

Perspectives of Students with Disabilities on Inclusive Education Challenges in Higher Education: A Case Study of a Jordanian University

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Abstract – This study aimed to identify potential challenges of implementing inclusive education practices at X University, Jordan, as perceived by students with disabilities. The study used a qualitative case study methodology by interviewing ten students with sensory and physical disabilities. Semi-structured interviews and descriptive coding strategies were used to collect and analyze the data. The findings identified five themes that represented the main challenges with inclusive educational practices faced by the students with disabilities at the university: physical environment, modifications, personal attitudes, assistive technologies, support, and administrative procedures. This study suggests a set of recommendations that could provide the best inclusive education practices in Jordanian universities.

Keywords – Inclusive education, higher education, students with disabilities, case study, educational practices.

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1. Introduction

Inclusive education was developed for students with disabilities in schools. Thus, it is a challenge to implement inclusive education principles in higher education settings. [1]. However, there is a growing global awareness of the right to education for students with disabilities in higher education [2]-especially since the ratio of students with disabilities enrolled in universities in the past twenty years has increased [3], [4]. Inclusive education in universities is still generally inadequate for various reasons, including low expectations, negative attitudes, teacher training, physical barriers, availability of resources, transitional planning, and ineffective support services [5], [6], [7].

Students with disabilities in higher education settings may experience many academic, attitudinal, and physical obstacles [8]. Specifically, they are more likely to face many problems in their study, test, social life, and self-image [9], [10]. Students with disabilities also have issues with the educational environment and the ability of teachers to adjust this environment to be commensurate with students' abilities. As a result, students with disabilities face extraordinary challenges related to the available accommodations and academic adjustment, which affect their identity development [11]. With it, they are forced to develop various self-advocacy skills [12], [13]. These students face several challenges and obstacles beyond mere accessibility related to the curriculum, instruction style, and assessment [14].

Higher education is essential in inclusive education for people with disabilities by developing an academic environment that can contribute equality solutions to challenges [15]. Therefore, how students with disabilities' perspectives of services and programs provided by universities are essential components that lead to the success of these students [16].

In addition, higher educational institutions have a critical role in providing inclusive education services that meet the needs of students with disabilities by overcoming personal, communication, and physical obstacles [17].

2. Literature review

Simadi and Alqaryouti (2017) investigated the satisfaction level of students with disabilities regarding available educational services at Jordanian, Qatari and Yemeni universities. A total of 251 students with disabilities participated in the study. The study results show that the satisfaction of students with disabilities with social services came at the first level, and then psychological, educational, and health services. The results also indicated no statistically significant effect attributed to gender and degree of disability variables [18].

Ntombela and Soobrayen (2013) investigated the access barriers of students with visual impairments at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study used the case study method; specifically, the interview method was used with two faculty members working in the university's support office. The study results indicated that administrative barriers could limit students with disabilities' enrolment in university programs. These obstacles represented employees' lack of experience in dealing with students with visual impairments, lack of supportive educational aids and technologies, challenges related to educational practices, and academic challenges related to students with visual impairments [19].

Nel et al. (2015) investigated students' difficulties with physical disabilities at the University of Limpopo, South Africa. The study used the content analysis method, interviews, and open questionnaires. The study results showed that students with physical disabilities indicated the inadequacy of the university's infrastructure and facilities as a primary barrier to learning. In addition, the students reported negative attitudes from their colleagues and faculty members and a lack of accessibility [20].

Al-Miqdad and Al-Qatawneh (2018) studied the services provided to students with disabilities in a Jordanian university. The study used a questionnaire consisting of (34) items distributed over (57) students with disabilities. The results showed that students with disabilities were delighted with administrative services, building facilities, and transportation services. On the other hand, students with disabilities' satisfaction with academic services were rated as acceptable. The study indicated no effects of the student's gender, the field of study, and the type of disability in the study results [21].

Al-Hadidi and Alzboun (2013) assessed the academic services provided to people with visual impairments in Jordanian libraries. The study results indicated the library services in Jordan for people with visual impairments barely met international standards. The main challenges were library visitors' services, human resources, public relations, information sources, tools, equipment, and assistive technologies [22].

Kisanga (2020) explored the educational and social barriers facing students with sensory disabilities in higher education settings and their coping strategies. The case study design was used to collect data from (27) students with sensory disabilities selected from two higher education institutions in Tanzania. The study used semi-structured interviews, open questionnaires, and focus group discussions. The results showed that the significant academic barriers facing students with sensory disabilities were teaching and learning resources, teachers' practices, and communication barriers. Other academic barriers were exams, insufficiency of access to information, barriers in curricula, and inaccessibility to the environment, as well as negative attitudes and negative perceptions towards students. Students used problem and emotionally focused coping strategies to manage barriers [23].

3. Methods

The methodology of this study contains a description of the study purpose, design, participants, data collection, and analysis procedures.

3.1. Study purpose

Jordanian universities are witnessing an increasing number of enrolled students with disabilities. There is a defined insufficiency of accurate information about inclusive education policies in higher education settings in Jordan and the reality of the educational services effectiveness of the services provided to students with disabilities and programs that enable them to access information sources and services in universities. Hence, this study adopted the social model of disability, which focuses on the fact that disability is a product of the interaction between people with disabilities and the surrounding environment. Therefore, this study aims to explore the students with disabilities perspectives on inclusive education challenges at X University in Jordan. This study attempted to allow students with disabilities to express their needs to provide practical recommendations that the relevant authorities can implement. Specifically, this study attempted to identify the challenges facing inclusive education from students with disabilities at X University.

3.2. Study design

A qualitative case study method was used to investigate students with disabilities' educational experiences to explore challenges with inclusive educational practices used at X University. This approach allows researchers to understand phenomena deeply in a particular context [24]. This study utilized interviews; the fundamental data collection approach used in the case study [25]. Specifically, this study used semi-structured interview strategies to provide a focused framework that allows researchers to gather similar information from the participants [26]. Using interviews enable students to express their perspectives about their daily life at university.

3.3. Study participants

The participants of this study were ten students with disabilities from X University. The participants were selected purposely in collaboration with the University's Admission and Registration Department and Students with Disabilities Services Center. Students were contacted via phone to obtain their initial consent to participate in the study. Then, written permission was obtained from all students to conduct individual interviews. The interview times and locations were different based on the students' availability; however, all interviews were held inside the University, and students' consent to record the interview was obtained. Table 1 shows the study participants' information.

Table 1. Study participant information

Student	G Level	School	Disability
Ali	M Undergrad.	Science	Visual
Ahlam	F Undergrad.	Arts	Visual
Taghreed	F Graduate	Education	Physical
Ansam	F Undergrad.	Physical Ed.	Auditory
Mohad	M Undergrad.	Law	Physical
Sawsan	F Graduate	Education	Physical
Ragei	M Undergrad.	Pharmacy	Physical
Ihsan	F Undergrad.	Arts	Visual
Laila	F Graduate	Islamic Stu.	Visual
Tamim	M Undergrad.	Computer	Auditory

3.4. Procedures and data collection

Data was collected in the first semester of 2020/2021 after the Institutional Review Board conducted approval at X University No. 11/2021. This study developed interview questions (See the Appendix) to investigate students with disabilities' perspectives on inclusive education [1], [16], [19], [23].

The researchers then conducted ten semi-structured interviews. The participants answered open-ended questions about their educational experiences, obstacles, and challenges at the University considering inclusive education practices. The researchers used a sign language interpreter to conduct interviews with students with auditory impairments. The interviews lasted between 48 and 71 minutes, with an average of 55 minutes per interview. During the interviews, the researchers' role was asking questions, providing explanations, and prompting responses.

3.5. Data analysis

The interviews were conducted in the Arabic language and audio recorded. The researchers transcribed all interviews in Arabic and then translated them into English. Each researcher coded the data manually using a descriptive coding technic, then all researchers reviewed the codes together and divided them into categories [27]. Subsequently, themes were extracted from the classes [28]. To guarantee the trustworthiness of the qualitative research, the researchers meet the research credibility by using the member-checking strategy [29]. The transcribed data was sent to the participants to obtain their feedback. The participants confirmed data accuracy with slight language changes in sentences or terms. In addition, a peer debriefing method was achieved by holding many meetings between the researchers and other colleagues in the field to review the codes, categories, and themes [29]. The researchers provided detailed descriptions of the data collection and analysis procedures [30]. Finally, confirmability was preserved by establishing the qualitative trustworthiness elements without influencing the participants' experiences and beliefs [27], [30].

4. Results

Students with disabilities expressed their educational experiences and perspectives about their challenges regarding inclusive education practices at X University. Data analysis of the interviews identified five main themes: Physical Environment, Modifications, Personal Attitudes, Assistive Technologies, Support, and Administrative Procedures.

4.1. Physical environment

Students with disabilities expressed their perspectives about accessibility and accommodations provided at X University. Most of the students reported that the University environment lacks essential accessible services.

Students shared their experiences in using the University facilities. Students with disabilities emphasized the difficulty of accessing educational services freely and without assistance. The students' responses indicated that the facilities available at the University are insufficient, and the existing accommodations lack efficiency.

Findings revealed a set of codes (16 codes) belonging to three main categories: buildings, mobility, and accessibility. The experiences of students with disabilities regarding the physical environment accommodations provided by the University varied according to their disability. Students with physical disabilities expressed challenges related to university facilities, such as ramps, doors, elevators, and classroom size. Taghreed stated, *"Come see the college; I challenge you in a wheelchair if you can go to the third floor alone."* Ragei said, *"The University is huge, and students with physical disabilities want transportation to suit them. You know the College of Pharmacy is far from the College of Science, and I can't get on the bus because of the large number of students."*

On the other hand, students with visual impairments expressed similar challenges related to accommodations in the University, which are associated with the clarity of directions in the roads and corridors and the absence of signs written in Braille. Ahlam said, *"You must ask for the room number or a book in the library. If it is written in Braille, I won't ask."* Students with auditory disabilities reported fewer challenges concerning the physical environment but expressed the lack of accessible services outside the classroom. Tamim said, *"Sign language interpreters come with us to classes, but they may not be available at public events."*

4.2. Modifications

Students with disabilities expressed challenges in modifying the educational practices that limit their ability to participate in educational activities. The findings showed that students' educational experiences concerning modifications differed according to the teachers and the type of disability. Some students expressed positive experiences with educational practices by some teachers, but the students themselves expressed challenges associated with other teachers and the classroom environment. On the other hand, students' educational experiences differed in the type of disability and its requirements for modifying educational practices. The findings included (24 codes) divided into four categories: classroom environment, curriculum, exam, and time.

The students reported that inclusive education practices at the University differ according to the teacher. The students revealed positive experiences in modifying the educational material and the examination content to suit their educational needs. Ali reported, *"Many teachers allow me to audio-record lectures."* Mohamed said, *"Dr. X allows me to take the exam in his office and gives me enough time."* On the other hand, students expressed negative experiences with some teachers regarding their classroom modifications. *"...Sometimes you beg them for more time in the exam,"* Laila said. Ihsan said, *"The problem is that you ask them for something that is your right, but they don't provide it... Like asking them to speak more instead of using PowerPoint slides."*

Regarding disability, the challenges in inclusive education practices varied according to the student's requirements. Students with physical disabilities focused on modifying the classroom environment. Muhammad said, *"Sometimes I ask to change the classroom location because of the narrow space between seats, but not everyone responds."* Sawsan said, *"The curriculum is not a problem for me, but the type of the questions in the exam is, especially essay questions."* The challenges of students with auditory and visual impairments varied based on the modifications required in the educational environment. The students with visual impairments focused on the audio curricula, lighting, and font size. In contrast, the students with auditory impairments focused on allowing sign language interpreters to be present in the examination and modifying the curricula. For example, Ahlam stated, *"I wish all curricula would be turned into audiobooks."* At the same time, Tamim said, *"I know how to read and write, but not allowing the interpreter to be with me during the exam could cause some issues."*

4.3. Personal attitudes

Students with disabilities shared their experiences of challenges facing inclusive education practices from peers, administrators, and teachers at the University. There is a general agreement among students with disabilities regarding peers' positive and supportive attitudes, but their experiences differ about teachers and administrators. This theme showed (12 codes) distributed into two categories: positive attitudes and negative attitudes.

The students expressed positive attitudes expressed towards them from their peers. Most students indicated that their peers allow them to access learning resources through their assistance.

Ihsan said, *"I am very grateful for the help of my friends; without them, I would not be able to move around the University and meet the course requirements."* Laila said, *"May God reward my friend X. She is always there to help."* Taghreed said, *"I don't feel any discrimination from my friends."*

Regarding teachers and administrators, the experiences of students with disabilities about their attitudes were different. Some students associate the subject with the personalities of these teachers and administrators. Ansam said, *"It's different. Some people help, and some people don't."* At the same time, other students focused on these teachers' and administrators' negative and unsupportive attitudes.

Ragei said, *"Few doctors understand me, and most of them feel that having me in the class is a problem."* Ali said, *"Dealing with the employees is difficult, and many of them do not understand my needs."*

4.4. Assistive technologies

The results showed that assistive technology is one of the most critical challenges facing inclusive education practices for students with disabilities at X University. Students also indicated challenges related to assistive technology and the lack of this technology at the University. The results showed that there were (11 codes) in this theme, divided into two categories: supportive tools and educational technology.

In terms of supporting tools, students report challenges accessing some of the devices they need on campuses, such as large screens, projectors, and amplifiers. For example, students with visual impairments indicate their need for supportive technologies - such as large screens - in their classrooms. Laila said, *"If there are large screens with a clear and big font, I can see it from a close distance."* On the other hand, students with auditory impairments see visual aids as essential for learning and mobility. Ansam said, *"All students with auditory impairments must take classes together because there are few interpreters. Sure, some tools can support us."* Students with physical disabilities focused on the availability of mobility aids at the University. Mohammad said, *"I do not have an electric wheelchair, so my mobility between colleges is sometimes difficult."* Students also focused on the lack of assistive technology in the learning environment. Ahlam said, *"Learning can be much easier if it is in the right technology."* Ali said, *"We need audiobooks and books written in Braille."* Tamim asked, *"Why are there no loudspeakers in the classroom?"*

4.5. Support

Students also revealed their experiences within the University regarding the availability of support they might need to overcome obstacles they face. Students' perspectives differed about the availability of support based on educational level and type of disability. The results showed that there were (19 codes) in this theme were divided into three categories: academic support, social support, and resources.

Students expressed that one of the most significant challenges they faced inside the classrooms was the availability of educational support to fit the students' needs. Graduate students focused on the support needed to meet the teachers' expectations about the class assignments.

Taghreed stated: *"Doctors did not understand that there was a difference between the other students and me when they designed the syllabus. I mean, I must do research, presentation, and weekly assignment. Ok, I need help to do all of these things. Without help, it is almost impossible to do these things in the required time."*

Some students also expressed their experiences with social support as an essential aspect of inclusive educational practices in the University.

Ihsan said, *"You need people to stand up with you when you have a problem."* This social need was illustrated by Mohammad when he was sharing a story about his experience as a university student.

He said, *"... all that I told you is in one hand, and my happiness when my colleagues visited me is in another hand."*

Because of the differences between students with disabilities, their perspectives about the support they need to implement inclusive education practices at the University varied. For example, students with sensory disabilities emphasized the importance of different learning resources in improving the quality of educational practices;

Ansam stated, *"We want more support regarding programs and tools that we need."* Students with physical disabilities expressed their need for sources of support in exams, assignments, and course requirements.

Sawsan said, *"... support us in the grades and assignments; that's all we need."*

4.6. Administrative procedures

The students expressed a set of administrative challenges facing implementing inclusive education practices. The students, regardless of their disabilities and educational levels, stated that the administrative procedures at the University did not suit their needs.

Findings on this theme revealed seven codes divided into two categories: registration and follow-up procedures.

Although the registration procedures at X University are entirely online, the students expressed some problems related to the registration of some courses and the challenges they face in the administrative procedures. Ragei said: *"I needed to register for an alternative course from another department; I had a hard time between the registration center and the college to register for this course."* Laila reported, *"Graduate students have a problem with the lack of courses, which means that you constantly come to the department, especially if you are about to graduate."*

Students also expressed administrative challenges following up on their paperwork, especially in the financial department. Ali said, *"I have a refund check for my tuition; I went 100 times to the financial department with no benefits."* Ahlam said, *"I hate to have an administrative issue at the University. I submitted an academic request to the University presidency that required a decision from the Dean's Council. It's been two months so far..."*

5. Discussion

This study used the case study method to identify the challenges experienced by students with disabilities regarding implementing inclusive education practices at X University. The findings of this study identified several challenges facing implementing inclusive education practices, thus affecting the social and educational services provided to students with disabilities.

The lack of inclusive education practices constituted significant academic barriers for students with disabilities. The findings of this study are relatively consistent with the findings of Kisanga's (2020) study [23]. Physical environment, modifications, and lack of support were the major educational obstacle faced by students with disabilities, especially concerning exams, access to information, curriculum, and accessibility. This finding is also consistent with Nel et al.'s (2015) study [20], which showed that students with physical disabilities indicated the lack and inadequacy of the University's infrastructure and facilities and students' inability to access educational resources because of these challenges. These findings reflect that the inclusive education practices used with students with disabilities in Jordanian universities are still below expectations compared to methods used in foreign universities. The researchers believe that universities in Jordan are not designed to accommodate students with disabilities despite the legal structure of local legislation [31].

The findings also indicated a deficiency in providing appropriate inclusive educational practices used with students with disabilities in terms of teaching strategies, modifications, and support to students with disabilities. The case study results do not suggest a successful inclusive education implementation in higher education, represented by providing high-quality socio-educational practices from teachers and employees and providing resources, policies, and evaluations [32]. The researchers believe that the insufficient professional development for teachers and staff in Jordanian universities and the absence of a unified definition of inclusive education practices caused the challenges faced by students with disabilities in Jordanian universities.

Also, the findings revealed that the attitudes of teachers and the absence of social support at the University are crucial challenges experienced by students with disabilities in Jordanian universities. The perceptions of students with disabilities towards teachers' negative attitudes and their agreement with peers' positive attitudes reflect the structure of social relations in Jordanian universities. Researchers believe that students with disabilities' perceptions stem from the reality of strong social relationships between students, who show more support and empathy with students with disabilities than teachers who focus on the curriculum and instruction. This finding is consistent with Ntombela and Soobrayen's (2013) study [19], which indicated that obstacles limit students with disabilities' participation in academic programs, represented in the lack of staff experience in dealing with students with disabilities and challenges related to the educational practices used with them. It is also consistent with Nel et al.'s (2015) study [20], which showed that students with physical disabilities indicated that teachers distinguished them from their peers and treated them differently.

The findings also showed that insufficient assistive technology and sources of support were among the challenges facing implementing inclusive education practices at the University. This finding is consistent with Al-Hadidi and Alzboun's (2013) study [22], which indicated the lack of accessibility services provided to students with disabilities in Jordan. Researchers believe that the lack of assistive technology and sources of support in Jordanian universities is related to a lack of financial resources and budgetary restrictions at the University. In the presence of limited financial resources in Jordanian universities, providing these requirements is one of the most critical challenges facing implementing inclusive education practices.

6. Conclusion

Implementing inclusive education practices in Jordanian universities generally depends on activating laws and legislation related to students with disabilities in higher education.

Thus, universities must change their educational policies and provide accommodations aligned with best practices for students with disabilities. Also, bolstering the role of the Student Support Center in universities, which includes qualified staff and the necessary equipment to support the education of students with disabilities, will lead to more excellent implementation of inclusive education practices.

Jordanian universities need to consider the voice of students with disabilities by providing them with appropriate opportunities to express their needs and opinions. Thus, supporting the participation of students with disabilities in research studies, surveys, and information-gathering activities related to determining the quality of services and programs provided to them. Students' participation is an essential element that leads to dismantling barriers and building students' capacities for self-advocacy and acquiring self-determination skills.

Jordanian universities need to develop the professional skills of faculty and administrative staff to raise awareness of students with disabilities and ways to empower them at the university. Improving the practices of inclusive education in Jordanian universities will increase the success and self-realization of students with disabilities and, thus, the creation of productive and highly qualified students, which will contribute to the involvement of these students in the labor market and society in the future.

Finally, the main limitation of this study was that the participants represented only one university in Jordan: X University. Universities in Jordan may vary in the inclusive education practices used with students with disabilities. However, the purpose of this study was to explore the case of inclusive education practices used with students with disabilities in an exemplary higher education setting in Jordan versus making a general determination.

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Appendix

- Talk about yourself as a university student.
- Describe the educational services provided to you.
- Talk about the quality of these services to suit your disability.
- Describe your experience regarding the educational facilities provided to you at the university.
- In your opinion, how necessary is it to provide these facilities at the university?
- Talk about the consequences that disrupt your daily life as a university student.
- What is the extent of cooperation between the teachers and the university administration to overcome the obstacles you face?
- Describe the university's non-educational services (guiding, recreational, clubs).
- Talk about your experience with the attitudes of teachers and other students towards you as a university student.
- Describe the services you need that the university does not provide for you.
- Talk about any topic you would like to discuss.