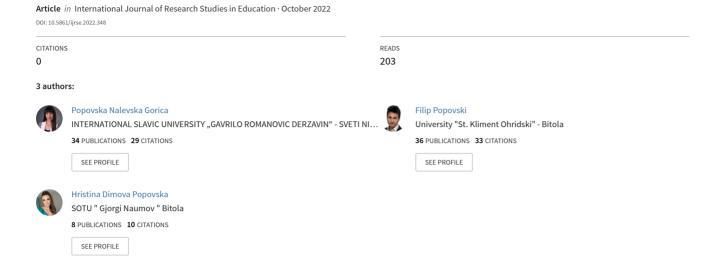# Higher education for students with disabilities in the Republic of Macedonia: Challenges and perspectives

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Higher education for students with disabilities in the Republic of Macedonia: Challenges and perspectives

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Abstract

One of the priorities of the European Union in the field of higher education is to build an inclusive and connected system of higher education. Inclusion in higher education means greater involvement of underrepresented groups and groups with special needs in the higher education process. The approach that the higher education process should be only elitist and exclusive is slowly being abandoned, and it is gradually shifting to a democratic and inclusive one. This study aims to investigate the opportunities and challenges for the inclusion of students with disability in higher education in North Macedonia by examining the attitudes of students with disability and the academic staff. Our findings identified that the lack of adapted study programs and didactic materials, professional development of academic staff to improve the quality of higher education for students with disabilities prevents academic staff from adequately facilitating teaching and student learning. The findings of this study highlight the role of student supports in improving institutional response to the needs of students with disabilities. Some of the responsibility lies with the students (and pre-admission preparation), but faculty and staff play a strong role in supporting student development and growth in self-advocacy as well.

Keywords: students with disabilities, inclusion, higher education, challenges, perspectives

Higher education for students with disabilities in the Republic of Macedonia: Challenges and perspectives

1. Introduction

A key principle for achieving inclusion is changing and adapting the social community so that it can support all its members regardless of diversity. An inclusive society is one that supports, helps and facilitates the inclusion in social flows of all members, including members with different disabilities. The tendency of most countries in the world is to develop policies to promote inclusion as an important process in democratic societies, through which equal opportunity is given to everyone and maximum flexibility in meeting the specific and social needs of the individual. Considering that inclusion is a developmental and dynamic process, the development level of inclusion in different countries takes place at a different pace.

Inclusion in education represents a process of mutual respect for the diversity of each student and his needs, where the student is in the center of attention, and the educational system copes with the challenges faced by all students. The flexibility of the education system is also reflected in the methods and materials used to give students the most efficient access to the regular curriculum. The essence of inclusive education is not only upbringing and education of children and youth with disabilities. The key elements of inclusive teaching, in the center of which are all children and young people, are: enabling more ways of learning; encouraging cooperative learning; creating purposeful teaching opportunities; developing attractive and flexible learning environments; rethinking assessment strategies and changing the role of teachers. "Inclusion is the process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners by increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities. It involves changes and excontent, approaches, structures and strategies, with a shared vision that it includes all children from the appropriate age and with the conviction that the regular education system is responsible for the education of all children". (UNESCO, 1994). In a broader sense, educational inclusion is a complete educational concept, a permanent and complex process, a permanent and comprehensive approach, a specific educational philosophy and a unique educational policy, i.e. adaptation of all conditions, the learning environment, expected results, tasks, teaching forms, methods and everything necessary for the student to progress in learning, behavior and the development of all the potentials of his personality... starting from the individual to the entire social community, everything has to be in the spirit of inclusion to fully succeed.

Inclusive education as an integral component of the overall education system that provides adequate education for all, recognizes and respects different needs and abilities including different learning strategies. The flexibility of the system is reflected in the methods and materials used to provide children with disabilities the most effective access to regular curricula. Inclusive education should constantly undergo changes and adapt to the needs of students and students with disabilities. However, there are still many challenges to inclusive education, not only in our country, but also within Europe. In the countries, there are many similarities but also differences in the political arrangement and practices that are applied towards the implementation of inclusive education. Changes are necessary, and they imply the implementation of legal frameworks that will not be ambiguous, the implementation of appropriate practices and the preparation of studies that will complement the quantum of knowledge, practices and competencies.

Education, without a doubt, is one of the basic postulates, a pillar of every society, without exception. The foundations of an inclusive society arise from and are an analogy to the building of inclusive education, because it is an indisputable fact that education produces students who tomorrow will become citizens of the state, bearers of overall social trends, changes and values. The general intentions of the institutions in our country are to direct national policies towards creating an inclusive society based on the principle of equal rights for all, according to which every person has equal rights and opportunities, that is, respect for individual differences.

The social and democratic challenges faced by countries not only in the European Union, but everywhere in the world, show that higher education has an important role in solving those challenges. It is for this reason that the European Union recognizes the importance of having quality higher education, and with the previous support in the field of higher education through financial aid and cooperation policy, it shows significant success. One of the priorities of the European Union in the field of higher education is the building of an inclusive and connected system of higher education. Inclusion in higher education means greater involvement of underrepresented groups and groups with special needs in the higher education process. The approach that the higher education process should only be elitist and exclusive is slowly being abandoned, and it is gradually turning towards democratic and inclusive. That is why it is important that higher education institutions redefine their missions, goals and visions and integrate democratic and inclusive principles into them.

Inclusion in the process of higher education means the inclusion of all participants in the process of higher education, whether it is students with disabilities, marginalized groups of students, special categories, or gifted and talented students. This means much more than just financial support to those students, although it is also necessary for students who come from low-income families. The idea of inclusion means offering everyone equal and fair opportunities to learn and progress, providing time, space, tools and knowledge through learning and teaching. This approach to education requires an individual approach to each student, and the student is seen as a person who deserves attention, help, understanding in order to achieve success further. The success of inclusive education means accepting, understanding and following student diversity and particularities, and this includes multiple aspects, such as physical, cognitive, academic, social and emotional aspects. The main idea in this process is for all students to feel equal, with the same opportunities, to feel welcome, regardless of where they come from, with what opportunities and under what conditions. This means that in practice, inclusive education should be deeply rooted in the curriculum and not just a specific intervention to solve problems.

The problem of equal opportunities in the context of higher education is observed within the broader topic of the social dimension in education, which is defined in the basic documents of the Bologna Process. The social dimension of higher education is an institutional measure that contributes to and encourages equal opportunities for enrolling in studies, during the duration and at the end of studies, with a special emphasis on students from underrepresented groups, which include students with disabilities. The social dimension of higher education implies that higher education institutions must play an important role in reducing social inequalities by encouraging greater inclusion of students from vulnerable social groups and by removing obstacles to their enrollment and completion. The basic documents of the Bologna process encourage and highlight the idea of equal opportunities for everyone to access higher education based on their abilities (Farnell & Kovač, 2010).

The Republic of Macedonia is a signatory to important international and strategic documents on which inclusive education is based:

➢ 	- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10, 1948)

➢ 	- Convention on the Rights of the Child (ratified by the Republic of Macedonia in 1993)

➢ 	- Salamanca Communiqué (1994)

➢ 	- World Forum on Education for All and Framework for Action (Dakar, 2000)

➢ 	- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ratified by the Republic of Macedonia in December 2011)

With the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the country is obliged to respect the individual and collective rights of citizens with disabilities and to create full conditions for their realization both at the national and local level. According to the Convention basic characteristics of inclusive education are:

➢ "Whole systems" approach: Ministries of education must ensure that all resources are invested in promoting inclusive education and in introducing and embedding the necessary changes in the institutional culture, policies and practices;

➢ "complete educational environment": the dedicated educational leadership institutions is essential for the introduction and inculcation of culture, the policies and practices needed to achieve inclusive education for all levels and in all areas, including teaching and classroom relationships, council meetings, teacher supervision, counseling and medical care, excursions, budget allocations, every interaction with the parents of students with and without disabilities and, where applicable, in the local community or general public;

➢ "Whole person" approach: the learning ability of every person, and high expectations are established for all students, including students with disabilities. Inclusive education offers flexible curricula programs and methods for teaching and learning adapted to different abilities, conditions and learning styles. This approach involves providing support, appropriate adjustment and early intervention in order for all students to meet it its potential. The focus when planning teaching activities is on abilities and aspirations of students, not content. The purpose of the approach "whole person" is to end segregation in educational environments by doing so which will ensure inclusive learning in accessible teaching environments with appropriate support. The education system must offer a personalized opportunity for education, rather than expecting students to fit into the system;

➢ "Supported teachers": all teachers and other staff receive the education and training they need to pass the basic values and abilities to adapt to inclusive teaching environments, which include teachers with disabilities. An inclusive culture provides an accessible and a supportive environment that encourages work through collaboration, interaction and problem solving.

➢ "Recognition of partnerships": associations of teachers, students and student associations and federations, organizations of persons with disabilities, school boards, parent-teacher associations and others functional school support groups, formal and informal, are encourage them to gain a greater understanding and knowledge of disability. The involvement to parents or guardians and to the community is considered a resource and asset. The relationship between the learning environment and the wider community must be recognized as path to inclusive societies.

While this legislative basis guarantees the right to higher education for all, the question concerns the practical implementation of these documents concerning accommodating students with special needs in Macedonian's higher education. In fact, there are numerous problems, even barriers of various kinds, which are also reported in research at universities around the world (Brandt, 2011; Bunbury, 2018; Fuller et al., 2004; Hanafin et al., 2007; Moriña, 2017; Mutanga & Walker, 2015; Ramaahlo et al., 2018), and North Macedonia, in particular.

2. Relevant research regarding the higher education of students with disabilities

Relevant research shows that students with disabilities are underrepresented in higher education (Macleod & Cebula, 2009). However, the number of students with disabilities is constantly increasing in universities. Students with disabilities continue to be a growing demographic on college and university campuses (Sanford et al., 2011). According to Hurst and Smerdon (2000), 63% of all high school students with disabilities enroll in higher education institutions. Greater numbers of students with disabilities have learning disabilities, ADHD, and mental health disorders (Raue et al., 2011). A large number of students with disabilities face significant obstacles that negatively reflect on their experiences in higher education. In academic institutions, there are no resources that will make higher education more accessible for students with different disabilities (physical and sensory impairment), nor are sufficient financial resources allocated for physical adaptation of the facilities intended for theoretical and practical teaching, and there is no special fund. for assistive technology and other adapted

equipment that would increase efficiency in the educational process. The architectural inaccessibility of higher education institutions, the lack of psychosocial support, negative social attitudes and social isolation, as well as the lack of financial resources affect the success and inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. Lombardi and Murray (2011), point out that female faculty staff demonstrate greater disability knowledge, willingness to accept and support students with disabilities. The results of other research indicate that staff who have had contact with students with disabilities have more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities (Bourke et al., 2000). University staff who had more frequent contact with students with disabilities showed greater knowledge about disabilities. (Lombardi & Murray, 2011). Some studies indicate that university staff do not have a solid understanding of legislative institutional policy for the inclusion of students with disabilities (Abu-Hamour, 2013; Katsiyannis et al., 2009; Murray et al., 2008).

Moriña (2017) argues that although constant awareness for inclusion in higher education might have eliminated the immediate physical barriers, higher education institutions have not been able to address problems related to lack of inclusive curricula, formal teaching, learning, and assessment approaches, preventing a full involvement of students with special needs. Additional studies focused on the relevance of implementing inclusive curriculum to change attitudes to cultivate sustainable inclusion in higher education (Bunbury, 2018).

According to Majoko (2018), around 10% of the students with disabilities have enrolled in higher education. The inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education has been facilitated by regulatory policy documents, inclusive physical and social environments, innovative technologies, inclusive program design and delivery, and a shared belief among students disabilities regarding the positive influence of higher education in their future employment and well-being. In addition, Hadjikakou and Hartas (2008), have shown that effective service delivery for students with disabilities hinges on accurate information on their needs, sustainability and access to resources and expertise, the existence of an inclusive ethic, a receiving culture of higher education and, also, institutions willingness to anticipate the needs of students, and engage responsibly in inclusive pedagogy. Hence, there are various aspects that higher education institutions should consider to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Amid various responsibilities of higher education, diversity and inclusion have been placed at the forefront of higher education reform discussions (Moriña, 2017). While studies confirm that the number of students with special needs in higher education has increased (Majoko, 2018), students with special needs experience various barriers to higher education that are as diverse as physical, difficult access to facilities, poor support or lack of facilitation services within the university, lack of funding for additional support, difficulties or other barriers related to rigid curriculum, inappropriate teaching and assessment methods, etc. Hence, the implementation of inclusion principles and the practical involvement of students with special needs in higher education remains a persistent challenge at the global, national, and institutional level (Moriña, 2017).

The provision of vertical mobility in education in the Republic of North Macedonia in recent years has only slightly changed the image of continuing higher education for young people with disabilities. Insufficiently motivating secondary education, as well as insufficient support further contributes to the fact that higher education is still not a challenge for this group of young people. Those who decide to be part of the higher education process face a series of problems. Inclusive higher education must be part of the commitment to inclusive education in general.

The establishment of a National Register of Persons with Disabilities is particularly important for the process of greater inclusion of persons with disabilities. In our country, there is no reliable and systematic way to collect data on persons with disabilities, that is, there is no register of persons with disabilities or the number of pupils/students with disabilities.

For the needs and preparation of this scientific paper, we made an analysis of documentation available at the two largest universities in the Republic of North Macedonia the University "St. Cyril and Methodius" - Skopje and the University "St. Kliment Ohridski" - Bitola, which refers to the number of active students with disabilities

in undergraduate studies in the academic year 2020/2021 and graduate students in the last five years 2016-2021.

In the academic year 2020/2021, a total of 35 registered students with disabilities study at the faculties of both universities, while the total number of graduated students in 2016/2021 reports a total of 25 students with disabilities

3. Methodology of the research

Goal of the research - The main goal of this study was to investigate the opportunities and challenges for the inclusion of students with disability in higher education in North Macedonia. The main goal of the research was realized through the following tasks:

1. Examination the attitudes of students with disability about the infrastructural accessibility of faculties and the adaptation of learning and teaching.

2. Examination the perception of the academic staff's own competence in working with students with disabilities.

3.2 Methods and techniques of research

The research was conducted with a descriptive - analytical method that is adequate and in accordance with the nature and character of the set goals of the research. The analytical method analyzed the views and opinions of the respondents covered in the sample of the research. The research was carried out using a structured interview with students with disabilities and questionnaire for academic staff's. Questionnaires contained a combination of closed and open type question and Likert Scales.

3.3 Sample of research

The sample of the research consists of students with disabilities and academic staff's from different higher education institutions in in the Republic of North Macedonia. Due to the

small number of students enrolled in higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia, the selection of the sample of students with disabilities was made according to the number of registered students in the database of the faculties.The sample of academic staff's included the faculties where students with disabilities are enrolled and was randomly selected. The sample of the research was consisted of 15 students with disabilities and 44 academic staff's.

3.4 Data processing

The data were processed quantitatively and qualitatively using the EXCEL and STATISTICS computer programs which were grouped according to the number of matching in certain categories and then placed in tables. The data from questionnaire were quantitatively processedwere calculated with frequencies for which a percentage was calculated. The data obtained from the interview were qualitatively processed using a narrative style and verbal description of the researched goals.

3.5 Limitations of the study

The findings of this study must be understood within the context of several limitations. Our volunteer sample was recruited from two large, public universities, and our response rate was modest; however, it was within the expected range for people within this age demographic highlighted as difficult to recruit. The establishment of a National Register of Persons with Disabilities is particularly important for the process of greater inclusion of persons with disabilities. In our country, there is no reliable and systematic way to collect data on persons with disabilities, that is, there is no register of persons with disabilities or the number of pupils/students with disabilities.

The perceptions of the respondents in this sample may not reflect those of college

students with disabilities in general, particularly in light of the low racial and ethnic diversity in our sample.

The obtained results do not fully reflect the quality of the inclusion in the higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia and should not be generalized in other country. Inclusion is a process by which educational institutions, national and local education authorities and others develop cultures, policies and practices to include students and it is necessary a team approach in detecting and resolving problems in the regular educational institutions.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Analysis of the results of the interview with students with disabilities

The interview was conducted with 15 students with different types of disabilities in order to examine the attitudes of students with disability about opportunities and challenges for the inclusion, infrastructural accessibility of faculties and the adaptation of learning and teaching.

Infrastructure accessibility

The results confirmed that the infrastructure of the faculties is its weak point when it comes to students with disabilities, especially students with physical and visual disabilities. There is a consensus among the respondents that the faculties do not meet the requirements for inclusive infrastructure (criteria) determined by the standards. We quote some of the responses of students with disabilities who need infrastructural accessibility.

A student with a physical disability: "The elevator at the faculty only goes to the 1st

floor, not to the other floors, students with disabilities do not have access to the dean's office, the professors' offices; the faculty does not have an accessible toilet for students with disabilities."

Visually impaired student: "Architectural barriers at the entrance to the university that caused me to have an accident, inaccessibility in the faculty itself, I had to always ask for someone to help me to the office of each professor and to the lecture halls."

A student with a physical disability: "I had no architectural access to the exam rooms (no elevators) and sometimes it was a problem for me to get to the exams on time."

Visually impaired student: "First of all, the architectural barriers should be removed, internal access for all as well as appropriate learning aids."

Adaptation of learning and teaching

The results give the impression that the inclusion of students with special needs is only treated as a formality. Most of the respondents answered that a lot more needs to be done in terms of higher education for students with disabilities if we want to have quality inclusive education.

A student with autistic spectrum disorders, dyslexia and dyscalculia: "We don't have any "I" from inclusiveness. The curriculum should be individually adopted, something similar to IEP (Individual Educational Plan) in primary education."

A visually impaired student: "Compared to other faculties in the country, average level of inclusiveness. But the level of inclusiveness of higher education in ours state is 0% compared to what it should be. I would not compare with the developed ones countries why there is a greater or lesser lack everywhere."

Some of the students expressed positive attitudes. A visually impaired student: "Well, on the one hand, it's good that there is no discrimination at both faculties where I study, and in

general all employees from professors and all the others who actually perform their duties try to help all students, regardless of whether they are disabled or not, to help us as much as possible." A student with a physical disability: "The study is great, except for the architectural accessibility in the faculty."

To the question "How much professors provide additional help during learning?", attitudes of students with disability are divided.

Student with Down syndrome: "There is not enough help."

Student with a physical disability: "Very little, only in certain urgent situations."

Student with visual impairment: "It depends on who and how. There are professors who constantly and in every time are available to all students, but there are also professors who are not up-to-date at all contactable."

Student with visually impaired: "Most often they were people in the true sense of that word and they from they gave themselves and are giving their maximum, but without special depth. General students with disabilities are seen from the perspective of charity, rather than from the human right to education, so their attitude, actions and everything else is based on the principle of mercy."

A student with Down syndrome: "Appropriate assistive technology, academic staff training, full digitization, textbooks in electronic form."

A student with visual impairment: "Combined approaches to taking the exams should be used according to the specific needs of the student: oral, written with assistance or electronically through assistive technology.”

The results, thus, show that there is a variation between different experiences and tailored teaching and learning is ad hoc and inconsistent, depending on individual staff efforts and of course knowledge of the specific needs of the student.

4.2 Analysis of the results of the the questionnaire with the academic staff

We have a total of 45 respondents to the questionnaire answered by the academic staff of which 34.1% of respondents are male and 65.9% are female. The largest percentage of respondents or a total of 34.1% have the title of full professor, 31.7% associate professors, 29.3% assistant professors and 4.9% assistants, and 36.6% work in the field of social sciences, 31.7% medical sciences and health, 17.1% technical-technological sciences, 7.3% biotechnical sciences, 4.9% natural-mathematical sciences and also 4.9% humanities.

Self-assessment of the academic staff about their own competencies for working with students with disabilities.

Table 1. The attitudes of academic staff about the process of teaching students with disabilities

	I completely disagree %	I d'not agree %	I have no opinion %	I agree %	I completely agree %	Total %
Students with disabilities are treated equally by the academic staff and other employees of the faculty with other students.	/	7.3	19.5	41.5	31.7	100
In the academic environment, there are still stereotypes and prejudices towards students with disabilities	2.4	24.4	17.1	41.5	14.6	
Teaching curriculum in higher education is properly adapted for active participation of students with disability	2.4	36.6	26.8	24.4	9.8	100
Students with disabilities can affect the reduction of the quality of teaching	17.1	65.9	7.9	9.1	/	100
The teaching staff in higher education should be adequate trained to teach students with disabilities	/	7.2	17.1	22	53.7	100

I have completed training in adapting teaching with students with disabilities	56.3	28.4	/	4.5	10.8	100
The college where I work has assistive technology for students with disabilities	85.6	/	7.3	2.4	4.7	100
The faculty where I work has a Support Center for students with disabilities	92.3	/	/	4.5	3.2	100

The results of this research show that there are still stereotypes and prejudices regarding the inclusion of students with different types of disabilities in higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia. Most of the academic staff agree that students with disabilities are treated equally as all other students, but there are divided opinions among the academic staff from different faculties regarding the adaptability of the curriculum for students with disabilities. Most of the academic staff agree that the faculties are not equipped with assistive technology that would facilitate the process of teaching and taking exams for students with disabilities. Most of the academic staff do not have additional training in adapting teaching with students with disabilities and improve the quality of learning for students with disabilities.

In the last decade we have witnessed a constant discussion in which we talk about equal right to education. The loudest in that discussion are the proponents of deinstitutionalization of children with disabilities and strengthening of support in formal education in the form of more inclusive classrooms. Considering the small number of persons with disabilities involved in the process of higher education, and the reasons for the same, which are external factors in relation to this category: architectural barriers, lack of assistive technology, non-adjustment to the literature on people with disabilities, unprepared teaching/academic staff for work with students with disabilities and finally inadequate legal acts that determine the rights of persons with disabilities in the field of higher education, the need for an inclusive culture also arises in higher education institutions.

Although there are a number of opportunities to improve the quality of higher

education for students with disabilities, this study confirmed the following limitations regarding higher education for students with disabilities:

- Inclusive teaching in higher education is pedagogically effective only for people with mild developmental disabilities;

- Inclusive teaching takes place in complexes that have not fully resolved the problems with infrastructural barriers;

- There is a need for professional development of the academic staff and the administration within the university;

- Additional financial resources are needed to equip universities with assistive technology;

- There are stereotypes and prejudices regarding persons with disabilities and their inclusion in higher education;

- The percentage of faculties that have centers to support students with disabilities in order to provide higher quality higher education for students with disabilities is very small.

These findings may help higher education institutions, policy makers, and professionals to identify the accommodations and services needed to enhance inclusion of students with disabilities. These study highlights the need for academic staff on how to (a) better understand the nuances of different disabilities across individuals; (b) provide effective adaptation of learning and teaching; (c) assist students to locate resources and support services, (d) prepare students for barriers they may experience in college.

Although inclusive educational practices can result in numerous benefits, our findings indicate that academic staff should maximize student outcomes by acknowledging disability as part of the natural human experience in order to increase an understanding and comfort among all stakeholders, decrease stigma, and help individuals with disabilities to access resources and systems of support. Participants recommended that educators need more information about disabilities, including how to recognize various disabilities, make

appropriate modifications, and use technology to support the independence of students. Participants stated that all students need to feel safe, validated, and be treated fairly and with dignity.

As the international community steps up to the challenge of the sustainable development agenda and tries to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all children, it is crucial that we bear in mind that we cannot simply assume outcomes in developing countries based on our experience in developed countries. When introducing inclusive education in developing countries, we should strive to ensure that programs are localized and established upon local data and conditions, and do not merely attempt to apply established practices from developed countries.

This study may encourage more collaboration between policy, institutional management, and teaching and learning groups, coupled with positive values and attitudes cultivation, will ensure the successful inclusion of students with disability towards developing an inclusive higher education environment

Conclusion

Students with disabilities continue to be a growing demographic on college and university campuses. In academic institutions, there are no resources that will make higher education more accessible for students with different disabilities, nor are sufficient financial resources allocated for the physical adaptation of facilities intended for theoretical and practical teaching, and there is no special fund for assistive technology and other adapted equipment that would increase efficiency in the educational process.

Our findings have identified that lack of tailored study programs and didactic materials (including literature, the Braille Alphabet, assistive tehnology) inhibit academic staff to properly facilitate student teaching and learning. In this context, our stady argues that rigid curriculums, formal assessment criteria, and lack of innovative and engaging teaching and learning approaches will serve as barriers for the full inclusion of students with special needs in higher education. As such, regardless of their positive values and attitudes about achieving

an inclusive higher education, as long as academic staff have limited capacities and resources, they will not achieve inclusive teaching and learning goal. Therefore, our study suggests that higher education institutions should constantly support academic staff to achieve their teaching and learning objectives through embedding lifelong inclusive professionalism. The findings of this study highlight the role of student supports in improving institutional response to the needs of students with disabilities. Some of the responsibility lies with the students (and pre-admission preparation), but faculty and staff play a strong role in supporting student development and growth in self-advocacy as well. It is necessary to implement serious reforms that will improve the conditions for persons with disabilities in higher education, psycho-social support, support services and independent living, raising public awareness and fighting to eradicate discrimination. Experiences from other countries and relevant research show that the establishment of a Center for the support of students with disabilities, will be significant step towards recognizing the importance of equal opportunities in education and providing conditions for high-quality and equally accessible and successful studies for students with disabilities. The Center's activities will take the first steps towards the implementation of legal regulatory and strategic documents that emphasize the obligation of higher education institutions to equalize the opportunities of students with disabilities in the higher education system.

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