidelines emphasise that although people often skip pilot testing, it's essential for solid instrument design. It checks for validity and reliability, helps minimise bias, and mentally prepares the researcher for collecting the data (Tate et al., 2023).

The pilot played a key role in sharpening both reliability and validity through several diagnostic steps. The researcher first developed the questionnaire after reviewing relevant literature, and secured approval from both the supervisor and the UNISA College of Education Ethical Review Committee (Ref: 2023/04/12/17185270/23/AM, dated 2023/04/12). With that done, the survey and interviews were conducted on two campuses not part of the main sample. After analysing the data, the researcher found the instrument only needed minor amendments to some content and to the statistical methods used. Taking this feedback, the researcher, working alongside academic experts and researchers at Ambo University and statisticians at Jimma University, made sure the questions suited the research objectives. This step checked content validity, confirming the instrument actually covered what needed to be studied. Then, pilot testing focused on how respondents understood each item, flagging questions that were unclear or confusing and needed to be revised or removed. The third step involved stress-testing the procedures: they measured how long it took to complete the questionnaire, checked if the instructions made sense, and reviewed their sampling plan.

As Matimbwa & Ringo (2025) argue, a good pilot isn't just box-ticking; it's a detailed, multi-step diagnosis that sets up strong instruments, reduces risk in the main study, and boosts the credibility of the research. The pilot offered practical lessons that shaped the main study. After experts weighed in and the pilot ran, the researcher rewrote unclear questions, dropped redundant ones, and added yes/no questions alongside Likert-scale items. The researcher timed the survey to reduce participant burden and keep data quality high. Participant feedback led to clearer instructions for both surveys and interviews. The pilot also made it clear that some planned procedures just wouldn't work, so the approach for data collection got adjusted (Tumla et al., 2023). As Shrestha et al. (2023) show, pilot results can drive significant changes in design in data collection methods, all to strengthen validity. All those iterative improvements from the pilot eventually raised the standards for quality, credibility, and feasibility, making sure that when the main study started, both the tools and the procedures would get the job done.

4.11 Research Ethics

Research ethics goes far beyond simply following procedures; it's anchored in a basic duty to protect the rights, welfare, and dignity of everyone involved. When you're working with human subjects, you can't just rely on technical skill; you have to open yourself up to real human experiences, sharing a kind of chartered intimacy with those who take part (BERA, 2024; Dooly et al., 2017). This approach to ethics isn't only about rules and tick-boxes; researchers must navigate tricky power dynamics, cultural backgrounds, and all the vulnerabilities that come up in relationships shaped by research. Throughout this study, the ethical framework rested on the pillars of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice principles at the heart of human research. Ethical guidance isn't just about outlining rules on paper; it means demonstrating genuine respect for participants, letting them make their own decisions, and prioritising confidentiality and privacy, all while considering how sociocultural or belief systems shape those choices (Singh, 2023). For that reason, the researcher took a broad approach to ethics here, never losing sight of procedural standards, but always remembering the relational side, making sure participants' well-being stayed central throughout the whole process. Measures taken to ensure ethical compliance throughout the research process were stated as follows:

Informed consent, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw: Informed consent isn't just a buzzword; it's the backbone of ethical research. Participants need to make a deliberate choice

to take part once they fully understand potential risks and benefits (Klykken, 2021). Written, voluntary, informed consent is standard when we talk about upholding autonomy in research, but getting consent that's genuinely informed and voluntary isn't always easy, especially in qualitative and postcolonial settings (Brear, 2020). In this study, the researcher broke down informed consent into several steps to make sure everyone truly understood what they were agreeing to and felt free to participate. Before collecting any data, participants received detailed info sheets laying out the purpose, the process, benefits, risks, and their rights. The researcher didn't move forward until they received written consent, and checked that everyone understood they could walk away at any point, no strings attached. That was especially important given the hierarchy in Ethiopian public universities; managers hold power over staff and students, which can pressure people to say yes. To address that, the researcher made it absolutely clear that deciding to opt in or out wouldn't impact anyone's job, grades, or institutional standing; and reminded participants of their right to withdraw at every stage.

Confidentiality, anonymity, and data management: Confidentiality and anonymity aren't just formalities; they signal true respect for participants as human beings, not just as data sources (Bhandari, 2024). Protecting participant privacy is central to ethical educational research. The researcher kept personal information under wraps, never sharing data outside the approved parameters (Bellas & Fontenla-Romero, 2024). Anonymity is standard; most professional associations demand it for good reason (Godfrey-Faussett, 2022). In this study, when it came to confidentiality, the researcher used a few different layers of protection. Survey answers, interview recordings, and transcripts were all stored in password-protected files. Access was strictly limited to the researcher and authorised supervisors. The researcher assigned pseudonyms and unique IDs, so no one could link responses back to a real person (UKSA, 2022). This mattered especially for high-profile participants like university presidents, deans, and coordinators, who might otherwise be identifiable. The researcher made sure to inform participants that only ever aggregate or de-identified data would show up in any publications; no individual or institution could be recognised.

Power relations and positionality: In qualitative research, where both the researcher's and participants' positions shape every part of the process, acknowledging where everyone stands is critical (Reich, 2021). Power imbalances crop up all the time and they need active navigation. Researchers are responsible for thinking through diverse ethical viewpoints, even when it's

uncomfortable (Guevara & Campoverde, 2021). In this study, the researcher addressed power dynamics by being reflexive and transparent. The researcher openly stated the position as a student from the University of South Africa, aware that this could influence how participants viewed and responded. To keep things balanced, the researcher used a collaborative approach, always acknowledging participants as the experts in their own lives. What they had to say came first. This honest, respectful way of communicating built trust and made it easier for participants to open up, which added real depth to the data.

Institutional approval and ethical clearance: The researcher made sure to secure institutional ethical approval before collecting any data, sticking to recognised procedural standards. On 12 April 2023, the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Education at the University of South Africa cleared the project (Ref: 2023/04/17185270; see Appendix F). Their approval meant the research design, tools, and procedures met all necessary standards for work involving human participants. This wasn't just box-ticking, especially since the project involved higher education managers and students with disabilities, who face unique power dynamics. The ethics review required the researcher to clearly show how they would handle informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and data management. The researcher also obtained permissions from the Ethiopian public universities and relevant authorities before contacting participants, staying true to local institutional rules and respecting those organisational hierarchies.

Application to the study context: All these ethical measures applied across both parts of the study, i.e., quantitative and qualitative. For the quantitative phase, participants got info sheets and consent forms, and simply filling in the survey counted as consent. For the qualitative phase, interviewees gave written informed consent and could check their transcripts, correcting anything or expressing any discomfort. Throughout, the researcher stayed alert to ethics; it's more than an upfront agreement; it's about maintaining respect and responsible conduct from start to finish. This comprehensive ethical framework shaped how the study unfolded, underpinning everything with integrity and respect and supporting the credibility of the findings.

4.12 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter is primarily concerned with the design and methodology of research, and uses a concurrent mixed-method approach to collect and evaluate data on the roles of managers in

improving inclusion in Ethiopian public universities, particularly for students with disabilities. It also provides a detailed explanation of data collection tools, such as questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews, while relating the tools to specific study objectives. Additionally, the chapter outlines the study paradigm, the study population taken from ten Ethiopian public universities, and the ethical parameters created to promote participant well-being. Furthermore, it describes the data collection procedures and how the methodologies used complement each other to produce complete and convincing results. The following chapter will present and explore the themes that generated from the participants' responses, as well as provide an in-depth examination of the data collected.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and interprets the data collected to address the main research question of the study. What was the role of higher education managers in improving student inclusion in public universities in Ethiopia? The findings were also presented in alignment with the objectives of the study, which included examining the perceptions of higher education managers of students with disabilities, evaluating how inclusive education policies, strategies, directives and guidelines advance the inclusion of such students, identifying enabling and constraining factors in the implementation of inclusive education, and assessing how managers address the challenges faced by students with disabilities in Ethiopian public universities. The chapter focuses on systematic presentation, analysis, and interpretation of data obtained using the methodologies outlined in the preceding sections.

The main and sub-research questions listed below were all addressed through the data presentation, analysis, and discussion.

Main research question

What is the role of higher education managers in enhancing students' inclusiveness in Ethiopia's public universities?

Sub-research questions

- What is the perception of higher education managers about students with disabilities in public universities of Ethiopia?
- How can policies, directives, guidelines, and strategies on inclusive education enhance the inclusion of students with disabilities in public universities of Ethiopia?
- What are the factors that promote the effective implementation of inclusive education in public universities of Ethiopia?
- What are the factors that hamper the promotion and implementation of inclusive education in public universities of Ethiopia?

- How can Higher Education Managers address the challenges students with disabilities face in public universities of Ethiopia?

Aim and objectives of the study

The general objective of the study is to explore the role of higher education institution managers in improving student inclusion in Ethiopian public universities. Specifically, this study addressed the following objectives:

- Explore the perception of higher education managers about students with disabilities in public universities in Ethiopia
- Explore how policies, strategies, directives, and guidelines on inclusive education enhance the inclusion of students with disabilities in public universities in Ethiopia.
- Determine factors that promote the effective implementation of inclusive education in public universities of Ethiopia.
- Identify factors that hamper the actual promotion as well as the implementation of inclusive education in public universities of Ethiopia.
- Determine how higher education managers address the challenges students with disabilities face in public universities of Ethiopia.

Hypothesis for the quantitative data collection sections

The researcher could apply the three sample hypotheses listed below for the quantitative data collection portion of the study on inclusive education in Ethiopian public universities.

H_1: There is a significant correlation between the level of managerial commitment and the effectiveness of inclusive education in Ethiopian public universities.
H_2: Adequate institutional support services significantly increase the academic participation of students with disabilities in Ethiopian public universities.

Lastly, because of the nature of the method that was used, the quantitative and qualitative results are examined separately for this section before being integrated during the discussion phase.

5.2 Quantitative Research Findings and Presentation

5.2.1 Participants' background

A quantitative survey was administered to department heads, instructors, and students to gather their perspectives on inclusive education. The table below summarises the demographic characteristics of the respondents to the questionnaire from the sampled universities.

5 Table 5.1: Summary of the distribution of participants by university and position

University name	Students	Teachers	Department heads	Total
Jimma	21	16	5	42
Wollega	15	11	4	30
Mettu	15	11	4	30
Wolayita Sodo	15	8	7	30
Bonga	15	12	3	30
Wolkite	15	8	7	30
Selale	15	10	5	30
Ambo	15	10	5	30
Gambella	15	8	7	30
Hawassa	21	18	3	42
Total	162	112	50	324

The study incorporated participants from multiple universities to ensure diverse perspectives and a comprehensive understanding of inclusion, diversity, and academic challenges in varying institutional contexts. Participants comprising department heads, instructors, and students provided direct experiential insight into academic environments, policy frameworks, learning support systems, accessibility provisions, pedagogical practices, and challenges related to curricular inclusion of student needs.

The distribution of participants in three categories of mature public universities (Jimma, Hawassa), evolving (Ambo, Wolayita Sodo, Wollega) and embryonic (Mettu, Bonga, Wolkite, Selale, Gambela) reflects patterns correlated with institutional size and historical establishment. Mature universities (Jimma and Hawassa), being the largest and oldest, contributed the highest number of participants (42 each). Evolving universities (Ambo, Wolayita Sodo, Wollega) accounted for 30 participants each, while embryonic institutions (Mettu, Bonga, Wolkite, Selale, Gambela), as the newest and smallest, also contributed 30 participants collectively. This distribution highlights proportionate representation relative to institutional capacity, and mature universities demonstrate greater administrative involvement due to their established infrastructure. In contrast, embryonic

universities, despite their smaller academic ecosystems, maintained equitable representation in student, faculty, and leadership roles. This suggests a correlation between institutional maturity and managerial complexity, as well as the ongoing development of academic and administrative frameworks in emerging universities.

6 Table 5.2: Student background information summary

Study year										
Sex	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		4th year & above		Total	
Male	16	9.9%	30	18.5%	16	9.9%	46	28.4%	108	66.7
Female	7	4.3%	10	6.2%	15	9.3%	22	13.5%	54	33.3
Total	23	14.2%	40	24.7%	31	19.1%	68	41.9%	162	100%
Types of impairment										
Sex	Visual		Hearing		Intellectual		Physical		Other types	
Male	32	19.8%	10	6.2%	0	0%	32	19.8%	34	20.9%
Female	20	12.3%	3	1.9%	1	0.62%	20	12.3%	10	6.2%
Total	52	32.1%	13	8.0%	1	0.62%	52	32.1%	44	27.2%
Program study level										
Sex	Non degree			Bachelor degree			Master's degree		Total	
Male	0	0%		107	66.1%		1	0.62%	108	66.7%
Female	2	1.2%		52	32.1%		0	0%	54	33.3%
Total	2	1.2%		159	98.14%		1	0.62%	162	100%

The table above summarizes the demographic composition of the student participants involved in the research data collection process. The sample included male (66.7%) and female (33.3%) respondents, distributed in academic year cohorts as follows: first year (14.2%), second year (24.7%), third year (19.1%), and fourth year or greater (41.9%). Participants represented various disability categories, including visual (32.1%), hearing (8.0%), intellectual (0.62%), physical (32.1%) and other disabilities (8.0%). Furthermore, the study included students of non-degree programs (1.2%), bachelor’s (98.14%), and master's (0.62%).

7 Table 5.3: Summary of the background of teachers and department heads: gender, educational level, and academic rank.

Respondents Position		Gender					
		Male		Female		Total	
	Teachers	92	56.8%	20	12.35%	112	69.1%
	Department heads	48	29.6%	2	1.23%	50	30.9%
	Total	140	86.42%	22	13.58%	162	100%
		Education Level					
		BA		MA		Ph.D.	
	Teachers	1	0.62%	94	58.1%	17	10.5%
	Department heads	0	0%	43	26.5%	7	4.3%
	Total	1	0.62%	137	84.6%	24	14.8%
		Academic Rank					
		Assistant Lecture		Lecture		Assistant Professor	
	Teachers	12	7.4%	70	43.2 %	28	17.3 %
	Department heads	2	1.2%	29	17.9 %	19	11.7 %
	Total	14	8.6	99	61.1 %	47	29%

Respondents Position		Associate Professor		Professor	
	Teachers	1	0.62 %	1	0.62 %
	Department heads	0	0%	0	0%
	Total	1	0.62 %	1	0.62 %

The table above outlines the demographic composition of the teacher and department head participants in this study, detailing their gender distribution, educational qualifications, and academic ranks. Among the participants, the teachers comprised 92 males (56.8%) and 20 females (12.35%), while the department heads included 48 males (29.6%) and 2 females (1.23%). In terms of educational attainment, participants included 1 Bachelor's degree holder (0.62%), 137 Master's degree holders (84.6%), and 24 Ph.D. holders (14.8%).

Regarding academic rank, the distribution was as follows: 14 Assistant Lecturers (8.6%), 99 Lecturers (61.1%), 47 Assistant Professors (29%), 1 Associate Professor (0.62%) and 1 Professor (0.62%). Data reveal a disproportionate gender representation, with male participants significantly outnumbering female counterparts. The master's degree holders constituted the majority of respondents, and the sample encompassed a comprehensive representation across academic hierarchies, ranging from Assistant Professor to Profess.

5.2.2 Role of HEI managers in enhancing inclusiveness

5.2.2.1 Perceptions of higher education managers on disability inclusion

8 Table 5.4: Perceptions of higher education managers on disability students' inclusion

Variable	Position	Mean	Std. Dev	F	p-value
Students with disabilities should feel included in both the academic and social community.	Teacher	2.20	.71	3.11	.046
	Dep. Head	2.32	.74		
	Students	2.05	.73		
Officials and service providers at the university are willing and able to assist students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.25	.71	3.11	.046
	Dep. Head	2.32	.82		
	Students	2.08	.65		
Instructors' teaching strategies actively promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in academic activities.	Teacher	2.33	.65	3.64	.027
	Dep. Head	2.06	.62		
	Students	2.15	.71		
Managers view disability as a potential challenge to institutional processes and policies.	Teacher	2.16	.65	3.05	.049
	Dep. Head	1.98	.82		
	Students	2.33	1.12		
Managers believe students with disabilities can perform tasks comparable to their peers.	Teacher	2.28	.74	4.56	.011
	Dep. Head	1.90	.89		
	Students	2.29	.89		
Managers provide adequate instructional support for students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.08	.67	3.11	.046
	Dep. Head	2.00	.83		
	Students	2.33	1.21		
Managers believe families should take primary responsibility for providing services to students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.38	.79	3.06	.048
	Dep. Head	2.24	.72		
	Students	2.55	.92		
Managers view disability as a natural part of human diversity.	Teacher	2.81	.96	3.15	.044
	Dep. Head	3.00	1.07		
	Students	2.59	1.21		
Students with disabilities perceive that managers hold negative views about their capabilities.	Teacher	3.33	.92	4.62	.010
	Dep. Head	3.00	1.16		
	Students	2.91	1.24		
Negative attitudes toward disabilities among students and staff.	Teacher	3.04	.98	3.04	.049
	Dep. Head	3.12	1.22		
	Students	3.36	1.14		
Managers believe students with disabilities are capable of performing their academic and institutional duties.	Teacher	3.62	1.01	6.75	.001
	Dep. Head	3.92	1.14		
	Students	3.27	1.31		
Policymakers and educators acknowledge that students with disabilities have the right to education.	Teacher	3.84	1.12	4.65	.010
	Dep. Head	4.38	.72		
	Students	3.83	1.30		

The table above presents findings on the perceptions of higher education managers regarding the inclusion of disability in Ethiopian public universities. For the first item, which evaluated the consideration of students with disabilities (SWD) within academic and social communities, the mean scores (T = 2.20, DH = 2.32, S = 2.05) and the standard deviations (T = 0.71, DH = 0.74, S = 0.73) reflect the limited institutional accommodation of the needs and feelings of SWD. The second item evaluated the willingness of university officials and service providers to assist SWDs. The calculated mean values (T = 2.25, DH = 2.32, S = 2.08) and standard deviations (T = 0.71, DH = 0.82, S = 0.65) indicate a low proactive participation of institutional stakeholders in supporting SWDs.

In item three, instructors' teaching strategies to actively promote SWD inclusion in academic activities were analysed. Mean scores (T = 2.33, DH = 2.06, S = 2.15) and standard deviations (T = 0.65, DH = 0.62, S = 0.71) demonstrate a weak pedagogical adaptation to foster equitable participation. Item four examined the managerial perceptions of disability as a challenge to institutional processes and policies. The mean responses (T = 2.16, DH = 1.98, S = 2.33) and standard deviations (T = 0.65, DH = 0.82, S = 1.12) suggest that managers largely do not view disability as a systemic barrier to institutional operations. Item five evaluated the belief of managers in the ability of SWDs to perform tasks comparable to non-disabled peers. Mean scores (T = 2.28, DH = 1.90, S = 2.29) and standard deviations (T = 0.74, DH = 0.89, S = 0.89) reveal the weakest confidence among respondents in SWD competencies.

Items 6 to 11 produced moderate mean scores, while item 12 registered a high score, reflecting the generally positive perceptions of managers about students with disabilities in higher education institutions. However, despite the moderate scores for items 6–11, the variability and inconsistency in managerial perceptions about disability inclusion negatively impacted students. This underscores the imperative for critical evaluation and targeted interventions to address and rectify established biases and misconceptions toward students with disabilities. The analysis also identified statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) among respondent groups for specific variables, highlighting heterogeneity from institutional perspectives.

5.2.2.2 Factors that promote the effective implementation of inclusive education

9 Table 5.5: Factors relating to handling

Variable	Position	Mean	Std. Dev	F	p-value
Your university has clear policies, directives, and strategies to enhance diversity and inclusion for students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.30	.75	3.94	.020
	Dep. Head	1.96	.90		
	Students	2.08	.82		
Your university enforces anti-bullying measures to protect students with disabilities from harm.	Teacher	2.28	.71	3.47	.032
	Dep. Head	2.20	.73		
	Students	2.04	.79		
Managers treat students with disabilities equitably compared to non-disabled students.	Teacher	2.59	.88	6.08	.003
	Dep. Head	2.52	.76		
	Students	2.21	1.01		
Your university provides public awareness initiatives to inform the community about policies for supporting students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.61	.95	2.19	.113
	Dep. Head	2.76	1.04		
	Students	2.88	1.11		
Managers consistently provide a welcoming environment for students with disabilities from admission onwards.	Teacher	3.12	.96	6.45	.002
	Dep. Head	3.58	.93		
	Students	2.95	1.20		
Grand Mean	Teacher	2.13	.34	12.74	.000
	Dep. Head	2.15	.35		
	Students	1.93	.40		

Table 5 delineates the factors that influence the effective implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopian public universities, focusing on institutional mechanisms. The first item reflects the limited impact of university policies, directives, and strategies on the advancement of diversity and inclusion for students with disabilities (SWD). Mean scores (T = 2.30, DH = 1.96, S = 2.08) and standard deviations (T = 0.75, DH = 0.90, S = 0.82) indicate the limited effectiveness of these policies in promoting inclusion. The second item describes about the enforcement of anti-bullying protections for SWDs, with weak results, with mean scores (T = 2.28, DH = 2.20, S = 2.04) and standard deviations (T = 0.71, DH = 0.73, S = 0.79), suggesting inadequate implementation.

Item three of this table demonstrated a moderate level of commitment of managers to equitable treatment of SWD compared to non-disabled peers. Mean scores (T = 2.59, DH = 2.52, S = 2.21) and standard deviations (T = 0.88, DH = 0.76, S = 1.01) suggest inconsistent adherence to inclusive principles. The universities showed moderate participation in the dissemination of disability support policies through public awareness campaigns, as indicated by mean values (T = 2.61, DH

= 2.76, S = 2.88) and standard deviations (T = 0.95, DH = 1.94, S = 1.11) reflecting partial implementation of community outreach programs.

The final item was concerned about the welcoming environment provided by the SWD managers from admission onward. The result shows that the managers provided a moderately welcoming environment for SWDs from admission onward with mean scores (T = 3.12, DH = 3.58, S = 2.95) and standard deviations (T = 0.96, DH = 0.93, S = 1.20) that underscore the variability in institutional accessibility efforts.

10 Table 5.6: One-way ANOVA on differences in perceptions among teachers, department heads, and students on factors handling SWDs in promoting inclusive education

ANOVA					
Respondents position	*Sum of Squares*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
Between Groups	3.58	2	1.79	12.74	.000
Within Groups	45.06	321	.140		
Total	48.63	323			

*****. *The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.*

A one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in perceptions between teachers, department heads, and students about factors that promote inclusive education ($F(2, 321) = 12.74$, $p < 0.001$). *Post hoc Tukey tests* identified significant disparities between students, teachers, and department heads ($p < 0.05$). However, no significant differences were observed between teachers and department heads ($p = 0.96$), suggesting a greater consensus among staff (M and SD: T = 2.13 and 0.34; DH = 2.15 and 0.35) compared to students (S = 1.93 and 0.40).

11 Table 5.7: Factors relating to support

Variable	Position	Mean	Std. Dev	F	p-value
Your university offers scholarships and financial aid to students with disabilities according to national guidelines.	Teacher	2.32	.60	5.39	.005
	Dep. Head	2.20	.57		
	Students	2.04	.81		
The entire university community (faculty, staff, and students) provides comprehensive support to students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.31	.59	4.28	.015
	Dep. Head	2.16	.62		
	Students	2.06	.79		
Managers ensure that services for students with disabilities are adequately provided.	Teacher	2.30	.59	3.66	.027
	Dep. Head	2.18	.56		
	Students	2.08	.75		
Your university provides special consideration to students with disabilities in accordance with national constitutional guidelines.	Teacher	2.30	.76	3.84	.022
	Dep. Head	1.94	.89		
	Students	2.29	.87		
Students with disabilities have the right to access the services they require for their academic success.	Teacher	2.49	.89	1.48	.228
	Dep. Head	2.58	.83		
	Students	2.34	1.08		
Your university has a guidance and counselling team that supports students with disabilities in accordance with national guidelines.	Teacher	2.88	.97	6.74	.001
	Dep. Head	3.30	.91		
	Students	2.67	1.19		
Grand Mean	Teacher	2.09	.29	3.56	.031
	Dep. Head	2.04	.32		
	Students	1.99	.36		

Table 7 outlines the variables that influence the effective implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopian public universities, focusing on support mechanisms for students with disabilities (SWD). Item 1 reflects the limited efficacy of awarding scholarships and financial aid to SWDs in accordance with national guidelines. The mean scores (T = 2.32, DH = 2.20, S = 2.04) and the standard deviations (T = 0.60, DH = 0.57, S = 0.81) reflect minimal institutional effort in this domain. Item 2 reveals deficient support structures from faculty, staff, and students. Mean scores (T = 2.31, DH = 2.16, S = 2.06) and standard deviations (T = 0.59, DH = 0.62, S = 0.79) underscore systemic gaps in holistic assistance for SWD. Item 3 highlights the insufficient efforts of managers to ensure adequate services for SWDs. Mean scores (T = 2.30, DH = 2.18, S = 2.08) and standard deviations (T = 0.59, DH = 0.56, S = 0.75) demonstrate managerial shortcomings in the delivery of services.

Article 4 of the table identifies that managers provided inadequate and inconsistent instructional support to SWDs during their academic tenure, as indicated by mean scores (M: T = 2.08, DH =

2.00, S = 2.33) and greater variability between students (SD: T = 0.67, DH = 0.83, S = 1.21). Item five also illustrated that universities demonstrated limited adherence to national constitutional guidelines to accommodate SWD, with low mean scores (M: T = 2.30, DH = 1.94, S = 2.29) and moderate variability (SD: T = 0.76, DH = 0.89, S = 0.87).

Article 6 of the table evaluates the rights of SWDs to access the services they require for their academic success. SWDs' right to access necessary academic services was partially fulfilled, with moderate mean scores (M: T = 2.49, DH = 2.58, S = 2.34) and variability (SD: T = 0.89, DH = 0.83, S = 1.08). Regarding the availability of guidance and counselling teams for SWDs, according to national guidelines, was inconsistent. Mean scores (T = 2.88, DH = 3.30, S = 2.07) and standard deviations (T = 0.97, DH = 0.91, S = 0.32) highlight the disparities in support accessibility.

12 Table 5.8: One-way ANOVA on differences in perceptions among teachers, department heads, and students on factors of support for SWDs in promoting inclusive education

ANOVA					
Respondents position	*Sum of Squares*	df	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
Between Groups	.791	2	.395	3.524	.031
Within Groups	36.020	321	.112		
Total	36.811	323			

**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.*

A one-way ANOVA was performed to assess differences in institutional support knowledge for SWD in three respondent groups. Analysis revealed statistically significant differences between groups ($p = 0.03$, $\alpha = 0.05$), indicating divergent perceptions of support mechanisms. However, most of the variance originated from differences within the group rather than distinctions between groups. To identify specific group disparities, *Tukey's post hoc* multiple comparison test was applied. The results demonstrated that the students reported significantly lower levels of support compared to the teachers ($p = 0.02$). No significant differences were observed between teachers and department heads ($p = 0.58$) or between department heads and students ($p = 0.60$).

13 Table 5.9: Factors relating to resource

Variable	Position	Mean	Std. Dev	F	p-value (sig)
The university provides sufficient resources to support the academic needs of students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.32	.60	5.39	.005
	Dep. Head	2.20	.57		
	Students	2.04	.81		
Students with disabilities have adequate access to financial and material resources to meet their academic and personal needs.	Teacher	2.33	.61	5.46	.005
	Dep. Head	2.18	.56		
	Students	2.04	.80		
The university provides accessible library resources and accommodations tailored to the needs of students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.29	.62	5.33	.005
	Dep. Head	2.30	.58		
	Students	2.03	.81		
Ensure easy access to relevant disability-related information and resources on campus.	Teacher	2.31	.59	4.28	.015
	Dep. Head	2.16	.62		
	Students	2.06	.79		
Classes for students with disabilities are organized to accommodate the specific needs of different disabilities.	Teacher	2.33	.74	3.91	.021
	Dep. Head	2.16	.74		
	Students	2.07	.79		
The university provides accessible dormitory accommodations for students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.46	.98	4.10	.017
	Dep. Head	2.80	1.16		
	Students	2.82	1.12		
Grand Mean	Teacher	2.03	.31	5.77	.003
	Dep. Head	2.01	.26		
	Students	1.90	.36		

Table 9 outlines the variables that influence the provision of resources for the effective implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopian public universities, focusing on students with disabilities (SWD). Item 1 reflects an insufficient allocation of resources to meet the academic needs of SWD. Mean scores (T = 2.32, DH = 2.20, S = 2.04) and standard deviations (T = 0.60, DH = 0.57, S = 0.81) indicate inadequacies in the provision of institutional resources. The second item highlighted the inadequacy of financial and material resources for academic and personal needs. The mean scores (M: T = 2.33, DH = 2.18, S = 2.04) and the standard deviation values (T = 0.61, DH = 0.56, S = 0.80) reflect the systemic limitation in resource distribution.

Item 3 underscores the inaccessibility of library resources and accommodations tailored to the needs of SWDs with mean scores (T = 2.29, DH = 2.30, S = 2.03) and standard deviations (T = 0.62, DH = 0.58, S = 0.81) that show that universities neglected adaptive infrastructure. Item four identifies that access to disability-specific resources and information on campus was insufficient, evidenced by low mean scores (T = 2.31, DH = 2.16, S = 2.06) and high variability of standard

deviation (T = 0.74, DH = 0.74, S = 0.97). Item five demonstrated that universities have put minimal effort into organizing inclusive classrooms geared toward diverse disabilities, with mean scores (T = 2.33, DH = 2.16, S = 2.07) and standard deviation (T = 0.98, DH = 1.16, S = 1.12) indicating a lack of specialised class structures for diverse disabilities. Regarding the last item, the provision of disability-friendly dormitories was moderate, with mean scores (T = 2.46, DH = 2.80, S = 2.82) and low standard deviation variability (T = 0.31, DH = 0.26, S = 0.36), suggesting partial compliance with dormitory accessibility.

14 Table 5.10: One-way ANOVA on differences in perceptions among teachers, department heads, and students on the provision of resources for SWDs to promote inclusive education

ANOVA					
Respondents position	*Sum of Squares*	*df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
Between Groups	1.24	2	.62	5.77	.003
Within Groups	34.48	321	.11		
Total	35.72	323			

**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.*

Furthermore, the results of the ANOVA show that the provision of resources for the effective implementation of inclusive education insights differs significantly between the three groups (F (2, 321) = 5.77, p = .003). In a simple word, all groups (such as teachers, department heads, and students, based on the above data) do not view resource provision for the effective implementation of inclusive education the same. There is a real difference among them. Therefore, the *Tukey Post-hoc tests* further indicated that students reported lower mean scores (1.90) compared to teachers (2.03), although this difference approached but did not reach statistical significance (p = 0.074). The heads of departments (2.01) did not differ significantly from the students or teachers.

5.2.2.3 Obstacles to the adoption and use of inclusive education

15 Table 5.11: Factors that hamper the promotion and implementation of inclusive education

Variable	Position	Mean	Std. Dev	F	p-value (sig)
There is a poor understanding and implementation of policies, rules, and strategies to support students with disabilities.	Teacher	4.60	.62	1.60	.20
	Dep. Head	4.78	.42		
	Students	4.62	.68		
There is resistance to adopting inclusive education practices.	Teacher	4.63	.59	1.24	.29
	Dep. Head	4.76	.43		
	Students	4.60	.72		
The university lacks adequate resources and infrastructure to support students with disabilities.	Teacher	4.55	.64	1.56	.21
	Dep. Head	4.74	.44		
	Students	4.57	.72		
There is inadequate management support for students with disabilities.	Teacher	3.59	1.00	1.96	.14
	Dep. Head	3.66	1.19		
	Students	3.36	1.21		
There is a lack of knowledge or training on how to effectively work with students with disabilities.	Teacher	3.40	1.08	.062	.94
	Dep. Head	3.46	1.23		
	Students	3.40	1.18		
Teachers lack support for fostering positive attitudes toward inclusive education.	Teacher	3.15	1.08	3.87	.02
	Dep. Head	3.62	.945		
	Students	3.44	1.14		
The methods for engaging students with disabilities in inclusive education are not well understood.	Teacher	3.13	.99	3.39	.03
	Dep. Head	3.34	1.19		
	Students	3.47	1.09		
Academic and administrative staff refuse to collaborate with students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.86	1.07	4.32	.01
	Dep. Head	2.96	1.01		
	Students	3.28	1.34		
There is insufficient investment in training educators to work with students with disabilities.	Teacher	2.53	1.01	2.84	.06
	Dep. Head	2.84	1.17		
	Students	2.83	1.12		

Table 11 delineates the factors that hinder the promotion and implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopian public universities. Item 1 reflects profound deficiencies in the understanding and application of managers of policies, rules, and strategies to support students with disabilities. High mean scores (T = 4.60, DH = 4.78, S = 4.62) and standard deviations (T = 0.62, DH = 0.42, S = 0.68) indicate managers' failures in policy operation. The second item highlights significant institutional resistance to adopting inclusive frameworks. Mean scores (T = 4.63, DH = 4.76, S = 4.60) and standard deviations (T = 0.59, DH = 0.43, S = 0.72) underscore the

established opposition to bringing reforms to inclusive education. Item three identifies critical shortages in resources and infrastructure as major barriers. The mean scores (T = 4.55, DH = 4.74, S = 4.57) and the standard deviations (T = 0.64, DH = 0.44, S = 0.72) demonstrate widespread inadequacies in institutional capacity to support SWD.

Item 4 reveals moderate deficiencies in administrative support for SWD. Mean scores (T = 3.59, DH = 3.66, S = 3.40) and greater variability (SD: T = 1.00, DH = 1.19, S = 1.21) suggest inconsistent management involvement. Item five reflects moderate shortcomings in educator training for inclusion of disabilities. Mean scores (T = 3.40, DH = 3.46, S = 3.40) and standard deviations (T = 1.08, DH = 1.23, S = 1.18) indicate insufficient professional development initiatives. Item six highlights moderately negative faculty attitudes. The mean scores (T = 3.15, DH = 3.62, S = 3.44) and the standard deviations (T = 1.08, DH = 0.95, S = 1.14) reveal that there was resistance to support inclusive pedagogical practices. Item seven underscores the limited understanding of inclusive engagement strategies. Mean scores (T = 3.13, DH = 3.34, S = 3.47) and variability (SD: T = 0.99, DH = 1.99, S = 1.09) demonstrate gaps in instructional adaptability. Item eight identifies moderate reluctance among staff to collaborate with SWD. The mean scores (T = 2.86, DH = 2.96, S = 3.28) and standard deviations (T = 1.07, DH = 1.01, S = 1.34) reflect institutionalized exclusionary practices. Item nine reveals moderate underinvestment in training programs. Mean scores (T = 2.53, DH = 2.84, S = 2.83) and standard deviations (T = 1.01, DH = 1.17, S = 1.12) signify systemic neglect of capacity building initiatives.

16 Table 5.12: One-way ANOVA on differences in perceptions among teachers, department heads, and students on factors that hamper the promotion and implementation of inclusive education

ANOVA					
Respondents position	*Sum of Squares*	*Df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
Between Groups	1.16	2	.58	1.93	.15
Within Groups	96.61	321	.30		
Total	97.77	323			

**. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.*

The ANOVA results above indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between the means of the three groups of respondents (teachers, department heads, and students) in the variables associated with factors that hinder the promotion and implementation of inclusive

education. The analysis yielded a sum of squares between groups (SS = 1.16) and a sum of squares within groups (SS = 96.61), with an F-ratio of (1.93) and a significance level of (p = 0.15). As the p - value exceeds the conventional alpha threshold of 0.05, the observed differences between group means are likely attributable to random variation rather than systematic effects. This suggests that the independent variable does not exert a statistically significant influence on perceptions of barriers to inclusive education, failing to reject the null hypothesis of homogeneity between groups.

5.2.2.4 Institutional strategies for overcoming obstacles

17 Table 5.13: Institutional approach used to address challenges

Variable	Position	Mean	Std. Dev	F	p-value
Provide specialised professional expertise to promote inclusion for students with disabilities.	Teacher	4.79	.49	1.93	.147
	Dep. Head	4.84	.37		
	Students	4.70	.59		
All staff should collaborate to create a practical, shared plan focused on supporting students with disabilities.	Teacher	4.56	.597	5.57	.004
	Dep. Head	4.88	.33		
	Students	4.69	.59		
An inclusive environment should be created to help students with disabilities develop educational and social skills.	Teacher	4.71	.55	.76	.467
	Dep. Head	4.68	.55		
	Students	4.62	.64		
Decisions should be made to reduce isolation and promote positive attitudes towards disability.	Teacher	4.57	.62	1.45	.237
	Dep. Head	4.74	.44		
	Students	4.57	.72		
Alternative communication methods (e.g., sign language, pictures, and gestures) should be used to support students with disabilities.	Teacher	4.68	.62	3.46	.033
	Dep. Head	4.76	.55		
	Students	4.49	.86		
Collaboration between home (parents) and academic institutions is essential to support students with disabilities.	Teacher	4.55	.67	.47	.622
	Dep. Head	4.66	.59		
	Students	4.60	.68		
Teachers should be trained to support students with disabilities and build their confidence in their studies.	Teacher	4.41	.83	.30	.740
	Dep. Head	4.52	.76		
	Students	4.44	.85		
Grand Mean	Teacher	4.11	.39	1.79	.168
	Dep. Head	4.21	.29		
	Students	4.08	.47		

Table 13 outlines the strategies proposed by higher education managers to mitigate the challenges facing students with disabilities (SWDs) in Ethiopian public universities. On item one of the above table, respondents strongly recommended the allocation of specialised professional support to

advance inclusion for SWDs. The descriptive statistics show high mean scores across all groups (T = 4.79, DH = 4.84, S = 4.70) with low standard deviations (T = 0.49, DH = 0.37, S = 0.59), indicating consensus on its critical importance. The second item was emphasized on the necessity of collaborative efforts among all staff to develop actionable unified plans supporting SWDs. This produced high mean values (T = 4.56, DH = 4.88, S = 4.69) and modest variability (SD: T = 0.59, DH = 0.33, S = 0.59), underscoring a broad agreement. Item three expresses strong agreement with the need to foster an inclusive environment. The mean scores in all groups are above 4.6, indicating a high level of consensus on the importance of inclusion.

Item four of the table describes strategies to diminish social isolation and promote positive attitudes toward disability, which were deemed vital. High mean values (T = 4.57, DH = 4.74, S = 4.57) and standard deviations (T = 0.62, DH = 0.47, S = 0.72) suggest that inclusive decision-making is essential for attitudinal change. Regarding item five, the employing of adaptive communication tools (eg, sign language, visual aids) was identified as essential for the academic success of SWDs. Consistently high means (T = 4.68, DH = 4.76, S = 4.49) and variability (SD: T = 0.62, DH = 0.55, S = 0.86) highlight its perceived efficacy. Item six of the evaluation that strengthens partnerships between academic institutions and parents received substantial endorsement, with high mean scores (T = 4.55, DH = 4.66, S = 4.60) and moderate dispersion (SD: T = 0.67, DH = 0.59, S = 0.68), affirming its role in the achievement of SWDs. The last item was widely recognized as the necessity of training educators to support SWDs and improve their academic confidence. The mean values (T = 4.41, DH = 4.52, S = 4.44) and the standard deviations (T = 0.83, DH = 0.76, S = 0.85) reflect strong advocacy despite slightly greater variability in responses.

18 Table 5.14: One-way ANOVA on differences in perceptions among teachers, department heads, and students on the institutional approach used to address challenges of inclusiveness

ANOVA					
Respondents position	*N*	*Mean*	*Std. Dev*	*F*	*Sig*
Teacher	112	4.11	.39	1.80	.17
Dep. Head	50	4.21	.29		
Students	162	4.08	.47		

The table presents the results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) conducted to compare perceptions or responses between three groups. The analysis yielded an F value of 1.80 and a p value of 0.17. Given that the p-value exceeds the conventional significance threshold of 0.05, the results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences among the three groups in their perceptions of the measured variable. Although descriptive trends suggest marginally more positive perceptions among department heads compared to teachers and students, this observed variation is not statistically meaningful and may plausibly be attributed to random chance rather than systematic differences. These findings collectively imply a general consensus among the groups on the variable under investigation, with any apparent disparities lacking empirical significance.

19 Table 5.15: Facility and services offered for SWDs

Variable	*Available*		*Not available*		*I am not sure*	
	Freq.	*%*	*Freq.*	*%*	*Freq.*	*%*
Dedicated center for students with disabilities	116	35.5	205	63.3	116	35.5
Caretaker services for students with disabilities	93	28.7	226	69.8	93	28.7
Accessible classrooms and dormitories	146	45.1	172	53.1	146	45.1
Separate and accessible washrooms for students with disabilities	121	37.3	195	60.2	121	37.3
Assistive equipment for learning and mobility	90	27.8	225	69.4	90	27.8
Lounge or recreational space for students with disabilities	104	32.1	214	66.0	104	32.1
Accessible library services	117	36.1	202	62.3	117	36.1
Counselling and mental health support	98	30.2	222	68.5	98	30.2
Emergency/medical support for students with disabilities	55	17.0	262	80.9	55	17.0
Disability advocacy and rehabilitation services	54	16.7	262	80.9	54	16.7

Table 15 evaluates the availability of facilities and services that support students with disabilities (SWD) in Ethiopian public universities, highlighting significant gaps in equitable provision. 205 respondents (63.3%) reported that a dedicated disability center was unavailable, while 226 participants (69.8%) indicated the absence of caregiver services for SWD. Accessibility infrastructure was similarly deficient: 172 respondents (53.1%) reported inaccessible classrooms and dormitories (versus 45.1% affirming availability), and 195 participants (60.2%) confirmed the lack of accessible washrooms.

Critical assistive resources were largely unavailable, including learning/mobility equipment (69.4%, n = 225), standard recreational spaces (66.0%, n = 214), accessible library services (62.3%, n = 202), and counseling/mental health support (68.5%, n = 222). Emergency/medical support was inaccessible according to 262 respondents (80.9%), while disability advocacy and rehabilitation services were similarly absent, as reported by 222 participants (80.9%). These findings underscore complete inadequacies in institutional capacity to address the needs of SWD, reflecting disparities in service provision and infrastructural accessibility.

5.3 Qualitative Research Findings Presentation and Analysis

5.3.1 Participant background

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews to complement quantitative findings and triangulate data sources. As noted previously, participants were categorized into three groups: university presidents, academic deans, and coordinators or directors of disability support centers. All interviews were conducted individually, using both in-person and telephonic modalities. The demographic details of the interviewees are summarized in the table below.

20 Table 5.16: Information about the interview participants

Name	Sex	Service year in position	University Name	Qualifications	Code
PRT1	M	3	G/2U	Ph.D. (Biology)	1/G2U/PRT1
PRT2	M	2	G/1U	MA (English)	1/G1U/PRT2
D1	M	5	G/1U	MA (Psychology)	2/G1U/D1
D2	M	16	G/2U	Ph.D. (ELM)	2/G2U/D2
CD1	M	6	G/1U	MA (SNIE)	1/G2U/CD1
CD2	M	5	G/2U	MA (History)	2/G2U/CD2

NB: The letters PRT, D, and CD stand for President, Dean, Coordinator, or Directorate, respectively.

To evaluate the professional paths and qualifications of higher education managers, the study analysed their years of service and perceptions of how their educational background influenced their roles. The professional experience of the participants ranged from 2 to 16 years, with D2 representing the longest tenure and PRT2 the shortest, reflecting a combination of experience in

the institutional setting and emerging perspectives on educational challenges. In terms of academic qualifications, the respondents had advanced degrees, including PhD and M.A. credentials in various disciplines, suggesting a multidisciplinary orientation in their approach to educational management. This diversity in expertise can shape their interpretations of inclusive practices and management efficacy (Amnet, 2025).

In general, the analysis identified years of service, educational specialisation, and institutional affiliation as critical variables influencing participants' perspectives on educational management. Longer tenured professionals (e.g., D2, CD1 and CD2) were found to possess institutional memory and historical insights, while recent appointees (e.g., PRT2, PRT1) contributed novel viewpoints on contemporary pedagogical issues. Recognising these distinctions is essential to design targeted strategies to strengthen institutional policies and educational practices (Hajis & Othman, 2024).

5.3.2 Identified themes, sub-themes and categories

21 Table 5.17: Themes developed from the interview

Theme	Sub-theme and category
Theme 1: Perceptions of higher education managers on SWDs in PUE.	Sub-theme 1.1 University commitment and support Category 1.1.1 University managers commitment Category 1.1.2 Institutional management support
	Sub-theme 1.2 Academics and management engagement Category 1.2.1 Academic and management service delivery Category 1.2.2 Awareness of college and faculty management
	Sub-theme 1.3 Diversity and Inclusion Experience Category 1.3.1 Diversity and inclusion practices Category 1.3.2 Challenges in managing diversity and inclusion initiatives Category 1.3.3 Student perceptions and lived experiences
Theme 2: Policy frameworks on inclusive education to enhance the inclusion of SWDs in PUE.	Sub-theme 2.1 Policy Governance and Enforcement Category 2.1.1 Strategic policy implementation Category 2.1.2 University-government collaboration

	Sub-theme 3.2 Develop Inclusive and Legal Policy Category 2.2.1 Decision-making processes Category 2.2.2 Legislation and policy based on rights
Theme 3: Promoting factors (enablers) of inclusive education in PUE.	Sub-theme 3.1 Organization's Support and Accessibility Category 3.1.1 Infrastructure and facilities for students with disabilities Category 3.1.2 Accessibility services and support systems Category 3.1.3 Awareness-building and staff training initiatives
	Sub-theme 3.2 Regulations, Management and Execution Category 3.2.1 Regulations for inclusion Category 3.2.2 Integration of management Category 3.2.3 Diversity management and inclusive practices
	Sub-theme 3.3 Educational and Professional Development Opportunities Category 3.3.1 Academic and employment pathways Category 3.3.2 Support for professional development
Theme 4: Barriers to promoting and implementing inclusive education in PUE.	Sub-theme 4.1 Institutional and Structural Challenges Category 4.1.1 Implementation barriers and systemic challenges Category 4.1.2 Inadequate funding and resource distribution
	Sub-theme 4.2 Service Provision and Accessibility Barriers Category 4.2.1 Service accessibility and delivery limitations Category 4.2.2 Pedagogical and instructional barriers Category 4.2.3 Employment disparities and career progression obstacles
	Sub-theme 4.3 Diversity and Cultural Barriers Category 4.3.1 Inconsistent diversity and inclusion practices Category 4.3.2 Prevailing socio-cultural attitudes and biases

Theme 5: Institutional approaches to addressing challenges in PUE.	Sub-theme 5.1 Management Support Structure Category 5.1.1 Disability center management and university governance Category 5.1.2 Inclusive practices and institutional backing
	Sub-theme 5. 2 Student-Driven Policies and Strategies Category 5.2.1 Policy frameworks, guidelines, and operational execution

5.3.3 Presentation of results based on themes, sub-themes, and categories

5.3.3.1 Theme 1: Perceptions of higher educational managers on SWDs in PUE

5.3.3.1.1 Sub-Theme 1.1: University commitment and support

5.3.3.1.1.1 The commitment of university managers

The participants were asked the following questions by the researcher:

How committed are you to maintaining the notion that students with disabilities should have the same rights as students without disabilities?

This questionnaire item aims to measure participants' dedication to promoting and safeguarding equal rights for students with disabilities compared to their non-disabled peers.

The responses of the participants should be recorded precisely as they were said, as follows:

Dean 2 said: "*From the time I began serving as a leader until today, neither the university president nor the academic vice president has discussed the issue of students with disabilities. Additionally, the commitment to identifying and developing future plans for inclusion of diversity is very low. Therefore. The university should realize that disability is an issue that needs attention."*

Dean 2 said: "*Some university managers actively promote inclusion. While some university managers see inclusion as an added burden, university managers have different degrees of dedication to disability inclusion."*

President 2 said: "*It is my objective to keep our university a place where inclusion is valued. The Ethiopian constitution also includes the rights of person with disabilities. Inclusion is fundamental to the values of our university. We are dedicated to promoting equity."*

The results showed different opinions on how the university was implementing frameworks for disability equity. The interviews' records show a notable discrepancy between the visible realities of strategy implementation and the public commitments made by institutional managers to inclusiveness and awareness-raising initiatives. **Dean 2** revealed that senior managers, such as the academic vice president and university president, excluded disability equity from strategic agendas, according to respondents, who also highlighted the marginalisation of disability discourse in executive decision-making processes. With the response from **Dean 1**, Commitment levels to disability inclusion among university managers differed. The participant further indicated that certain university management groups actively promote inclusivity, and for some university managers, inclusion is seen as a burden. **President 2** described that the university's primary objective is to maintain and promote the principle of equity. The participant also mentioned the strategies used to promote and defend equity by making sure that the university continues to be a friendly place that respects the rights of persons with disabilities as specified in the Ethiopian constitution. This apparent contradiction highlights the organisational and managerial failure to take responsibility for their own commitments and the unequal treatment of disabilities as structural requirements within the institution.

Thus, there was a variety of attitudes among higher education managers regarding their commitment to disability inclusion, from proactive advocacy to views of inclusion as an unnecessary administrative burden. Ironically, institutional principles seem to be centered on open commitments to increase equity and inclusion. The way disability equity is applied at the university varies; some senior administrators minimize disability issues in executive decisions and exclude disability equity from strategic objectives. The level of commitment to inclusivity varies among university managers; some actively encourage it, while others find it annoying. The university's primary objective is to uphold the equity and rights of individuals with disabilities as specified in the Ethiopian Constitution. Looking at it through the lens of inclusive education theory,

commitment to disability equity is still uneven. This inconsistency shows a clear gap between what the constitution promises and what managers actually do (Easaw & Abebaw, 2023).

5.3.3.1.1.2 Institutional management support

The researcher posed the following questions to the participants:

How do you view the current state of SWD support at your university?

This questionnaire was developed to evaluate the managerial and institutional support for students with disabilities by examining the opinions of the interviewees about the existing support systems in their respective universities.

The following quotations specifically encapsulate the viewpoints of the participants.

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*Our motivation to work with disability and diversity is extremely weak. Managers do not pay attention to the problem of disability. Some managers will have a positive attitude. Some managers have a negative attitude. However, the issue of disabled students should be seen as a focus."*

President 1 said: "*Members of the academic commission and our university's administration are dedicated to increasing the participation of students with disabilities."*

Dean 2 said: "*At my university, the strengths and weaknesses that are seen in terms of supporting students with disabilities have never been identified, and the understanding of creating a favourable environment for students with disabilities and managing is unbalanced."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 specifies that motivation among managers and institutions to work with disability and diversity is extremely low. Managers at all levels do not focus on the issue of disability. This means that managers and organisations show little motivation to address diversity and disability issues, frequently showing a pronounced lack of interest in supporting students with disabilities. **President 1** noted that despite official commitments from academic commissioners and university management to increase enrollment and support for SWD, institutional initiatives actively encouraging participation of SWD still exist. **Dean 2** revealed that

his university does not take any action to help students. Management's understanding of SWD is unbalanced, and even strengths and weaknesses in terms of helping SWD had not been identified.

Inclusive education theory argues that systemic barriers, not students' individual deficits, are the main obstacles to full participation (Hornby, 2015). The differences in managerial commitment found in this study highlight a real gap between policy and what actually happens. While every management group recognised the need to support students with disabilities, their attitudes and strategies looked very different: some managers actively pushed for inclusion, while others showed little interest or didn't really understand what students with disabilities need. When managers and institutions offer uneven support like this, inclusive education simply doesn't work as it's supposed to. The theory is clear: meaningful inclusion only happens with a unified, institution-wide commitment, not when efforts are scattered or depend on individual will (Assefa, 2025). To fix these gaps, universities need a coordinated, evidence-based plan that strengthens their systems and boosts managers' capabilities. When universities align their structures with inclusive principles, they can deliver real, lasting support.

5.3.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Academics and management engagement

5.3.3.1.2.1 Academic and management service delivery

The researcher asked the following questions of the participants:

To what extent is the academic and administrative support offered to students with disabilities advantageous for them?

This interview question is intended to assess the effectiveness of academic and administrative support provided to students with disabilities.

The following quotations are presented as extracted from the participant narratives.

Dean 1 said: "*There is now a much greater awareness of the need to foster a diverse and inclusive learning environment for students with disabilities. Improvements include accessible infrastructure, assistive technology, and designated dormitories."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*College deans and academic coordinators advocated that students with disabilities should be taught a separate curriculum. We provide them with assistance so they can learn on an equal basis with their peers without facing any difficulties."*

President 1 said: "*Although I am certain that the services provided by our academic and administrative staff are generally adequate."*

The responses of the participants revealed a consensus on how well academic support systems for students with disabilities (SWD) operate. Although overwhelming positive feedback has been received on the efforts of academic and administrative staff to promote special curriculum accommodations, this consensus highlights potential parallels between institutional promotion and the structural implementation of support services. This is especially true for **Dean 1 and Disability Center Coordinator 1**. Despite being slightly different in scope, **President 1** determined that the services offered by academic and administrative staff to students with disabilities were adequate.

Through the lens of systems theory, universities operate as complex social systems where everything administration, campus culture, decisions about where resources go works together to shape how inclusive the institution actually is (Kioupi et al., 2023). Interview responses thus underscore the critical importance of fostering a diverse and inclusive learning environment alongside heightened awareness imperatives that require sufficient academic and administrative staffing to provide adequate support for students with disabilities. In this context, when universities upgrade their administrative and academic structures to foster equity, those changes aren't just isolated improvements they're evidence the institution is moving forward. Systems theory tells us that changes in one area ripple out, eventually touching every part of the organization. So, these steps signal real progress (Kioupi et al., 2023). This shows the university is breaking down old barriers and weaving inclusive values through its daily practices.

5.3.3.1.2.2 Awareness of college and faculty management

Participants were asked the following questions by the participants.

As president, coordinator, or dean of the college, how would you assess your level of awareness and dedication to promoting inclusive education based on national principles?

The purpose of this question is to know the level of commitment of college deans, disability center coordinators, and university presidents to promote inclusive education considering the national principle.

The responses provided by the participants should be expressed exactly as they were mentioned, as follows:

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*College deans and other academic coordinators rarely have a sufficient understanding of disability and have no problem implementing and implementing the national principle."*

President 1 said: "*Although some college deans may continue to have insufficient knowledge of the needs of disabled students, others may not. We are always involved in discussions that aim to identify gaps in our support of students with disabilities."*

Dean 1 said: "*The main problems of my university are the lack of a written policy and the lack of financing. In my academic institutions, the implementation of inclusive education policies is hampered by bureaucratic hurdles and faculty opposition. Inclusivity must be prioritised in policymaking to ensure equal opportunities for all students."*

The **Disability Center Coordinator 1** response reveals that academic coordinators and college deans are sufficiently knowledgeable about disabilities to adopt inclusive practices based on national standards. Despite this, **President 1** stated that although some college deans may remain uninformed about the needs of students with disabilities, others may be aware. Ongoing discussions are held to pinpoint regions where improved support is required for students with disabilities. **Dean 1** also alleged that the university was experiencing problems with funding and inadequate policies. The adoption of inclusive education is hampered by faculty resistance and bureaucratic obstacles. Inclusivity should be given the highest priority to ensure equal opportunities for all students.

Using systems theory, which sees universities as interconnected social systems where administrative decision making, resource allocation, and institutional culture all shape one another (Saitis & Saiti, 2018), the interviews bring a real problem to light. College deans and academic coordinators follow national guidelines for students with disabilities, at least on paper, but they

don't actually understand what each student needs. That's exactly the gap between law and practice that Moriña et al. (2020) describe. When deans lack knowledge about disability issues, it harms the institution's overall effectiveness. Two big problems stand out: funding is inadequate, and there's no clear process for including students with disabilities. Together, these keep the system running inefficiently. On top of that, implementing inclusive education regulations runs into persistent roadblocks like slow bureaucracy and, just as seriously, resistance from faculty. Studies show that attitudes and administrative red tape don't just slow things down; they actively block inclusion (Willemse et al., 2025). Inclusive education theory centers systemic barriers; not individual limitations as the real reason full participation is so hard to achieve (Hornby, 2015). So, what these findings really show is that institutions need to make inclusivity the foundation of their policies, and ensure everyday practice actually matches the goal of fairness.

5.3.3.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3. Diversity and inclusion experience

5.3.3.1.3.1 Diversity and inclusion practices

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

How do you assess the understanding of university administrators of diversity and inclusivity in terms of students with disabilities?

The purpose of this interview question is to know how university administration perceives and understands inclusivity and diversity in relation to students with disabilities.

The following, presented verbatim, captures the opinions of the participants.

Disability Center Coordinators 1 said: "*Inclusivity is relatively indistinguishable from diversity. Our understanding is that diversity and inclusion, in particular, means addressing all forms of diversity and creating equal opportunities for all without discrimination and exclusion."*

The Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*For me, as indicated in the Universal Declaration of Disability Law, inclusion means that all disabled person, regardless of whether*

they are blind, deaf, and dumb, crippled, or otherwise, should have equal access to educational and other benefits."

Deans 1 said: "*Diversity is a concept that acknowledges and respects the unique characteristics and perspectives of individuals and groups. Inclusiveness refers to the provision of equal access to education for all students. Inclusion ensures that these differences are valued and supported. We acknowledge that diversity and inclusion are crucial components of our university plan."*

President 1 said: "*I believe that our current initiatives differentiate us from other universities in the country in the services we offer in relation to inclusion and diversity."*

Analysis of participant feedback reveals that inclusion and diversity are unalienably linked ideas. **Disability Center Coordinator 1** noticed that diversity and inclusivity are inextricably linked and critical in their functions, since both include providing equitable opportunities for persons with and without disabilities, addressing all sorts of difference, and eliminating unfairness. According to **Disability Center Coordinators 2**, inclusion, as described in the Universal Declaration of Disability Law, guarantees all disabled individuals equal access to educational opportunities and other benefits. As he cites the proclamation, he highlights diversity. However, **Dean 1** places high priority on diversity, inclusivity, and inclusion in their university plan to ensure that all students have equal access to education. But emphasize diversity as a concept used to recognise and value unique personalities. Beyond understanding and knowledge, **President 1** confirmed that his university's efforts are unique in that they provide services related to diversity and inclusion, setting it apart from other universities across the nation.

Inclusive education theory which argues that systemic barriers, not individual deficits, hold students back (Hornby, 2015), respondents saw how closely diversity and inclusion are linked. They understood that real inclusion means everyone gets a fair shot at opportunities. To actually see the benefits of diversity, especially for students with disabilities, universities need to commit to true inclusivity, not just make superficial promises. Otherwise, exclusionary patterns stick around. In the realm of diversity and disability inclusion, institutions that make these values part of their strategy consistently get better results than those that don't. By weaving inclusive practices into their core objectives and following through, universities end up strengthening their own

strategic goals. This approach aligns with the basic idea of systemic theory meaningful and lasting change only happens when every part of the institution works together (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022).

Inclusive education theory emphasizes the need to remove systemic barriers to allow everyone to participate fully (Hornby, 2015). In this view, diversity and inclusion are deeply connected, and you can't have an equitable learning environment without both. Diversity means recognizing the wide variety of identities and abilities among students, but without inclusion making sure every student, especially those with disabilities, gets equal access, support, and a real chance to participate; diversity alone doesn't do much (Bunbury, 2018). When universities truly commit to both diversity and inclusion, it's not just about ethics or doing the right thing. This commitment ties directly into their core mission to pursue excellence. That's why the way management responds to students with disabilities tells us a lot about how far the institution has actually come toward real equity.

5.3.3.1.3.2 Challenges in managing diversity and inclusion initiatives

The researcher asked the participants the following questions:

What challenges do universities face when managing diversity and inclusion initiatives, and in what ways do these challenges impact the effectiveness of these programs?

This interview question seeks to identify the obstacles to effective diversity and inclusion initiatives, and their impact on organizational outcomes.

The direct statements from the respondents are presented below.

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*I have never seen or heard that international, national and regional disability laws and proclamations have gone beyond paper and turned into action because there is no body that moves or pressures the issue of disabled people to get attention. Additionally, it is believed that the management of diversity is a situation in which it is challenging to put into practice a small negative attitude held by some people. The university's approach to managing inclusion and diversity*

is not satisfactory. There are numerous challenges, and laws governing the inclusion of students with disabilities will not be properly implemented."

Dean 1 said: "*In this university, there is no structured institutional policy to manage diversity and disability inclusion. The absence of formal policies leads to inconsistencies in implementation. Implementation remains a challenge due to the absence of a strong enforcement mechanism."*

The primary obstacle, according to **Disability Center Coordinator 2**, is that national, international, and regional disability laws have not been implemented because management has not put enough pressure on them. He also points out that the university's strategy is insufficient for handling diversity and inclusion issues. This results in an improper implementation of the inclusion of students with disabilities. **Dean 1** states in favour of **Disability Center Coordinator 2** that the university lacks a formal process for addressing diversity and disability inclusion, leading to inconsistent implementation and issues due to the absence of effective measures for enforcement.

The data from the interviewees reveal that both practical and systemic barriers hinder higher education institutions from implementing diversity management. University management teams often see supporting students with disabilities as complicated, yet they frequently view related initiatives as disjointed or untrustworthy. This tension lines up with what Bakogiannis and Papavasiliou (2025) call a persistent values-practice gap, a built-in feature of systems that thrive on staying vague and facing as little change as possible. The inconsistent application of disability inclusion and diversity management strategies results from a lack of formalisation, with institutions often prioritising empty promises over tangible progress.

5.3.3.1.3.3 Student perceptions and lived experiences

The researcher asked the following questions of the participants:

Would you be willing to share your personal views and experiences about the difficulties and barriers faced by students with disabilities in academic settings?

The purpose of this inquiry is to examine management's perspectives and individual experiences concerning the challenges faced by students with disabilities within the university setting.

The direct statements from the respondents are presented below.

Dean 2 said: "*Students with disabilities are considered part of society. However, no special service is provided to disabled students on the main campus except for having a room on the ground floor where they can study and sleep. On the other campus, students with disabilities are seen as the non-disabled and do not receive any special services or support. In higher education institutions, these conditions ensure that students with disabilities understand that disability does not limit them from anything."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*Whether they were satisfied or not, the question of teaching and administrative issues has never been raised by disabled students."*

President 1 said: "*Because of the positive communication we have with SWDs, students have not raised many hard questions about teaching and administrative affairs."*

Dean 2 emphasised that while disabled students are regarded as integral members of society, they are not afforded special accommodations on the main campus and are instead perceived as nondisabled on other campuses. Students with disabilities understand that under these circumstances their condition does not limit them in any way. According to **Disability Center Coordinator 1**, no formal complaints have been made about challenges with management or instruction from students with disabilities. This might lead to the possibility of overlooked problems or challenges in academic and administrative processes. **President 1** states that SWDs report fewer difficulties they face in teaching and administrative issues when they are effectively communicated with. Inclusive education theory sees disability not as a personal shortcoming, but as the result of systemic barriers (Hornby, 2015). With this in mind, the finding shows that students with disabilities (SWDs) push forward toward their academic and personal goals, even when faced with challenges built into university systems. Universities officially say SWDs are part of the academic community, but their services don't actually adapt in meaningful ways; there's little difference between what's offered to SWDs and to other non-disabled students. What's striking is that, even when these students have rights on paper, they rarely use official complaints processes to report problems. Instead, they hold back, exhibiting what Liasidou and Liasidou (2023) call a "fear response to the stigmatising and discriminatory ramifications of disability disclosure," which

leads to their "reluctance to disclose their disabilities to access support." This reluctance doesn't exist in a vacuum, it gets worse in environments where, as Brown (2021) notes, a "vicious circle of non-disclosure" takes hold, fuelled by distrust in how institutions will respond. Through the lens of systems theory, it's clear that the problem runs deep within the system itself: formal rights don't actually create access if campus cultures and accountability systems ignore the real needs of SWDs.

5.3.3.2 Themes 2: Policy frameworks to enhance the inclusion of SWDs in PUE

5.3.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Policy governance and enforcement

5.3.3.2.1.1 Strategic policy implementation

The researcher posed the following questions to the participants:

In your organisational context, how do you assess the effectiveness of implementing national policies, guidelines, and strategies?

This question seeks to critically assess the extent to which national policies, guidelines, and strategies are put into practice within their institutional context.

The direct statements from the respondents are presented below.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*Our University is making substantial progress in the implementation of national policies, guidelines, and strategies, although not all have been fully realised. In alignment with these international and national frameworks, the university has developed its own set of policies and guidelines. The university has systematically identified which aspects have been implemented and which remain unaddressed with respect to international and national policies, guidelines, and implementation strategies. An implementation strategy has been devised to facilitate the execution of the university plan, with its progress being evaluated through periodic decision-making processes. A discussion session was held to deliberate on the preparation and implementation of these policies and guidelines. On the basis of our discussions, we are actively developing various guidelines and action plans to support students with disabilities. Regarding support*

mechanisms for students with disabilities, it is preferable to establish them through consistent application of decrees, laws, and regulations, rather than relying solely on approval by appointed leadership."

President 2 said: "*We have developed internal guidelines that focus on accessibility, student support, and faculty training to provide smooth and comfortable assistance to SWD."*

The university is progressing in the implementation of national policies, guidelines, and strategies, but some have yet to be fully implemented, as stated by **Disability Center Coordinator 1**. The university has developed its own rules and regulations to comply with international frameworks. A discussion was held to examine the formulation and application of these policies. As higher learning institutions are crafting action plans and procedural frameworks to enhance support systems for students with disabilities, they are also establishing local policies and procedural guidelines to meet national and international standards. A well-defined implementation plan is used to execute these strategies, with deliberate efforts made to ensure that institutional actions align with the policy objectives. Furthermore, **President 2** testified that guidelines are being developed internally to ensure that SWD receives smooth and comfortable support, focusing on accessibility, student support, and faculty training within the university. The interview response highlights the importance of institutional procedures for attaining equitable and sustainable implementation, proving that proactive management approaches are less effective than organised implementation of disability inclusion laws, policies, guidelines, and strategies.

This finding matches what the inclusive higher education framework describes: leadership, accountability, and evaluation are essential principles behind effective inclusion ((Hubbard & Gawthorpe, 2025). Looking at this through systems theory, higher education institutions act as complex networks where real change only happens when people coordinate across micro-level practices, meso-level departmental structures, and macro-level institutional policies (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). With that in mind, putting disability inclusion laws, policies, guidelines, and strategies in place in a structured way works better than relying on managers to react case by case. Formal procedures keep everyone accountable, build consistency, and make sure inclusion isn't just left up to individuals; it becomes an ongoing, integrated effort (Easaw & Abebaw, 2023). This

shows that, in reality, institutions are only as effective as the clear, enforceable processes they set up to turn legal mandates into everyday practice.

5.3.3.2.1.2 University-government collaboration

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

How do universities view and respond to the governance and policy execution processes that occur within their own institutions?

This question aims to investigate the responses of universities to governance procedures and policy implementation, as well as the realities surrounding these issues.

The following quotations summarize the opinions given by the respondents.

Dean 2 said: *"Currently, the 10-year plan that the Ministry of Education has given us has made inclusion one of the planning strategies, so the university has taken this as a starting point and has paid attention to it as a key work in planning."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*There are policies, guidelines, and strategies adopted to serve diversity and persons with disabilities at the national and university levels. The university also prepares uniform guidelines on the treatment of disabled students, although the policies, rules and strategies issued to promote diversity and students with disabilities at the national and university levels are not fully functional."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*There are no policies, guidelines, and strategies adopted to serve diversity and students with disabilities at the university levels."*

President 1 said: *"There are administrative and procedural problems. I think the Ministry of Education should address the problems of students with special needs and disabilities structurally."*

For the question posed, the participants expressed a range of opinions. Some highlighted how the government and policy exemption process is still marginalized, while others stated that the

governance and policy exclusion process is available with the institution. **Dean 2** highlighted the university's emphasis on procedures and strategic planning, particularly the implementation of plans issued by the MoE, which are adapted to the university's setting. Similar to the dean, **Disability Center Coordinators 1** remarked that his university has adopted national and university policies and guidelines to promote diversity and assist persons with disabilities. However, he also saw that these processes are not fully operational. In contrast to other responders, as stated by **Disability Center Coordinator 2**, universities lack policies, guidelines, or strategies to address diversity and people with disabilities. **President 1** believes that the Ministry of Education should solve the administrative and procedural problems faced by students with special needs and disabilities at a fundamental level, rather than through the university itself.

The standpoints of systems theory, which sees higher education institutions as interconnected systems where each part depends on the others (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022), and from inclusive education theory, which insists that true inclusion needs well-structured institutions (Hornby, 2015), the interview responses highlight a serious implementation gap. University governance bodies might have guidelines that match the Ministry of Education's procedures, but many still lack practical tools to actually meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. This gap shows the lack of established protocols, formal policies, and consistent university-wide rules. For educational institutions to have any significant impact, accessible governance and policies are necessary (Beyene et al., 2020). Therefore, gap between policy and practice implies a systemic inability to translate legislative intent into cohesive institutional frameworks.

5.3.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Develop inclusive and legal policy

5.3.3.2.2.1 Decision-making processes and diversity integration

The researcher posed the following questions to the participants:

How would you view the implementation of developed, inclusive legal policies that support students with disabilities and enable their cases to be considered in institutional decision-making processes?

This question aims to determine the opinions of the participants on the development of inclusive and legal policies that address the needs of students with disabilities and integrate inclusive practices into institutional decision-making.

The perspectives of the respondents on the question are combined and presented as shown below.

Dean 2 said: "*Plans and diversity implementation strategies are included in the plans that are being prepared in the document. But the university does not work on diversity in a certain way through policies, guidelines, and implementation strategies."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*Education sector development programs are prepared every three years, and the declaration of higher education institutions has brought attention to the inclusion of students with disabilities and the management of diversity. Therefore, inclusivity, like diversity management, is used as a strategy. In my university, diversity and inclusion are considered an indicator of planning strategy. Any decision-making and implementation related to disability and diversity should be based on these policies, guidelines, and strategies."*

The university does not operate through policies, guidelines, and strategies, according to **Dean 2**, although plans and strategies are being developed within the institution. Therefore, diversity and inclusivity are not taken into account. The importance of managing diversity and promoting inclusion in higher education institutions and education sector development initiatives is emphasized by **Disability Center Coordinator 1**. Legal policies that help students with disabilities are considered an indication of a planning strategy at his university, and it is said that these strategies guide the process of implementing and making decisions related to disability inclusion and diversity.

Drawing from inclusive education theory and contingency theory, respondents pointed out that diversity and decision-making must go hand in hand. Universities talk a lot about diversity and include it in their policies, but they haven't put solid processes in place to make those ambitions a reality. The result? There's a stubborn gap between theory and practice: universities celebrate inclusion in speeches and documents but don't turn those words into action (Bakogiannis & Papavasiliou, 2025). This gap isn't just an oversight; it's built into systems that thrive on ambiguity

and want to avoid shaking things up. The real problem isn't with how policies are written, but with how they're put into action. or rather, not put into action (UNESCO, 2025). From the contingency theory angle, universities can only act effectively when their strategies suit their actual circumstances. But when they don't have firm accountability structures, they stay stuck at the level of good intentions, unable to transform promises into real, enforceable change (Shamelo, 2022).

5.3.3.2.2.2 Legislation and policy based on rights

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

What do you think about the absence or presence of rights-based policies and legal frameworks designed to support students with disabilities?

This question aims to investigate the opinions of the participants about whether existing legal frameworks and rights-based policies are sufficient or insufficient to support students with disabilities.

The responses of the participants are as follows.

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*The laws governing the inclusion of students with disabilities were not properly implemented. That is, there is a clear concern that learners with disabilities at our university do not obtain the privileges that are granted by law, that is, divisions are made between regular and extension students."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*The basic international agreements that Ethiopia has signed serve as the law of this country in all sectors, including the educational institution."*

President 1 said: "*I firmly believe that all colleges should support disabled students by using rules and laws."*

President 2 said: "*Inclusion is not just a policy; it is a fundamental right. Therefore, universities follow national and international policies on inclusive education."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 asserted that current laws on disability inclusion are not fully enforced, leading to the segregation of regular and extension students and the deprivation of legally entitled privileges for students with disabilities. **Disability Center Coordinator 1** claimed that Ethiopian-signed international treaties are treated as domestic legislation across all sectors, including higher education; however, other respondents disagreed with this assertion. According to **President 1**, universities should leverage existing regulations and laws to assist disabled students. In his response, **President 2** noted that inclusion is a fundamental right, not simply a policy. As a result, universities should adhere to national and international policies governing inclusive education.

Inclusive education theory tells us that true inclusion depends on having solid, coordinated institutional structures (Kioupi et al., 2023). Systems theory adds that universities work as networks of connected subsystems, they depend on each other (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). Contingency theory argues that for an institution to act effectively, its practices need to fit the actual situations it faces (Shamelo, 2022). Even with these frameworks in mind, Ethiopian universities struggle to bridge the gap between what the law promises and what happens on the ground.

Ethiopia has signed legally binding international agreements like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the country's laws are supposed to guarantee equal access. Yet, people with disabilities rarely receive the rights or support those laws require. At the university level, students with disabilities in extension programs face even greater disadvantages compared to regular students. This isn't just a minor gap; its structural injustice and a clear violation of legal guarantees for equal treatment.

What's happening in Ethiopian universities lines up with UNESCO (2025) warning that inclusion is often more about making declarations than taking real action. Institutions talk about inclusion but keep their old structures untouched, which only keeps inequality alive. Many research participants put it frankly: inclusion is a basic human right. It shouldn't just be policy jargon. But when universities don't set up ways to hold themselves accountable, even the best legal frameworks don't lead to actual change. The right exists on paper; yet remains far from reality.

5.3.3.3 Themes 3: Promoting factors (enablers) of inclusive education in PUE

5.3.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Organisation's support and accessibility

5.3.3.3.1.1 Infrastructure and facilities for students with disabilities

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

What do you think about the accessibility of the institution's facilities for students with disabilities?

This question aims to investigate the views of respondents on institutional facilities' accessibility and accommodations for students with disabilities.

The responses of the participants are as follows.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*Almost all in our university, the service provided to students with disabilities by academic and administrative staff is sufficient. Members of the Academic Commission/Senate Support disabled students materially, financially, and morally. In our university, students with disabilities receive better care than those without disabilities. For example, as sighted students learn by seeing, the university creates an equal opportunity for the blind to learn by touching and hearing equally."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*I am blind. But, as other people tell me, both the learning environment and the dormitory environment are very good compared to other universities. In addition to the comfortable environment, there is another computer lab for the handicapped and the blind."*

President 2 said: "*Accessible study areas and ramps were installed in multiple buildings at my university. However, inadequate accessibility is still present in the institution, especially in the lack of wheelchair-accessible walkways and the insufficient availability of assistive technology for students with visual and hearing impairments."*

Dean 1 said: "*My University has a dedicated center for disabled students that provides assistive technology, learning materials, and the necessary accommodations."*

In addition to receiving material, moral, and financial support from the university management groups, i.e., Academic Commission/Senate, the **Disability Center Coordinator 1** stated that students with disabilities receive sufficient and advanced care and services from the university in comparison to their non-disabled peers. According to **Disability Center Coordinator 2,** the university provides SWDs with high-quality educational resources and dormitory services. Additionally, a computer lab is reserved for students who are blind or disabled. **President 2** noted that, although his university has installed ramps and accessible spaces to study in multiple buildings to accommodate students with disabilities, there are insufficient wheelchair accessible pathways and assistive technology for students who are deaf or blind. The university, as stated by **Dean 1**, has a center that offers support to students with disabilities, providing them with the necessary resources, assistive technology, and any necessary adjustments.

Inclusive education theory sees breaking down systemic barriers as the key to genuine participation for all students (Hornby, 2015). Systems theory adds another layer, viewing universities as tight webs; change one part, and the whole thing shifts (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). Based on interviews, universities have made real progress on accessible dorms and study spaces, ramps, and computer labs adapted for students with physical or visual disabilities. There's also more backing from university senates and academic leaders; support and advocacy are both stepping up.

Now, if we look through the lens of contingency theory, which argues that institutions function best when their actions match local conditions and needs (Burduli et al., 2018), these changes clearly aren't random. They grew out of specific demands within these university communities. As a result, students with disabilities tend to get average support from university management and faculty. That said, some challenges just won't budge. Many universities still lack adequate assistive technology and wheelchair-friendly pathways. These gaps point straight to the limits of the current institutional set-up (Beyene et al., 2020). The foundation exists, but there's still a long way to go.

5.3.3.3.1.2 Accessibility services and support systems

The participants were asked the following questions by the researcher:

How would you rate the accessibility of the support systems and institutional services offered to students with disabilities?

This question aims to find the opinions of the respondents on the effectiveness and accessibility of institutional services and support systems to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

The participants' responses are described in the following statements.

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*Since its establishment, the Center has been providing material support to students with disabilities. Disabled persons are provided with a free photocopy service of the paper copy provided by the center teachers. An embosser machine has been purchased that converts the writing of a normal letter into a braille letter."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*The supporting methods for SWD are designed in our university. All disabled students are supported by the university according to the type of disability they have. Materials such as flashlights, cans, batteries, wheelchairs, headphones, crutches, tape recorders, etc. are purchased and provided by the university at its own expense to students with disabilities."*

Dean 2 said: "*The management provides access to resources and services in the institution so that students with disabilities can benefit equally from other students without disabilities."*

President 1 said: "*We provide seasonal support for SWDs. Our goals for the future are to establish consistent policies that facilitate the offer of financial and material assistance to SWD."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 attests that students with disabilities at his university have access to complimentary photocopying services, as well as educational resources designed to facilitate their learning. The institution uses an embosser machine to convert standard writing into

braille for blind or visually impaired students. Additionally, **Disability Center Coordinator 1** verify that the university takes into account the kind of disability that students with disabilities have to provide them with assistance. The university established a system to support students with disabilities by covering expenses for items such as tape recorders, flashlights, cans, batteries, wheelchairs, headphones, and crutches. According to **Dean 2**, the university gives students with disabilities the resources they need to succeed equally with their non-disabled peers. **President 1** has stated that my university provides seasonal support to students with disabilities. Moving forward, our goal is to establish consistent policies that will facilitate the provision of SWD with resources and financial assistance.

Inclusive education theory says real inclusion demands universities dismantle systemic barriers and provide the right resources, so every student can take part fully (Bakogiannis & Papavasiliou, 2025). Systems theory adds another concern: universities aren't just collections of separate departments. Resource allocation, infrastructure, and academic support- all these pieces depend on each other (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). That's why the university invests in a wide range of supports for students with disabilities. There's funding for assistive tech, accessible materials, helpful facilities like photocopying and braille conversion, plus devices like crutches, wheelchairs, headphones, recorders, flashlights, and batteries.

Contingency theory takes it a step further. It says institutions succeed when they match their practices with the reality of their situation and the resources they actually have (Burduli et al., 2018). So, the university pushes for clear, consistent ways to allocate funds and support. Yet, as Bakogiannis and Papavasiliou (2025) point out, there's a stubborn gap between what the university claims to value and what happens day to day. Ambiguity can serve the system; it allows officials to talk about inclusion while real barriers remain. The real challenge is obvious: universities need to stop relying on one-off fixes. They have to create lasting, accountable systems that make inclusion part of everyday practice not just an aspiration.

5.3.3.3.1.3 Awareness-building and staff training initiatives

The participants were asked the following questions by the researcher:

What are your thoughts on the university's efforts to promote disability inclusion awareness and provide staff with training?

The purpose of this question is to find out what participants think about the importance and efficacy of the university's efforts to train staff and raise awareness of disability inclusion.

The participants' responses are described in the following statements.

President 2 said: "*The University also plans to introduce a specialised training program to equip students with disabilities with the necessary skills for their professional growth and recognises that continuous improvements are necessary for students with disabilities."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*Negative attitudes toward SWD were addressed by organising training to fill gaps. Within a year, my university prepared an orientation or half-day training for staff members on how to manage students with disabilities and special needs. In the future, what I think is to provide training to all teachers by creating a perspective-taking initiative to provide humanitarian-based assistance and support to students with disabilities."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*Training sessions were rarely used to address staff negative opinions of students with disabilities and special needs. At this university, everyone treats and cares for students with disabilities without attending formal training; in other words, they treat them with humanity. To bridge the gap, it would be helpful to develop a comprehensive program that provides training to all university educators."*

Respondents confirmed that their university has introduced training programs for administrative and academic staff aimed at promoting positive attitudes toward students with disabilities. As stated by **President 2**, the institution has launched a training initiative for staff that supports students with disabilities, with a focus on ongoing development to improve career prospects.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 noted the importance of training in developing attitudes. Within a year, the university provided a half-day training or orientation to staff members on how to work with students with disabilities and special needs. In particular, **Disability Center Coordinator 2** have observed that everyone at this university treats and cares for students with disabilities with dignity. Staff members' negative attitudes towards students with special requirements were rarely addressed through training programs. A comprehensive training program is provided to all university staff members in an effort to bridge the skill disparity.

Inclusive education theory argues that real inclusion means tearing down systemic barriers (Hornby, 2015). Systems theory adds another layer, seeing universities as webs of interconnected parts; everyone and everything impacts one another (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). So, when universities train both academic and administrative staff, they aren't just sharing information. They're working to cut back on the obstacles students with disabilities face. They're trying to build a culture where everyone feels welcome.

That's why the suggestion to roll out uniform training to all faculty makes sense. When everyone gets the same foundation in disability inclusion, there's less room for confusion and inconsistency. Now, if we look through the lens of contingency theory, the idea is straightforward: universities need to adapt their actions to their unique challenges and resources. In this context, they put a real emphasis on supporting students with disabilities, striving to make sure respect isn't just a buzzword, but an everyday reality.

Even so, things don't always go as planned. Osuna-juárez et al. (2024) noticed that while professors support inclusion in theory, they stumble in practice. Good intentions aren't enough; comprehensive training must fill the gap between promise and action.

5.3.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Regulations, management and execution

5.3.3.3.2.1 Regulations for inclusion

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

What do you think of the laws that control the inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education?

This question aims to explore the opinions of the participants on the effectiveness of legal frameworks that govern and encourage the inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education.

The following is an exact transcript of what participants said about legal inclusion frameworks.

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*The institution is exclusively funding blind students without providing other options, according to a letter from the Ministry of Education, which was previously paid equally to all disabled students."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*Social reform is being carried out at the university to improve accountability in the real execution of policy."*

The president said 2 that: "*Our university offers a variety of social reform services that take into account disability and diversity before admission."*

The responses of the respondents revealed a significant institutional transformation following the suggestion of the Ministry of Education. According to **Disability Center Coordinator 2**, before the Ministry's intervention, equal financial support was provided to all students with disabilities; nevertheless, subsequent policy revisions limited these funds to students who are blind alone. **Disability Center Coordinator 1** noted that the university is implementing social reforms to improve the legitimacy of how policies are implemented. In a similar manner to Disability Center Coordinators 1, **President 2** emphasised that the university provides social reform services that consider diversity and disability in the admissions process for students.

Inclusive education theory and systems theory both stress the importance of broad, consistent support for students with disabilities (Esparza et al., 2026). Yet, the Ministry of Education's latest policy revision disrupts this principle (Assefa, 2025). The Ministry once provided equal financial assistance to all students with disabilities. Now, only blind students receive support. This change directly challenges the idea of fair treatment and sets up barriers for those left out.

From a contingency theory perspective, the real issue here is misalignment (UNESCO, 2025). Institutional practices no longer match the promise of equal rights for all students with disabilities. The university talks about social reforms and makes moves to change administrative systems,

efforts meant to increase legitimacy and prove its dedication to inclusivity. This policy shift exposes a clear gap: the university's inclusive values on paper don't always show up in practice. The institution says it believes in equal treatment, yet the new system keeps old inequalities alive; making inclusion something that's stated rather than truly delivered.

5.3.3.3.2.2 Integration of management

The participants were asked the following questions by the researcher.

What do you think institutional management practices are doing in terms of implementing disability rights policies for students with disabilities?

The purpose of this question is to find out how participants perceive how well institutional management practices incorporate and enforce disability rights policies for students with disabilities.

The opinions of the respondents are reflected in the following verbatim excerpts.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*Since the implementation of the plan is in the colleges, it is understood from the report that there is a difference in performance between the colleges. Senior leadership, members of the senate, and the academic commission are doing to promote and focus on the inclusion of disabled students. Now, based on the favourable situation and comfortable environment of the university for disabled students, many students assigned to other universities are coming to our university to request a transfer from their assigned university."*

Dean 2 said: *"My University's disability management policy is unclear, and institutional managers frequently act in ways that go against the guidelines of the national policy."*

President 1 said: "*We have received a wave of transfer requests from students with disabilities from other universities who want to join our programs due to the supportive services we provide as part of the national policy."*

The implementation of policies in educational institutions for students with disabilities has resulted in practical differences among colleges. **Disability Center Coordinator 1** stated that his university supports students with disabilities by creating a welcoming atmosphere. For example, all management staff actively promote the inclusion of disabled students according to policy, resulting in SWDs seeking to transfer from other universities to our university. Unlike the Disability Center Coordinator 1, **Dean 2** argued that institutional managers frequently breach the national policy's mandates and that his university's disability management policy is unclear. According to national policy, **President 1** stated that the university has received a significant number of transfer requests from students with disabilities who are currently enrolled at other institutions.

Inclusive education theory says true inclusion means breaking down systemic barriers so everyone can take part fully (Juan & Ortiz, 2023). Systems theory sees universities as webs of interconnected parts; when you change one thing, it ripples out everywhere (Juan & Ortiz, 2023). By taking inclusion seriously, this university has built learning environments that work for everyone. That effort hasn't gone unnoticed; more and more students from other universities, especially those with disabilities, are asking to transfer in. It's real evidence that the policies here aren't just words; they actually line up with national standards and make a difference.

But not every university does this well. Contingency theory argues that you can't just copy and paste the same policies everywhere; institutions have to fit their actions to their own unique settings (Abrahams et al., 2023). The reality is, some universities still have fuzzy or ineffective policies around disability management. Those gaps throw a wrench into fair access and create confusion, which holds students back.

5.3.3.3.2.3 Diversity management and inclusive practices

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

What experience do you have with inclusive practices and the management of diversity in higher education?

This question seeks to explore the experiences of participants with inclusive practices and diversity management in higher education.

The participants' opinions are expressed in the following verbatim quotes.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*Inclusion allows students with disabilities, culture, language, religion, environment, lifestyle, wealth, etc. to be effective in their studies. Inclusivity, like diversity, is a strategy in which we meet the needs of students with and without disabilities and those with special needs. The efforts of our university to create a good environment for disabled students are very impressive."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*Inclusion is the process of providing special care to students with disabilities. Inclusiveness means teaching students with special needs and disabilities alongside non-disabled students. Inclusion provides equal access to services. The practical trend of my university and its experience in managing diversity have been positive."*

The participants argued that inclusivity is defined as the integration of students with disabilities and special needs into mainstream classes along with students without disabilities. **Disability Center Coordinator 1** noted that the institution's considerable and substantial efforts to provide an inclusive and welcoming environment for students with disabilities are centering on diversity management and inclusive practices. According to **Disability Center Coordinator 2**, our university has had encouraging and positive experiences, as well as useful strategies for managing diversity and fostering inclusivity.

Inclusive education theory holds that real inclusion requires universities to dismantle systemic barriers and provide adequate resources so that every student can participate fully (Bakogiannis & Papavasiliou, 2025). Systems theory adds another concern: universities aren't just collections of separate departments. Resource allocation, infrastructure, and academic support- all these pieces depend on each other (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). That's why the university invests in a wide range of supports for students with disabilities. There's funding for assistive tech, accessible materials, helpful facilities like photocopying and braille conversion, plus devices like crutches, wheelchairs, headphones, recorders, flashlights, and batteries.

Contingency theory takes it a step further. It says institutions succeed when they match their practices with the reality of their situation and the resources they actually have (Burduli et al., 2018). So, the university pushes for clear, consistent methods for allocating funds and support. Yet, as Bakogiannis and Papavasiliou (2025) point out, there's a stubborn gap between what the university claims to value and what happens day to day. Ambiguity can serve the system; it allows officials to talk about inclusion while real barriers remain. The real challenge is obvious: universities need to stop relying on one-off fixes. They have to create lasting, accountable systems that make inclusion part of everyday practice, not just an aspiration.

5.3.3.3.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Educational and professional development opportunities

5.3.3.3.3.1 Academic and employment pathways

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

What are your thoughts about the academic accomplishments and career choices of students with disabilities?

The purpose of this question is to explore participants' views on academic achievements and career advancement possibilities for students with disabilities.

The participants' opinions are expressed in the following verbatim quotes.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: *"At the college level, SWDs are made to compete for different job levels, including the teaching profession, based on their scores. To encourage students with disabilities, they will receive 3% support at the level of work for which they are competing, with special attention given to them."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: *"Disabled students who score high marks will be recognised by awarding a prize in front of the university community. Until now, two disabled female students have taken advantage of the scholarship opportunity to pursue a second degree and work as university instructors."*

President 1 said: *"We provide students with disabilities with the opportunity to compete at various career levels, including teaching roles."*

President 2 said: *"We encourage students with disabilities to pursue various career paths and provide a mentoring program, and there are also opportunities for the development of careers and skills for students with disabilities."*

The results of the perspectives of the participants revealed that the institution has established structured support systems to improve the academic and professional competencies of the SWD. According to a report by the **Disability Center Coordinator 1,** students with disabilities at my university have unrestricted access to both teaching and administrative positions at the college level. The government provided individuals with disabilities a 3% preferential hiring advantage over those without disabilities in their desired job fields, with extra consideration. The **Disability Center Coordinator 2** asserts that students with disabilities who achieved high grades were awarded a university prize in a public ceremony. This year, scholarships for advanced degrees and subsequent roles as university instructors are also available to two disabled female students at my university. In line with the previous respondent's statement, **President 1** notes that students with disabilities are allowed to compete for positions in a range of professional fields, such as teaching. **President 2** clearly asserts that his university offers opportunities for career and skill advancement, along with a mentoring program, to motivate students with disabilities to investigate various career options.

Using the lens of inclusive education theory, which sees inclusion as breaking down systemic barriers to make full participation possible (Kioupi et al., 2023), university teaching frameworks let students with disabilities build competitive teaching careers, and specialised mentoring programs guide career exploration (Cardinot & Flynn, 2022) If we shift to systems theory, universities are networks of interconnected systems, with subsystems like academic support, career services, and policy enforcement all relying on one another (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). Institutional policies push for equal job opportunities, using steps like a 3% affirmative action quota and public awards for top students with disabilities, aiming to drive academic success. The university doesn't just stop at policy; it actively tackles systemic barriers, offers customised support, and ties career integration to academic performance. From the perspective of contingency theory, which says that universities work best when their practices fit specific contexts and resources (Shala et al., 2021), these measures show a targeted, flexible strategy for promoting inclusion.

5.3.3.3.3.2 Support for professional development

The researcher asked the participants the following questions.

What is your perspective on the help that institutions offer students with disabilities as they build their careers/profession?

The purpose of this questionnaire is to examine participants' views on whether institutional guidance is effective in supporting students with disabilities in their career development.

The following quotations offer an overview of the perspectives of the respondents.

Dean 2 said: "*Providing students with disabilities with equal access to university resources and services is necessary for their professional development. Before their graduation, our university makes significant efforts to assist SWD in their professional development."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*However, an obvious fact remains: If students with disabilities graduate from the department they studied with high marks, they will have the opportunity to pursue a second degree for free."*

President 1 said: "… *we take a proactive approach to supporting students with career goals in disability rather than simply including them.'*

Before graduation, **Dean 2** acknowledged the university's proactive assistance for students with disabilities and highlighted the importance of guaranteeing equal access to university facilities and services for their career advancement. As stated by the **Disability Center Coordinator 2**, students with disabilities who achieve high grades in their department are eligible to pursue a second degree at no cost, thus enhancing their career advancement. **President 1** highlighted a forward-thinking approach to helping students with disabilities reach their career goals, stepping beyond basic accessibility.

Inclusive education theory says real inclusion means taking down the systemic barriers that block full participation (Bjørnerås et al., 2024). Systems theory sees universities as networks; every part depends on the others (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). Through that lens, respondents felt the

university took a proactive stance in advancing the career goals of students with disabilities. The institution isn't just encouraging students; it's making sure everyone has equal access to career resources and tackling the deeper barriers in place. Looking through contingency theory, which argues institutions need to fit their actions to their actual context to work (Shala et al., 2021), that commitment from the university played a key role in supporting disabled students' professional growth.

5.3.3.4 Themes 4: Barriers to promote and implement inclusive education in PUE

5.3.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Institutional and structural challenges

5.3.3.4.1.1 Implementation barriers and systemic challenges

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants

How do you understand the challenges and structural barriers involved in implementing inclusive education strategies and policies?

This question aims to find out the extent to which participants comprehend the gaps and structural problems hindering the implementation of inclusive education policies and strategic frameworks in practice.

The following quotations offer an overview of the perspectives of the respondents.

Dean 2 said: "*Since our university is far from the capital of the country, the government does not allocate students with disabilities directly. Therefore, our plan for the inclusion of students with disabilities is still on paper, not on the ground. Colleges have also been directed to revise their plans accordingly. Occasionally, it is done by individuals from college to college and from department to department. Furthermore, my university has not done anything to ensure that all employees understand the policies, guidelines, and implementation strategies developed at the national level, except to disseminate them to colleges and departments. So, they can all live with the same awareness."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*The policies, guidelines, and strategies issued are implemented only when there is an executive body. If it is not possible, let students with disabilities and teach in universities where the government has prepared for them rather than for integration."*

President 2 said: "*The main challenges include a lack of awareness among some faculty members about the specific needs of students with disabilities and the complete implementation of policies due to resource constraints. Additionally, there is a shortage of assistive devices and sign language interpreters, limiting students' ability to fully participate in academic activities."*

The university's distance from the capital, as stated by **Dean 2**, makes it difficult for the government to place students with disabilities there, meaning that the inclusion plan remains largely on paper. Colleges are required to review their plans on their own, with not enough effort made to inform staff members about national policies and regulations, which highlights the systemic obstacles to effective implementation. The **Disability Center Coordinator 2** noted that policies can only be enforced with the presence of an executive body and the willingness of other service providers to implement their activities in accordance with policy, guidelines, and strategy, which were found to be very inadequate. **President 2** highlighted systemic issues that hindered the implementation of inclusive education. These factors include teachers' lack of awareness of students' requirements, the partial implementation of policies, and insufficient resources, like interpreters and specialised apparatus.

Drawing on inclusive education theory, which views inclusion as dependent on coherent institutional structures (Kioupi et al., 2023), and systems theory, which treats universities as networks in which subsystems depend on one another (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022), national inclusive education initiatives still fall short in practice. Instead of consistently following clear institutional protocols, implementation often happens through scattered, unpredictable activities. Contingency theory argues that effective institutional action requires practices tailored to specific contexts (Shamelo, 2022), yet disability inclusion plans remain stuck at the level of theoretical frameworks without integrated operational support at the national policy level. Practical gaps emerge in particular, with weak communication about policy and implementation producing

inconsistent compliance and fragmented understanding across departments and institutions. (Beyene et al., 2020) point out these issues as a "lack of institutional tools (policy, procedure, guidelines, etc.) to bridge the gap between law and practice."

5.3.3.4.1.2 Inadequate funding and resource distribution

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

What are your thoughts on institutional obstacles to inclusivity and discrepancies in the distribution of funds and resources to students with disabilities?

The aim of this query is to investigate participants' perspectives on institutional obstacles to inclusion and the disparities in the distribution of funds and resources for students with disabilities.

The following quotations offer an overview of the perspectives of the respondents.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*If we look at the allocation of the budget for service provision, there is no clarity on the allocation of the budget for the disabled. When we ask colleges to acquire and distribute learning materials to impaired students during new student admissions, they refuse. The institution only funds blind person without providing other options, according to a letter from the Ministry of Education. In addition, blind students have a challenge because the government has not provided the money (3500.00 birr) in time to pay for individuals who read for them.* We, *as a coordination center, do not have a tank or a bank in our hands, so we can do nothing but fight for it to be fixed in the future."*

Dean 2 said: "*Our University seems to have a limited number of students with disabilities (SWD), and the amount of funding they receive is unclear. Students with disabilities often request financial assistance, which involves communicating with university administrators. Occasionally, one or two times per year, the university provides resources to help students with disabilities, rather than offering direct financial aid."*

Dean 1 said: "*My University established a fund for students with disabilities before the year, which serves as pocket money for them to purchase educational materials and*

assistive devices for their disabilities. All students have not received their pocket money today, except the blind student."

The Disability Center Coordinator 1 pointed out problems including unclear budgeting, insufficient learning materials, and preferential allocation of institutional funds to disability students, particularly the blind, as well as delays in receiving government subsidies. The Disability Coordination Center, although it lacks direct financial authority, continues to promote improved services for students with disabilities. Additionally, **Dean 2** noted that the amount of university funding allocated to students with disabilities was not well defined. Typically, direct financial aid is limited, with institutions allocating resources through administrative channels on a quarterly basis, usually no more than once or twice a year. **Dean 1** stated that the university maintains a fund for students with disabilities, which is used to provide assistive technology and educational resources. Currently, no students have received their allocated funds, except for a blind student.

Inclusive education theory holds that true inclusion entails removing systemic barriers that impede access (Kioupi et al., 2023). Systems theory, on the other hand, treats universities as interconnected organisations where every part of resource allocation depends on the others (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). Respondents pointed out that the budget process for disability services was anything but clear; the way money gets allocated lacks transparency. From the angle of contingency theory, which argues that effective action depends on matching policies to the real context (Shamelo, 2022), current procedures reflect Ministry of Education policy. That policy limits direct financial support to blind students and shuts out other groups with disabilities, denying them equal support. Disability center coordinators said they're stuck. With so many resource constraints, they can't put effective solutions into practice. Their hands are tied; they can raise concerns, but they don't have the authority or resources to close funding gaps or launch equity-based projects.

5.3.3.4.2 Sub-theme 4.2: Service provision and accessibility barrier

5.3.3.4.2.1 Service accessibility and delivery limitations

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

What are your thoughts on the challenges that prevent students with disabilities from accessing resources and the services that are provided to support them?

The purpose of this question is to find out what participants think about the difficulties of being accessible and the quality of services offered to students with disabilities.

The following quotations offer an overview of the perspectives of the respondents.

Dean 1 said: "*At our university, both academic and administrative services provided to SWDs are highly limited. The availability of these services is insufficient, especially for students with disabilities and other disadvantaged populations."*

Dean 2 said: "*First of all, my university needs to create awareness of the university community. There is no special service provided to disabled students on the main campus in addition to having a room on the ground where they can study and sleep."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*A challenge or problem associated with creating a good learning environment is the delay in service delivery. Most of the support we provide is for the blind cane, the slate study, the battery, the blind paper, the wheelchair and the crunch for the disabled, and the battery for the deaf."*

Dean 1 pointed out that the university's services for students with disabilities, including academic and administrative support, are severely underdeveloped, particularly for learners and other disadvantaged groups, and **Dean 2** also emphasised that the available services are sparse and insufficient. The **Disability Center Coordinator 2** articulated disagreement with the idea that services are being provided efficiently, pointing to service delays as a substantial obstacle to establishing a supportive learning environment. Most available support is limited to items such as blind canes, crutches, wheelchairs, braille paper, study slates, and hearing aid batteries, which highlights the limited scope of available assistance.

Taking cues from inclusive education theory, which views inclusion as removing systemic barriers (Abrahams et al., 2023), and systems theory, in which universities function as interconnected systems with dependent subsystems (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022), respondents pointed out a serious lack of both academic and administrative support for students with disabilities. Looking at this through contingency theory, which holds that institutions succeed when they match their actions to specific contexts (Moriña et al., 2020), support systems fall short due to delivery delays.

As it stands, support mostly centers on basic assistive tools. This shows just how limited the institutional support really is (Beyene et al., 2020).

5.3.3.4.2.2 Pedagogical and instructional barriers

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

What are your thoughts on the barriers to higher education faced by students with disabilities in terms of pedagogy and instruction?

This question aims to assess the participants' views on the instructional and pedagogical obstacles that restrict accessibility and prevent students with disabilities from fully engaging in university education.

The views expressed by the respondents are presented in the following quotations.

Disability Centre Coordinator 1 said: *"Sometimes teachers are seen to not recognise the type of disability of these students with physical disabilities and do not provide appropriate support in the learning process."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: *Most of our university's impacted students are blind and deaf due to their disability. Above all, I am always concerned about the challenges and difficulties that students with disabilities face during the teaching-learning process. Some are angry and claim that using braille as a writing tool during lectures annoys the lecturers. Also, this year, a blind student studying a master's degree at his own expense prepared a dissertation proposal and submitted it to his mentor at the end of the schedule. The mentor warned him that he would not accept him because he was elsewhere and hadn't brought it on time. I also want to inform the superior body to solve the problem, but the student claims that tomorrow the counsellor will give me a low grade and hurt me, so I will keep quiet.*

President 1 said: *"However, it is alarming when faculty do not notice the special needs of students with physical disabilities or when students with hearing impairment cannot access sign language interpreting services."*

As stated by **Disability Center Coordinator 1**, some teachers do not recognise the unique needs of students with physical disabilities, which prevents them from receiving adequate support during the educational process. Similarly, **Disability Center Coordinator 2** noted that many impaired children, particularly those who are deaf or blind, have a very difficult time learning and teaching. Students with visual impairments also reported problems related to the use of braille in the classroom, which some teachers found distressing. **President 1** agreed and emphasized how concerning it is when teachers do not accommodate the various needs of students with physical disabilities or when students with hearing impairments cannot access sign language interpretation.

Using inclusive education theory, which needs to remove systemic obstacles to make real participation possible (Kioupi et al., 2023), and drawing on systems theory where universities work as interlinked systems with mutually dependent subsystems (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022), respondents argued that teaching practices often drift away from official standards. Some teachers even see Braille as a distraction. This attitude shows a deep-seated reluctance toward inclusive education, echoing research that many lecturers don't really understand or respond to the needs of students with disabilities. That stems from poor coordination and weak information sharing across university departments (Sikoyo et al., 2023). Looking through the lens of contingency theory, which argues that real institutional effectiveness comes from matching practices to the situation (Vaszkun & Koczkás, 2024), students who are blind or deaf deal with steeper obstacles, gaps in accommodations and misleading educational information. Deaf students get left behind because universities don't offer sign language interpreters, and students with physical disabilities get little help during class. All of this shows how universities keep failing to turn their inclusive policies into real-world, tailored support (Beyene et al., 2020).

5.3.3.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Diversity and cultural barriers

5.3.3.4.3.1 Inconsistent diversity and inclusion practices

The researcher asked the following questions to the participants:

How is the inclusion of students with disabilities impacted by cultural and diversity barriers, as well as irregularities in institutional processes?

This question aims to find out how participants perceive how cultural and diversity-related barriers, along with irregularities in institutional processes, affect the successful inclusion of people with disabilities.

The views expressed by the respondents are presented in the following quotations.

Dean 2 said: "The management of *students with disabilities is still in its infancy at the university. There has been no movement, meeting, or discussion during my time at this university to create an effective and institutionalized climate of diversity and inclusion. The management of students with disabilities requires special attention. Last year, based on student complaints about infrastructure, as I was unable to solve infrastructure problems, I reported it to the relevant senior management and no positive corrective action was taken."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*Reforms were being carried out. Although we have not reached the level we want, we have come a long way and much work awaits us in the future."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*The issue of disabled people in top management, starting from the ministry, is a neglected issue. Similarly, at my university, there are today no opportunities to establish a productive or favourable environment for the inclusion of diversity and disability."*

Dean 2 clarified that the university's handling of students with disabilities is still lacking since it does not have formalised programs for diversity and inclusion. Additionally, despite students' concerns about the facilities being brought to the attention of senior management, no corrective action was taken, exposing discrepancies between reporting and responsiveness. The **Disability Center Coordinators 1 and 2** agreed that there have been ongoing reforms and some progress, but that more work is needed to achieve meaningful results. **Disability Center Coordinator 2** also mentioned that there is a lack of representation of people with disabilities in top management, including ministries, and that the university's limited opportunities make it difficult to create a diverse and inclusive environment.

Inclusive education theory says that real inclusion means tearing down the barriers built into our systems so everyone can participate fully (Abrahams et al., 2023). Systems theory adds that universities aren't just isolated parts; each piece depends on the others (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). When you look closer, you see institutional hesitancy in universities: a pattern of disconnected efforts that never quite add up to systemic change. There's a clear, consistent failure stretching from policies created by ministries down through university leadership, and it keeps students with disabilities on the margins. Contingency theory brings another layer to this conversation. It argues that universities don't automatically make things better just by copying best practices; their actions matter only if they fit the real-world context (Vaszkun & Koczkás, 2024). Here, you can spot where policy talk splits from daily reality, especially when universities claim to champion multiculturalism and inclusion but fall short in practice. The outcome is that universities don't even meet basic standards for accessibility. Cramped physical spaces and a campus culture that isn't prepared for everyone (Beyene et al., 2020) get in the way of making diversity a guiding principle. These problems block students with disabilities from being fully engaged in academic and social life, and exclusion remains the rule rather than the exception.

5.3.3.4.3.2 Prevailing socio-cultural attitudes and biases

The researcher posed the following questions to the participants.

What are your concerns about the social views of students with disabilities and the obstacles within the system created by cultural attitudes towards disability?

This question aims to examine participants' concerns about the role sociocultural perceptions of students with disabilities play in creating systemic obstacles influenced by cultural perspectives on disability.

The views expressed by the respondents are presented in the following quotations.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: *"Conventional beliefs have a significant influence on how society views people with disabilities, and this cultural perspective is prevalent in all educational institutions, including my university. These traditional and cultural attitudes, in my opinion, make it more difficult for formal systems to operate effectively."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: *The main gap is the problem of attitude towards disability. An issue in universities is the failure to treat students with disabilities on the same basis as those without disabilities.*

Dean 2 said: **"***In my university without establishing a center that can create a movement for students with disabilities, it seems like a joke to talk about students without disabilities when the management has not considered inclusion as a concrete task."*

Principal 2 said: *"Despite the fact that social norms are operationalised at my university, they have not changed academicians' perspectives and are still restricted to formal disability procedures of the institution."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 clarified that conventional beliefs heavily influence the societal perceptions of students with disabilities and that these deeply rooted cultural attitudes hinder the efficient operation of formal systems in higher education. Similarly, **Disability Center Coordinator 2** stressed that because universities frequently do not treat students with disabilities equally to their peers, the persistent bias toward disability continues to be a significant gap. **Principal 2** added that while social norms have been operationalised, they have not changed the attitudes of academic staff and are still limited to formal disability procedures. **Dean 2** further contended that any discussion of students without disabilities is immoral if the institution has not set up a center to promote inclusion, characterising this absence as a management failure.

Drawing from inclusive education theory, which sees true inclusion as breaking down systemic barriers so everyone can fully participate (Osuna-juárez et al., 2024), and systems theory, which views universities as networks where every part depends on the others (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022), it's clear that higher education's formal structures are still shaped by old-fashioned social attitudes. Universities still fail to treat students with disabilities equitably, reinforcing prejudice and deepening systemic inequalities. Researchers have shown that "social barriers and a lack of understanding among university staff continue to hinder students with disabilities" (Goodall et al., 2024). Even as universities claim to embrace socially accepted standards, the attitudes of academic staff haven't really shifted. Scholars call these "attitudinal barriers"; they hang around, right there with the physical and bureaucratic ones (Goodall et al., 2024). The fact that many universities lack dedicated inclusion centres highlights a broader failure in institutional leadership. Research shows

that without strong leadership, efforts to manage disability diversity fall short and remain disappointing (Easaw & Abebaw, 2023).

5.3.3.5 Themes 5: Institutional approaches to addressing challenges in PUE

5.3.3.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Management Support Structure

5.3.3.5.1.1 Disability center management and university governance

The researcher posed the following questions to the participants.

How do you assess the impact of institutional support frameworks on disability inclusion, focusing particularly on university governance and the administration of disability centers?

The purpose of this question is to find out how participants feel about how institutional support frameworks, including disability center administration and university governance, help to advance disability inclusion.

The views expressed by the respondents are presented in the following quotations.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*Something better will be created for disabled students. My university independently establishes a center for students with disabilities and facilitates conditions for disabled students to study in their chosen department without pressure, etc."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*The organisational structure has occasionally led to difficulties for the center. The Center for Disabled Students is now part of the Directorate of Gender Affairs, but it reports to the dean of student services and cannot function on its own. The center coordinator lacks a voice because he is not a member of the university senate and simply hears decisions about students with disabilities from the Dean of Student Services."*

Dean 2 said: "*To encourage students with disabilities, my university, like other existing universities, should first establish a center that can create a movement for students with disabilities."*

President 1 said: "*The University creates an atmosphere that allows students with disabilities to succeed in their chosen industries or departments without undue pressure.*"

A Disability Center Coordinator 1 disclosed plans to improve resources for students with disabilities, and the institution has started setting up a center aimed at creating a welcoming atmosphere that relieves academic pressure. However, **Disability Center Coordinator 2** also noted that the center, currently under the Directorate of Gender Affairs, encounters organizational challenges due to its limited autonomy, lack of representation in the university senate, and dependency on the Dean of Student Services for information on students with disabilities. **President 1** reinforced the university's commitment to creating an environment where students with disabilities can thrive, while **Dean 2** highlighted the need for specialised centers to advance a comprehensive initiative for disability inclusion.

Inclusive education theory views inclusion as a process that means removing systemic barriers (Díaz-Jiménez et al., 2025). Systems theory sees universities as networks of interconnected subsystems, each relying on the others (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). Based on these frameworks, the results show that students with disabilities now have access to better services, like supportive environments and disability centres. Still, placing the centre under the Directorate of Gender Affairs has brought organisational issues, mainly a lack of autonomy, and no direct representation in the senate, and no independent access to student data. Looking at this through contingency theory, which says institutions need to tailor their actions to their unique contexts (Santas et al., 2024), the university shows its intent to support students with disabilities by requiring dedicated centres for disability inclusion. Yet, the current structure actually holds back the centre's ability to work well.

5.3.3.5.1.2 Inclusive practices and institutional backing

The researcher posed the following questions to the participants.

What are your thoughts on the university's management support systems, particularly in terms of their institutional commitment and inclusive policies?

This question aims to determine the views of the respondents on the efficiency of the university's management support systems, focusing on the level of institutional commitment and the implementation of inclusive practices.

The views expressed by the respondents are presented in the following quotations.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*The issue of diversity and inclusion is one of the most important jobs. There should be improvement in the treatment and care of disabled students in universities. However, all colleges have paid some attention to the implementation of inclusiveness based on the gaps and strengths identified."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: "*Diversity has to do with administrative matters and refers to the acceptance or accommodation of differences."*

President 1 said: "*I firmly believe that all colleges should improve their support for disabled students systematically, supported by rules and laws to guarantee uniformity."*

President 2 said: "*We are committed to making our university a place where all students, regardless of their abilities, can thrive. Although challenges remain, we are dedicated to overcoming them and ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed."*

Disability Center Coordinator 1 emphasised that colleges have identified both their strengths and weaknesses in this regard, and that diversity and inclusion are essential to improve the treatment of students with disabilities. Likewise, **Disability Center Coordinator 2** emphasised that bureaucratic acceptance of differences is necessary for diversity, highlighting the institutional duty to instil inclusive ideals. To create inclusive environments where all students can thrive despite enduring obstacles, university **presidents 1 and 2** pushed for methodical changes backed by explicit rules and institutional dedication. The results indicate that there is considerable emphasis on establishing consistent and inclusive support networks within colleges to identify strengths and weaknesses in serving the needs of students with disabilities in all universities. Despite ongoing obstacles, institutions demonstrate an aspirational commitment to promoting these students' academic success by working to reduce structural barriers and create inclusive settings. More importantly, the colleges have publicly vowed to create an encouraging and

constructive academic atmosphere, highlighting their dedication to diversity in the face of current challenges.

Inclusive education theory, which sees inclusion as the need to break down systemic barriers so everyone can take part fully (Abrahams et al., 2023), and systems theory, which looks at universities as networks where all parts depend on each other (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022), the results show that universities put a lot of focus on building consistent and inclusive support systems. They use these networks to spot both strengths and gaps when it comes to supporting students with disabilities across all universities. Even though problems remain, institutions clearly show their desire to promote academic success by working to remove structural barriers and make their environments more inclusive. That lines up with recent findings: some universities are making real efforts toward inclusion, but there's still plenty to do (Abrahams et al., 2023). Contingency theory adds another layer: it says universities are effective when they match what they do to their particular circumstances (Huang, 2025). Along these lines, colleges say publicly that they aim to foster supportive academic environments and stay committed to diversity, even when things get tough. Still, it's important to look at these claims with a critical eye. As Nieminen and Pesonen (2022) point out, unless universities systematically confront the idea of the "normal, able student" in their teaching and policies, these commitments can end up being more about appearances than real change.

5.3.3.5.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Student-driven policies and strategies

5.3.3.5.2.1 Policy frameworks, guidelines, and operational execution

The researcher posed the following questions to the participants.

How has your experience been affected by the adoption of reasonable, student-centered policies and procedures to assist students with disabilities?

The purpose of this question is to find out how participants' personal experiences and opinions on inclusion at the university have changed as a result of the implementation of reasonable, student-centered policies and procedures for assisting students with disabilities.

The views expressed by the respondents are presented in the following quotations.

Disability Center Coordinator 1 said: "*The University has begun to implement its own policies and guidelines. The Academic Commission/Senate of the College makes significant efforts to promote the inclusion and participation of SWDs. We are also providing them with all the necessary support to provide permanent and temporary material, support based on their disability to use digital technologies and eliminate analogue objects."*

Disability Center Coordinator 2 said: *"Several higher educational institutions have chosen to offer stipends to students with disabilities. Financial support comparable to this is provided at my university under a policy devised by the senate and the administration, which utilise internal funds."*

Dean 1 said: *"There is no formal policy or strategy in place at my college and university to support and integrate individuals with disabilities, resulting in inconsistent implementation practices."*

President 2 said: *"We are committed to creating an environment at our university where all students can thrive, and despite continuing obstacles, we will continue to coordinate our efforts with policy frameworks and guidelines to ensure effective operational execution that allows every student to succeed."*

Universities are implementing policies to support students with disabilities, including giving them access to digital tools and material aid, according to **Disability Center Coordinator 1**. **Disability Center Coordinator 2** added that some universities also distribute financial stipends through internal funding and policies approved by the Senate. However, the lack of codified procedures in certain institutions weakens consistent support for students with disabilities, as **Dean 1** noted in pointing out ongoing inconsistencies. Despite continuing difficulties, **President 2** responded by stressing the value of creating a positive learning environment for all students and the need for coordinated strategies that are in line with guidelines, policy frameworks, and efficient operational execution to guarantee student-driven success.

Grounded in the concept of inclusive education theory, which sees inclusion as needing clear, coordinated institutional structures (Bakogiannis & Papavasiliou, 2025) and systems theory that

treats universities as interconnected systems with interdependent subsystems (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022), senates have tried to push inclusion forward by passing supportive policies. Still, without solid procedures in place, inconsistencies creep in, undercutting how well these efforts work (Assefa, 2025). Contingency theory argues that effective action comes down to matching practices with the realities on the ground (Santas et al., 2024). So, developing strategies that knit together policy frameworks, guidelines, and on-the-ground operations is key to creating a learning environment where students can genuinely succeed.

5.4 Presentation of Data from Document Analysis

22 Table 5.18: Document analysis

Document textual analysis	Yes	No	Remark
Higher education strategy regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities and the promotion of diversity in university planning.	X		The surveyed universities had annual and strategic plans that include measures for the integration of students with disabilities (SWD) and the advancement of diversity. Upon thorough examination of the supporting documentation on practical execution, it was found that most institutions lacked clear decisions and evaluative evaluations of efficacy, or official reports presented to the top leadership or the Ministry of Education. This systemic gap between plan articulation and concrete implementation demonstrates the lack of established accountability mechanisms to translate inclusion-oriented goals into measurable results.
Policies, guidelines, and strategies to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities			All universities do had the Ministry of Education's standardised policy and strategy, but only two designed implementation guidelines customised to their specific operational needs.
Policies:	X		The Ministry of Education developed an Educational and Training Policy that applies to all educational levels, from kindergarten to university, and enforced its implementation throughout organizations. Although certain universities are aware of the policy, have promoted a shared understanding of its principles, and have attempted to implement

			it within contextual restrictions, systemic gaps remain. The policy recognizes the need for inclusivity in theory, but it lacks tangible, step-by-step guidance to promote diversity or inclusion for students with disabilities (SWD). Universities display a sophisticated awareness of inclusive imperatives, but this recognition is not translated into organized and measurable methods to meet the needs of SWDs. This disconnect highlights the lack of concrete execution mechanisms to connect the policy purpose with similar results.
Strategies:	X		The Ministry of Education has formulated and distributed a Strategy for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, integrating principles of diversity. However, the awareness of this strategy varies between universities, and some institutions lack familiarity with its documentation. Even where awareness exists, adherence to the objectives of the strategy remains inconsistent, as implementation efforts often deviate from their intended purpose of advancing inclusion and diversity for students with disabilities. When operationalized as designed, the strategy has the potential to promote equitable access to quality education and equal opportunities, thus enhancing the educational outcomes and experiences of all students.
Guidelines:	X		Only one university had official guidelines for including students with special needs, whilst

			others had either begun development processes or lacked such frameworks entirely. The institution used the existing guidelines to conduct public awareness campaigns to communicate the guideline between colleges and departments for execution. These guidelines advocate for the inclusion of students with disabilities (SWD), address educational opportunities through measures such as ensuring equitable access to academic programs, launching awareness campaigns for staff and students, and developing accessible facilities and modifications to curriculum plans. By prioritizing these elements, the guidelines hope to promote institutional inclusion while emphasizing the importance of institutional responsibility in converting policy promises into tangible results.

The study analysed three key documents to assess the frameworks of inclusive education of Ethiopia: the Educational and Training Policy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (2015) and 1994, the Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy (2022 / 23 to 2029 / 30) and the Guideline for the Inclusion of Person with Special Needs at Jimma University (2024). The review synthesizes the following insights:

1. Policy Analysis: Ethiopia's Educational and Training Policy incorporates inclusive education into more comprehensive educational approaches, with the risk of limiting the emphasis on students with disabilities (SWD). Advocacy and the implementation of inclusive practices are hampered by the policy's lack of operational details for day-to-day management, despite its emphasis on management and professional development. It raises questions about its effectiveness in promoting systemic inclusivity since, although

recognizing diversity and inclusion as objectives, it leaves out concrete measures to overcome obstacles like resource shortages or infrastructure deficiencies.

2. Strategy Analysis: The 2022–2030 Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy promotes a methodical framework with an emphasis on stakeholder engagement, equitable participation, and accessible learning settings. By suggesting resource centers, teacher preparation, and community involvement, it fills in previous policy gaps. However, its success is threatened by variable results between universities due to uneven funding, unclear implementation protocols for higher education institutions, and lack of institutional coherence.
3. Guideline analysis: The Special Need and Inclusion Guideline, which describes executive roles, inclusive curriculum creation, and accessible facilities, is in line with national and international goals. To advance fairness, it places a strong emphasis on creating awareness and collaborating with stakeholders. However, it goes low in addressing issues such as staff knowledge deficits or institutional reluctance. While promoting technology assistance and skilled workers, implementation specifics are still ambiguous, making effectiveness dependent on ongoing institutional commitment, procedures for accountability, and training.

When taken as a whole, the above documents show a recurring disconnect between ideal goals and actual implementation, highlighting the necessity of legally binding policies, resource distribution, and institutional responsibility to operationalize inclusive education.

5.4.1 Comparative analysis of policy, strategy, and guideline

5.4.1.1 Similarities of policy, strategy, and guideline

In all three documents, the inclusion of students with special needs in classrooms is given top priority. Inclusion in public universities and the role academic leaders' play in creating inclusive cultures are highlighted in Ethiopia's Education Training Policy. For students with special educational needs (SEN), the Special Needs / Included Education Strategy emphasizes the importance of inclusion in providing fair educational opportunities. Likewise, Jimma University's Guideline makes a clear commitment to provide all students, regardless of ability, with equal access. These documents outline the roles and responsibilities of educators and managers: the

Policy stresses leadership and professional development to promote inclusion; the Strategy outlines cooperative roles for stakeholders, such as parents and civic organizations; and the Guideline outlines managerial responsibilities to guarantee campus accessibility.

5.4.1.2 Differences in policy, strategy, and guideline

The distinctions between the Educational Training Policy, the Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy, and the University Guideline lie in their specificity, operational focus, and responsiveness to challenges. Regarding specificity, the Educational Training Policy and Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy present broad frameworks for inclusive education but lack actionable methodologies; the former emphasizes inclusivity without concrete steps, while the latter outline operational strategies such as resource centers and teacher training. The University Guideline surpasses both by detailing specific implementation measures, including accessible curricula and infrastructure adaptations, tailored to institutional contexts. In terms of application, the Educational Training Policy identifies inclusion challenges, but omits mitigation strategies, creating an execution gap. In contrast, the Special Needs / Included Education Strategy delineates barriers and proposes capacity-building and accountability mechanisms. The University Guideline further prioritizes operational frameworks by addressing systemic issues such as discrimination through targeted solutions. Regarding awareness, the educational training policy overlooks the distinct challenges faced by students with disabilities and institutional managers. In contrast, the Special Needs/Included Education Strategy acknowledges these issues, but highlights institutional variability in addressing them. The University Guideline explicitly recognizes these challenges and establishes structured support mechanisms, reflecting the institutional commitment to resolving them in a comprehensive way.

5.5 Discussion of the Main Findings by Theme

This section presents and discusses the findings as they relate to the theories that underpin the study, with the support of the literature review.

5.5.1 Theme 1: Perceptions of higher education managers on disability inclusion

5.5.1.1 Sub-them 1: University engagement and support

From the data presented and analysed above, the perceptions of higher education managers about disability inclusion in Ethiopian public universities reveal a moderate general perception (Mean = 2.62) with limited variation between responses (SD = 0.36). Critically, Papadakaki and colleagues identified considerable gaps in university and college staff understanding of disability, as well as persistent preconceptions about the characteristics of students with disabilities (Papadakaki et al., 2022). This result suggests persistent gaps in managerial attitudes, which requires targeted interventions to change beliefs regarding the academic capabilities of students with disabilities (SWDs), reduce perceptions of SWDs as institutional burdens, and strengthen advocacy for their inclusion in academic and social spheres. The rationale is based on the idea that negative management perceptions of students with special needs will probably have a negative effect on the effectiveness and results of inclusive education initiatives (Patel et al., 2024; Tait & Purdie, 2000).

Tugli, (2013) argues that rather than any fundamental restrictions in their ability to perform on par with their peers, the difficulties faced by students with disabilities are primarily the result of systemic institutional failures to accommodate their unique requirements. In particular, the low mean score (M = 2.23) and the high standard deviation (SD = 0.84) on the confidence of managers in the ability of SWD to perform comparable to peers underscore the prevalent uncertainty about the academic success of SWD. Lockmun-Bissessur, Samy and Peeroo (2024) asserts that with the right skills and experience, professionals, i.e., educational managers, can build confidence in opportunities for learners with disabilities. Although this latent managerial skepticism may not directly impede institutional experiences of SWDs, its visibility within stakeholder groups' risks perpetuating systemic doubts, potentially affecting the trust of SWDs in institutional support throughout their academic journeys.

Higher education institutions are committed to eliminating exclusionary practices by rejecting assimilationist frameworks that prioritize institutional conformity over student needs (Ainscow, 2020b). According to the finding, managers' opinions on disability inclusion vary from actively advocating for inclusion to considering it as an administrative burden. Beauchamp, (2007) attests that the views of managers constrain the impact of students with disabilities. This means that higher education managers have varying opinions on disability inclusion, with some strongly endorsing it while others view it mainly as a procedural requirement, even though their institutions have stated values of fairness and diversity. According to the contend of Jardinez and Natividad, (2024)

the inclusive education theory paradigm is effective in promoting education-for-all goals, fostering inclusive societies, and combating discriminatory attitudes. In particular, when it comes to perceptions of inclusion as an imposition, a lack of managerial commitment seriously hampers the efficacy of the institution and students with special needs or disabilities. Although diversity and inclusivity are highly valued in university culture, operational implementation lags due to pragmatic strategies are not always given attention. Therefore, Rapp and Corral-Granados suggest using systems theory of management in conjunction with the conceptual underpinnings of inclusion and exclusion to understand how implicit communication practices can either promote student inclusion or maintain exclusion during implementation rather than fostering a hostile attitude towards them. (Rapp & Corral-Granados, 2021).

However, academic commissioners and management have made formal asserts to increase enrollment for students with disabilities (SWDs); the results show that practical steps to encourage their participation are still insufficient. Administrators in higher education view inclusive education as a paradigm shift that recognizes student diversity and rethinks institutional approaches to diversity at the same time (Ainscow, 2020; Nīmante et al., 2021). The contradiction between the ideological adherence to inclusive values and the uneven prioritization of implementation approaches is shown by this discrepancy. Therefore, the finding verifies that although management acknowledges its commitment to addressing disability-related issues, their level of enthusiasm and understanding of inclusion varies. The biggest element influencing managers' ability to deal with students with disabilities is attitude (Edna, 2016).

Paradoxically, universities publicly emphasize the promotion of inclusive academic environments, yet structural and attitudinal barriers persist. Parveen and Qounsar, (2018) strengthen as the implementation of inclusion and inclusive education faces many challenges that are frustrating the efforts of governments around the world. These findings require systemic reforms to align managerial perspectives with institutional equity goals for students with disabilities (SWDs). Contrastingly, Makuve, (2024) posits that organizations achieve genuine inclusion by cultivating cultures that intrinsically value diversity. Consequently, higher education managers must actively cultivate positive perceptions and implement inclusive practices rather than exclusionary approaches to equitably accommodate diverse learners, as Echeita, Simón, and Sandoval, (2016)

demonstrate that inclusive leadership adapts educational conditions to student needs through justice-based principles.

Quantitative analysis shows that university officials and service providers are reluctant to support students with disabilities (SWD), as demonstrated by a low mean score (M = 2.22) and moderate dispersion (SD = 0.73), indicating inconsistent institutional participation. Scholarly suggestions, on the other hand, advocate for effective managerial structures. Mcginty (2016), suggests comprehensive systems monitoring instructional adaptations, transition protocols, and disability support administration, whereas Connally, (2020) emphasizes managers' role in preparing educators to improve learning outcomes for SWD.

Qualitative research findings reveal further systemic flaws, most notably the perception of disability equality as extraneous rather than essential to institutional goals. Support mechanisms tend to represent welfare-based approaches, which contrast with rights-based paradigms and emphasize institutional accountability deficiencies. This supports Rufo and Emma, (2012) categorization of accommodation inadequacies as organizational issues. As a result, Piyarat et al. (2020) argue that addressing these difficulties demands proactive managerial engagement in policy reform and crucial service delivery to ensure student success.

5.5.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Academics and management engagement

The efficiency of service provision is essential for the academic and social success of students with disabilities (SWD), as managerial perceptions directly impact institutional service delivery. Evidence suggests that inadequate commitment, expertise, and proactivity among managers hinder learning for students with disabilities (Thompson, 2020). Quantitative results indicate administrative inadequacies in service delivery, evidenced by a low mean score (M = 2.18, SD = 0.63), while qualitative data corroborate the lack of customized academic assistance. Institutional frameworks uniformly implement services for students with disabilities and non-disabled students, without specialized accommodations or policy-driven processes.

The moderate mean results (M = 2.47, SD = 0.93) provide evidence that SWD continue to have inadequate access to essential academic services. Despite qualitative statistics indicating that academic and administrative services are generally adequate, the satisfaction ratings by SWD are

still below ideal compared to demand. This is consistent with Kabuta, (2014) identifying insufficient service provision is the main obstacle. Despite efforts by institutions to improve services, realities continue to diverge from the theoretical focus on rights-based support (Kabuta, 2014; Salmi, 2009).

The result emphasizes the critical need for a diverse and inclusive setting for learning, as well as the importance of providing adequate aids for students with disabilities. While college deans and academic coordinators follow national norms, they frequently lack a detailed understanding of individual students' needs, reducing institutional efficiency. To meet the comparable service demands of SWD, managers must go beyond generic techniques and perform a thorough assessment of service gaps. According to Walelign (2018), institutional leaders should respect the rights of SWDs rather than deny them by facilitating comprehensive support services that help them improve their academic and social capacities. This calls for strategic alignment with Edmund's (2019) integrated academic management model and Salmi's (2009) organizational performance criteria, guaranteeing that specialised support mechanisms are given priority within institutional operations.

For inclusion to be successful, academic staff members, especially educational managers, must have positive and tolerant attitudes towards students with disabilities (Yaz, 2021). However, the results show that universities and colleges carry out disability management awareness programs differently. Deans and academic coordinators generally follow national regulations for students with disabilities (SWD), but often show little awareness of the unique needs of each student. In line with Parveen and Qounsar (2018) conclusion , administrators frequently lack the ability to address the cognitive and behavioral requirements of SWDs, and this knowledge gap among some deans runs the risk of weakening the effectiveness of institutional services. For them to overcome these constraints, organizations need integrated systems that respond to various disability profiles at the college and university levels. It should be implemented according to Ecaterina's (2013) principle of adapting programs to each learner's psychological, physical, social, or developmental needs regardless of disability status, as well as Denisa's (2013) contextual approach, which aligns inclusion strategies with institutional culture within larger frameworks for inclusive society development.

Furthermore, insufficient support, weak procedural frameworks, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and faculty reluctance all inhibit academics and management's active involvement in building genuine inclusion. Such reservations, as confirmed by Mitiku et al. (2014), is a major barrier in addition to attitudinal barriers. These difficulties are exacerbated by institutional slowness in decision-making processes (Abduwani, 2017), which calls for leadership that can empower stakeholders while negotiating bureaucratic structures, a crucial managerial skill for successful inclusion.

5.5.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Diversity and inclusion experience

The findings confirm that diversity and inclusion are interrelated concepts, and inclusion acts as the foundation for equitable educational access regardless of individual traits. These words are commonly confused with traditional methods such as mainstreaming, and if misinterpreted, they run the possibility of perpetuating categorizations or deviance (Hayde, 2024), acknowledging variations in identity, experience, and viewpoint is what diversity is all about, whereas inclusion guarantees fair access. According to Özbilgin and Erbil (2023) , organizational cross-demographic social interactions are governed by inclusion, diversity, and equality, necessitating the intentional integration of differences into institutional frameworks. This goes beyond disability to include multidimensional identities (Boyle et al., 2020). Universities that prioritize genuine inclusivity achieve better outcomes (Alam Molla & Nur Shawlin, 2023) by guaranteeing equal access to opportunities and actively encouraging participation that aligns with their institutional objectives.

Although highlighting operational flaws, the results of the study also argue for diversity and inclusion as strategic importance. According to Tiruneh (2019), managers need a thorough grasp of diversity to create supportive settings, and inclusion is an emerging paradigm that is underutilised in practice (Nīmante et al., 2021). However, there are institutional diversity and inclusion gaps, with structural limitations that hinder the support of disadvantaged students and prevent them from using formal channels. Fair resource distribution for SWD through needs-based modifications is a prerequisite for authentic inclusion (Echeita et al., 2016). Managers must promote accessibility, innovate, and eliminate biased practices in order to be inclusive (Alam Molla & Nur Shawlin, 2023).

According to Kim et al. (2011), stigmatization endures across educational levels, which lowers the enrollment and retention of SWDs even when they are capable students. Specialised

accommodations are rarely granted when SWDs are recognized by the institution. Systems theory is recommended by Rapp and Corral-Granados (2021) for the analysis of communicative inclusion or exclusion mechanisms. Notably, despite structural obstacles, SWDs refrain from filing on official grievances; this conclusion is supported by Villa and Thousand (2005), who highlight the importance of inclusion in reducing social isolation.

5.5.2 Policy frameworks to enhance the inclusion of SWD

5.5.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Policy Governance and policy enforcement

By encouraging fair access and removing obstacles using justice-based principles, inclusive policy improves institutional decision-making (Echeita et al., 2016). While higher education institutions profess commitments to physical, curricular, and accommodation access (Valle-Flórez et al., 2021) and sound policy design and political commitment are necessary for effective education reform (WBG, 2018), research shows that institutional managers and the actual implementation of policies are different. Despite Degener's (2017) human rights model that emphasizes disability dignity, this supports Beauchamp's (2007) claim that person with disabilities lack power in the legislative, policy, and practical arenas.

According to MoE (2016), operational-policy mismatch worsens marginalization and violates national educational goals intended to assist marginalized people. Implementation difficulties continue despite the emphasis on institution-wide approaches and unique admissions provisions in Ethiopian policy guidelines (Tena & Motuma, 2024) and (FDRE, 2009). Mcginty (2016) notes that administrative systems are essential parts of support frameworks and attributes this gap to insufficient management systems for transition procedures and disability assistance management.

The fundamental governance flaws are identified by the respondents as follows: the enforcement mechanisms are deficient, the implementation is inconsistent, and inclusion is still not given priority in policy design. Through the lack of organized operational processes, these gaps impede the implementation of policies and maintain imbalances. According to Mwambi (2020), in order to get competent results, effective policy requires specific goals, strategic inputs, and efficiency-focused transformation procedures.

Beyond simply adhering to policies, inclusive education theory positions inclusion as a basic human right and envisions accessible instructions and policies for diverse learners (Hornby, 2015). However, there are still recurring discrepancies between the goals of policies and their actual implementation, even in spite of institutional claims of conformity to legal frameworks. The achievement of inclusion with a theoretical foundation is weakened by this difference.

Although Ethiopia's Educational and Training Policy incorporates inclusion in more comprehensive strategies, it runs the risk of lessening the emphasis on students with disabilities. Although it places a strong emphasis on professional growth and management, it is devoid of structural solutions, tangible steps to address resource shortages, and operational specifics for day-to-day management, which hinders advocacy and implementation. Valle-Flórez et al. (2021) in their research advised higher educational institutions to facilitate physical, curricular, and relational access of all students and comply with a reasonable accommodation policy to allow students with disabilities equal opportunities to those without disabilities.

To conform to international standards and national laws, institutions adopt local policies and procedural guidelines. However, low mean scores for alignment with national guidelines ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.70$) and constitutional adherence ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.84$) show poor institutional efficacy in helping students with disabilities (SWD), according to quantitative findings. Despite international frameworks that require proactive identification of disability requirements, this implementation deficiency often exists. To operationalize inclusion through gap identification and targeted interventions, UNESCO (2005) stresses examining national education plans, whereas IASC (2019) guideline dictate that humanitarian actors fulfill rights-based requirements.

The university's reviewed guideline is aligned with overall equity goals through stakeholder engagement and awareness campaigns, as it outlines executive duties, incorporates inclusive courses, and supports accessible facilities. However, it provides vague implementation procedures for technical assistance and specialised staff, failing to appropriately address institutional resistance and staff skill deficiencies. The primary shortcoming, which reflects administrative shortcomings in operationalizing inclusion principles, is not the lack of guidelines, but the inability to implement them. Effective guidelines, according to UNESCO (2005), must show how inclusive difficulties may be resolved through methodical transformation in order to overcome attitudinal

hurdles. Therefore, formal institutional procedures are crucial to achieve fair and long-lasting disability inclusion (Mcginty, 2016), showing greater effectiveness than casual proactive actions. Notwithstanding their effectiveness, they are undermined by shortcomings in tools, resources, and frameworks, which hinder the achievement of inclusive education goals (Jaafar et al., 2020).

Strategies for implementing inclusive education were developed according to national rules, which provide them with special validity in recognizing the rights of students with a range of disabilities (Tiruneh, 2019). The results show that universities execute their plans using well-defined implementation strategies, making conscious efforts to ensure that institutional actions align with policy goals. As demonstrated by 10-year strategic plans that place inclusion as a top priority, the analysis also finds a direct relationship between diversity and inclusivity, highlighting their importance within institutional goals and national norms. Therefore, to make inclusive education a reality, the government and educational institutions must adopt a systems approach to bring about cultural change, enhance the planning and strategy of the education sector and educational institutions, and think holistically (UNESCO and UNICEF, 2020). The Special Needs/Inclusive Education Strategy document in the analysis advocates for a systematic framework that prioritizes equitable participation, stakeholder engagement, and accessible learning environments.

5.5.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Develop inclusive and legal policy

Divjak and Rađep (2015) found that institutional duties in student development contribute to the complexity of higher education decision making. The findings show that senior managers systematically ignore disability concerns from strategic priorities. Respondents note the marginalization of disability discourse in executive debates, which supports Beauchamp (2007) observation that person with disabilities are excluded from decision-making channels, resulting in rights deprivation. These shortcomings in establishing inclusion as essential institutional tasks lead to welfare-based rather than rights-based protections for students with disabilities. Although SWDs have a collective social voice, university officials must aggressively limit administrative malpractice risks. Amponsah-Bediako (2013) emphasizes anticipating SWDs' preferences and rights, whereas Rice (2021) promotes disability-inclusive policies and engagement in management to alleviate complaints.

In treaties around the world, inclusion constitutes a progressive theme driven by shared values aimed at systemic development (UNESCO, 2009). State-ratified agreements for disability inclusion are considered de facto legal mechanisms in Ethiopian universities. Advocacy-driven enrollment increases have not resulted in uniform implementation of accommodations across academic institutions, despite governments' growing recognition of human rights via legislative enactments (IDA, 2019). Human rights, societal values, and civilization are all inherently impacted by higher education (Güemes et al., 2023). However, research shows that institutional shortcomings commonly prevent SWDs from receiving the benefits to which they are legally entitled. According to Dreyer (2017), truly inclusive societies require inclusive education as a moral requirement based on human rights.

Human rights approaches require universities to uphold fundamental rights (Rice, 2021). However, the findings reveal systematic inequalities, specifically unfair distinctions between regular and extension students that violate the rules of equal treatment. According to (Rice, 2021), institutions must recognize disability as an intrinsic part of human diversity in order to promote equal opportunities and justice. Ecaterina (2013) observes how legislation promotes education for all students throughout national systems. The findings confirm that inclusion is a basic human right that is independent of legal systems. The need for institutional cultures that operationalize inclusion as a moral obligation rather than simply compliance has been emphasized by the ongoing gaps between the articulation and execution of policies.

Although universities are increasingly adopting diversity policies in their planning, there is still a significant discrepancy in how well these policies are being implemented. From an ideological standpoint, Tiruneh (2019) claims that the adoption of inclusive practices in higher education constitutes a universal educational principle. Although Ethiopians recognize international agreements that safeguard the rights of those with disabilities, these individuals frequently face denial of their rights, revealing systematic inequity (FDRE, 2009).

5.5.3 Factors that promote the effective implementation of inclusive education

5.5.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Organizational support and accessibility

Students with disabilities (SWD) need assistance in order to succeed academically (Walelign, 2018). Quantitative findings reveal significant institutional inadequacies: caretaker services

(69.8%), accessibility infrastructure (53.1%) and specialty disability centers (63.3% of SWD) are mainly lacking. Systemic capacity limitations are highlighted by the continued inaccessibility of vital resources such as advocacy or rehabilitation services (80.9%), emergency or medical care (80.9%), and assistive technologies (69.4%). These shortcomings support the results of Tungaraza (2010) on attitudinal, physical, and resource constraints, as well as Kiyuba and Tukur (2014) describing of difficulties such as insufficient infrastructure, supplies, and classroom access.

Implementing inclusive education effectively is hampered by three important factors: severely restrictive resource distribution (M = 2.07, SD =.310), insufficient support structures (M = 2.04, SD =.323), and inadequate handling mechanisms (M = 2.07, SD =.363). Systemic operational capacity deficits are reflected in these quantitative findings. The resource constraints are consistent with the findings of WBG (2018) and Thys-Clément and Wilkin (2010) that poor resource management compromises investments in education and disability support worldwide, requiring multilevel solutions. Notably, Tamrat (2022) argues that rather than a lack of resources, the main obstacles to providing inclusive education are inefficient use of current systems, poor administration, and insufficient mobilization.

Partial institutional improvement, such as computer labs for students who are physically or visually handicapped, is indicated by qualitative findings. University management has allocated funds, provided financial assistance, and launched advocacy campaigns in spite of Kabuta's (2014) identification of infrastructure deficiencies as the main barrier. Upgrades to the infrastructure, such as ramps and accessible study areas, are the subject of attention. Kabuta (2014) further promotes universal design principles (e.g., accessible classrooms, dormitories, and roadways) to enable fair mobility, whereas ICED (2019) highlights the critical role institutional administration plays in creating accessible facilities.

Learning environments that are accessible, equitable, and supportive are largely shaped by resources (Tugli, 2013). Fairness between SWDs and their peers without disabilities in terms of financial, academic, and infrastructure resources is necessary for an equitable distribution. Connally (2020) points out that in order to improve results, inclusive education management must offer resources and supporting environments. Although the university has established equality-based resource distribution guidelines, Papadakaki et al. (2022) contend that support should put

autonomy first with little interference. According to (Hornby, 2015) and (UKEssay, 2020), systemic adaptation to a variety of learner demands across all educational dimensions is necessary for inclusion.

To maintain organizational change, managers in the 21st century need to be trained in executive competencies such as cooperation, communication, critical thinking, creativity, and entrepreneurship (Achmad et al., 2019). The university's implementation of continuous training programs for academic and administrative staff to reduce attitudes against SWDs is confirmed by results from interviews, indicating institutional awareness of human capital development as the basis of inclusiveness.

5.5.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Regulations, management, and execution

Inconsistencies in achieving regulatory requirements for disability inclusion have resulted from a change in university policy that was driven by Ministry of Education directives. Legal mechanisms aimed at inclusive education face significant challenges due to the poor availability and quality of accessible educational institutions and educators (Hata et al., 2021). The findings imply significant institutional transformation in response to Ministry of Education directions, which is consistent with Maisyaroh et al. (2019) argument that situational management requires balancing varied conditions through regulatory compliance. In violation of earlier pledges to promote equality for all, subsequent policy changes cut funding for blind students. This goes against the underlying principles of inclusive education put forward by Regmi (2017), which include full involvement for all students, acceptance of diversity, and equal opportunity.

Higher education institutions have been placed at the center of recent Higher Education reforms in Ethiopia (Department of Special Needs Education, 2014). Consequently, the result of the study indicates that the university is taking social reforms on board to strengthen its policies and promote inclusivity, which will lead to the development of more accessible learning environments that attract students. This growth demonstrates successful alignment with national standards (Molla, 2018), differentiating it from institutions with less effective disability management practices (Thys-Clément & Wilkin, 2010). The inclusion of students with and without disabilities is considered integral to creating shared classroom environments, with supportive policies considered vital for promoting equity and diversity.

Academic commissions, senate representatives, and senior administrators actively promote inclusiveness through the creation and monitoring of strategic policies. Integrating strategies to address diversity in teaching and student management is still a top goal, as McInnis (2004) highlights. Echoing Shala et al. (2021) assertion that successful organizational structures must enable integration, respondents emphasize integrated collaboration across academic and administrative institutions to solve implementation inconsistencies.

For higher education institutions to handle complicated student diversity, integrated teaching and administrative methods are becoming more and more necessary (McInnis, 2004). Diversity management and inclusion of inclusive practices have been shown to improve academic achievement for students with disabilities (SWD) by facilitating equitable participation and reducing systemic exclusion. Despite acknowledged advantages, institutional managers continue to face challenges when operationalizing diversity integration (Shala et al., 2021), which reflects conflicts between strategic planning objective and real-world implementation.

5.5.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Educational and professional development opportunities

There are no uniform models for academic and professional pathways in higher education organizational management (Abdel-Kader, 2014; Huihui, 2018). According to the literature, improving professional development and academic inclusion for students with disabilities (SWD) is still a recurring institutional difficulty that requires context-specific strategies (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022; Fernandez et al., 2003). The results show that SWDs' capabilities are improved by organized support systems: In addition, the university is actively working to eliminate obstacles by offering customized support and linking academic achievement with career prospects. Their pursuit of careers is guided by skilled mentorship, and admission into competitive professions is facilitated by pedagogical frameworks aligning with Karim's (2009) focus on management structures facilitating growth. Institutional policies use a 3% affirmative action quota to prioritize equitable employment, and female SWDs who achieve instructor positions are an example of gender-inclusive advancement. High-achieving SWDs are recognised at public recognition events that foster a culture of academic performance. All of these efforts are grounded in national regulations by operating within rights-driven frameworks created by laws such as Proclamation No. 568/2008, which guarantees rights for persons with disabilities through

employment assistance, special provisions, tax exemptions for mobility devices, and affirmative actions (FMoLSA, 2012).

However, higher education institutions are the foundation for professional development and the advancement of professionalization (Waugh & Goss, 2019). The results show that by giving students with disabilities equitable access to career development opportunities and resources, the university takes the initiative to assist them in achieving their professional objectives. This operationalizes the inclusive education thoughts that successful inclusion actively supports holistic learner development to fully aid all students (NCIE, 2011; Parveen & Qounsar, 2018)

5.5.4 Barriers to the promotion and implementation of inclusive education

5.5.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Institutional and structural challenges

Inclusive education initiatives are hampered by being based on decentralised activities that vary in consistency rather than standardised procedures. The finding attests that comprehensive operational structures are lacking in national policy frameworks for inclusion of disabilities, resulting in inefficiencies and poor communication between institutions. In higher education, encouraging the academic inclusion of students with disabilities (SWD) is still a crucial modern concern (Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022). The findings indicate that there are still obstacles in place, such as institutional misalignment with the inclusive education goals set forth by the government. Implementation attempts are still dispersed, despite the revolutionary potential of inclusive education to break down barriers, improve outcomes, and end hatred (Georgeta et al., 2017). Insufficient funding, uneven approaches, low awareness, and lack of support services (such as sign language interpretation and assistive technology) cause institutions to follow national inclusive education policy unevenly. According to the findings of studies conducted in a variety of contexts, systemic barriers such as lack of funding, inadequate infrastructure, lack of resources, difficulties in gaining access, and enduring negative attitudes exacerbate these implementation gaps (Kiyuba & Tukur, 2014; Tugli, 2013; Tungaraza, 2010).

Furthermore, the results show that there are no special accommodations for students with disabilities (SWD), and budgetary procedures for disability services are marked by a lack of transparency and confusing allocation systems. This supports the OECD (2014) finding that one of the main obstacles to SWD success in higher education is the lack of funding for educational

aids. Despite lobbying efforts, disability center coordinators face operational challenges due to a lack of resources and the inability to obtain funding or carry out equitable programs. Higher education institutions need specific funding streams for advancing inclusion agendas, as Chiwandire and Vincent (2019) contend. However, current practices follow exclusionary MoE policies that arbitrarily deny other disability groups equitable access to resources while limiting financial aid to blind students.

Institutions face resource scarcity, uneven planning, and coordination issues despite rising SWD enrolment (Tirussew & Mesfin, 2021). Crucially, necessary academic accommodations become impossible while Ministry-approved funds are not released. Unpaid examination money (3,500.00 birr) and delayed reader allowances for blind students are two severe examples of financial insecurity that severely limit academic engagement. Furthermore, the low mean scores (M = 2.18, SD = 0.66) in the quantitative data show insufficient funding for the academic demands of the SWDs, pointing to deficiencies in the institutional structures. In order to ensure that SWDs have meaningful academic experiences, Tirussew and Mesfin (2021) stress that administrative prioritization of pedagogical supports, including prompt payment for readers and interpreters, is essential. According to the study Maria et al. (2020), higher education institutions should adopt disability agendas and management focuses to improve resource access.

5.5.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Service provision and accessibility barrier

Managerial inclusivity, according to Alam Molla and Nur Shawlin (2023), is a complete approach that fosters accessibility. But research shows that educational institutions do not have the facilities or specialised assistance needed to meet the academic accessibility demands of students with disabilities. They provide only a small amount of accessible materials and some pedagogical and infrastructure adjustments. The claim made by Jorgensen and Claeys-Kulik (2018) that universities must accommodate the needs of diverse and accessible learners goes in contradiction to this. Personalized educational responses, accessible learning settings, and inclusive pedagogies are some of the ways that Ainscow (2020) highlights the need for accessible, inclusive higher education. Systemic support gaps are caused by fragmented service delivery and poor policy implementation, which are the root causes of current institutional deficiencies.

Educational professionals equip teachers with crucial pedagogical insights for effective teaching methodologies (Connally, 2020). Higher education institutions exhibit restricted experiential capacity in people with physical, auditory, and visual disabilities (Nīmante et al., 2021). This study identifies substantial obstacles faced by blind and deaf students at the university, such as insufficient accommodations and incorrect transmission of academic knowledge. Notwithstanding global obligations, the execution of pedagogy significantly varies, evident in educators' views of braille as obstructive and the systemic marginalization of students with disabilities. Educational administrators and educators need more awareness and sensitivity to engage effectively with students with disabilities (ODR, 2021). Furthermore, inadequate academic assistance and the lack of accountability mechanisms sustain inequality, highlighting significant discrepancies in the implementation of inclusive education policies. Therefore, the establishment of a supportive learning environment can be affected by delays in service delivery (Tugli, 2013). Therefore, higher education must emphasize five essential pillars: inclusion, learning, participation, accountability, and respect for diversity, requiring managerial knowledge of educational frameworks and social dynamics to promote fair education (Hunt, 2021).

5.5.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Diversity and cultural barriers

Higher education managers recognize diversity in teaching and administration as a complex challenge requiring strategic implementation (Makuve, 2024), necessitating inclusive environments accommodating diverse needs, including those of students with disabilities Sibanda (2018) emphasizes recognizing disability and inclusiveness as integral, valuable components of diversity essential to institutional advancement. Despite this conceptual alignment, the findings reveal the absence of formal initiatives, such as structured programs, discussions, or meetings that specifically promote inclusive environments for students with disabilities, indicating systemic deficiencies in operational frameworks to advance diversity and inclusion.

Institutions must cultivate positive attitudes toward disability among stakeholders to foster inclusive cultures and dismantle barriers (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Makuve, 2024). Authentic inclusion is achieved when organizations nurture diversity by embracing cultures that support equality to ensure that all individuals are valued and supported (Makuve, 2024). On the contrary, systemic neglect stemming from institutional hierarchies and ministerial policy drives

marginalization. Divjak and Ređep (2015) identify weak systemic structures inadequate policies, processes, and institutional frameworks, and hierarchical decision making that centralizes authority while excluding diverse perspectives as primary barriers to effective disability inclusion.

The study identifies resistance within academic communities to recognize students with disabilities (SWDs) as equal members, rooted in negative sociocultural attitudes that perpetuate exclusion and stigma. This contextualizes Ethiopia's prioritization of inclusive education in ESDP IV, which responded to limited awareness of disabilities, established negative attitudes, and institutional resistance to change (FMoE, 2010). The disability social model of disability (Mole, 2016; Oliver, 2004) further attributes disability exclusion to social barriers that include prejudice, inaccessible environments, discriminatory practices, and segregated systems. The findings confirm that the absence of dedicated disability support centers exacerbates structural marginalization, fragmenting institutional responses to the needs of SWDs. As Wilson (2018) argues, this approach frames disability as socially constructed, necessitating societal transformation rather than individual adaptation. Current initiatives remain largely symbolic, underscoring the imperative for systemic reforms to align institutional practices with inclusion mandates. So, SWDs face challenges in social and academic participation. Traditional social perceptions also have an effect on academia, leading to injustices and persistent discrimination against students with disabilities. Despite evolving norms, academic staff attitudes have not changed, and the absence of specialised inclusion centers is a sign of management failure.

5.5.5 Institutional approach used to address challenges

5.5.5.1 Sub-theme 1: Management support structure

The establishment of disability support centers within Ethiopian universities reflects a strategic response to both national policy frameworks and global educational imperatives. Governments increasingly rely on higher education institutions to cultivate human resources essential for global economic competitiveness (Mwelwa & Sooltan, 2019). In Ethiopia, legal frameworks grant universities greater autonomy in governance, allowing them to address diverse student needs more effectively (Ashcroft, 2010; Tareke et al., 2024). The finding underscores that academic governance bodies, such as university senates, have taken proactive steps by establishing disability support centers to meet the needs of students with disabilities (SWDs). These centers are crucial

in providing customized interventions, promoting equity, improving agency, and encouraging participation in academic and extracurricular activities, thus aligning institutional practices with inclusive education mandates.

Effective management across multiple levels, from government to the classroom, is critical to ensuring inclusivity in higher education. As Hunt (2020) notes, coordinated management is essential to promote cooperation, implement policies, and allocate resources in alignment with inclusion objectives. Disability support centers serve as centralized hubs that streamline these efforts, addressing the needs of SWDs through targeted support and accessible infrastructure. Furthermore, Birhanu (2020) highlights that university management plays a vital role in promoting inclusive policies, increasing enrollment of SWDs, recognizing their rights, and establishing special admissions processes for underrepresented groups. This multi-tiered management approach strengthens the institutional commitment to equity and inclusion, ensuring that disability support centers operate within a broader framework of systemic change.

Inclusive policy strengthens institutional decision making by promoting justice, equality, and the removal of exclusion barriers (Echeita et al., 2016). Inclusive programs advocate for the full integration of all students with special needs and disabilities into mainstream education (McCarty, 2006). The findings of the study show that universities prioritize inclusive policies and uniform support networks for students with disabilities; and advocate for improved institutional structures, fair treatment, and resource distribution. Higher education institutions ensure equal opportunities for students with disabilities by providing physical, curricular, and social access along with reasonable accommodations (Valle-Flórez et al., 2021). Diversity and inclusion are strategic priorities, with institutions aiming to promote academic and personal success for all students, regardless of ability, by eliminating structural barriers and integrating accessibility. Governments can promote quality education and reduce social inequalities by supporting families and advancing inclusive education (Curtis, 2022).

5.5.5.2 Sub-theme 2: Student-driven policies and strategies

A persistent gap between equity-focused policy objectives and tangible structural reforms in higher education has been evident since the introduction of inclusion initiatives (Molla, 2018). Despite this, academic commissions and university senates are advancing strategic initiatives to improve the inclusion and participation of students with disabilities through governance restructuring and leadership frameworks. These efforts aim to embed accessibility and equality within policy architectures, operational guidelines, and implementation processes, ensuring institutional commitments are actionable. The World Bank (WBG, 2018) underscores that effective education reform requires robust political commitment, well-crafted policies, and proficient execution capacity to bridge this divide.

The university's inclusive leadership development program reflects a strategic focus on representative governance, aligning with Ali and Alrhaimi (2020) model, which integrates curricular design, accountability systems, organizational behavior, and adaptive leadership. These components foster an institutional culture that prioritizes inclusion, allowing SWDs to fully participate in mainstream academic and co-curricular activities. By aligning policies with practical implementation, universities aim to create equitable environments that support the diverse needs of SWDs, addressing long-standing structural and systemic barriers. Furthermore, universities to improve learning require the development of coherent strategies that are consistent with operational execution and policy frameworks.

5.6 Discussion of the Main Findings by Research Objectives

This section takes a close look at the findings from this mixed-methods study, laying them out based on the five research objectives that shaped the study. Instead of just describing what happened, the discussion digs deeper, connecting dots, highlighting where things fit, where they clash, and all the messy details in between. By looking at similarities, differences, contradictions, and the particular context within the dataset, the analysis pushes toward real insight. Everything gets filtered through Inclusive Education Theory, Systems Theory, and Contingency Theory, working together as the backbone of the analysis. These theories help untangle the complex ways that manager perspectives, policy roll-out, and day-to-day university practices affect disability inclusion in Ethiopian public universities.

The discussion brings together quantitative survey results from 324 participants (including 162 students with and without disabilities, 112 department heads, and 50 teachers), along with in-depth interviews with university leaders (two presidents, two deans, and two disability centre coordinators). By blending these different sources, the research captures a fuller picture of how education managers in Ethiopia see, put into practice, and wrestle with the realities of making universities truly inclusive. The key takeaway is clear: Ethiopia already has a solid policy base for inclusive education. The sticking points come not from what's written on paper, but from real operational and managerial hurdles that hold back implementation.

5.6.1 Objective 1: Perceptions of Higher Education Managers about Students with Disabilities

The first research objective focused on exploring how higher education managers view students with disabilities in Ethiopia's public universities. The results paint a complicated, sometimes conflicting picture. Managers formally stress the importance of inclusion, but their understanding of disability is still shaped by deficit-based models, seeing disability as something "lacking" in the individual, so there's a noticeable gap between what they say and what they actually grasp.

Quantitative findings show that, on paper, universities express commitment to disability diversity management. But, in reality, top management's follow-through at Ethiopian public higher education institutions falls short. Students with disabilities aren't happy with how their universities manage disability diversity. This trend shows up across public universities in Ethiopia, which means there's a noticeable correlation between how much managers understand disability and how inclusive their institutions are. Most students with disabilities also said they're dissatisfied with how committed leadership is to managing and supporting disability diversity and equity on their campuses.

Interestingly, participants mostly agreed that inclusive education isn't just a policy, but a fundamental human right. This fits with inclusive education theory, which frames inclusion as an ethical and social justice issue, not just a strategy for the classroom (Hornby, 2015). Still, a big disconnect remains between recognising inclusion as important and truly understanding disability. Managers admit inclusion matters, but they continue to see disability through medical and charity

models as something that needs special treatment instead of as an indicator that the institution itself needs to change.

Qualitative responses spotlight this divide. University management frequently talks about disability in terms of what individuals can't do and the need for special treatment, rather than as a result of institutional shortcomings. One respondent put it this way: inclusion means "combining students with and without disabilities into regular classrooms" a view that scholars say is merely integration, not true inclusion. This exemplifies what Beyene et al. (2020) call the "lack of institutional tools (policy, procedure, guidelines, etc.) to bridge the gap between law and practice."

From an inclusive education theory standpoint, which defines disability as a product of systemic barriers rather than personal deficits (Hornby, 2015), the data show that Ethiopian higher education managers still mostly use the medical and charity models. Managers often described students with disabilities as vulnerable and dependent, needing special help instead of asking how the system could change. This fits with findings by Abrahams et al. (2023), who found barriers like limited financial support, inadequate university services, inaccessible facilities, and negative attitudes. Even when students self-advocated for themselves and got some support, it wasn't enough.

These persistent deficit-based models affect how institutions actually operate. When managers see disability as the individual's problem, their efforts focus on accommodations for individuals, not removing the larger barriers. That's why policies exist, but real change remains occasional and inconsistent. The data shows that a genuine shift in how managers perceive disability is key for progress. It's not enough to know the policies; managers need to stop seeing disability as a personal tragedy and instead see it as a societal construct that demands institutional responsibility.

Systems theory helps explain this. Universities are complex, interconnected systems where managerial attitudes, institutional culture, resource decisions, and policy enforcement are all linked (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). When deficit-based approaches remain at the management level, they spread, influencing resources, staff viewpoints, and student experiences. These medical and charity models aren't just individual misunderstandings; they're systemic features of Ethiopian higher education. On top of that, Zerihun et al. (2024) point out that, although students without disabilities and instructors generally have positive attitudes toward students with disabilities, those

students say they're not getting the specialised support promised by official policy. This further highlights the persistent gap between attitudes and actual practice.

5.6.2 Objective 2: Enhancing Inclusion through Policies, Directives, Guidelines, and Strategies

The second research objective looked at how policies, directives, guidelines, and strategies for inclusive education can actually increase the inclusion of students with disabilities in Ethiopia's public universities. The findings show that while Ethiopia has put together an extensive policy framework in line with international conventions, turning these policies into real changes within universities is still spotty and incomplete.

Ethiopia has signed on to global conventions and drawn up matching national directives for its higher education institutions. In practice, though, not all policies are carried out consistently, and nobody seems quite certain whether the academic environment meets the needs of students with disabilities. This matches what scholars call a persistent policy-practice gap: a real break between what the policies aim for and what actually gets done. The problem here isn't with the policy design itself, but with a failure to truly put it into action.

If you consider systems theory, which sees universities as complex systems with lots of interdependent parts (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022), the findings suggest that policies by themselves can't guarantee inclusion. National frameworks set out the basic rules for inclusion, but these don't work unless universities have their own working tools practical procedures, guidelines, and real accountability that link what the law says to what people do day-to-day.

The study highlights that Ethiopian universities don't always enforce or put into practice these policies and strategies for inclusion as they should. For instance, educational technology is not widely used to create more accessible learning environments for students with disabilities. Beyene et al. (2020) call this the lack of institutional tools to bridge the gap between law and practice. One big barrier is that many university lecturers resist the idea of using technology to help students with disabilities.

Now, looking at contingency theory, which argues that good institutional action means tailoring practices to fit the local context (Vaszkun & Koczkás, 2024), the findings really stress how formal

procedures in institutions are crucial for fair and lasting progress. Interview responses backed this up: having clear institutional guidelines leads to better outcomes, much more so than relying on individual, spontaneous efforts, when it comes to carrying out laws and policies around disability inclusion.

This connects with the Inclusive Higher Education Framework, which puts leadership, accountability, and evaluation right at the center of effective inclusion (Hubbard & Gawthorpe, 2025). (Assefa, 2025) add that for universities to successfully manage disability diversity, they need deep institutional commitment, especially in leadership, so ideals of equality and social norms can really take hold.

Participants mentioned the lack of funding and support services, physical access issues, and negative attitudes as major hurdles to inclusion. Abrahams et al. (2023) found that while students often speak up for themselves and do get some support, it just doesn't go far enough. This policy practice gap also shows up in the classroom, where instructors often skip the accommodations students need, making it harder for them to succeed. Employers also don't know enough about their legal responsibilities or how to make opportunities truly fair for students with disabilities.

Viewed through the lens of systems theory, this gap shows a basic breakdown inside these institutions. As Beyene et al. (2020) put it, the lack of institutional tools to bridge the gap between law and practice is at the core. See here how policies and methods aren't well communicated, how departments and institutions apply the rules inconsistently, and how the understanding of inclusion gets lost between different levels of university leadership.

5.6.3 Objective 3: Factors Promoting Effective Implementation of Inclusive Education

The third research objective aimed to pinpoint what helps inclusive education work well in Ethiopia's public universities. The findings highlight several key factors at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels: leadership commitment, institutional support structures, policy frameworks, and stakeholder awareness.

Through the lens of contingency theory, which argues that institutions need to align institutional practices with specific local conditions (Vaszkun & Koczkás, 2024), leadership commitment stands out as crucial. The results show that educational leaders, when they actively work to include

students with disabilities, manage disability diversity better and achieve greater satisfaction. Assefa and Adamu (2023) also find that for diversity management to succeed, these initiatives need strong, ongoing commitment from university leaders, who must stand behind equality and social inclusion as core values. Still, the findings show that top leaders' commitment in Ethiopia's public higher education isn't enough. So while leadership is necessary, it's not the whole answer. Filippou et al. (2025) report that students with disabilities continue to face limited inclusion both academically and socially, run into weak teaching support, see poorly implemented policies, meet resistance at the institutional level, and lack both infrastructure and specialised services.

Institutional support structures turn out to matter too. Disability centers, support services, and specialised staff make a real difference. But according to Tirussew and Mesfin (2021), while universities have made progress, these supports still aren't fully developed or matched to what students need. The type of disability affects how much help students actually get.

Support systems and self-guided advocacy also contribute. Some universities are working hard to improve inclusion and accessibility, but there's still a long way to go. This matches Filippou et al. (2025) conclusions, emphasising the need for stronger management accountability, better enforcement of policies, more accessible infrastructure, disability-centred support services, and more staff development for inclusive education.

5.6.4 Objective 4: Factors Hampering the Promotion and Implementation of Inclusive Education

The fourth research objective aimed to identify the factors that hinder the promotion and implementation of inclusive education in Ethiopia's public universities. The findings point to interconnected challenges at different levels: individual, institutional, and systemic. These obstacles include limited resources, poor infrastructure, resistance from faculty, negative attitudes, and a lack of integration across systems.

Looking through the lens of systems theory, resource constraints stand out as a crucial failure of a subsystem, with rippling effects across the entire institution. When universities don't have enough financial and material resources, every part of disability inclusion suffers. Assistive technology

becomes scarce. Campuses remain physically inaccessible. Support services fall short, and staff members can't get proper training.

Participants reported minimal financial support and insufficient university services, along with physical inaccessibility and persistent negative attitudes faces students with disabilities. All these create barriers that limit access to education and social inclusion. The lack of reading materials designed for students with disabilities underlines a deeper problem: these institutions aren't truly accessible or inclusive. Students struggle with a range of issues: spaces that are hard to navigate, a shortage of trained sign language interpreters, missing assistive devices and teaching aids, limited elevators and ramps, negative attitudes, and the inability to form social connections.

The findings also show that the kind of disability a student has strongly affects the support they receive. Students with visual and hearing impairments face more severe challenges: not enough accommodations, a lack of sign language interpreters, and little academic support in class. This lines up with Tirussew and Mesfin (2021), who found that the nature of disability plays a big role in accessing support.

From the perspective of contingency theory, faculty resistance makes sense when there's a mismatch between what institutions expect and what individual teachers can actually do. If teachers aren't trained, don't have resources, and lack support for inclusive teaching, their resistance becomes a logical response to unrealistic demands. This shows just how vital it is to create solid faculty development programs that deliver both the knowledge and resources needed for genuine inclusive teaching.

The findings also highlight how institutions hesitate to put disability inclusion first. This shows up in scattered, unsystematic initiatives and a lack of cohesive effort, stretching from ministry policy down to universities themselves. There's a clear gap between what the policies say and what actually happens, especially when it comes to multiculturalism and real, lasting inclusion. Again, with systems theory in mind, the study's challenges reflect a basic disconnect in how the institutions function. Beyene et al. (2020) point out this lack of institutional tools to bridge the gap between law and practice. You see this in poor policy communication, irregular implementation across departments, and confusion between different levels of university leadership. Finally, the findings reveal that traditional views still shape how universities treat students with disabilities.

Prejudice endures, unfair treatment persists, and deeper disparities worsen. Despite universities formally adopting inclusive norms, staff attitudes hardly shift. The lack of dedicated inclusion centers at some universities signals a deeper failure of leadership and institutional will.

5.6.5 Objective 5: Addressing Challenges Faced by Students with Disabilities

The fifth research objective focused on how higher education managers can tackle the challenges that students with disabilities face in Ethiopian public universities. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, the findings point to several key areas for action: strengthening leadership commitment, putting formal institutional procedures in place, building capacity, and dealing with broader systemic barriers.

Viewed through the lens of contingency theory, which argues that effective institutional action hinges on matching practices to the specific context (Vaszkun & Koczkás, 2024), strengthening leadership commitment comes out as essential. The data show that for disability diversity management to succeed, these universities need a real, active commitment from their leaders. Those leaders have to show they're dedicated to the values of equality and social norms around inclusion. The study points out gaps in managerial accountability, policy enforcement, infrastructure access, disability-specific support services, and staff professional development. Strengthening inclusivity in higher education takes more than policy knowledge; it demands practical skills, policy implementation, and ongoing staff development.

Inclusive education theory says genuine inclusion requires coherent institutional structures (Kioupi et al., 2023), while systems theory views universities as interconnected systems (Nieminen & Pesonen, 2022). The findings highlight just how critical formalised institutional procedures are to equitable and sustainable change. Interview responses echoed this, emphasising that clear procedures, laws, policies, guidelines, and strategies make a bigger difference than informal or ad hoc approaches. This lines up with the Inclusive Higher Education Framework, which identifies leadership, accountability, and regular evaluation as the pillars of inclusive practice (Hubbard & Gawthorpe, 2025). When disability inclusion laws and policies are put into practice in a structured way, accountability follows. It’s more reliable than leaving inclusion up to individual managers or leaving it to chance. This suggests that if universities want to be effective at disability inclusion, they need enforceable procedures that turn legislation into actual practice on the ground.

The findings also show a need for capacity building at different levels. Tirussew and Mesfin (2021) argue that higher education institutions need a national policy and strategic framework to support students with disabilities more efficiently and effectively. The challenges facing teacher training in Ethiopia stand out as well, especially its difficulty meeting global standards for supporting teachers in inclusive education. There's a clear need for urgent and far-reaching reforms. To tackle the gaps in understanding inclusion, in attitudes, and in hands-on teaching experience, the teacher education curriculum and practices have to be rebuilt from the ground up.

Looking through a systems theory lens, the study shows that removing barriers for students with disabilities means confronting issues at every level. Problems stem from the diverse backgrounds of learners, a shortage of educational resources in accessible formats, and institutional weaknesses that prevent laws from having real impact. Abrahams et al. (2023) found that limited financial support, scarce university services, inaccessible spaces, and negative attitudes all impede access and inclusion. Students do use support systems and self-advocacy, but these measures aren't enough. Solving these systemic problems requires a wide-ranging approach: stronger enforcement, real institutional commitment, teamwork among policymakers, educators, employers, and society as a whole, and the creation of practical institutional tools and guidelines. All these are needed to truly bridge the gap between laws on paper and inclusion in practice.

5.7 Synthesis and Theoretical Integration

5.7.1 Integration of Findings across Research Objectives

Looking across all five research objectives, a clear pattern stands out: Ethiopian public universities have strong, progressive policies for inclusive education, but real progress gets blocked by day-to-day management and operational roadblocks, not by gaps in the policy itself. Everybody sees the same problems cropping up again and again: not enough resources, poor infrastructure, faculty resistance, tangled bureaucracy, and no real system to hold anyone accountable.

The consistency across both quantitative and qualitative data makes these conclusions more convincing. Survey data captured the scale of the problem; most people see little real inclusivity in Ethiopian public higher education. Interviews showed exactly how things break down: unclear budget processes, inconsistent policy enforcement, missing step-by-step guides for disability support, and so on.

5.7.2 Divergences and Contradictions

Within the data, a few contradictions deserve attention. Managers talked about the value of inclusion, but their thinking about disability often defaulted to outdated deficit-based models. There's a real gap between what leaders say and what they genuinely understand, reflecting the theory-practice gap described by Bakogiannis and Papavasiliou (2025), a systemic feature that lets ambiguity stick around because it serves certain interests. Another contradiction: some universities are active, trying new initiatives for inclusion, while others lack interest or basic understanding. This unevenness fits with contingency theory, where effective action depends on tailoring practices to a university's specific context (Vaszkun & Koczkás, 2024). Yet the data suggests some universities use context as an excuse to do nothing, rather than as a challenge they're trying to solve. One more contradiction stands out. Most students without disabilities and instructors say they have positive attitudes toward students with disabilities, but students with disabilities still aren't getting the support or accommodations promised in official policies. This disconnect shows the need for targeted actions to close the gap between good intentions and meaningful support.

5.7.3 Contextual Nuances

Certain local factors shape what's possible for inclusive education in Ethiopia's public universities. Resource shortages shape almost everything when it comes to supporting students with disabilities. The type of disability makes a major difference; students with visual and hearing impairments struggle most to get the accommodations they need. Culture counts faculty attitudes, leadership's seriousness, and whether there are reliable support units all play a defining role in inclusion outcomes. So, these details point to the need for context-sensitive solutions. Like contingency theory argues, there's no universal best blueprint for inclusion strategies must fit each institution's reality. At the same time, these practical adjustments shouldn't compromise the fundamental idea that inclusion is a basic human right.

5.7.4 Theoretical Contributions

This study adds a few important theoretical insights about inclusive higher education in places where resources are tight. First, it stretches inclusive education theory by showing that putting principles into practice depends heavily on leaders' perspectives, the institution's structure, and

the local environment. The current theory mostly developed in the West needs to be adapted to work in resource-constrained contexts like Ethiopia. Second, this study extends systems theory by showing that when just one part of the system fails, say, managerial support or budget allocation, the failure ripples through and undermines the whole institution's effort at inclusion. Real progress depends on moving all parts of the system forward together, from policy writing to funding to staff training to direct student support. Finally, the study sharpens contingency theory by identifying which specific local factors available resources, committed leaders, faculty attitudes, and dedicated support systems shape inclusion in Ethiopian public universities. Effective strategies aren't one-size-fits-all; they must match the on-the-ground context at each institution.

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has offered a thorough discussion of the study's findings, all organised around the five research objectives that shaped the investigation. The analysis moved past surface-level descriptions and dug into deeper interpretations by looking at where the data aligned, where it conflicted, and by examining the details in this context.

The findings show that Ethiopia's public universities have laid out progressive policies for inclusive education, yet the real challenge isn't policy gaps, it's the barriers that crop up during day-to-day operations and management. There's not enough in the way of resources, infrastructure falls short, many faculty members resist change, bureaucracy slows things down, and accountability is lacking across the board. On top of that, many managers still hold deficit-based views of disability, institutional efforts are scattered rather than unified, and there's no formal process to ensure disability inclusion, all of which keeps exclusionary practices in place.

The discussion framed these results through Inclusive Education Theory, Systems Theory, and Contingency Theory, showing how these approaches together help unpack the tangled factors shaping how managers perceive and practice inclusion. In the end, the findings highlight how crucial it is to boost leadership commitment, craft practical ways to implement policy, and tackle the systemic barriers that are holding Ethiopian public universities back from reaching their goals for inclusive education.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter of the dissertation provides an in-depth summary and analysis of the major study findings presented in the previous chapter's data presentation, analysis, and discussion. It is divided into five main sections: the dissertation statement and research questions, the overview of the chapters, the main findings, the conclusions and recommendations along with suggestions for further study.

Main research question

What is the role of higher education managers in enhancing students' inclusiveness in Ethiopia's public universities?

Sub-research questions

- What is the perception of higher education managers about students with disabilities in public universities of Ethiopia?
- How can policies, directives, guidelines, and strategies on inclusive education enhance the inclusion of students with disabilities in public universities of Ethiopia?
- What are the factors that promote the effective implementation of inclusive education in public universities of Ethiopia?
- What are the factors that hamper the promotion and implementation of inclusive education in public universities of Ethiopia?
- How can Higher Education Managers address the challenges students with disabilities face in public universities of Ethiopia?

6.2 Overview of the Chapters

6.2.1 Chapter one: Study orientation

This chapter offers an overview of the study, including its background, argument, research problem, research questions, and objectives. The study includes a brief review of relevant

literature, covering both practical and theoretical elements, as well as a presentation of the theoretical framework that guided the research. The chapter goes on to describe the research design and methodology in further detail, indicating that the study used a pragmatic paradigm due to the diverse views presented in the study. A mixed-methods approach was used, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques, with data collected in natural settings in sensitive ways for participants, and thematically evaluated using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Both descriptive and inferential statistics and phenomenological approach was used to allow for a more in-depth analysis of participants' lived experiences, and both probability and non-probability sampling methods were used to generate rich and comprehensive results. Data were collected using three primary methods: surveys, interviews, and document analysis, to ensure the scope and applicability of the study. Additionally, the study looked at problems about dependability, credibility and moral standards, as well as its own scope and limitations. The key words central to the study were defined to provide conceptual clarity.

6.2.2 Chapter two: Literature review

This chapter was primarily concerned with reviewing the relevant research literature. A literature review is a detailed and critical review of current research on the specific roles of higher education managers in promoting inclusivity among students at PUE, synthesizing key findings to form the researcher's perspective. This chapter establishes the foundation for a dissertation by providing a context and rationale for the research that was conducted. The review summarizes existing research, extracts major findings, and identifies gaps in the current study area. A complete literature review involves evaluating several sources, such as books, journals, and reports, which are critical to inform different stages of the research process. The literature review covers several key points, including the background of higher education and the responsibilities of its managers; how managers view inclusive practices for students with disabilities; Ethiopian regulations and practices concerning inclusivity in higher education; the effects of inclusive teaching methods on students' learning outcomes; implementing inclusivity in Ethiopian higher education institutions; difficulties faced by students with disabilities in higher education settings; ways to improve education managers' professional development; strategies for recruiting educational leaders; and the types of disabilities found in higher education contexts.

6.2.3 Chapter three: Theoretical framework

This chapter presents and examines the theoretical framework for the research topic of how higher education managers contribute to student inclusion at PUE. The framework provides historical context, examines the current situation, and introduces theoretical concepts related to inclusive education and management theory. This framework is built on interrelated principles that seek to explain and foresee observed events, as well as impact the choice of research methodologies and shape the structure of the research objectives. The framework brings together several educational philosophies to provide practical principles for effective and sustainable inclusion practices, addressing the complexity of inclusive education for children with disabilities.

6.2.4 Chapter four: Research design and methodology

Chapter Four outlines the research methodology and design, starting with a brief overview of the research approach, which integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to enhance credibility. In the study, a parallel convergent mixed methods design was used, allowing it to collect both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time, enabling comprehensive analysis. The study successfully combined the two approaches, guided by a pragmatic paradigm. The researcher had a comprehensive plan for the population and the sampling procedure. The study comprised a diverse group of populations, including university presidents, college deans, disability center coordinators, department heads, lecturers, students, and students with disabilities, using both probability and non-probability sampling methods. The final sample population of ten universities comprised two presidents, two deans, two coordinators of disability centers for interviews, 50 department heads, 112 teachers, and 162 students with disabilities, who were selected to complete a questionnaire. The necessary instrumentation used to collect data, including questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, provided the researcher with the help to collect data for the study. This chapter also describes the software used for data analysis, including SPSS for quantitative purposes and ATLAS.ti for qualitative purposes. This chapter discussed the reliability and validity assessment of quantitative data, trustworthiness assessment for qualitative data, and the researcher's adherence to research ethics throughout the study.

Chapter five: Data presentation and discussion

This chapter examines and interprets data on higher education administrators' contributions to fostering student inclusion in Ethiopian public universities. Quantitative and qualitative data are structured around themes and related to the research questions. The analysis focuses on how managers perceive students with disabilities, examines inclusive education policies and practices, determines what affects the implementation of these policies, and identifies the obstacles that students with disabilities face. The chapter consolidates its quantitative and qualitative findings into a single section, with the discussion of these results presented in a separate section. All results are presented systematically, as previously outlined in the study methodologies.

6.2.5 Chapter six: Summary of findings, recommendations, and conclusions

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the main findings of the study along with conclusions and recommendations that align with the research of the appropriate body of literature. To improve disability inclusion and management procedures within higher education settings, the researcher also offers helpful recommendations and direction for additional research.

6.3 Summary of the Major Findings

This section summarizes the main findings of the study by synthesizing the main ideas presented in Chapter five of the dissertation.

6.3.1 Summary of higher education manager perception on disability inclusion

6.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1. University engagement and support

The study acknowledges that Ethiopian public universities have a moderate perception of disability inclusion, indicating significant gaps in staff awareness and persistent preconceived notions about students with disabilities. These unfavorable managerial attitudes impede the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives, increasing mistrust in the academic achievement of SWDs. Institutional failures to provide proper accommodations compound these problems, highlighting a gap between the resolve to eradicate exclusionary behaviors and its practical implementation.

Despite institutional commitments to create inclusive settings, managerial opinions on disability inclusion remain inconsistent, undermining the effectiveness of advocacy for SWDs (Patel et al.,

2024; Tait & Purdie, 2000). The study identifies a lack of practical strategies to enhance student participation, emphasizing the need for higher education administrators to nurture positive attitudes and implement inclusive practices in order to fairly accommodate different learners. This requires deliberate measures to overcome attitudinal barriers and improve institutional responsiveness to the demands of SWD.

The empirical study demonstrates a reluctance among higher education officials and service providers to assist SWDs, indicating inconsistency in institutional engagement. This lack of dedication impedes the development of equal educational environments. The findings propose strong management structures, such as thorough methods for monitoring instructional modifications and disability assistance management, to address these inadequacies and increase institutional capability which is supported by Mcginty (2016),.

Systemic illness issues, notably the idea that disability equality comes second to institutional goals, stifle progress. The findings emphasize the importance of proactive managerial involvement in policy reform and successful service delivery to support academic success and inclusion of SWDs. Such measurements are crucial for aligning institutional practices with equity-focused goals and creating settings that welcome different learners (Piyarat et al., 2020).

6.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Academics and management engagement

The study suggests that while SWDs' academic and social success depends on efficient service delivery, their educational accomplishments are hampered by a lack of managerial dedication, knowledge, and initiative. Institutional frameworks frequently use uniform service models for students with and without disabilities, without specialised accommodations or procedures driven by policies that are adapted to meet the unique needs of SWDs. This viewpoint is consistent with that of Kabuta (2014), whose study suggests that low satisfaction rates among SWDs are essentially caused by limited access to the necessary academic services.

To address these difficulties, the findings propose that managers perform demands reviews of service shortcomings while still protecting the rights of SWDs. Furthermore, establishing positive attitudes among academic personnel towards SWDs is crucial for effective inclusion (Ecaterina, 2013), as many faculties and colleges are unaware of their students' specific needs, undermining

service delivery. To overcome these challenges, the study proposes integrated systems at the college and university levels that are sensitive to a wide range of disability profiles, providing equitable and effective support for SWD.

6.3.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Diversity and inclusion experience

The study underscores the critical interplay between diversity and inclusion in educational contexts, presenting them as interconnected principles. Inclusion ensures equitable access to educational opportunities regardless of individual characteristics, while diversity recognizes and values differences in identity, experience, and perspective. Together, these concepts govern organizational cross-demographic social interactions, embracing multidimensional identities to foster equality.

Effective management of diversity is essential for creating supportive educational environments that improve accessibility, promote innovation, and eliminate biased practices (Alam Molla & Nur Shawlin, 2023). However, stigmatization and inadequate special accommodations can obstruct the enrollment and retention of students with disabilities (SWD). By prioritizing inclusion, institutions can mitigate social isolation for SWDs, fostering an environment conducive to their academic and social success.

6.3.2 Summary of policy frameworks on inclusive education to improve inclusion of SWD

6.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1. Policy governance and policy enforcement

6.3.2.1.1 The Structure of policy

The study finds that inclusive policies in higher education strengthen institutional decision-making by promoting fair access and reducing barriers, but there is still a large gap between policy commitments and their practical implementation. Institutional executives often fail to properly implement pledges to physical, curricular, and accommodation access, exacerbating the mistreatment of students with disabilities (SWD) and undercutting national educational objectives. Students with disabilities continue to be underrepresented in Ethiopian higher education, even with recent reforms that have improved access (Department of Special Needs Education, 2014). Despite the incorporation of institutional efforts and special admissions rules within Ethiopian policy frameworks, structural difficulties continue to impede successful implementation.

Progress toward inclusive education is hampered by fundamental governance flaws such as insufficient inclusion in policy design, inconsistent policy application, and weak enforcement mechanisms. Despite the fact that inclusive education theory views inclusion as a basic human right (Hornby, 2015), its actualization faces obstacles due to the discrepancy between policy goals and actual results (Gebreegziabher, 2008). Although it incorporates inclusion, Ethiopia's Educational and Training Policy frequently ignores the unique needs of SWDs, making efforts to provide equitable access to education even more difficult.

6.3.2.1.2 The Structure of a guideline

Institutions follow national laws and international standards by implementing local policies and procedural rules. However, low results for constitutional adherence and alignment with national standards suggest that institutions are not doing enough to help students with disabilities. Although international frameworks are notwithstanding, implementation failures are common. Although it supports equitable goals, the only university guideline being reviewed offers ambiguous instructions for specialised staff and technical assistance. Successful guidelines should show a systematic shift in mindset to overcome challenges.

6.3.2.1.3 The structure of a strategy

Inclusive education strategies are developed according to national rules that recognize the rights of students with disabilities. Universities use well-defined implementation strategies, aligned with policy goals. Diversity and inclusion are closely related, which highlights their importance within institutional goals and national norms. A systems approach is needed for cultural change, improved planning, and holistic thinking in the education sector.

6.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Develop inclusive and legal policy

Senior managers in higher education regularly underestimate disability concerns in strategic priorities, according to the findings, which violates the rights of students with disabilities (SWD) that others have. Despite the official recognition of human rights, the failure of institutional engagement results in welfare-based protections rather than comprehensive rights-based frameworks, restricting the realization of legally entitled benefits for SWD.

Universities must acknowledge disability as a fundamental human right and give priority to the rights of SWDs in order to promote inclusive communities (Rice, 2021). To ensure fair treatment and access for SWDs, the study notes that institutions must operationalize inclusion as a moral imperative that goes beyond simple compliance and address the enduring gaps between the formulation of policies and their successful execution.

6.3.3 Summary of factors that promote the effective implementation of inclusive education

To properly implement inclusive education, three critical factors must be addressed: limited resource distribution, insufficient support structures, and ineffective handling procedures.

6.3.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Organizational support and accessibility

Students with disabilities (SWD) experience substantial institutional shortcomings, such as a lack of career services, accessibility infrastructure, and dedicated disability centers. Lack of access to critical resources such as advocacy services, emergency care, and assistive technologies demonstrates limits of systemic capacity. Institutional enhancements, such as computer labs for physically or visually impaired students, are required. Fairness between SWDs and their peers without disabilities is required for an equitable distribution of resources. Similar findings have been found in studies conducted by Alnahdi (2014); Awais and Ameen (2015), indicate that educational institutions do not provide students with disabilities with adequate support, essential services, or a variety of educational possibilities. To increase the results, inclusive education management should provide resources and supportive environments.

6.3.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Regulations, management, and execution

The study emphasizes how poor quality and restricted accessibility in educational institutions restrict inclusive education. For regulatory compliance and efficient situational management to coexist, institutional change is necessary (Maisyaroh et al., 2019). Inequities for students with disabilities (SWD) are exacerbated when policy changes that cut funding for blind students compromise inclusive education foundations. Senior managers, senate representatives, and academic commissions are aggressively advancing inclusion through integration plans and strategic programs. In the same way, Debub University (2013) confirms Senior managers, senators, and academic commissioners must assign tasks, determine priorities, and set goals in

order to provide SWDs with useful assistance. The study indicates that the effective implementation of inclusive education depends on the integrated collaboration between the management of academic and administrative institutions. Although diversity management improves the academic performance of SWDs, ongoing difficulties in operationalizing diversity integration remain in the way of the development of fair learning environments. In line with McInnis (2004) and Thys-Clément and Wilkin (2010), higher education management must apply more advanced management strategies and diversity-focused strategies in order to address complex institutional challenges.

6.3.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Educational and professional development opportunities

The study concludes that improving academic inclusion and professional development for students with disabilities (SWD) presents major problems for organizational management in higher education. While it is true that ODR (2021) mandates that all professionals, particularly educational managers, be aware of and sensitive to disability issues, Lockmun-Bissessur, Samy and Peeroo (2024) asserts that academic staff are essential to the advancement of academic inclusion. Enhancing the abilities of SWD and promoting their academic achievement requires organizational support structures, such as strong instructional frameworks and qualified mentorship.

Proclamation No. 568/2008 and other national regulations protect the rights of persons with disabilities by providing tax exemptions, special provisions, and job help (FMoLSA, 2012). To assist the holistic development of students, higher education institutions play a critical role in ensuring fair access to resources and career development opportunities. Conforming to Aitken et al. (2012), true inclusion guarantees full participation and equal access to community resources for students with disabilities, while Azoulay (2023) asserts that organizational management plays a critical role in supporting inclusion resources.

6.3.4 Summary of factors that hamper the promotion and implementation of inclusive education

6.3.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Institutional and structural challenges

The study finds that academic inclusion of students with disabilities (SWD) in higher education is hampered by systemic impediments such as institutional misalignment with government objectives and inconsistent implementation attempts. Similarly, structural, interdependence, and persistent gaps pose a challenge to higher education systems (Divjak & Ređep, 2015; Molla, 2018). In light of these issues, Papadakaki et al. (2022) emphasize the necessity of restructuring settings to accommodate students with disabilities. Insufficient financing, inconsistent approaches, limited awareness, and inadequate support services are all major barriers to the growth of inclusive education. For example, structural issues in educational organizations are mostly caused by misperceptions (Papadakaki et al., 2022), passive approaches (Piyarat et al., 2020), inadequate support and services (Tungaraza, 2010), and inadequate funds (Tugli, 2013). All of those factors contribute to the establishment of successful and inclusive educational systems.

Despite advocacy efforts, disability center coordinators face operational challenges due to insufficient resources, which limit their capacity to seek funding or conduct equitable programs. Institutions suffer from budget constraints, inadequate planning, and coordination issues, making critical academic concessions unfeasible. Similarly, crucial institutional adjustments are impossible due to a combination of factors such as inadequate coordination (Tirussew & Mesfin, 2021), not contextualized planning (Hunt, 2020), lack of finances (OECD, 2014), and limited resources (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2019). These barriers severely limit the adoption of inclusive approaches to instruction. The study emphasizes the importance of administratively prioritizing pedagogical services to provide meaningful academic experiences to SWD. To improve resource access, institutions must implement disability-focused agendas and support management initiatives to address systemic issues.

6.3.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Service provision and accessibility barrier

The research findings emphasize the importance of management inclusion in encouraging accessibility in higher education, but also demonstrate that institutions frequently lack the necessary facilities and specialised support to meet the academic demands of students with

disabilities (SWD). In the same way, Alnahdi (2014) and Awais and Ameen (2015) approves educational institutions do not offer enough assistance, necessary services, or a range of educational assignments to students with disabilities. To satisfy these needs, personalized educational approaches, accessible learning environments, and inclusive pedagogies are required (Ainscow, 2020b; Connally, 2020). However, systemic deficiencies in assistance are the result of fragmented service delivery and inefficient policy implementation, which impede fair access to education. ODR (2021) suggested that the need for increased understanding and sensitivity among educational managers and educators to properly connect with SWD. Instead, to foster an equitable education, Hunt (2021) recommends prioritizing five essential pillars such as inclusion, learning, participation, accountability, and respect for diversity in higher education. These ideas are critical for developing supportive and accessible academic environments that promote the achievement of SWDs.

6.3.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Diversity and cultural barriers

The weaknesses in functional structures are revealed by the lack of efforts of institutional managers to provide inclusive environments for students with disabilities, according to the findings. Conversely (Pretorius, 2020) says managers of educational institutions managers should promote an inclusive learning environment and foster empathy. This means that academic communities must develop and have favorable attitudes towards disability for institutions to create inclusive cultures and remove obstacles to overcome. By the same token; (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Makuve, 2024) in their study suggests educational institutions to foster inclusive cultures, and (Makuve, 2024) inform educational organizations for upholding equality to ensure all SWDs are valued.

Negative sociocultural views are also the finding that perpetuates stigma and exclusion contribute as the root cause of resistance to acknowledging SWDs as equal members. Similarly; (Olkin, 2022) in his study justify as disability is frequently associated with stigma, humiliation, and blame in the societies. Likewise, (Tan et al., 2020) in his study identify as exposing for complete social exclusion. However, educational institution managers are responsible for combating prejudices and promote empathy (Pretorius, 2020). The rationale for the prevalence of negative sociocultural views is that the absence of disability support centers complicates structural marginalization and leads to fractured institutional responses to the needs of students with disabilities. To provide fair

support and access to SWDs, the study highlights the necessity of systemic changes to institutional processes to bring them into compliance with inclusion laws.

6.3.5 Summary of the institutional approach used to address challenges

6.3.5.1 Sub-theme 1: Management support structure

In order to meet the requirements of students with disabilities (SWDs), the findings of the study strongly suggest that universities have and set up disability support centers. In the same manner, (Ashcroft, 2010; Tareke et al., 2024) emphasizes how universities can improve their management autonomy by setting up disability support centers to better serve the different needs of their student. To ensure that institutional practices comply with inclusive education regulations, these centers provide personalized interventions, promote equity, and strengthen student voice (Birhanu, 2020). Therefore, promoting inclusion in higher education requires effective management.

The study finds that universities prioritize inclusive policies and support networks for students with disabilities while also lobbying for improved institutional structures, equitable treatment, and resource distribution. These scholars likewise affirm that higher education institutions must guarantee equal opportunities for students with disabilities (Valle-Flórez et al., 2021). Curtis (2022) emphasizes that governments can promote quality education and mitigate social inequalities by advancing inclusive education. Similarly, Connally (2020) highlights that institutions must strive to support the academic and personal success of all students, regardless of their disability status. Universities aim to assist all students' academic and personal achievement, regardless of aptitude, by removing structural barriers and including accessibility measures.

6.3.5.2 Sub-theme 2: Student-driven policies and strategies

Research indicates that, despite ongoing disparities, initiatives are underway to improve accessibility, spearheaded by academic commissioners and university senators through governance reform. Effective reform requires robust political commitment and skilled policy implementation to attain significant results (Al-Ababneh & Alrhaimi, 2020; WBG, 2018). Universities are focusing on inclusive management development that is inclusive (Moriña, 2017), using established approaches to create environments where SWDs can participate in both academic and extracurricular activities (Schuelka, 2018). Institutions aim to separate deep-rooted barriers by

developing coherent strategies that align with operational policies (Kabuta, 2014), thereby fostering learning environments that are equitable and uphold the principles of inclusivity and accessibility.

6.4 Conclusions

All citizens must be sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities (SWD) and actively cooperate to achieve true inclusion in higher education. Rather than being the sole duty of particular individuals or departments, inclusion is a team effort in which everyone is important. Being sensitive means actively helping SWDs and acknowledging their special needs and rights. An inclusive atmosphere is created in the university setting when all participants' faculty, staff, and students alike adopt a sense of shared responsibility. This kind of culture encourages respect, empathy, and fair access to possibilities. Furthermore, in the 21st century, managers must be trained in executive competencies such as entrepreneurship, critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and creativity. To reduce attitudes towards SWD, academic and administrative professionals must participate in ongoing training programs. Therefore, it is only when inclusion is embraced and valued by the entire academic community that it can be effectively promoted. The conclusions presented below wrap up each theme independently.

6.4.1 HEMs' perceptions of students with disabilities in PUE

Management perspectives on disability inclusion in Ethiopian public universities indicate a very early level of progress. These institutions have moderate levels of perceived inclusivity, but staff awareness is low and misconceptions are still present. Such flaws hinder the effectiveness of inclusive education initiatives and generate mistrust among students with disabilities. As a result, the study emphasizes the importance of pragmatic initiatives to increase student participation and institutional responsiveness to SWD demands.

The study also demonstrates that academic achievement of SWD is dependent on successful service delivery, which is greatly hampered by insufficient managerial commitment and proactive engagement. Institutions primarily use standardized service models without specialised accommodations that are applied uniformly to disabled and non-disabled students. This strategy increases disappointment among SWDs. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the crucial relevance of promoting diversity and inclusion in educational institutions. Inclusion ensures equal access to

educational opportunities, while diversity recognizes the inherent importance of differences in identity, experience, and perspective. Proper application of these ideas is essential.

6.4.2 Policy to improve the inclusion of SWDs

Inclusiveness and inclusive education policies in higher education seek to promote fair access and reduce barriers. However, there is a continuous discrepancy between formal policy promises and their actual execution. Institutional management frequently fails to meet stated commitments, worsening the marginalization of students with disabilities and undercutting national educational equity requirements. Despite the adopted policy reforms, persistent structural constraints continue to prevent effective implementation.

Concurrent administrative issues inhibit progress, including insufficient stakeholder participation during policy creation, inconsistent policy implementation across institutions, and ineffective enforcement mechanisms. While institutions ostensibly follow national legislation and international treaties, low levels of constitutional compliance and standard alignment suggest systematic weaknesses in the delivery of SWD support. Common operational issues include implementation errors and unclear orders for expert staff members.

Strategically, inclusiveness and inclusive education frameworks based on national rules prioritize diversity and inclusion values. Implementing these notions requires a complete system approach. Such an approach is essential to generate the necessary cultural shift, improve institutional planning effectiveness, and integrate holistic thinking throughout the educational institution system.

6.4.3 Promoting factors of inclusive education

It was concluded that three crucial factors must be addressed for inclusive education to be implemented successfully: inadequate funding, weak support systems, and ineffective university procedural frameworks. The absence of career development programs, inadequate accessibility infrastructure, and a lack of disability resource centers are examples of institutional shortcomings that obstruct improvement. A basic requirement for fairness is the equitable distribution of resources between peers without disabilities and students with disabilities (SWD).

This study addresses the inherent limits of inclusive learning that result from poor quality and accessibility within higher education organizations. Transformative institutional change is required to ensure regulatory compliance and effective situational management. Additionally, policy changes that undermine fundamental inclusion in education principles worsen the current gap for SWD. Successful operationalization requires ongoing inter-departmental coordination among academic and administrative bodies. Although diversity management is associated with greater academic performance, ongoing problems limit the systematic implementation of integration. Likewise, the study identifies significant obstacles to increasing academic inclusion and professional growth for SWDs in higher education. It emphasizes the critical importance of academically qualified people, strong pedagogical structures, and specialised mentorship.

6.4.4 Barriers to promoting and implementing inclusive education

Regarding the findings, academic inclusion for students with disabilities (SWD) in Ethiopian higher education is hampered by systemic issues, particularly institutional misalignment of national-level objectives and inconsistent implementation attempts. These include issues such as insufficient funding, disparate methods, low stakeholder knowledge, and insufficient support services. Despite ongoing campaigning, disability support center coordinators have substantial operational constraints due to resource inadequacy, funding limits, and coordination weaknesses, which impede efficient service delivery.

The study shows by stressing the importance of managerial inclusion in promoting accessibility in educational institutions. Nonetheless, the results show a recurring failure in institutional management's attempts to establish cultures that are truly inclusive. This disparity is a reflection of a logical rejection of adopting inclusive policies in their entirety. Furthermore, by promoting exclusionary standards, deeply ingrained unfavorable sociocultural views significantly hinder advancement. In the end, these attitudes marginalize students with disabilities by boosting ongoing institutional resistance. Therefore, overcoming these cultural and managerial obstacles is crucial to achieving true inclusion.

In addition, the absence of specific disability support centers perpetuates institutional fragmentation and social marginalization. This widespread neglect emphasizes how important it is to completely redesign institutional frameworks and procedures. Such radical adjustments are

necessary to guarantee fair access and unbiased support systems for SWDs, thus bringing practice into line with policy aspirations.

6.4.5 Institutional approaches for overcoming inclusivity challenges

The study underscores the critical role of universities in establishing dedicated disability support centers to effectively serve students with disabilities (SWD). These centers are essential mechanisms for delivering customized interventions that address individual student needs, thus advancing equity and facilitating equitable access to educational opportunities. Additionally, disability support centers empower SWD by amplifying their voices within institutional decision-making processes, ensuring that their perspectives and lived experiences are meaningfully integrated.

Furthermore, the research emphasizes the imperative that universities prioritize the development and implementation of inclusive policies and robust support networks that cultivate an equitable academic environment. This requires active advocacy for improved institutional structures that promote fairness in resource allocation and equitable treatment for all students. By systematically removing structural barriers and embedding accessibility measures across all aspects of university operations, higher education institutions can guarantee that SWDs are given opportunities comparable to their peers. Finally, the study identifies the proactive engagement of university senates, academic commissions, and institutional management bodies as instrumental in advancing inclusion. These leadership entities are adopting deliberate strategic initiatives designed to increase the participation and academic success of SWD.

In conclusion, higher education in Ethiopia presents a paradox for students with disabilities: it may offer initial access, but sustaining progress within the system remains extremely challenging. While policy reforms have improved general access to higher education, students with special needs continue to face significant barriers. The absence of customized educational programs and adequate support services makes many unable to continue or complete their studies. As a result, these students are often excluded from opportunities for advanced education. This exclusion limits not only their academic and professional development, but also their full participation in social and economic life.

6.5 Recommendations

The continuing disparities in Ethiopia's higher education institution pose considerable challenges in creating equitable and inclusive learning environments. Addressing these issues is critical to increasing participation and achievement among all students, especially those of underrepresented groups. These inequities must be closed through focused efforts and institutional improvements. As a result, the following findings were reached on the roles of managers in enhancing inclusiveness in Ethiopian higher education institutions:

6.5.1 Recommendations for the minister of education

The substantial efforts of the Ministry of Education to create, approve and distribute policies, guidelines, and strategies to manage disability, inclusion, and diversity in higher education were recognized in the study. However, it is recommended that the MoE should

- Actively participates in regularly observing how these frameworks are being implemented among universities to improve their efficacy.
- Ensure that these policies are suitably modified and successfully implemented within the particular setting of each institution, the Ministry should offer frequent, context-specific feedback.
- Help improve educational outcomes and increase academic achievement of students with disabilities throughout the country by increasing oversight and providing specialised support.
- Formally create separate departments focused on disability and inclusion within its existing structure.
- Strengthening institutional accountability and promoting inclusive practices should be prioritized in the higher education sector.

6.5.2 Recommendations for higher education

Implementing inclusiveness of disability and inclusive education in higher education still faces several challenges that are not being practically addressed. Hence, for the challenge they face, universities should.

- Need to solidify and standardize their management systems in order to provide effective support for inclusive education programs.
- Align their guidelines and procedures with national guidelines formulated by the Ministry of Education to guarantee consistency and accountability.
- Creating custom-made guidelines and long-term plans to tackle specific obstacles and efficiently implement inclusive strategies.
- Need to improve institutional rights and liability to maintain inclusion of disability and guarantee fair participation.
- Establish dedicated units like disability centers to address disability and inclusion issues.
- Set up formal monitoring systems to meet to the diverse needs of students, especially those with disabilities.
- Establish comprehensive support networks to guarantee uniform and fair services for students with disabilities.
- Give top priority to recruiting, training, and retaining skilled professionals in areas such as inclusion pedagogies and diversity management.
- Implement customized educational methods that respond to varied learning styles, requirements, and abilities.

6.5.3 Recommendations for university managers

University managers arrange a variety of activities designed to ensure harmony in the services of students with disabilities. As a result of knowledge gaps, negative perceptions, and low-priority SWDs received from managers, SWDs face a significant challenge. Hence, to alleviate these gaps, university managers should.

- Fulfill managerial responsibilities by consistently applying the policies, guidelines, and procedures set by the ministry of education, the national government, and international laws in a transparent and accountable way.
- Develop easy-to-implement plans that foster inclusive environments and alleviate managerial hurdles.
- Develop and implement disability-center plans to ensure inclusive learning environments.

- Improve access to resources in order to facilitate full participation and academic achievement for pupils with disabilities.
- Conduct thorough evaluations and ongoing monitoring to detect discrepancies in services, while giving top priority to the rights and requirements of students with disabilities.
- Provide adequate resources and funding to support programs that promote sustainable, accessible, and efficient learning, and maintain support for students with disabilities.
- Enhance management protocols to pinpoint and resolve ongoing obstacles encountered by students with disabilities.

6.5.4 Recommendation for teachers

Teachers in real classrooms have direct interactions with students from diverse backgrounds. In this study, students with special needs reported their grievances to teachers regarding the support they received pedagogically. Consequently, the sole and most recommended course of action for the teacher should be the following:

- Integrate inclusive pedagogies as a fundamental aspect of their teaching methods to guarantee equal learning opportunities for all students.

6.5.5 Recommendations for further research

With an emphasis on students with disabilities, this study has investigated the role of higher education management in fostering inclusivity within Ethiopian public universities. Despite efforts to examine pertinent data, the results show that more research is necessary in this area. As a result, the following suggestions are made for further study:

- A detailed and methodical study of students with disabilities should be conducted, focusing primarily on their academic rights and experiences from placement to graduation in Ethiopian higher education institutions.
- More studies are required to measure the awareness, attitudes and readiness of administrative personnel to provide inclusive supports and services to students with disabilities.
- Intervention-based research should be formulated and carried out using data collected directly from students with disabilities to develop evidence-based remedial activities that improve inclusive practices in higher education.

6.6 Proposed Model for the Study

6.6.1.1 Introduction

Inclusive education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of social justice and equitable development. In Ethiopian higher education, inclusion remains a key issue, especially for students with disabilities. With policy commitments, institutional practices continue to fall short of accessibility and equitable expectations. The purpose of this research, which is entitled "The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Inclusiveness in Public University Education," is to develop a complete leadership-centered model for supporting inclusive higher education institutional settings.

The EPU Management Role in Improving Inclusiveness of Students with Disabilities Model developed by Andualem Mola incorporates structural, cultural, and managerial elements that together allow inclusive education to be implemented successfully. It offers Ethiopian public universities and comparable establishments in developing countries a practical framework to operationalize inclusion through policy consistency, leadership participation, and participatory management techniques.

6.6.1.2 Summary of the study findings

The study's conclusions identified five key areas that influence how inclusive higher education is for students with disabilities.

1. Perception and attitude of managers: Many higher education managers still show little awareness or commitment to disability inclusion, which frequently leads to welfare-based or passive strategies rather than rights-based ones.
2. Policy frameworks and gaps: Ethiopia's legal frameworks are in line with international agreements, but their execution is still lacking due to insufficient institutional accountability, fragmented policies, and a lack of oversight systems.
3. Factors promoting inclusion: Allocating resources for all students with disabilities, providing financial help for students who are blind, and maintaining ongoing support systems through dedicated leadership by officers of disability centers all contribute to effective inclusion.

4. Challenges hampering inclusion: Negative societal beliefs, inadequate infrastructure in institutions, lack of assistive technology for people with disabilities, and lack of professional development in disability sensitivity are examples of persistent challenges.
5. Institutional approaches: Some universities have shown better inclusion outcomes, which have implemented organized support centers, inclusion committees, and policy review procedures; however, sustainability is still a problem due to inadequate governance.

The above aggregated conclusions inspired the development of the Andualem Mola EPU management role to improving inclusiveness of the SWD model, which addresses inefficiencies in perception, policy, practice, and performance dimensions.

6.6.1.3 Andualem Mola EPU management role for improving inclusiveness of SWD model

6.6.1.3.1 Model overview

According to the suggested model, inclusive higher education is an interactive system in which institutional policy, management leadership, and cultural change come together to give students with disabilities equal access to learning opportunities and participation. It is organized around five interconnected fundamental principles:

1) Management Engagement and Leadership
2) Policy and Institutional Alignment
3) Inclusive Support Structures
4) Capacity Building and Resource Development
5) Monitoring, Evaluation, and Sustainability

With evidence-based treatments, participatory management, and systemic planning, each pillar functions dynamically to support inclusion.

The EPU management role for improving inclusiveness of the SWD model is based on five essential concepts that work together to promote inclusive higher education institutions. Managerial dedication and leadership are the foundation, highlighting the critical role of progressive and transparent management in promoting inclusion initiatives throughout universities. Legal and ethical compliance is strengthened when corporate practices align with

national and international frameworks for disability inclusion through policy and institutional alignment. Inclusive programs are the operational structures that allow students with disabilities to have equal educational and social advantages. To ensure inclusivity, capacity building and resource development prioritize personnel expertise, technological adaption, and infrastructural availability. Lastly, monitoring, evaluation, and sustainability ensure ongoing examination and improvement of inclusion procedures, resulting in long-term reform of institutions and responsibility.

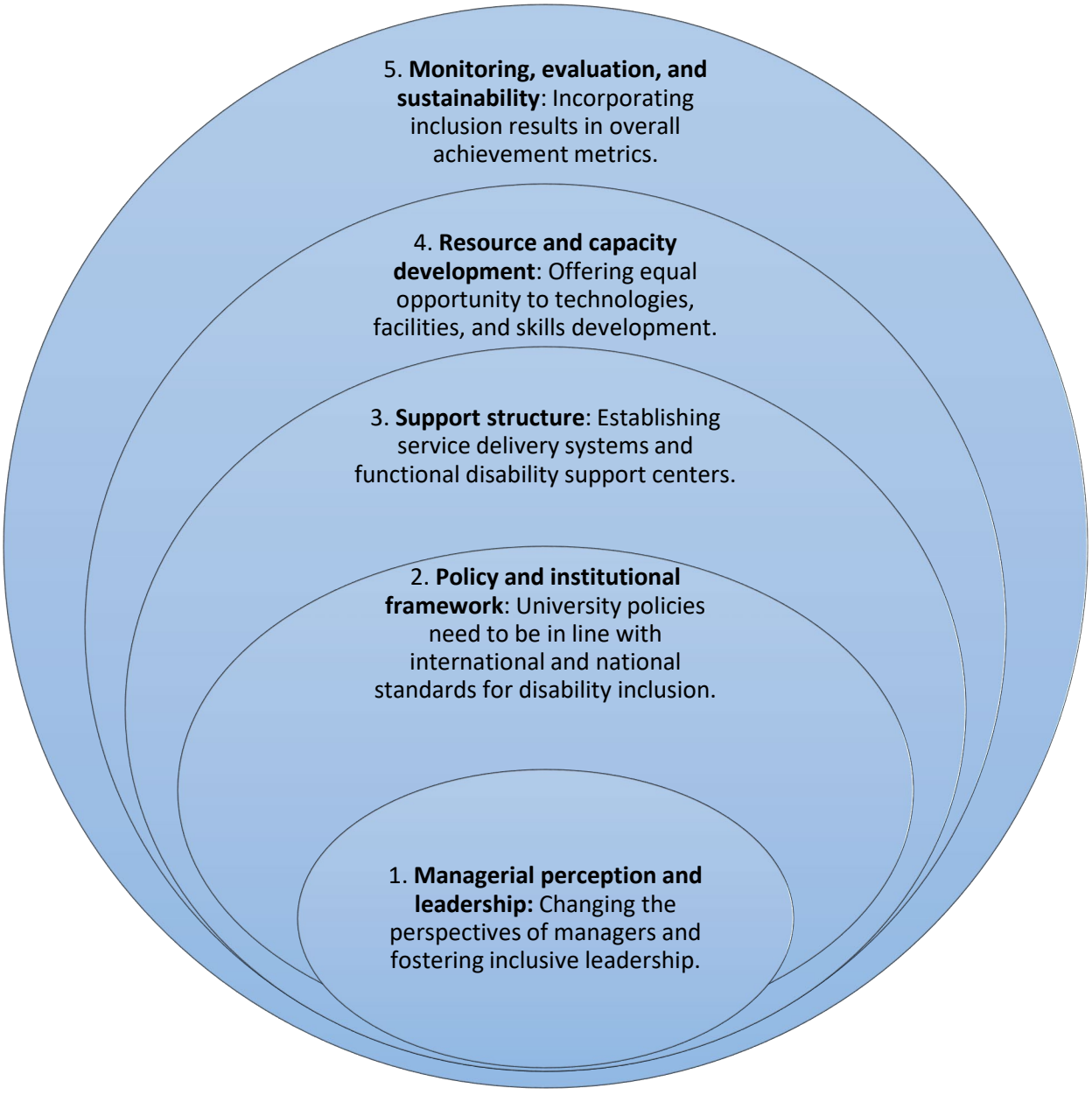
6.6.1.3.2 Conceptual framework of the model

The Andualem Mola model is built on an integrative conceptual framework that brings together five supportive theoretical viewpoints sociocultural theory, transformational leadership theory, human rights-based approach, inclusive education theory, systems theory, and contingency theory to provide a comprehensive foundation for fostering inclusiveness in higher educational institutions. Drawing on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1920s-1930s), the approach focuses how learning and inclusion develop from meaningful interactions with others and framed experiences. This demonstrates that inclusivity is more than a policy requirement; it is a communal and cultural norm ingrained in the institutional context. In addition, Burns' (1978) Transformational Leadership Theory emphasizes the critical role of visionary leadership in motivating commitment, encouraging reform in institutions, and enabling partners to view inclusion as a common moral and ethical duty.

Furthermore, the Human Rights-Based Approach, based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), views inclusiveness as a human intrinsic privilege and a statutory obligation, rather than a benevolent offering. The approach of inclusive education theory improves this perspective by claiming that equal engagement of students with various needs is a pedagogical and ethical requirement, necessitating responsive curricula, welcoming educational environments, and a culture of inclusion. Systems theory expands the model's outlook by reframing PUE institutions as complex systems with which leadership, policy, teaching practices, and support structures interact dynamically to create inclusive effects. Finally, contingency theory adds versatility to the paradigm, noting that effective inclusive initiatives must adapt to changing institutional circumstances, assets, and partner capacity. These theoretical foundations work together to

establish a cohesive framework that views inclusivity as a holistic, adaptive, and equitable approach guided by innovative leadership and perpetuated through cooperative, culturally responsive strategies.

The model is depicted as a five-layered, circle-shaped structure:



Source: Researchers' own source **conceptualization**

Figure 6.1: Andualem Mola EPU management role for improving inclusiveness of SWD model

6.6.1.4 Role of EPU managers in the model

Active participation of EPU managers is critical to the effectiveness of this model. Their roles consist of the following:

1) Strategic leadership

In order to improve disability services, strategic leadership requires mobilizing sufficient resources and relationships while incorporating inclusion objectives into the institution's mission and strategic plans. Sustainability, accountability, and a systemic commitment to inclusive education are guaranteed by the relationship between them.

2) Policy implementation and supervision

Ensuring complete adherence to national and international inclusive education frameworks, such as the UNCRPD, is necessary for both policy implementation and supervision. To ensure equity and accessibility, managers must thoroughly examine institutional policies. In higher education, this procedure increases inclusive governance and promotes responsibility.

3) Capacity development

To improve disability awareness, capacity building involves supporting ongoing training for academic and executive staff while also encouraging flexible curriculum and adaptive teaching strategies that meet the needs of a wide range of students.

4) Institutional coordination

In order to promote shared responsibility for inclusion, institutional development should improve cooperation between departments, student unions, and disability support centers. To ensure the active participation of all stakeholders, it must also encourage open and inclusive lines of communication. The institutional capacity for fair decision making and long-term inclusion is strengthened by these concerted efforts.

5) Monitoring and accountability

Measurable inclusion metrics including accessibility, participation, and achievements should be developed as part of monitoring and accountability. To assess success, regular institutional audits and feedback systems must be implemented. These procedures guarantee evidence-based choices and ongoing advances in inclusive approaches.

EPU managers serve as transformative change agents in higher education through their responsibilities in capacity building, institutional coordination, policy implementation and oversight, strategic leadership, monitoring, and accountability. By promoting an equitable and participatory culture, they close the gap between inclusive education theory and institutional practice. Their leadership ensures that institutional structures adapt to the unique needs of students with disabilities and that policies are successfully implemented. They encourage long-term educational transformation by incorporating inclusive ideas into management, planning, and assessment. In the end, their acts strengthen the dedication of universities to maintaining diversity as a fundamental institutional principle.

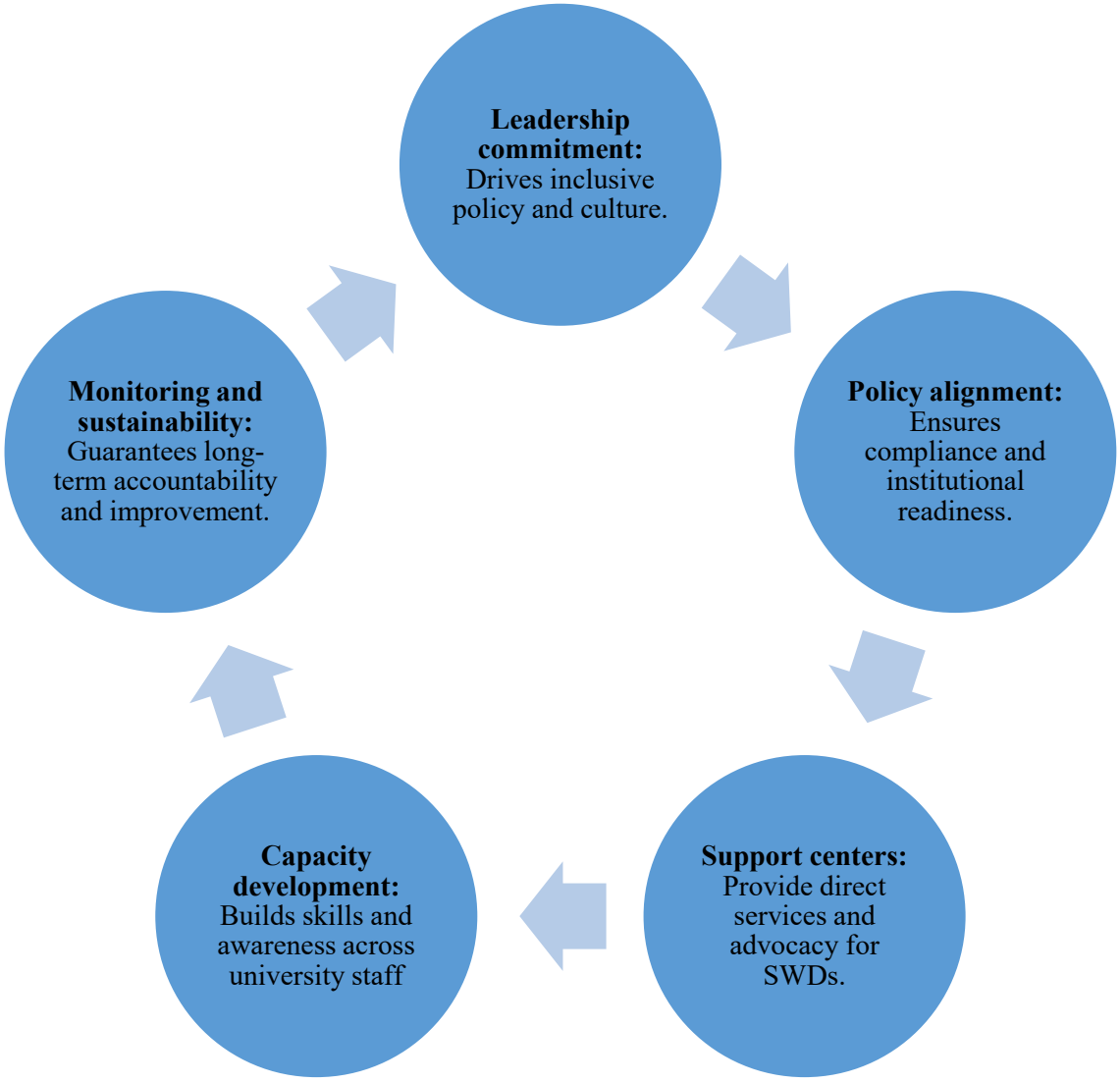
6.6.1.5 Beneficiaries of the model

Multiple stakeholders will gain from the Andualem Mola management role for the inclusiveness model:

- **S**tudents with disability (SWD): Obtain fair access to academic support, educational institution services, support resources, and enhanced social inclusion.
- University managers: Get organized advice on how to manage inclusiveness and match institutional procedures with policy.
- Academic staff: Gain access to resources that enhance instructional inclusion, professional support training, and awareness of SWD therapies.
- Policy makers: Get data-driven knowledge and insights to improve and synthesize frameworks and policies for inclusive education.
- Community and society: Develop a more accepting society that celebrates diversity and eliminates the negative perceptions associated with disabilities.

6.6.1.6 Summary of the model

In Ethiopian higher education, the Andualem Mola management role to improve the inclusiveness of the SWD model creates a comprehensive framework that closes the gap between policy and practice. The concept promotes a long-lasting foundation for inclusion by highlighting management leadership, policy coherence, and institutional capacity. The practical application of the model. as seen visually below the circle:



***Source: Researcher's own* conceptualization**

Figure 6.2: Andualem Mola *circle for the practical application of the model*

In the end, this model promotes a transformative management perspective that reinvents inclusion as a moral duty of higher education institutions, as well as a developmental objective.

6.7 Limitations of the Study

This study, which investigated the role of higher education management in creating inclusiveness in Ethiopian public universities, has limitations due to the small number of interview participants who were restricted by their professional responsibilities. Despite assurances of anonymity via pseudonyms, some participants were hesitant to provide data, which limited the generalizability of the findings in all Ethiopian higher education institutions. To address these issues, the researcher used strategic recruitment to increase participation and ethical protections to foster confidence.

Ten universities were included in this study, but it was extremely difficult to visit all in person due to the ongoing conflicts and general insecurity in Ethiopia. The researcher used different approaches to overcome these limitations and guarantee reliable data collection. Key participants were successfully engaged through telephone interviews and local assistants were hired to distribute and gather a large number of questionnaires. These flexible methods lessened the restrictions imposed by the national context and made it easier to gather useful data.

The shortcomings of the study underscore the need for additional research to delve deeper into the subject. These limitations provide insightful guidance for the next research to fill the gaps and support the conclusions.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A: Questionnaire for Department Heads and Teachers

Dear Respondent,

I sincerely appreciate you agreeing to take part in this research study. I'm Andualem Mola, a registered PhD candidate working under Professor N. Ndou at the University of South Africa. This study explores the part managers' play in encouraging the inclusion of students with disabilities in Ethiopian public universities. Completing structured questionnaires is required for participation, and it should take you 30 to 40 minutes. Understanding managerial viewpoints and practices about disability inclusion is crucial, and your ideas will help to promote fair learning settings.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and there are no consequences if you decide not to answer some questions or withdraw at any point. Your anonymity is guaranteed by secure data handling procedures, and all responses will be handled with the utmost confidentiality. As far as I'm aware, there are no risks to one's health, mental well-being, legal status, or social standing, and there will not be any payment made. Your participation gives you the chance to discuss institutional procedures and have an impact on future decisions and policies pertaining to the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education.

The results of this research will provide significant insights on perceptions of managers, the application of policies, and the variables influencing the provision of services and assistance for students with disabilities. The Ministry of Education, policymakers, managers of higher education, and faculty members will all receive the results in order to use them to guide future planning. The UNISA PhD dissertation archive, scientific journals, and even public forums will all publicize the findings. Please complete the questionnaire completely, marking your response with a "√" for alternatives and filling in the blanks with concise words for open-ended questions.

Thank you very much for your contribution.

Yours sincerely,

Andualem Mola, PhD Candidate

Department of Educational Planning & Management

Jimma University

3 Background Information

1. Name of University _____
2. Name of College/Institute _____

3. Name of Department _____
4. Position: Teacher ☐ Department head ☐
5. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
6. Highest level of education
   BA/B.Sc. MD ☐ MA/M.Sc. ☐ PhD ☐ Others (specify) _____
7. Academic rank
   Assistant Lecturer ☐ Lecturer ☐ MD specialty ☐
   Assistant Professor ☐ Associate Professor ☐ Professor ☐
   Others (please specify) _____
8. Area of specialization _____

Instruction: for each of the following statement, put "✓" on the five-point scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) that best describes how much you agree on the statement.

4 Managers perception about students with disabilities

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Managers view disability as a natural part of human diversity.					
2	Managers treat students with disabilities equitably compared to non-disabled students.					
3	Managers consistently provide a welcoming environment for students with disabilities from admission onwards.					
4	Students with disabilities perceive that managers hold negative views about their capabilities.					
5	Managers believe students with disabilities can perform tasks comparable to their peers.					
6	Managers provide adequate instructional support for students with disabilities.					
7	Managers ensure that services for students with disabilities are adequately provided.					
8	Managers believe students with disabilities are capable of performing their academic and institutional duties.					
9	Managers believe families should take primary responsibility for providing services to students with disabilities.					
10	Managers view disability as a potential challenge to institutional processes and policies.					

1. What misunderstandings do managers have regarding inclusion, diversity, and disability?

_____

_____

_____

_____

5 Inclusive education policies, directives, guidelines and strategies executing

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Policymakers and educators acknowledge that students with disabilities have the right to education.					

2.	Your university provides special consideration to students with disabilities in accordance with national constitutional guidelines.					
3	Your university has clear policies, directives, and strategies to enhance diversity and inclusion for students with disabilities.					
4	Your university has a clear and inclusive admissions policy for students with disabilities.					
5	Your university provides public awareness initiatives to inform the community about policies for supporting students with disabilities.					
6	Your university offers scholarships and financial aid to students with disabilities in accordance with national guidelines.					
7	Your university has a guidance and counselling team that supports students with disabilities in accordance with national guidelines.					
8	Your university enforces anti-bullying measures to protect students with disabilities from harm.					

1. List the consequences for students with disabilities if the university lacks policies, guidelines, directives, or strategies.

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Describe the negative effects of delaying the implementation of policies, guidelines, directives, and strategies for students with disabilities.

_____

_____

_____

_____

6 Favorable factors for the implementation of inclusive education

No	**Statement**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	Officials and service providers at the university are willing and able to assist students with disabilities.					
2	The university provides sufficient resources to support the academic needs of students with disabilities.					
3	The entire university community (faculty, staff, and students) provides comprehensive support to students with disabilities.					
4	Students with disabilities have adequate access to financial and material resources to meet their academic and personal needs.					
5	Instructors' teaching strategies actively promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in academic activities.					

6	Classes for students with disabilities are organized to accommodate the specific needs of different disabilities.					
7	The university provides accessible dormitory accommodations for students with disabilities.					
8	The university provides accessible library resources and accommodations tailored to the needs of students with disabilities.					
9	Students with disabilities have the right to access the services they require for their academic success.					

1. Describe your concerns about positive factors for successful inclusion of students with disabilities at your university.

_____

_____

_____

_____

7 Factors hindering the implementation of inclusive education

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	There is a poor understanding and implementation of policies, rules, and strategies to support students with disabilities.					
2	There is a lack of knowledge or training on how to effectively work with students with disabilities.					
3	There is inadequate management support for students with disabilities.					
4	Negative attitudes toward disabilities exist among students and staff.					
5	There is resistance to adopting inclusive education practices.					
6	The methods for engaging students with disabilities in inclusive education are not well understood.					
7	Teachers lack support for fostering positive attitudes toward inclusive education.					
8	Academic and administrative staff refuse to collaborate with students with disabilities.					
9	There is insufficient investment in training educators to work with students with disabilities.					
10	The university lacks adequate resources and infrastructure to support students with disabilities.					

1. Explain the factors that make accommodating students with disabilities and special needs difficult.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

8 Ways to overcome challenges

No	Resource	Response scale				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	All staff should collaborate to create a practical, shared plan focused on supporting students with disabilities.					
2	Decisions should be made that reduce isolation and promote positive attitudes towards disability.					
3	An inclusive environment should be fostered to help students with disabilities develop educational and social skills.					
4	Provide specialised professional assistance to promote inclusion for students with disabilities.					
5	Alternative communication methods (e.g., sign language, pictures, and gestures) should be used to support students with disabilities.					
6	Collaboration between home (parents) and academic institutions is essential to support students with disabilities.					
7	Students with disabilities should feel included in both the academic and social community.					
8	Ensure easy access to relevant disability-related information and resources on campus.					
9	Teachers should be trained to support students with disabilities and build their confidence in their studies.					

1. Describe your concerns regarding the most effective way for managers to handle the challenges that students with disabilities encounter.

_____

_____

_____

_____

9 Facilitated services

Instructions: The following is a list of statements regarding available/unavailable services for students with disabilities. Please read each item below and mark the box (✓) to indicate your agreement.

No	Statements	Response		
		Available	**N/Available**	**I am not know**
1	Dedicated center for students with disabilities			
2	Caretaker services for students with disabilities			
3	Accessible classrooms and dormitories			
4	Separate and accessible washrooms for students with disabilities			
5	Assistive equipment for learning and mobility			
6	Lounge or recreational space for students with disabilities			

7	Accessible library services			
8	Counselling and mental health support			
9	Emergency/medical support for students with disabilities			
10	Disability advocacy and rehabilitation services			

Thank You!

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Students

Dear Respondent,

I sincerely appreciate you agreeing to take part in this research study. I'm Andualem Mola, a registered PhD candidate working under Professor N. Ndou at the University of South Africa. This study explores the part managers' play in encouraging the inclusion of students with disabilities in Ethiopian public universities. Completing structured questionnaires is required for participation, and it should take you 30 to 40 minutes. Understanding managerial viewpoints and practices about disability inclusion is crucial, and your ideas will help to promote fair learning settings.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and there are no consequences if you decide not to answer some questions or withdraw at any point. Your anonymity is guaranteed by secure data handling procedures, and all responses will be handled with the utmost confidentiality. As far as I'm aware, there are no risks to one's health, mental well-being, legal status, or social standing, and there will not be any payment made. Your participation gives you the chance to discuss institutional procedures and have an impact on future decisions and policies pertaining to the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education.

The results of this research will provide significant insights on perceptions of managers, the application of policies, and the variables influencing the provision of services and assistance for students with disabilities. The Ministry of Education, policymakers, managers of higher education, and faculty members will all receive the results in order to use them to guide future planning. The UNISA PhD dissertation archive, scientific journals, and even public forums will all publicize the findings. Please complete the questionnaire completely, marking your response with a "√" for alternatives and filling in the blanks with concise words for open-ended questions.

Thank you very much for your contribution.

Yours sincerely,

Andualem Mola, PhD Candidate

Department of Educational Planning & Management

Jimma University

I. Background Information

1. University _____
2. Sex: Male ☐ Female ☐
3. Age: 18 years ☐ 19 years ☐ 20 years ☐ 21 years and above ☐
4. Type of Disabilities
    a) Visual Impairment ☐
    b) Hearing Impairment ☐
    c) Intellectual Impairment ☐
    d) Physical Impairments ☐
    e) Others ☐
5. Study year:
    a) First year ☐
    b) Second year ☐
    c) Third year ☐
    d) Fourth year and above ☐
6. Level and programme of study:
    a) Non-Degree Programme ☐
    b) Bachelor Degree ☐
    c) Master's Degree ☐
    d) PhD ☐

Instruction: for each of the following statement, put "✓" on the five-point scale (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Uncertain, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree) that best describes how much you agree on the statement.

II. Managers perception about students with disabilities

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Managers view disability as a natural part of human diversity.					
2	Managers treat students with disabilities equitably compared to non-disabled students.					
3	Managers consistently provide a welcoming environment for students with disabilities from admission onwards.					
4	Students with disabilities perceive that managers hold negative views about their capabilities.					
5	Managers believe students with disabilities can perform tasks comparable to their peers.					
6	Managers provide adequate instructional support for students with disabilities.					
7	Managers ensure that services for students with disabilities are adequately provided.					
8	Managers believe students with disabilities are capable of performing their academic and institutional duties.					
9	Managers believe families should take primary responsibility for providing services to students with disabilities.					

10	Managers view disability as a potential challenge to institutional processes and policies.					

III. Inclusive education policies, directives, guidelines and strategies executing

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Policymakers and educators acknowledge that students with disabilities have the right to education.					
2.	Your university provides special consideration to students with disabilities in accordance with national constitutional guidelines.					
3	Your university has clear policies, directives, and strategies to enhance diversity and inclusion for students with disabilities.					
4	Your university has a clear and inclusive admissions policy for students with disabilities.					
5	Your university provides public awareness initiatives to inform the community about policies for supporting students with disabilities.					
6	Your university offers scholarships and financial aid to students with disabilities in accordance with national guidelines.					
7	Your university has a guidance and counselling team that supports students with disabilities in accordance with national guidelines.					
8	Your university enforces anti-bullying measures to protect students with disabilities from harm.					

IV. Favorable factors for the implementation of inclusive education

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Officials and service providers at the university are willing and able to assist students with disabilities.					
2	The university provides sufficient resources to support the academic needs of students with disabilities.					
3	The entire university community (faculty, staff, and students) provides comprehensive support to students with disabilities.					
4	Students with disabilities have adequate access to financial and material resources to meet their academic and personal needs.					
5	Instructors' teaching strategies actively promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in academic activities.					
6	Classes for students with disabilities are organized to accommodate the specific needs of different disabilities.					
7	The university provides accessible dormitory accommodations for students with disabilities.					

8	The university provides accessible library resources and accommodations tailored to the needs of students with disabilities.					
9	Students with disabilities have the right to access the services they require for their academic success.					

V. Factors hindering the implementation of inclusive education

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	There is a poor understanding and implementation of policies, rules, and strategies to support students with disabilities.					
2	There is a lack of knowledge or training on how to effectively work with students with disabilities.					
3	There is inadequate management support for students with disabilities.					
4	Negative attitudes toward disabilities exist among students and staff.					
5	There is resistance to adopting inclusive education practices.					
6	The methods for engaging students with disabilities in inclusive education are not well understood.					
7	Teachers lack support for fostering positive attitudes toward inclusive education.					
8	Academic and administrative staff refuse to collaborate with students with disabilities.					
9	There is insufficient investment in training educators to work with students with disabilities.					
10	The university lacks adequate resources and infrastructure to support students with disabilities.					

VI. Ways to overcome challenges

No	Resource	Response scale				
		1	2	3	4	5
1	All staff should collaborate to create a practical, shared plan focused on supporting students with disabilities.					
2	Decisions should be made that reduce isolation and promote positive attitudes towards disability.					
3	An inclusive environment should be fostered to help students with disabilities develop educational and social skills.					
4	Provide specialised professional assistance to promote inclusion for students with disabilities.					
5	Alternative communication methods (e.g., sign language, pictures, and gestures) should be used to support students with disabilities.					
6	Collaboration between home (parents) and academic institutions is essential to support students with disabilities.					

7	Students with disabilities should feel included in both the academic and social community.					
8	Ensure easy access to relevant disability-related information and resources on campus.					
9	Teachers should be trained to support students with disabilities and build their confidence in their studies.					

VII. Facilitated services

Instructions: The following is a list of statements regarding available/unavailable services for students with disabilities. Please read each item below and mark the box (✓) to indicate your agreement.

No	**Statements**	**Response**		
		Available	**N/Available**	**I am not know**
1	Dedicated center for students with disabilities			
2	Caretaker services for students with disabilities			
3	Accessible classrooms and dormitories			
4	Separate and accessible washrooms for students with disabilities			
5	Assistive equipment for learning and mobility			
6	Lounge or recreational space for students with disabilities			
7	Accessible library services			
8	Counselling and mental health support			
9	Emergency/medical support for students with disabilities			
10	Disability advocacy and rehabilitation services			

Thank You!

Appendix C: Interview Guide for University Presidents

Dear Respondent,

The main purpose of this interview guide is to get the necessary information for the research titled ***"The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia"***. Your response to the items of this interview will remain confidential, and the results will be used to encourage institutional managers to take action, promote an inclusive campus environment (inclusiveness) for all academic communities, especially for students with disabilities. I hope that you will be able to take the time, and comprehensively complete this interview.

Thank you very much for your contribution.

Yours sincerely,

Andualem Mola, PhD Candidate

I. Background Information

1. University _____
2. Position

   President ☐ V/President ☐
3. Service year as a president, v/president, _____
4. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
5. Educational qualification

   BA/B.Sc. MD ☐ MA/M.Sc. ☐ PhD ☐
6. Others (specify) _____
7. Academic rank

   Assistant Lecturer ☐ Lecturer ☐ MD specialty ☐

   Assistant Professor ☐ Associate Professor ☐ Professor ☐
8. Others (please specify) _____
9. Area of specialization _____

II. Interview questionnaire

1. How do you view your university's level of commitment to equal rights for students with disabilities and the effectiveness of its existing support systems?

2. How do you assess the adequacy of support services for SWDs in academic and administrative contexts, and how does your commitment to inclusive education align with national guidelines?
3. What is your perception of diversity and inclusivity policies for SWDs, and what obstacles does your university encounter in putting them into practice successfully?
4. In what ways do SWDs face challenges in academic settings, and how does your institution interact with national policies and initiatives to tackle these issues.
5. What role do legal and rights-based policies play in shaping your university's support services for SWDs and fostering an inclusive academic atmosphere?
6. To what extent are your university's facilities and support services accessible to SWDs, and what initiatives are in place to promote awareness and train personnel on disability inclusive practices?
7. To what extent do your institution's management practices effectively enforce disability rights policies, and how do they demonstrate the university's dedication to diversity and inclusion?
8. What programs and resources does your university offer to help SWDs succeed academically and professionally?
9. What difficulties does your university encounter in putting IE strategies into action, especially with regards to structural obstacles and resource distribution for SWDs?
10. How do systemic obstacles, including insufficient support and restricted inclusive teaching methods, impact the capacity of SWDs to fully participate in higher education?
11. How do cultural attitudes, barriers related to diversity, and irregularities within institutions challenges the inclusion of SWDs at your university?
12. How do you evaluate the efficiency of university support systems, encompassing governance and disability services, in fostering inclusivity for SWDs?
13. How has your experience been affected by the adoption of sensible, student-centered policies and procedures to assist students with disabilities?

Thank you,

Appendix D: Interview Guide for Collage Deans

Dear Respondent,

The main purpose of this interview guide is to get the necessary information for the research titled ***"The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia"***. Your response to the items of this interview will remain confidential, and the results will be used to encourage institutional managers to take action, promote an inclusive campus environment (inclusiveness) for all academic communities, especially for students with disabilities. I hope that you will be able to take the time, and comprehensively complete this interview.

Thank you very much for your contribution.

Yours sincerely,

Andualem Mola, PhD Candidate

I. Background Information

1. University _____
2. College _____
3. Position

   Dean ☐ V/Dean ☐ Coordinators ☐
4. Service year as a dean, v/dean or coordinator _____
5. Gender: Male ☐ Female ☐
6. Educational qualification

   BA/B.Sc. MD ☐ MA/M.Sc. ☐ PhD ☐
7. Others (specify) _____
8. Academic rank

   Assistant Lecturer ☐ Lecturer ☐ MD specialty ☐

   Assistant Professor ☐ Associate Professor ☐ Professor ☐

   Others (please specify) _____
9. Area of specialization _____

II. Interview questionnaire

1. How do you view your university's level of commitment to equal rights for students with disabilities and the effectiveness of its existing support systems?

2. How do you assess the adequacy of support services for SWDs in academic and administrative contexts, and how does your commitment to inclusive education align with national guidelines?
3. What is your perception of diversity and inclusivity policies for SWDs, and what obstacles does your university encounter in putting them into practice successfully?
4. In what ways do SWDs face challenges in academic settings, and how does your institution interact with national policies and initiatives to tackle these issues.
5. What role do legal and rights-based policies play in shaping your university's support services for SWDs and fostering an inclusive academic atmosphere?
6. To what extent are your university's facilities and support services accessible to SWDs, and what initiatives are in place to promote awareness and train personnel on disability inclusive practices?
7. To what extent do your institution's management practices effectively enforce disability rights policies, and how do they demonstrate the university's dedication to diversity and inclusion?
8. What programs and resources does your university offer to help SWDs succeed academically and professionally?
9. What difficulties does your university encounter in putting IE strategies into action, especially with regards to structural obstacles and resource distribution for SWDs?
10. How do systemic obstacles, including insufficient support and restricted inclusive teaching methods, impact the capacity of SWDs to fully participate in higher education?
11. How do cultural attitudes, barriers related to diversity, and irregularities within institutions challenges the inclusion of SWDs at your university?
12. How do you evaluate the efficiency of university support systems, encompassing governance and disability services, in fostering inclusivity for SWDs?
13. How has your experience been affected by the adoption of sensible, student-centered policies and procedures to assist students with disabilities?

Thank you,

Appendix E: Checklist of document analysis

Items used in check list for document analysis	Yes	No
The role of higher education leaders with regard to the inclusion of students with disabilities and diversity o Planning role o Organizing role o Decision making role o Evaluation role		
The concern to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education is set forth in o Policies, o Directives, o Guidelines and o Strategies		

Appendix F: Notification of ethical clearance by UNISA CED Ethical Review Committee

UNISA university of south africa

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2023/04/12

Ref: **2023/04/12/17185270/23/AM**
Name: Mr AM Maru
Student No.:17185270

Dear Mr AM Maru

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2023/04/12 to 2028/04/12

Researcher(s): Name: Mr AM Maru
E-mail address: 17185270@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: +251963423135

Supervisor(s): Name: Dr N Ndou
E-mail address: ndoun@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0124294468

Title of research:

The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia

Qualification: PhD Educational Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2023/04/12 to 2028/04/12.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2023/04/12 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2028/04/12.** Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2023/04/12/17185270/23/AM** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,

Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za

Prof Mpine Makoe
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN
qakisme@unisa.ac.za

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Appendix G: Request for permission to conduct a research at PUE

Request for permission to conduct research at Public University of Ethiopia

Title of the research: - The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia

Date: - January 8, 2023

Name: - Professor Berhanu Nugussie
Organization: - Jimma University College of Education and Behavioural Science Research and Postgraduate Study office Coordinator

Contact of person: - (Phone number +251920848795, email: - brexnigussie83@yahoo.com)
Dear Professor Berhanu Nugussie,

I, Andualem Mola doing research under supervision of Dr N Ndou, a lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education towards a PHD at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia.

The aim of the study is to explore the role of Higher Educational Institution managers in enhancing students' inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia. Specifically, the study will address the following objectives:

- To explore the perception of Higher Education Managers about students with disabilities in public universities in Ethiopia.
- To explore how policies, strategies, directives and guidelines on inclusive education enhance the inclusion of students with disabilities in Public Universities of Ethiopia.
- To find out factors that promotes the effective implementation of inclusive education in Public Universities of Ethiopia.
- To identify factors that hampers the actual promotion as well as the implementation of inclusive education in Public Universities of Ethiopia.
- To assess how Higher Education Managers address challenges students with disabilities face in Public Universities of Ethiopia.

Your organization has been selected because to take part in providing data for the study. The study will entail your respective organizations' participation to provide genuine data on roles of higher education managers in enhancing students' inclusiveness. The benefits of this study are notifying roles of university managers' to accommodate students with disabilities, and informing inclusive education policy-makers to incorporate roles expected from higher education managers in the policy, rules and guidelines at large. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. For all participants I will give the feedback by using newsletters, websites, e-mails, public forums, articles, mailed letters or postcards and social media.

Yours sincerely

Andualem Mola Maru

PHD Student at UNISA

Request for permission to conduct research at Public University of Ethiopia

Title of the research: - The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia

Date: - January 10, 2023

Name: - Dr. Tadese Habtamu
Organization: - Jimma University Acadamic Vice President

Contact of person: - (Phone number +251911962721, email: - habtamu_tadese@yahoo.com)
Dear Dr. Tadese Habtamu,

I, Andualem Mola doing research under supervision of Dr N Ndou, a lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education towards a PHD at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia.

The aim of the study is to explore the role of Higher Educational Institution managers in enhancing students' inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia. Specifically, the study will address the following objectives:

- To explore the perception of Higher Education Managers about students with disabilities in public universities in Ethiopia.
- To explore how policies, strategies, directives and guidelines on inclusive education enhance the inclusion of students with disabilities in Public Universities of Ethiopia.
- To find out factors that promotes the effective implementation of inclusive education in Public Universities of Ethiopia.
- To identify factors that hampers the actual promotion as well as the implementation of inclusive education in Public Universities of Ethiopia.
- To assess how Higher Education Managers address challenges students with disabilities face in Public Universities of Ethiopia.

Your organization has been selected because to take part in providing data for the study. The study will entail your respective organizations' participation to provide genuine data on roles of higher education managers in enhancing students' inclusiveness. The benefits of this study are notifying roles of university managers' to accommodate students with disabilities, and informing inclusive education policy-makers to incorporate roles expected from higher education managers in the policy, rules and guidelines at large. There will be no reimbursement or any incentives for participation in the research. For all participants I will give the feedback by using newsletters, websites, e-mails, public forums, articles, mailed letters or postcards and social media.

Yours sincerely

Andualem Mola Maru

PHD Student at UNISA

Appendix H: Notification of ethical clearance by JU CEBS RPPC

JIMMA UNIVERSITY
ጅማ ዩኒቨርሲቲ

ቁጥር Ref.No CEBS/RP-1366/23
ቀን Date 10/01/2023

To: Andualem Mola Maru (Ph.D Scholar at UNISA)

Principal Investigator

Subject: Notification of Your Study's Ethical Clearance Result

After critically evaluated your Ph.D dissertation proposal entitled "**The role of higher education managers in enhancing students' inclusiveness in public universities of Ethiopia**" the Ethical Review Board of the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in Jimma University has ethically cleared the proposal in January 2023, and gave approval for data collection.

Best regards

Berhanu Nigussie (PhD)
Research & Postgraduate Program Coordinator of The College of Education & Behavioral Sciences

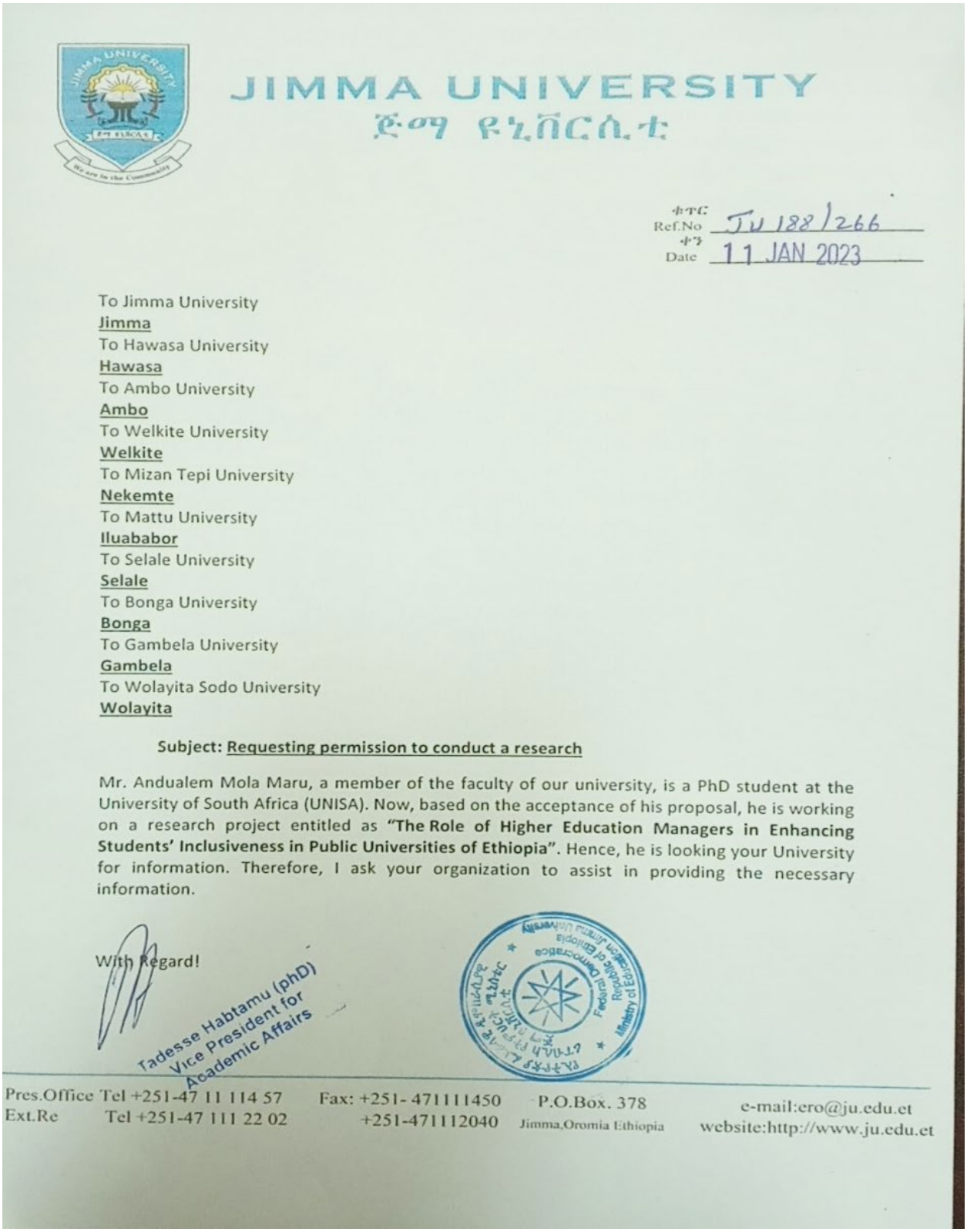
Jimma University College of Education & Behavioral Sciences Research & Postgraduate Program Coordinating Office

CC

Dr. N Ndou (Promoter)
University of South Africa

Pres.Office Tel +251-47 11 114 57 Fax: +251- 471111450 P.O.Box. 378 e-mail:ero@ju.edu.et
Ext.Re Tel +251-47 111 22 02 +251-471112040 Jimma,Oromia Ethiopia website:http://www.ju.edu.et

Appendix I: Requesting permission to conduct a research (data collection)



JIMMA UNIVERSITY
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ቁጥር Ref.No JU 188/266
ቀን Date 11 JAN 2023

To Jimma University
Jimma
To Hawasa University
Hawasa
To Ambo University
Ambo
To Welkite University
Welkite
To Mizan Tepi University
Nekemte
To Mattu University
Iluababor
To Selale University
Selale
To Bonga University
Bonga
To Gambela University
Gambela
To Wolayita Sodo University
Wolayita

Subject: Requesting permission to conduct a research

Mr. Andualem Mola Maru, a member of the faculty of our university, is a PhD student at the University of South Africa (UNISA). Now, based on the acceptance of his proposal, he is working on a research project entitled as **"The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia"**. Hence, he is looking your University for information. Therefore, I ask your organization to assist in providing the necessary information.

With Regard!

Tadesse Habtamu (phD)
Vice President for
Academic Affairs

Pres.Office Tel +251-47 11 114 57 Fax: +251- 471111450 P.O.Box. 378 e-mail:ero@ju.edu.et
Ext.Re Tel +251-47 111 22 02 +251-471112040 Jimma,Oromia Ethiopia website:http://www.ju.edu.et

JIMMA UNIVERSITY
ጅማ ዩኒቨርሲቲ

ቁጥር Ref.No JU122/265
ቀን Date 11 JAN 2023

To Whom It May Concern

Subject: Requesting permission to conduct a research

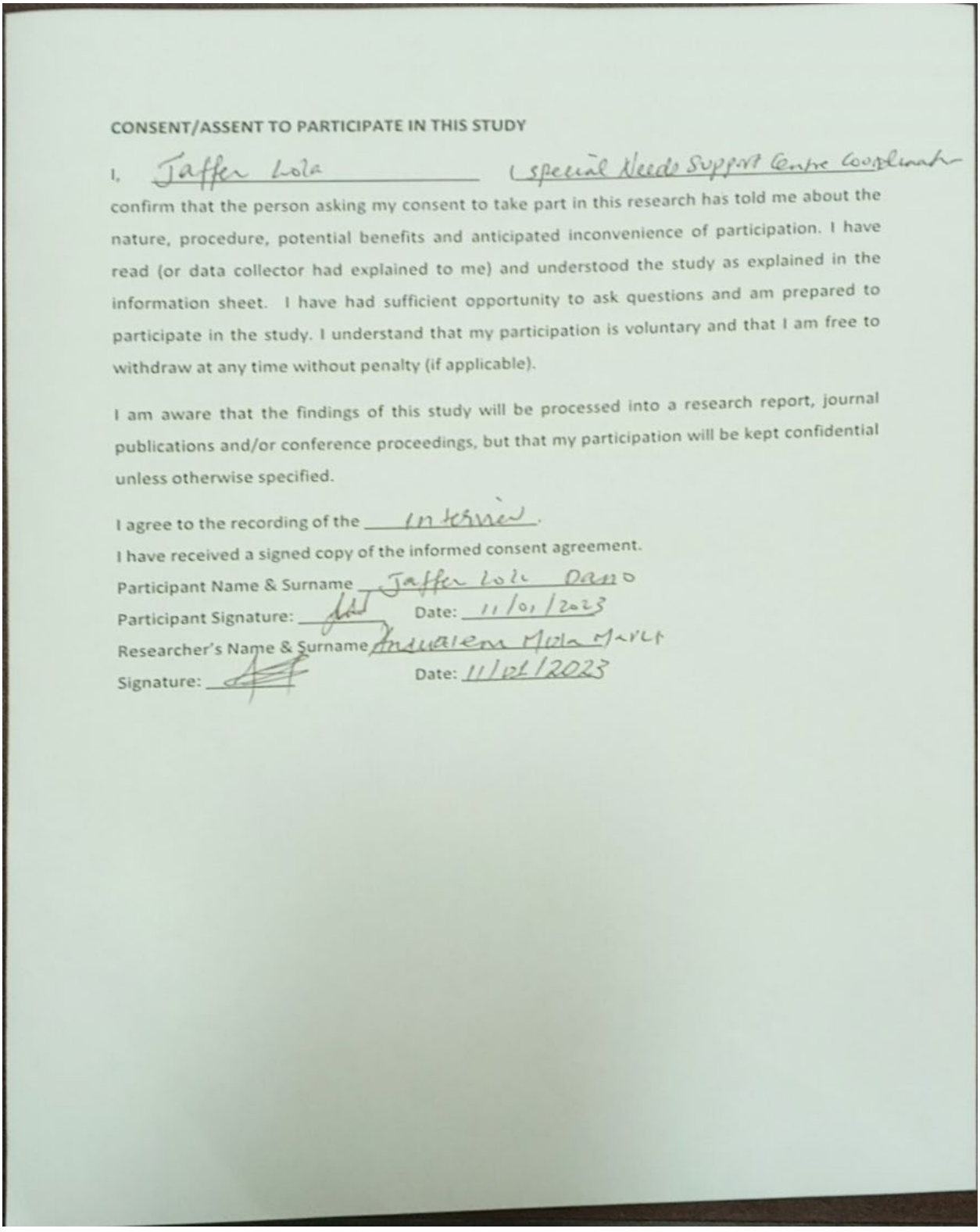
Mr. Andualem Mola Maru academic staff of our university is a PHD student in the University of South Africa (UNISA). By now based on the acceptance of his proposal he is working a research project entitled as **"The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia"**. Hence, he is looking your University for information. Therefore, I request your institution to help him in providing the necessary information.

With Regard!

Tadesse Habtamu (phD)
Vice President for
Academic Affairs

Pres.Office Tel +251-47 11 114 57 Fax: +251-471111450 P.O.Box. 378 e-mail:ero@ju.edu.et
Ext.Re Tel +251-47 111 22 02 +251-471112040 Jimma,Oromia Ethiopia website:http://www.ju.edu.et

Appendix J: Consent/Assent of Participants



CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, Jaffer Lola (Special Needs Support Centre Coordinator

confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read (or data collector had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname: Jaffer Lola Dano

Participant Signature: [signature] Date: 11/01/2023

Researcher's Name & Surname: Innocent Mola Mark

Signature: [signature] Date: 11/01/2023

CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, Kasahun Aseta (Student Social work [illegible])

confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation. I have read (or data collector had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the Questionnaire

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname Kasahun Aseta Lolesse

Participant Signature: [illegible] Date: 12/01/2023

Researcher's Name & Surname [illegible]

Signature: [illegible] Date: 12/01/2023

Appendix K: Participant information sheet

Date: February 9, 20023

Title: The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Andualem Mola and I am doing research under the supervision of Dr N Ndou a lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education towards a PhD Degree in Educational Management at the University of South Africa. We have funding from University of South Africa for conducting a PHD research. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study aims to collect key information focusing on the role of higher education administrators in improving the inclusion of students with disabilities. Because disability is now a cross-cutting issue that every manager in every organization needs to grapple with. Therefore, higher education managers' have a role to play in mainstreaming disability issues. However, the exclusion of persons with disabilities from university curricula is one such limitation that perpetuates stigma and discrimination against persons with disabilities (Wudneh, 2022). This may have led to the inability of managers' at all levels of education, including higher education, to adequately address the challenges faced by students with disabilities. Therefore, the aim of this study is to encourage institutional managers to take action, based on the results, to promote an inclusive campus environment (inclusiveness) for all academic communities, especially for students with disabilities.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because, as a member of the organization, you are the most important person who knows about the issue. Also, observe and listen to complaints and grievances from students with disabilities, as they are not treated in the same way as non-disabled students in university and classrooms.

I obtained your contact details from the university record office list/university registrar students record system/University student service. The numbers of participants for providing data are 3

University Presidents, and 10 Deans (5 collage deans and 5 inclusive education program center coordinators), 50 Department Heads, 100 Teachers, and 150 Students with Disabilities.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves 3 university presidents and 10 deans (5 collage deans and 5 inclusive education program center coordinators) for interviews and 50 Department Heads, 100 Teachers, and 150 Students with Disabilities for questionnaires. Mixture of the two (structured and open-ended) interview types and both close-ended and open-ended questions will arrange for data collection. Interview and questionnaires are structured into two parts. The first part covers personal information such as sex, age, education level, position, and field of specialization and the second part comprises questions related to higher educational managers' role in enhancing students' inclusiveness. Time allocates for interview is two hour and questionnaires one hour per individual.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent or assent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Participating in this study is very advantageous in contributing parts expected from you in alleviating the mistreatment and exclusion happened on students with disability in the university. In addition to this the outcome of this study used as an input for managements' to pay a due consideration in role execution and serve for as feedback to the policy makers about what will be focused in improvement when policy, rules and guidelines are passed and ratified.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

There are not any risks you face due to your participation in this research. If incidental problems are occurring in the process of data collection safety scripts tools will be used by data collectors to formally assess a respondent's distress and take appropriate action to settle emotional distress and risks.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research or your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

If relevant, identify who will have access to the data and how these individuals will maintain confidentiality by signing a confidentiality agreement. Please note that confidentiality agreements should be submitted to the Research Ethics Review Committee for consideration. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Create a sentence to inform participants that their anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. Also indicate how privacy will be protected in any publication of the information (e.g. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report).

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet of Jimma University College of Education and Behavioral Science Department of Educational Planning Office number 29 for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After five years papers used for data collection (questionnaires, interview sheet and checklists) will be burned and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There are not any incentives/rewards given for the participants in this study. The study result by itself will important to improve managers' in role fulfilling in inclusion of students' with disability in their organization.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of Unisa and Jimma University College of Education and Behavioral Science Review Board. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Mr. Andualem Mola Maru on +251963423135 or email moladego@gmail.com or 17185274@mylife.unisa.ac.za. The findings are accessible for after June 2024.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Dr N Ndou; email ndoun@unisa.ac.za, internal phone number 0124294468.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

Signature: 

Researcher Name: Andualem Mola Maru

Appendix L: Universities center for disability




SYL
There is no greater disability in society, than the inability to see a person as more.
"Leadership and Participation of persons with Disabilities toward an Inclusive, Accessible and Sustainable Post COVID-19 World"

Appendix M: Similarity report

Similarity Report

PAPER NAME
The Role of Higher Education Managers in Improving Student Inclusion in PUE.docx

AUTHOR
ANDUALEM MOLA MARU

WORD COUNT
89703 Words

CHARACTER COUNT
555791 Characters

PAGE COUNT
304 Pages

FILE SIZE
9.8MB

SUBMISSION DATE
Nov 17, 2025 11:49 PM PST

REPORT DATE
Nov 17, 2025 11:59 PM PST

18% Overall Similarity

The combined total of all matches, including overlapping sources, for each database.

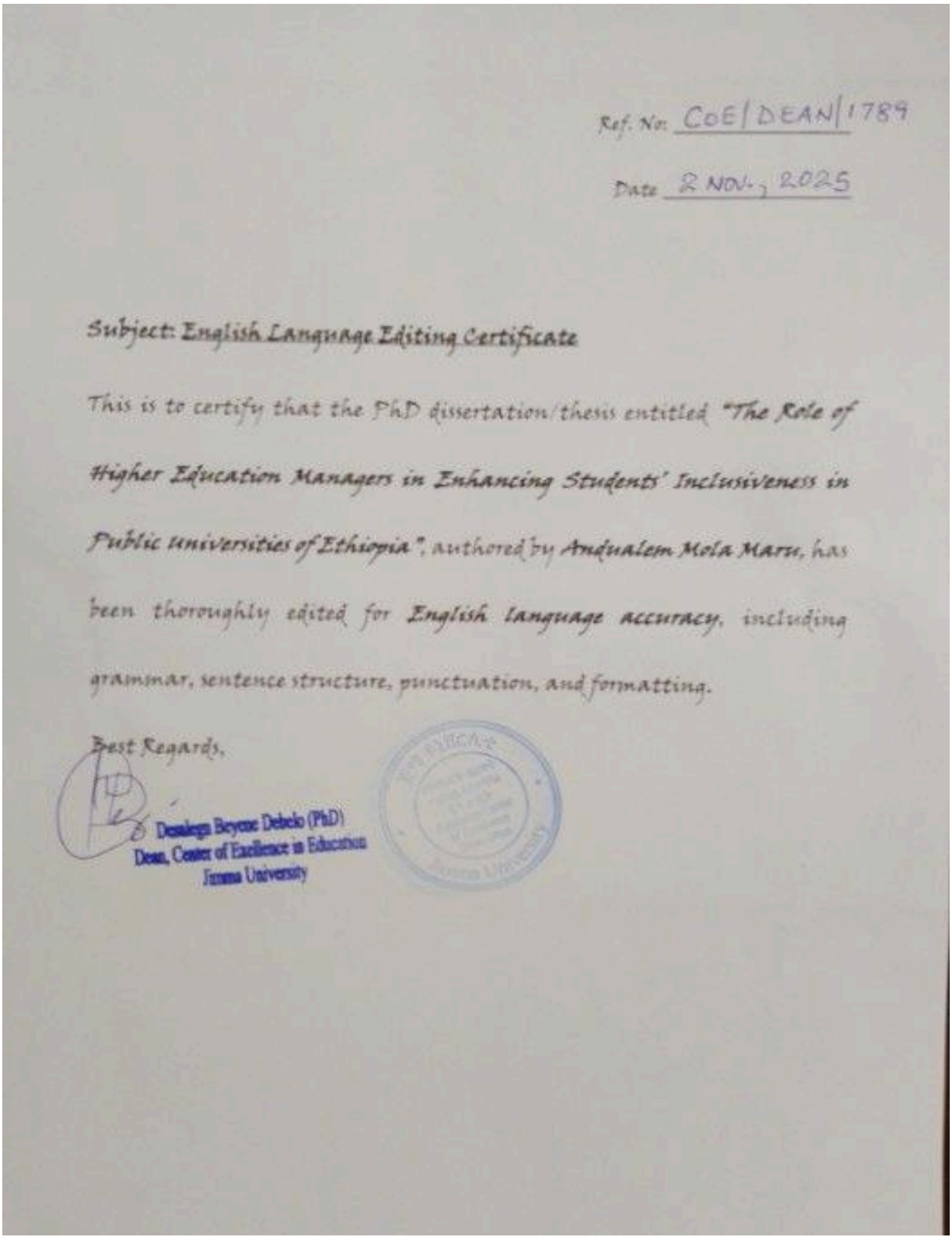
- 8% Internet database
- 16% Publications database
- Crossref database
- Crossref Posted Content database
- 9% Submitted Works database

Excluded from Similarity Report

- Manually excluded sources

Summary

Appendix N: English language editing certificate



Ref. No: COE/DEAN/1789

Date 2 NOV, 2025

Subject: English Language Editing Certificate

This is to certify that the PhD dissertation/thesis entitled "The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public universities of Ethiopia", authored by Andualem Mola Maru, has been thoroughly edited for English language accuracy, including grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and formatting.

Best Regards,

Desalegn Beyene Debelo (PhD)
Dean, Center of Excellence in Education
Jimma University

Appendix O: Academic editing and formatting certificate

Prof. Berhanu Nigussie's Consultancy Firm
(Dhaabbata Gorsaa, Leenjii fi Qorannoo)

Prof. Berhanu Nigussie's Consultancy Firm
የፕሮፌሰር ብርሃኑ ንጉሴ አማካሪ ድርጅት
(በአማካሪነት፣ በስልጠና እና በምርምር ዙሪያ)

Ref. No: BNCF/ATR-255/25

Date:27/11/2025

Subject: Academic Editing and Formatting Certificate

This is to certify that the PhD dissertation/thesis entitled **"The Role of Higher Education Managers in Enhancing Students' Inclusiveness in Public Universities of Ethiopia,"** authored by **Andualem Mola Maru**, has been thoroughly edited for **academic writing quality, technical coherence, and reference formatting.**

The editing process was carried out to ensure that all sections of the dissertation meet the required standards of academic clarity, scholarly presentation, and professional communication.

Best regards,

Dr.Birhaanuu Nigusee (PhD)
ዶ/ር ብርሃኑ ንጉሴ (PhD)
Dr.Berhanu Nigussie (PhD)
Consultancy For Social Affairs

Tajaajila Gorsa Saaylinsii Hawwaasummaa
Dr.Berhanu Nigussie Waajjira

Teessoo Dhaabbata Daldalaa/የንግድ ድርጅቱ አድራሻ/Consultancy Firm's Address: Magaalaa Jimmaa/ጂማ ከተማ/Jimma Town፣ Hermaataa Markaatoo/ሄርማታ መርካቶ/Hermata Markato

Lakk. Bilbilaa/ስልክ/Phone: +251920848795፤ Imeelii/ኢሜይል/Email: berhanu.nigussie18@gmail.com