

International Conference on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education



PROCEEDINGS

14th of September 2023



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



**International Conference on
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education
(RUICHSS 2023)**

14th September 2023



Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

University of Ruhuna

Matara

Sri Lanka

© Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna, 2023

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means: electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher.

International Conference on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education - 2023

ISSN 2706-0063



Published by: Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna, Matara, Sri Lanka

Technical Editing and Cover Design by: Department of Information Technology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna

Organising Committee

International Conference on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education (RUICHSS 2023).

Advisory Committee

Senior Professor Sujewa Amarasena, Vice-Chancellor, University of Ruhuna

Professor Saman Chandana Ediriweera, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Ruhuna

Mr. I. Renuka Priyantha, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna

Main Organizing Committee

Prof. Upali Pannilage - Conference Chair

Dr. R. A. S. P. Ranabahu - Co-Secretary

Ms. Indu Gamage - Co-Secretary

Dr. Kokila Ramanayaka - Treasurer

Mr. I. Renuka Priyantha - Chair - Editorial Board

Editorial Board

Mr. I. Renuka Priyantha - Chair - Dept. of Public Policy

Mr. C. M. Arakulasuriya - Dept. of English and Linguistics

Ms. H. M. T. M. H. Molagoda - Dept. of English Language Teaching

Mr. Samitha Udayanga - Dept. of Sociology

Ms. S. T. W. M. Pushpananda - Dept. of English Language Teaching

Ms. R. A. W. D. Jayawardhana - Dept. of English Language Teaching

Ms. G. A. R. C. Jayarathna - Dept. of English Language Teaching

Ms. S. H. Piyumi - Dept. of English Language Teaching

Logistics Committee (Accommodation, Food & Beverage and Transport)

Dr. N. S. Ariyaratna	- Chair - Dept. of Public Policy
Dr. E. H. C. G. Padmasiri	- Dept. of Geography
Ms. I. G. S. Kumari	- Dept. of Economics
Mr. Upul Sanjeewa Wijepala	- Dept. of Sociology
Ms. Indu Gamage	- Dept. of English Language Teaching

Ceremonial and Entertainment Committee

Dr. L. G. D. S. Yapa	- Chair - Dept. of Geography
Ms. I. R. N. Sandamali Pieris	- Dept. of Sinhala
Ms. Sonali Dasanayake	- Dept. of History and Archaeology
Ms. A. J. Jayasekara	- Dept. of Economics
Ms. Anuradha Gamage	- Dept. of Economics

Publicity, Publication and Digitalisation Committee

Dr. Kokila Ramanayaka	- Chair - Dept. of IT
Ms. Hansi Andrahennadi	- Dept. of IT

Session Organising Committee

Dr. P. R. Ekanayake	- Chair - Dept. of Sociology
Ven. Aparekke Sirisudhamma	- Dept. of Sinhala
Dr. R. A. S. P. Ranabahu	- Dept. of Geography
Dr. Dilshan Manoj Rajapaksha	- Dept. of Pali and Buddhist Studies
Ms. Mayuri Kularathne	- Dept. of Public Policy
Ms. Wasana Fernando	- Dept. of Geography
Ms. Ishara Wanniarachchi	- Dept. of Sociology
Ms. N. E. H. Lanka	- Dept. of Sinhala

List of Reviewers, RUICHSS 2023

Senior Prof. A.S.P. Abhayaratne	Department of Economics and Statistics Faculty of Arts University of Peradeniya
Prof. Samanmala Dorabawila	Department of Economics and Statistics Faculty of Arts University of Peradeniya
Prof. Ven. Belligalle Dhammajoti	Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Prof. Vasantha Devasiri	Department of Paediatrics Faculty of Medicine University of Ruhuna
Prof. Upali Pannilage	Department of Sociology Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Prof. N. V. G. A. Hemantha Kumara	Department of Sociology Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Prof. Sakunthala Yatigammana	Department of Education Faculty of Arts University of Peradeniya
Prof. S. W. Amarasinghe	Department of Sociology Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Prof. P.P.A. Wasantha Athukorala	Department of Economics & Statistics Faculty of Arts University of Peradeniya

Prof. Chandani Liyanage	Department of Sociology Faculty of Arts University of Colombo
Prof. V. Gunaratnam	Department of Social Sciences Faculty of Arts and Culture Eastern University of Sri Lanka
Prof. A.S. Ananda	Department of Social Sciences Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka
Prof. G.P.T.S. Hemakumara	Department of Geography Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Prof. H.I.G.C. Kumara	Department of Geography Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Dr. T.M. Wijekoon Banda	Department of Sociology Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Dr Shyama Ranabahu	Department of Geography Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Dr. Nandasiri Keembiyahetti	Department of Economics Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Dr. B.M. Sumanaratne	Department of Economics Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Dr. Kokila Ramanayaka	Department of Information Technology Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna

Dr. A. A. R. Priyanka	Department of Pali and Buddhist Studies Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Dr. S.G.S. Samaraweera	Department of English Language Teaching Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Dr. K.D. Dushmanthi Silva	Department of Sociology Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Dr. P.K.M. Dissanayake	Department of Sociology Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Dr. A.M.A.S. Gunasekara	Department of Sociology Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Dr. M.A. Varghese	School of International Relations and Politics Mahatma Gandhi University
Dr. Amaranath Karunanayake	Department of Physiology Faculty of Medicine University of Ruhuna
Dr. L.N.P. Wedikandage	Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education University of Colombo
Dr. Nanda Gunawardhana	Coordinator Centre for Research and International Affairs Sri Lanka Technological Campus
Mr. Nimal Hettiarachchi	Librarian University of Ruhuna

Mrs. J.K. De Silva	Department of History and Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Mrs. L. S. Karunarathna	Department of Sinhala Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Mr. Samitha Udayanga	Department of Sociology Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna
Mr. I. D. K. L. Fernando	Senior Assistant Librarian Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka
Mr. C.M. Arsakulasuriya	Department of English and Linguistics Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences University of Ruhuna

Editorial Note

It is with great pleasure we present the conference proceedings of the 9th Ruhuna University International Conference on Humanities and Social Sciences (RUICHSS 2023) under the theme of "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Higher Education" organised by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna in collaboration with the IncEdu (Erasmus+) Project. This is a unique collection of scholarly contributions, which represents the collective efforts and intellectual endeavors of educators, researchers, and advocates committed to fostering a more inclusive and equitable higher education landscape.

In this digital age defined by rapid social change and evolving demographics, addressing issues of diversity, equity and inclusion in higher education has become imperative. This theme has become a key topic of our academic discourse, echoing a profound commitment to transforming educational institutions into spaces that facilitate equitable opportunities for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status or disability. The papers contained within these proceedings cover a wide spectrum of topics, from inclusive pedagogical practices and university policies to strategies for assistive technology, all aimed at creating an environment where every student, regardless of their background, can thrive.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the authors, reviewers, conference organisers, and participants who have contributed to this remarkable academic venture. It is our hope that these proceedings will not only inform but also inspire you to continue the essential

work of promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.
Together, we can forge a brighter and more inclusive future for all.

Editorial Board

RUICHSS 2023

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

University of Ruhuna

Matara

Sri Lanka

Keynote Address

Inclusion and Social Dimension of Higher Education

Lelia Kiš-Glavaš, PhD, Full Professor Tenure
University of Zagreb
Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences
Department of Inclusive Education and Rehabilitation

Equal access to education is crucial not only for realising human rights but also for fostering individual and societal development. Although we primarily emphasise the educational dimension, the social dimension of higher education holds equal significance. Education equality is an integral component of social equity, ensuring that everyone can access and develop knowledge and skills without facing discrimination (Sočo & Zrnić, 2021).

Discrimination puts individuals or groups at a disadvantage compared to others based on certain characteristics, such as disability. Disability has the potential to expose a person to discrimination, as the term is used to describe people based on certain characteristics or the lack of abilities. This can lead to stigmatisation in various aspects of social life (Mattila & Papageorgiou, 2017), representing direct discrimination. Indirect discrimination occurs when seemingly neutral provisions or rules create disadvantages for specific individuals or groups. For instance, prohibiting pets on public transportation may discriminate against blind people who rely on guide dogs for mobility. Discrimination can also take multiple forms, combining various grounds such as gender, age, and disability at the same time. Moreover, individuals related to people with disabilities, including parents, relatives, peers, and teachers, might also experience discrimination. This form of discrimination, referred to as "transferred or associative discrimination" or "courtesy stigma" (Goffman,

1963), can lead to the exclusion of people with disabilities from the social community and, consequently, from the (higher) educational system.

Higher education plays a crucial role in developing the skills, competencies, and knowledge essential for thriving in our society. However, certain educational structures and policies inadvertently contribute to the exclusion of socially disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, resulting in low participation rates in higher education (European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2022).

The underrepresentation of specific social groups, even if unintentional, poses challenges at both individual and collective levels. For example, young people from immigrant backgrounds, experiencing limited opportunities to access and complete higher education, are more susceptible to unemployment or being confined to low-skilled and low-paid jobs. Consequently, this not only results in economic precarity but also fosters social marginalisation and alienation (European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2022).

Exclusion from higher education has far-reaching consequences, impacting not only personal development and career prospects but also economic productivity and growth. Therefore, increasing the participation of vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups in higher education yields broader benefits, such as reduced welfare provision, improved health outcomes, and increased community involvement. These combined advantages foster the cohesion of a democratic society, emphasising recognised values such as social justice, the public good, public responsibility, and social mobility (European Commission, European Education and Culture

Executive Agency, 2022). It is all these factors mentioned above that constitute the social dimension of higher education.

The social dimension of higher education can be achieved by recognising higher education as a public good that should be accessible to everyone, irrespective of their social and economic status. This inclusivity extends to underrepresented and vulnerable student groups.

Recruiting students from traditionally underrepresented groups in higher education should be a primary objective. This entails adopting innovative approaches to connect with these students and offer them support through flexible access and study pathways, making higher education feasible for them. Embracing true inclusivity and equity does not compromise on quality. Inclusion and excellence are not conflicting values or principles. A more inclusive academic system and community thrive on a diverse array of strengths and talents, fostering a fertile environment for knowledge creation and innovation both academically and socially (Bush & Trani, 2021).

In today's world, universities must exhibit and advocate for leadership that propels higher education institutions forward, embraces social and moral responsibility, and contributes to a more united and inclusive society. They can achieve this by fostering intercultural understanding, encouraging civic engagement, promoting ethical awareness, and ensuring equitable access to higher education (Gregersen-Hermans et al., 2021).

Thus, higher education is recognised as a fundamental catalyst for empowering individuals and societies. Its social dimension, integral to the entire process, holds the capacity to foster equality, fairness, and inclusion

within higher education. This emphasis on equity and well-being aligns with the mission of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA, n.d.).

Enhancing the social dimension of higher education has been a core foundation of the Bologna Process from its outset (Van Hees, 2022). References to the social dimension of higher education have been present in ministerial statements within the Bologna process since 2001. In 2007, during the London Communique, a comprehensive definition was agreed upon, stating: "The student population that enrolls, attends, and completes higher education at all levels reflects the diversity of our society."

Social inclusion is closely tied to the level of education attained, making the eradication of social inequalities in higher education crucial in fostering a society with equal opportunities. Achieving a fair and socially inclusive higher education requires implementing diverse measures to ensure that admission, successful academic performance, and degree attainment primarily depend on student competencies rather than personal characteristics and living circumstances beyond their control (Institute for Development of Education, n.d.).

The social dimension of higher education inherently embodies inclusivity, thereby enhancing the diversity of the student community. Addressing the challenges of inclusion is imperative, as everyone possesses an unequivocal and equal right to education—this right belongs to you, me, and every individual.

According to the Croatian Language Portal (2023), inclusion refers to a state of being encompassed and included. It signifies not only an attitude and tendency but also a policy that includes EVERYONE, not just the best but all

individuals. Consequently, "inclusive" implies involving, encompassing, and being an integral part of something. Inclusion emphasises respect for diversity rather than striving for equalisation. The focus lies in recognising the potential of each individual and providing the necessary support.

According to UNESCO (2017), (educational) inclusion represents a process aimed at overcoming barriers that hinder learners' attendance, participation, and achievements. Inclusion is considered a fundamental goal of contemporary education (Romstein & Sekulić-Majurec, 2015). Equity, on the other hand, denotes an attitude where the education of all learners is regarded as equally important.

The goal of inclusion is to secure equal opportunity, granting everyone equal access to goods, services, resources, and full participation in society, including education. This goal can be realised when EVERYONE actively engages, contributes, and enjoys the benefits. In the context of higher education, this means enabling students to pursue their professional interests and acquire the learning outcomes of their chosen study programme in line with their abilities.

Equal opportunities imply achieving a state of equality, embracing the same value system, attaining equivalent outcomes, and being treated the same (Croatian Language Portal, 2023). The realisation of equal opportunities involves selecting methods that best suit each individual, considering their unique abilities and needs. Equality of opportunity is not synonymous with uniform conditions; rather, it necessitates adapting and adjusting the environment, requirements, forms of communication, teaching techniques, methods, and more, to cater to everyone through an individualised approach.

There is a distinction between integration and inclusion. Integration (Croatian Language Portal, 2023) involves unification, fusion, connection, and adaptation to a new environment. It includes assimilation, where individuals fit into the existing environment, and adaptation, where behaviour is reshaped and changed. Integration typically involves a one-way change for individuals or groups. Therefore, social integration merely encompasses the physical presence of different people in society, with expectations for them to adapt and become as similar as possible to the average, ordinary, or "normal."

On the other hand, inclusion involves the integration of people with fewer opportunities (underrepresented, disadvantaged, and vulnerable groups) to ensure they receive equal rights and opportunities in life. This encompasses improving conditions and implementing measures of positive discrimination, which means compensating for their less favourable position (e.g., using various aids, assistive technology, subsidies). It also entails placing them in a better position than others (e.g., quotas, the right to direct access to faculty, secured parking spaces) and providing support, empowerment, and adapted education for their development.

People with fewer opportunities (underrepresented, disadvantaged, and vulnerable groups) exhibit diversity and uniqueness, which is inherently valuable as it fosters a wide range of views, perspectives, and discourse, leading to innovative and creative solutions. Emphasising the ethical advantages of encountering diversity, it raises awareness, reduces prejudice, and cultivates more realistic attitudes within a genuine and expanded social environment. Encouraging active social action and embracing diversity in its broadest sense are integral parts of this process (Kiš-Glavaš, 2023).

To ensure effective inclusive action and policies for all three groups of students with fewer opportunities, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of who these groups include, what belonging to one of these groups entails, how they can overlap and to what extent. Authors Panchenko et al. (2022) reference the Rome Ministerial Communiqué (2020) when differentiating vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups of students.

According to the Communiqué (2020), underrepresented students are those whose representation is lower than a comparable group's share in the total population, considering specific characteristics such as gender, age, nationality, geographic origin, socioeconomic background, and ethnic minorities. This underrepresentation can be observed at the time of admission, during studies, or at graduation. Individuals often exhibit multiple underrepresented characteristics, emphasising the importance of considering combinations of underrepresented characteristics, referred to as "intersectionality."

Furthermore, underrepresentation can manifest at various levels of higher education, including study programmes, faculties or departments, and higher education institutions and systems. This definition complements the previously mentioned London Communiqué (2020), which emphasises that the student body in higher education should reflect the diversity of populations but does not fully encompass the concept of underrepresentation.

Disadvantaged students are characterised as students who often encounter specific challenges in higher education, setting them apart from their peers. These challenges can take various forms, including disabilities, low family income, little or no family support, being an orphan, experiencing frequent

school moves, mental health issues, pregnancy, or having limited time to study due to the need to work or fulfill caregiving duties. The extent of disadvantage may vary, with some experiencing it permanently, intermittently, or only for a limited period. It is crucial to note that disadvantaged students may or may not belong to an underrepresented group, making "disadvantaged" and "underrepresented" distinct terms and not synonymous.

Vulnerable students are individuals who face the risk of disadvantage and, in addition, have specific (protection) needs. This vulnerability may arise due to various factors, such as suffering from an illness (including mental health conditions) or having a disability. Other vulnerabilities include being minors, having their residence permit dependent on academic performance (and therefore subject to individual teachers' decisions), or being at risk of discrimination. These students are vulnerable because they might encounter challenges in ensuring their personal well-being or safeguarding themselves from harm or exploitation. As a result, they require additional support and attention to help them navigate their educational journey effectively.

Inclusivity brings benefits to everyone involved. Author Gozik (2021) introduces the concept of "inclusive excellence," which stems from a strengths-based perspective, emphasising that all students gain more from being in an inclusive environment.

Diversity is fostered, valued, and embraced through universal design. Universal design refers to the creation of objects, goods, and services that can be utilised by individuals with various abilities without the need for modification, to the greatest extent possible. In its widest scope, it caters to all

individuals, from infants to the elderly, irrespective of their abilities (Kiš-Glavaš, 2023).

Currently, universal design for learning is gaining greater prominence as an approach to teaching and learning, seeking to offer all students an equitable opportunity for success. It entails employing diverse methods to motivate students, utilising various teaching materials and techniques, and allowing for diverse ways of demonstrating knowledge. However, in specific instances, especially when working with people with disabilities, this approach does not preclude the need for additional accommodation (reasonable accommodation).

Reasonable accommodation is a personalised measure adapted to the specific needs of an individual person (Ombudswoman for Persons with Disabilities, n.d.). It comprises necessary and reasonable adjustments and accommodations that do not impose a disproportionate or undue burden, facilitating children with developmental disabilities, i.e., persons with disabilities, to enjoy or benefit from all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others in individual cases where deemed necessary (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006). So, it could be derived that universal design is proactive and reasonable accommodation is reactive.

According to the Salto-Youth Inclusion Resource Centre (2009) booklet, inclusion in practice is an ongoing participatory process. It recognises that young people are the experts on their own lives, empowering them to control the process and set the agenda based on their current circumstances. Inclusion entails involving young individuals regardless of age, sex, gender, sexual preference, ethnicity, belief, socioeconomic status, or ability. It provides them with the skills, knowledge, and opportunities necessary to actively participate

as equal citizens at all levels of society, granting them the power and opportunity to contribute, with their contributions recognised and respected. Inclusive practices extend beyond the obvious and conventional aspects, incorporating activities such as meeting with friends, going to the movies, bars, and clubs, as these experiences and opportunities often add quality to our lives.

Authors Gregersen-Hermans et al. (2021) elucidate that belongingness serves as a metric of inclusivity. They emphasise that belongingness and inclusivity can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. In the higher education context, inclusivity pertains to the intentional consideration and equal relevance of the diverse range of student voices, perspectives, and experiences in institutional decision-making, focusing on the institution itself.

On the other hand, belonging refers to the emotional attachment of students to their university, fostered by factors such as a robust social support network and an appropriate balance between academic challenge and support. It centers on student-university relationships, and a positive sense of belonging is correlated with improved academic performance (Gregersen-Hermans et al., 2021).

A university ethos that prioritises students' sense of belonging is based on respect, integrity, and equity, acknowledging the inherent value and contribution of each student. This ethos allows every individual to find a sense of home at their institution (Gregersen-Hermans et al., 2021). But how to promote equality, fairness, and inclusion in higher education?

According to UNESCO (2017), fostering inclusive and equitable education necessitates acknowledging that students' challenges stem from various

aspects of the education system itself. These aspects include the current organisation of education systems, the types of instruction provided, the learning environment, and the approach to supporting and assessing student progress. Transforming this understanding into tangible reforms is crucial, with the perspective that individual differences should not be viewed as problems requiring fixing but rather as opportunities to democratise and enrich learning. Embracing differences can act as a catalyst for innovations that benefit all learners, irrespective of their personal characteristics and circumstances (UNESCO, 2017).

The Academic Cooperation Association (ACA, 2023) is an organisation dedicated to promoting and funding the internationalisation of higher education. In early 2021, ACA placed significant emphasis on understanding and supporting inclusion in international higher education, particularly within the context of Europe. To accomplish this goal, they decided to share insights along the way with the help of experts in the field of inclusion through an ACA Think Piece series titled "Inclusion in International Higher Education: European Perspectives & Insights."

While this series of professional papers specifically addresses inclusion in higher education in the context of international cooperation, the reflections from the experts have broader applicability. Many of the insights gleaned from this series can be relevant and applicable to the context of any higher education institution or procedure. Consequently, the reflections provided by the experts in this series serve as valuable guidelines for advancing inclusivity in higher education overall.

Janebova et al. (2021) emphasise that inclusive education goes beyond mere box-ticking on an organisational "to-do" checklist. It requires a commitment to challenging the underlying assumptions and culturally ingrained biases within organisations and taking tangible steps to effect change. For instance, Kiš-Glavaš's (2014) study reveals that students with disabilities who use wheelchairs and blind students express the highest satisfaction with the support system in higher education in Croatia. This positive outcome is likely a result of agreements between public universities, university colleges of applied sciences, community colleges, and the Croatian Ministry of Science and Education, which fund the implementation of strategic goals encompassing the social dimension of higher education.¹

However, most higher education institutions have predominantly utilised the funds to enhance the environmental accessibility of buildings and entrances, such as constructing elevators, ramps, and tactile guidance systems for the blind. Conversely, they have made considerably fewer efforts or none at all to adapt the teaching process and train university teachers to work effectively with students with disabilities. Therefore, students with so-called invisible impairments, those who require support from teachers in the classroom, such as students with specific learning difficulties like dyslexia, Asperger's syndrome², ADHD, various chronic diseases, and especially students with

¹ According to the decision of the Croatian Government on the conditions, criteria, and manner of subsidising participation fees of studies of full-time students, and co-financing of material costs for public higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia in the academic years 2015/2016, 2016/2017, and 2017/2018, <https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Sjednice/2015/238%20sjednica%20Vlade/238%20-%204.pdf>

² Although the DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) no longer recognises "Asperger's Syndrome" as a separate diagnosis and has included it under a unified diagnosis

psychological disabilities, express dissatisfaction with the support system in higher education in the Republic of Croatia (Kiš-Glavaš, 2014).

Although higher education institutions have implemented the most expensive adjustments to support a specific group of students, it appears that they have merely fulfilled the minimum requirements to check off the lists. While they may claim in their reports that they are striving to improve the social dimension of higher education, the overall impact on all students with disabilities has been limited.

Of course, specific accommodations will always be necessary for certain individuals and groups. However, it is also essential to reform our institutional systems to enhance their responsiveness and accessibility to diverse and varied populations (Johnstone & Edwards, 2019). So, who are these populations? Who are the potential participants in higher education who have historically been excluded?

Ten or more years ago, the individuals who were often excluded participants in higher education included those with disabilities and individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, which sometimes encompassed students with children. Bohle (2021) further highlighted participants with physical, mental, and health-related conditions, students who had parental responsibilities, students who were employed, professional athletes, and students from study fields that were underrepresented in mobility programmes. These students were typically referred to as "disadvantaged students," a term that could be stigmatising for them (Guedens, 2021).

of Autism Spectrum Disorder, the term "Asperger's Syndrome" is used here as it was the term used in the original research.

In the past, we used to identify target groups, but today, our focus has shifted towards recognising and listing the multiple barriers that hinder equal participation in higher education. A barrier is anything that obstructs the achievement of a goal. Increasing motivation can help overcome barriers, but when the barriers are too significant, motivation tends to decrease. For instance, when discussing people with disabilities, we often refer to their special or specific needs. However, the reality is that the key issue lies in the barriers they encounter daily, such as environmental obstacles, prejudices, negative attitudes, and discrimination.

Additionally, proximity to the goal is crucial in this context. The closer a person is to their goal, the higher their motivation tends to be. Conversely, if the desired goal seems too distant, the investment to achieve it diminishes. Therefore, it is essential to provide or bring opportunities closer for people with disabilities, allowing them to get nearer to their goals.

Furthermore, the level of expectations also plays a vital role. It refers to what an individual expects of themselves when they undertake a task and is influenced by the expectations of significant others such as parents and teachers. Low expectations for someone can result in a reduced level of commitment, while higher expectations can lead to greater dedication. Unfortunately, people with disabilities are frequently subjected to overprotection and evaluation below their actual potential. The expectations of their social environment regarding their performance tend to be very low, which can negatively impact their own aspirations and may even result in learned helplessness. Hence, it is of utmost importance to create opportunities for them and to instill belief in their abilities.

Today, we refer to students who are categorised as students with fewer opportunities (and the term "students facing barriers" is preferred) or those whose personal, psychological, physical, mental, or health conditions are such that their participation in higher education would not be feasible without additional financial or other support. It is essential to use inclusive language, acknowledging and systematically listing both genders to ensure representation and fairness.

After listing exclusion factors, an ellipsis is always added to the end of each list to ensure that this definition of who we want to include never excludes young people who could genuinely benefit from our inclusion support. Additionally, new exclusionary factors might emerge over time, such as mental health challenges (as observed during the COVID-19 pandemic), digital addiction, and others. It is essential to remain flexible in our approach to inclusion and adapt as circumstances evolve.

Moreover, the relevance of exclusion factors may vary in different countries. In some countries, inclusion efforts may encompass members with migrant backgrounds, individuals with diverse skin colours, religions, or nationalities, HIV-positive students, and others. On the other hand, in countries with stringent accessibility policies, students with disabilities might have relatively independent access to higher education. Similarly, if there are generous national scholarships available, there may be less need to consider economic disadvantage as a significant exclusion factor. However, in countries where certain minorities or categories are underrepresented or face discrimination, there is a compelling need for additional support and efforts to ensure their participation (Guedens, 2021).

Therefore, individuals with fewer opportunities encounter one or more barriers that put them at a disadvantage compared to their peers. As previously mentioned, this unfavourable living environment often hinders their access to employment, participation in formal and informal education, transnational mobility, engagement in democratic processes, and full participation in society. They often face limited access to essential resources, such as adequate housing, employment opportunities, healthcare, cultural activities, and education (Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes – AMEUP, n.d.).

To promote the social dimension in higher education, Erasmus+, the EU mobility programme in the field of education, training, youth, and sport for the period 2021-2027, has a primary objective of fostering equal opportunities, accessibility, inclusion, diversity, and fairness in all its actions. As a part of this commitment, "Inclusion and Diversity" has been identified as one of the top priorities of the Erasmus+ programme (European Commission, 2023). The Erasmus+ Programme Guide outlines potential barriers that may impede students' participation, both as a single factor and in combination with other factors:

- Disabilities: This encompasses physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, when combined with various barriers, may hinder an individual's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.
- Health problems: Barriers may arise due to health problems, including severe illnesses, chronic diseases, or other physical or mental health conditions that prevent individuals from participating in the programme (education).

- Barriers related to education and training systems: This includes individuals who encounter difficulties within education and training systems for various reasons, such as school dropouts, NEETs (individuals not in education, employment, or training), and low-skilled adults. While other factors may also contribute, these educational challenges are often linked to personal circumstances and are typically a result of an education system that imposes structural limitations and/or fails to fully address the specific needs of individuals.
- Cultural differences: While cultural differences can be perceived as barriers by people from all backgrounds, they can have a particularly significant impact on individuals with fewer opportunities. Such differences may act as a notable hindrance to learning in general, especially for those from immigrant or refugee backgrounds - particularly newly arrived immigrants, individuals belonging to national or ethnic minorities, sign language users, etc.
- Social barriers: Social adjustment difficulties, such as limited social skills, antisocial or high-risk behaviour, (ex) offenders, (ex) drug or alcohol addicts, or social marginalisation, may present barriers. Other social barriers may arise from family circumstances, such as being the first in the family to pursue higher education or being a parent (especially a single parent), caregiver, breadwinner, or orphan, or having lived or currently living in institutional care.
- Economic barriers: Economic disadvantages, such as a low standard of living, low income, learners having to work to support themselves, dependence on the social welfare system, long-term unemployment, precarious situations, poverty, homelessness, debt, or financial problems,

etc., can be significant barriers. Additionally, difficulties may arise from the limited portability of services (especially support for people with fewer opportunities), which must be "mobile" along with participants when they relocate to distant locations or even abroad.

- Discrimination based on gender, age, ethnicity, religion, belief, sexual orientation, disability, or intersectional factors (a combination of two or more of the aforementioned grounds of discrimination) can act as significant barriers to access and participation.
- Geographical barriers: Individuals living in remote or rural areas, small islands, peripheral/outermost regions, urban suburbs, less developed areas (limited public transport, poor facilities), or less developed areas in third-world countries, etc., may face challenges in accessing higher education.

Another important concept to consider when discussing the creation of a more inclusive social dimension of higher education is intersectionality. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the term intersectionality refers to "the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect, especially in the experiences of marginalised individuals or groups" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). In other words, intersectionality acknowledges the interconnectedness and interplay of various aspects of one's identity, resulting in a unique and complex experience that goes beyond simply combining multiple forms of discrimination. It recognises that experiencing discrimination on multiple bases creates specific challenges that are distinct from those arising from individual forms of discrimination.

For example, a person with disabilities who belongs to the majority ethnic/racial group might feel comfortable seeking support to overcome

barriers related to their disability. However, a person with disabilities from a minority ethnic/racial group might hesitate to seek support for their disability-related challenges due to the fear of facing discrimination based on their ethnicity/race.³

In 2014, the Croatian Parliament adopted the Strategy of Education, Science and Technology, which emphasises that "the inclusion of underrepresented persons in the system of higher education is one of the priorities for the development of the Croatian education system" (Objective no. 6.). The strategy outlines various tasks in the higher education section that aim to enhance the social dimension of higher education in Croatia. One of these tasks involves identifying underrepresented and vulnerable groups in higher education, as well as examining the factors that contribute to lower enrollment rates of students from these groups in higher education.

This task was entrusted to the cross-sectoral National Group for the Improvement of the Social Dimension of Higher Education. The group acts as an advisory body to the Government of the Republic of Croatia, the Ministry of Science and Education, the Rectors' Conference, and the Council of Universities and University Colleges of Applied Sciences. Its establishment was supported by one of the measures of the National Strategy.

Since its establishment in late 2015, the National Group has identified underrepresented groups of students in higher education (students whose share of higher education is lower compared to population data or compared to their share in other countries of the European Union) and vulnerable groups of

³ This is a simplified example of intersectionality, which is a complex concept and cannot be adequately described in a few paragraphs.

students (students who have fewer opportunities in higher education compared to other students, for example, in international mobility). The group has also identified some of the factors that put these students at risk:

Students whose parents have a lower level of education:

In the EUROSTUDENT sample (Šćukanec et al., 2016), 5.1 % of students have fathers with the lowest level of education, whereas in the population of men aged 40-60, 18.5 % have only primary education. Conversely, 34 % of fathers in the sample have secondary or higher education, while their share in the total population is 17 %. Typically, children of parents with a high level of education are more likely to enroll in universities and plan to study abroad (Šćukanec et al., 2016).

Students whose parents have primary and secondary education are significantly more likely to rate their financial difficulties as very serious or more serious than students whose parents have higher education (Šćukanec et al., 2016).

Students from families with a lower socioeconomic status:

Košutić et al. (2015) discovered that one-third of students cited a lack of financial resources as a reason for not continuing their education.

Students from families with a lower socioeconomic status often have full-time jobs, and those with full-time jobs perceive their study obligations' intensity to be lower compared to students who do not work (Šćukanec et al., 2016).

Students who work during their studies:

Students who work full-time have less time for study commitments than students who do not work (Šćukanec et al., 2016).

Female students in technical fields; male students in humanistic fields:

According to Jugović (2015), gender stereotypes about professions and fields of study are an important factor in choosing a field of study: the belief that one's gender indicates a lower level of talent for a particular profession or field of study is associated with a lower likelihood of choosing that field of study. Therefore, male students are the clear majority in technical sciences (70 %), while female students are the clear majority in humanities and social sciences (74 %) and medicine and healthcare (71 %) (Šćukanec et al., 2016). This, consequently, contributes to future socioeconomic inequality, as the typically male-dominated fields and professions are, on average, the ones with higher wages compared to the typically female-dominated fields.

Older students:

Only 8 % of students in Croatia enroll in higher education for the first time after the age of 21 (Šćukanec et al., 2016). Evidence suggests that older students are more likely to not complete their first year of study (Mihaljević Kosor, 2010), and that social integration into higher education is more difficult for them (Doolan et al., 2014).

Students with children:

Students who are parents indicate that studying is more difficult for them than for students who do not have children. They negatively assess the time available to them (Doolan et al., 2014).

Students with disabilities:

Students with disabilities represent a highly diverse group, leading to varied and individualised needs within the higher education system. Their challenges and requirements can be broadly categorised based on the nature of their disability. These may encompass the need for environmental accessibility, meaning having access to all areas for students with motor impairments; the need for adapted access to literature for students with visual impairments; the need to provide a communication facilitator for students with hearing impairments; the need for flexibility in the set deadlines for fulfilling student obligations, and sometimes the daily rhythm of activities for students with chronic diseases and mental disorders; and adapted teaching materials and assessment methods for students with specific learning difficulties and sometimes for those with motor and sensory impairments.

In addition to these adaptations, which are primarily the responsibility of higher education institutions, the inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education relies on various factors. These include the willingness of secondary education students with disabilities to pursue further education, access to adapted transportation and accommodation, support in dormitories and canteens, and the availability of assistive devices (Kiš-Glavaš, 2012).

Students who have completed vocational education:

According to Baranović (2015), a significant majority of high school students (98.5 %) and four-year vocational school students (75 %) aspire to attend university. However, the percentage decreases significantly for three-year vocational school students, with only 16.5 % planning to pursue higher education at a university. Similarly, there is evidence that it is more difficult for students who have completed vocational schools to pass first-year university exams (Mihaljević Kosor, 2010).

Students traveling to study:

According to Doolan et al. (2014), students who travel from another country cannot be present at all classes due to travel costs, as well as irregular public transportation. Because of the time required for travel, these students have less time to study.

Student-children of Croatian war veterans who died in the war:

The loss of a parent has a long-term negative impact on academic achievements; the negative impact is greater, the longer a child has grown up without the parent(s), and the psychological consequences of early parental loss are more pronounced, the older the child becomes (Kovač, 2015).

Students belonging to the Roma minority:

Members of the Roma minority are less likely to attend secondary schools, which is an obstacle to continuing their education at a higher level (Baranović, 2009).

LGBT+ students:

The results of a study conducted on a sample of high school students in Croatia (Jugović & Bezinović, 2015) show that LGBT+ students are more likely than heterosexual students to be exposed to relational violence and physical violence in school and are a potentially vulnerable group of students in higher education in Croatia. Furthermore, LGBT+ students face ignorance and prejudice that can, according to the UN Office of the Human Rights High Commissioner (UN OHCHR, 2019), take the form of discriminatory education policies, regulations, curricula, and teaching materials and practices. They are also exposed to homophobic/transphobic comments by both their peers and, although more rarely, staff (Štambuk et al., 2022), and the lack of LGBT-friendly and/or specialised support services.

Students coming from alternative care:

Young people from alternative care settings often participate in vocational education programmes, after which it is more difficult to continue their education at a higher level. In addition, financial difficulties make it more difficult for this group of young people to continue their education at higher levels (Šimić et al., 2011).

Students from rural areas, small towns, and islands:

Reasons for the underrepresentation of students from rural areas include financial difficulties because higher education institutions are located in urban areas. Schools in rural areas often do not have the same resources as schools in urban areas. Additionally, family and community support for study is often

lower in rural areas, and there is also a digital divide issue compared to students from urban areas (Kiš-Glavaš, 2019).

Refugees and asylum seekers:

Refugees and asylum seekers are considered, in the European and Croatian space, as a group in need of special protection, whose integration must be systematically supported by the national state. Lack of knowledge of the Croatian language, lower socioeconomic status, lack of integration into society, the education system, and the labour market, as well as problems with housing, are just some of the problems that these potential students face on a daily basis (Kiš-Glavaš, 2019).

This definition of vulnerability is consistent with the assumption that students from vulnerable and underrepresented groups encounter specific barriers related to their social position and identity during their studies. Recognition of the aforementioned barriers is a prerequisite for strengthening the social dimension of higher education, i.e., for expanding the "real options" for successful study and graduation (Puzić et al., 2020).

Well, how can we support them? What should we do?

Today, higher education institutions can no longer be just providers of courses, but should instead serve as facilitators of a functional link between students and graduates, their careers, education, and the business world. A student-oriented approach, which involves taking care of them from enrolment to graduation and preparing them for integration into society and the labour market, is a crucial factor for improving the quality of studies. This approach

should ultimately ensure an effective transition from education to the labour market and foster the professional and social development of graduates.

It is crucial to prioritise and demonstrate transparency while showing a willingness to be more inclusive. This approach will also encourage individuals from targeted groups to apply, even if they might have previously believed the opportunity was not meant for them. While it is acceptable to focus on certain student profiles, if students from other target groups express interest in participating in higher education, priorities should not serve as a reason to discourage them from applying or to reject their application (Guedens, 2021).

It is essential not to confuse equality and equity. Merely offering nominal or formal fairness, which implies equal rights and responsibilities for all, does not always guarantee real equality or equity in practice to promote inclusion and diversity in higher education. For instance, data shows (European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2022) that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds face relatively greater difficulties in school, resulting in them having different prospects for accessing higher education compared to students from more privileged backgrounds. Additionally, relatively more public money has been invested in young people of better socioeconomic status because they tend to pursue longer education and are relatively more likely to attend more expensive faculties, such as medicine (European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2022).

So, not only is unconditional equality of opportunity insufficient to achieve real equality, and therefore equity, in higher education, but there is strong

evidence that it may hinder it (European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, 2022).

According to Bush and Trani (2021), it is crucial to be flexible and actively eliminate all forms of visible and invisible discriminatory practices that harm various student groups, while occasionally allowing unequal treatment of unequal groups of students if it helps to correct mistakes or injustices committed at earlier levels of education.

We need to put inclusion at the heart of everything we do by embedding equality and diversity in our organisational structures, policies, processes, and procedures, and ensuring that we 'live' our values in practice. We then need to attract, retain, develop, and support a truly diverse staff and student body, and ensure that we are all aware of our personal responsibility to promote equality, diversity, and inclusion (Bush & Trani, 2021).

Authors Janebova et al. (2021) consider that the first step towards inclusive higher education is to ask honest, uncomfortable questions about why education in our institutions is not inclusive. They point out that searching for answers might be discomfoting and will probably be dependent on national, cultural, and institutional contexts. Asking such questions requires courage, honesty, and empathy. The answers might reveal unspoken power structures or cultural biases that we may not want to acknowledge. But only when these questions are asked and answered, can we make our institutions more inclusive.

The social dimension should interconnect the principles of accessibility, equity, diversity, and inclusion into all laws, policies, and practices (Ščukanec, 2020). It is important to ensure a holistic approach to the social dimension,

aiming to create coherent policies from early childhood education, through schooling to higher education, and throughout lifelong learning. This requires more connectivity between the work of those responsible for higher education and other ministries and sectors, which can bring about change only through a joint effort.

Higher education institutions need to strengthen their capacity in responding to the needs of a more diverse student and staff body, particularly through improving initial and continuing professional training for academic and administrative staff. Effective counselling and guidance for potential and enrolled students should help widen their access to, participation in, and completion of higher education studies. International mobility programmes in higher education should be structured and implemented in a way that fosters diversity, equity, and inclusion (Ščukanec, 2020).

Community engagement should be considered as a process whereby higher education institutions engage with external community stakeholders to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial. Like social dimension policies, community engagement should be embedded in the core missions of higher education. Such engagement provides a holistic basis on which universities can address a broad range of societal needs, including those of vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underrepresented groups while enriching their teaching, research, and other core functions (Ščukanec, 2020).

In 2014, the Development Strategy for Student Support at the University of Zagreb until 2025 (University of Zagreb, 2014) was adopted, which states, among other things, that students will be supported in extracurricular activities

which will contribute to better achievement of learning outcomes, employability, and personal development.

The Centre for Student Counselling and Support at the University of Zagreb was also established as a unique information center available to students from all faculties and academies. The Centre united student support activities towards information, counselling, and education in the following areas:

- academic skills development,
- career development and management, including professional practice guidance,
- development of communication and social-emotional skills,
- counselling for personal and academic difficulties,
- support for students with disabilities,
- mental health services,
- health care support,
- support for underrepresented and other groups of students requiring additional support,
- support for the teaching, professional, and administrative staff of the University of Zagreb in relation to the aforementioned student services,
- other areas as identified based on student needs and decisions made by the University Senate.

Authors Puzić et al. (2020) conducted a study with the aim of understanding the needs of students from underrepresented and vulnerable groups, in relation to their studies. They focused on several groups of students that had been less researched in the past and identified recommendations to enhance the study conditions for these groups. Here are three examples:

Refugees and asylum seekers:

- improve the availability of information about studying in Croatia,
- clearly define the procedures for admission to higher education institutions and make them easily accessible,
- enhance the availability of information on scholarship opportunities,
- organise preparatory courses in the Croatian language at the university level,
- introduction of a "peer" counselling system, where students with similar experiences can provide advice to other students.

LGBT+ students:

- provide psychological counselling for LGBT+ persons at all levels of education,
- establish offices of psychological and counselling support at all universities,
- encourage the establishment of LGBT+ student associations at all universities,
- promote the introduction of LGBT+-sensitive curricula and raise awareness among university staff about the issues faced by LGBT+ students,
- ensure synergy between educational institutions, relevant government institutions, LGBT+ NGOs, and the media in developing policies and implementing equality for LGBT+ people in higher education and education in general.

Female students in technical fields:

- organising educational activities for male and female students of primary and secondary schools with the aim of breaking down gender stereotypes related to different professions and areas of human activity,
- providing earlier vocational orientation and counselling during high school,
- organising training for university teachers to break down gender stereotypes,
- introducing disciplinary regulations at universities, specifying sanctions for university teachers who behave inappropriately (for example, if they treat female students differently than male students, make inappropriate comments, have different educational expectations, etc.).

In December 2018, the Government of the Republic of Croatia adopted the National Plan for the Improvement of the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019-2021. The plan contained six goals with a whole set of sub-goals, listed activities, responsible institutions and organisations, and implementation indicators. The goals were as follows:

- systematically collecting and processing data relevant to improving the social dimension of higher education and using them for this purpose,
- improve access to higher education for underrepresented and vulnerable groups and remove barriers to access,
- ensuring equal opportunities for all students during their studies,
- increase graduation rates and employment of underrepresented and vulnerable groups upon graduation,

- improve the system of financial support for members of underrepresented and vulnerable groups,
- the quality assurance system includes standards related to the social dimension of higher education.

As previously mentioned, finding solutions to the complex challenges posed by the nuances of inclusion in higher education requires innovative and continuous collaboration among institutions and organisations working in academia at the local, national, and international levels (Delap & Ferencz, 2021).

Indeed, the complexity of fostering inclusion in higher education requires a multi-faceted approach. Merely increasing funding may not be sufficient. Instead, it entails having knowledgeable staff who can thoroughly analyse the student population and comprehend their unique needs. Finding qualified and compassionate individuals within universities who are driven to support underrepresented students in overcoming obstacles is crucial. Moreover, creating open connections between diverse groups of students fosters an inclusive and welcoming environment (Delap & Ferencz, 2021).

For example, when we talk about students with disabilities, they are only one of the stakeholders in their higher education. Other important stakeholders are university teachers, administrative and professional staff in higher education (staff in libraries, departments, administrative and support services), fellow students, experts and institutions of practice (workshops, practical work, on-site teaching), other services (canteens, dormitories, cultural and sports facilities), the local community (transportation, access to facilities, universal design), the state/ministries (scholarships, transportation allowance, personal

assistance, personal disability allowance), and NGOs (information, fight for rights, provision of services). All should take responsibility for their part of obligations in higher education and work well together if the studies of students with disabilities are to be successful.

The fact that we may not have discovered people with fewer opportunities in our educational institutions is no excuse for inaction. Maybe they really do not exist or we just do not know about them, but by creating an inclusive atmosphere in our higher education institutions, we show them that they are welcome. Our job is to provide opportunities, to give chances, to accept, and it is up to the students themselves to decide if they want to "declare" themselves as belonging to a marginalised group and take advantage of the support we offer. If they do, it is a sign that we are on the right track. Likewise, if we notice a continuing reluctance of students to "declare" themselves, we should look into possible reasons why they might not feel safe or comfortable enough to do so.

If universities embrace student diversity, unpack the details about it, and engage in cooperation with students, many possible solutions can be created (e.g., enrolment quotas, enrolment priority, scholarships and cost subsidies, housing, transportation support system, psychological, academic, career, and other support). There is no one-size-fits-all approach, and regardless of the struggles, universities can always find a way to give underrepresented students equitable access to a life-changing educational experience and support them in that (Hovhannisyan, 2021).

We must be completely honest in what we do. If we strip education of the social experience, the relationship between teachers and students, all that

remains is fragmented teaching. Education does not exist outside of relationships and reality. We are talking about the hidden curriculum, a concept introduced by researcher Phillip Jackson in 1968 (Betkowski, 2023). The hidden curriculum is what educators convey to students through their interactions, by their example, and the school or classroom culture without being aware of it; it consists of unspoken values, beliefs, norms, and culture, including inclusion. If we do not treat our students as we teach them to treat others, our teaching is not authentic, valid, or persuasive. If we ourselves are not inclusive, we cannot teach and persuade anyone to practice inclusion.

So, we all need to make decisions in our areas for which we are responsible and make the necessary changes to promote inclusion. These changes must come from the bottom up, with students being the agents of change. Students are important; they are participants in the educational system who should decide about their education and improve it. Before making conclusions, proposals, procedures, or providing support for their education, we should always ask the students about it.

However, simply occasionally consulting students from groups facing barriers or only including them at the beginning of the decision-making process, but then proceeding to act without them in further stages is not enough. As previously mentioned, true inclusive practice relies on an inclusive mindset and philosophy. In other words, we must be willing to work with students from various marginalised groups instead of simply for them, involving them in each step of the decision-making process as well as approaching them as equals in this setting. It also requires us to challenge our own professional

identities as “experts” and the position of power or supremacy that comes with it.

Thus, it is necessary that we are constantly on the outlook for new inclusion practices or modes of ensuring a truer, more comprehensive inclusion process. These new models are often found not in the current academic circles, but rather in the marginalised/underrepresented/vulnerable communities themselves, among activists and experts belonging to these groups. Examples of such models include lived experience informed practice and co-production.

Lived experience informed practice is a model that considers the research evidence but emphasises the lived experience of the individuals and communities we are trying to include and engage. It is a response to the limitations and biases of the evidence-based approach, especially when it comes to the field of social sciences and helping professions (Wise, 2023). If considered in the context of this paper and the aforementioned need for an individualised approach when trying to ensure a more inclusive social dimension of higher education, this model offers a new framework that is in line with the ideas proposed elsewhere in this text. While research is important because it offers a specific type of data overview, it is impossible to create truly inclusive, individualised support systems without considering the lived experiences of those we are trying to support.

In turn, co-production is a concept that could be said to build on lived experience-based practice. Makey et al. (2022) define it as a process adopted in health, social care, research, policy development, and higher education that aims to bring together the skills and experiences of service users and professionals. It has a range of advantages, such as enabling users of a service

to have a voice and to equalise power among service users, professionals, and leaders. In other words, co-production can be viewed as a practical application extension of the well-known motto of the disability rights movement "nothing about us without us." Simply put and applied to the context of the social dimension of higher education, it is a collaboration on and co-creation of an inclusive environment that not only accounts for diversity but actively engages with it in a constructive manner.

And, for the end, as authors Janebova et al. (2021) remind us, we must bear in mind that inclusive education is not an outcome, but a process that is constantly revised and reconsidered. We can never be fully inclusive, but we can get close to it. There will always be new questions and challenges. It is a never-ending process. So, there is no end point to inclusion, but a cycle of effort, critical reflection, further change, and hope (Janebova et al. 2021).

The effort is truly worth it because very often the impact of the opportunities, education, and mobility provided is much more significant for people with fewer opportunities than for the typical population. All efforts to achieve inclusion, equity, and fairness in higher education are worthwhile because higher education has a mission to change society, to make it better. Let's do it!

References

ACA - Academic Cooperation Association (n.d.). *Home page*. Retrieved June 7th 2023. <https://aca-secretariat.be/>

Agency for Mobility and EU Programmes (AMEUP) (n.d.). U potrazi za uključivanjem i raznolikošću [In Search of Inclusion and Diversity]. Retrieved June 10th, 2023. <https://ampeu.hr/files/U-potrazi-ua-ukljucivanjem-i-raznolikosc.ppt>

- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596>
- Baranović, B. (2015). Materials for workshops with teachers resulting from the project *Social identities, access to higher education and choice of studies*, financed by the Croatian science foundation.
- Baranović, B. (2009). *Život Romkinja u Hrvatskoj s naglaskom na pristup obrazovanju [The Life of Roma Women in Croatia with an Emphasis on Access to Education]*. Research Report. Association of Roma Women, Bolja budućnost.
http://www.ijf.hr/socijalna_ukljucenost/adminmax/files/Izvjestaj_ZivotiObrazRomkinja.pdf
- Beames, J. R., Kikas, K., O'Grady-Lee, M., Gale, N., Werner-Seidler, A., Boydell, K. M., & Hudson, J. L. (2021). A New Normal: Integrating Lived Experience Into Scientific Data Syntheses. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2021.763005>
- Betkowski, A. (2023). *What is the Hidden Curriculum in Education?* Grand Canyon University. <https://www.gcu.edu/blog/teaching-school-administration/what-hidden-curriculum-education>
- Bohle, C. (2021). *Bridging the structural gaps in supporting inclusive mobility*. ACA Think Pieces, Article Two. <https://aca-secretariat.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/ACA-2021-04-26-Think-pieces-Article-2-A4-04.pdf>
- Bush, K., Trani, D. (2021). *Building a truly inclusive European University: the YUFE experience so far and emerging challenges*. ACA Think Pieces, Article Six. <https://aca-secretariat.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/ACA-2021-09-24-Think-pieces-September-Article-6-A4-03.pdf>
- Croatian Language Portal (n.d.). Retrieved June 7th, 2023. <https://hjp.znanje.hr/index.php?show=search>
- Delap, J., Ferencz, I. (2021). *Introduction to the series*. ACA Think Pieces, Article One. <https://aca-secretariat.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ACA-2021-03-25-Serie-Introduction-A4-05.pdf>

Doolan, K., Košutić, I., Barada, V. (2014). *Institucijski poticaji i prepreke za uspjeh u studiju: perspektiva studenata/ica (Izvješće o nalazima istraživanja) [Institutional incentives and obstacles for success in studies: students' perspective (Research Report)]*. Institute for Development of Education.

EHEA - European Higher Education Area (n.d.). *Social Dimension*. Retrieved May 30th 2023. <https://www.ehea.info/page-social-dimension>

European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, (2022). *Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe*, Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/631280>

European Commission (2023). *Erasmus+ Programme Guide 2023 (Version 1)*. <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/erasmus-programme-guide-2023-version-1>

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Simon & Schuster.

https://books.google.hr/books?id=zuMFXuTMAqAC&printsec=frontcover&hl=hr&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

Government of the Republic of Croatia (2018). *Nacionalni plan za unaprjeđenje socijalne dimenzije visokog obrazovanja u Republici Hrvatskoj 2019-2021. [National Plan for the Improvement of the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia 2019-2021]*. <https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/VisokoObrazovanje/RazvojVisokogObrazovanja/Nacionalni%20plan%20za%20unaprje%C4%91enje%20socijalne%20dimenzije%20visokog%20obrazovanja%20u%20Republici%20Hrvatskoj%202019.%20-%202021..pdf>

Government of the Republic of Croatia (n.d.). *Odluka Vlade Republike Hrvatske o uvjetima, kriterijima i načinu subvencioniranja participacije redovitih studenata u troškovima studija i sufinanciranje materijalnih troškova javnim visokim učilištima u Republici Hrvatskoj u akademskim godinama 2015./2016., 2016./2017. i 2017./2018. [The Decision of the Croatian Government on the conditions, criteria, and manner of subsidizing participation fees of studies of full-time students, and co-financing of material costs for public higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia in the academic years 2015/2016, 2016/2017, and 2017/2018]*.

<https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Sjednice/2015/238%20sjednica%20Vlade/238%20-%204.pdf>

Gozik, N. J. (2021). *A house We All Belong: Re-envisioning Education Abroad through a Systematic Approach*. ACA Think Pieces, Article Eight. <https://aca-secretariat.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/ACA-2021-12-21-Think-pieces-December-Article-8-A4-02.pdf>

Gregersen-Hermans, J., Casals Sala, M., Whitsed, C. (2021). *Internalisation for all: Belonging or not, this is the question*. ACA Think Pieces, Article Seven. <https://aca-secretariat.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/ACA-2021-10-28-Think-pieces-October-Article-7-A4-01.pdf>

Guedens, T. (2021). *Inclusion lessons from the youth field*. ACA Think Pieces, Article Four. <https://aca-secretariat.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/ACA-2021-06-23-Think-pieces-Article-4-A4-04.pdf>

Hovhannisyan, G. (2021). *Building trust with underrepresented student groups*. ACA Think Pieces, Article Five. <https://aca-secretariat.be/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/ACA-2021-08-31-Think-pieces-Article-5-A4-02.pdf>

Institute for the Development of Education (n.d.). *Social dimension of higher education*. Retrieved May 30th, 2023. <https://en.iro.hr/higher-education-policies-2/higher-education-policies/social-dimension-of-higher-education/> (30. 5. 2023.)

Janebova, E., Johnstone, C., Medalis, C. (2021). *Inclusive Internationalisation: An invitation to ask honest, perhaps uncomfortable questions instead of ticking "diversity" boxes*. ACA Think Pieces, Article Nine. <https://aca-secretariat.be/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ACA-2022-01-31-Think-pieces-January-Article-9-A4-07b.pdf>

Johnstone, C., & Edwards, P. (2019). Accommodations, Accessibility, and Culture: Increasing Access to Study Abroad for Students With Disabilities. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 24(4), 424–439. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315319842344>

Jugović, I. (2015). Rodna dimenzija odabira područja studija [The Gender Dimension of Choosing a Field of Study]. In B. Baranović (Ed.), *Koji srednjoškolski*

namjeravaju studirati? Pristup visokom obrazovanju i odabir studija [What Do High School Students Plan to Study? - Access to Higher Education and Choice of Study] (pp. 165 – 185). Institute for Social Research in Zagreb.

Jugović, I., Bezinović, P. (2015). Školska iskustva i percipirana dobrobit učenika koji osjećaju istospolnu privlačnost [School experiences and perceived well-being of same-sex attracted students]. In P. Zarevski, T. Jurin & K. Modrić Stanke (Eds.) (p. 89). *Proceedings of the 22nds Days of Ramir and Zoran Bujas, Zagreb 16th – 18th April 2015*.

Kiš-Glavaš, L. (2023, February 21st). *Inkluzija u visokom obrazovanju: što, zašto i kako [Inclusion in Higher Education: What, Why and How]*. Universitas portal. <https://www.universitas-portal.hr/inkluzija-u-visokom-obrazovanju-sto-zasto-i-kako/>

Kiš-Glavaš, L. (2019). The Improvement of the Social Dimension in Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia – a Prerequisite for Its Inclusiveness. In K. Krčmar (Ed.), *The Inclusivity Gap* (pp. 172 – 190). Inspired By Learning.

Kiš-Glavaš, L. (2014). Multidimenzionalna analiza socijalne uključenosti studenata s invaliditetom u visokoškolskom obrazovanju – kvantitativno istraživanje [Multidimensional analysis of social inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education - quantitative research]. In Uzun, T. (Ed.), *Multidimenzionalna analiza socijalne uključenosti djece s teškoćama u razvoju i studenata s invaliditetom u obrazovnom procesu, Izvješće o istraživanju [Multidimensional Analysis of Social Inclusion of Children and Students with Disabilities in the Education Process, A Research Report]*. Croatian Association of Deafblind Persons DODIR.

Kiš-Glavaš, L. (2012). Studenti s invaliditetom u sustavu visokog obrazovanja u Republici Hrvatskoj (Students with Disabilities in the System of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia). In L. Kiš-Glavaš (Ed.), *Opće smjernice, priručnik za nastavno, administrativno i stručno osoblje sveučilišta [General Guidelines, A Handbook for Teaching, Administrative, and Expert University Staff]* (pp. 35 – 69). University of Zagreb.

Košutić, I., Puzić, S., Doolan, K. (2015). Društveni i institucionalni aspekti odluke o studiranju i odabira visokoškolske institucije [Social and institutional aspects of the decision to study and the choice of a higher education institution]. In B. Baranović (Ed.), *Koji srednjoškolci namjeravaju studirati? Pristup visokom*

obrazovanju i odabir studija [What Do High School Students Plan to Study? - Access to Higher Education and Choice of Study] (pp. 123 – 163). Institute for Social Research in Zagreb.

Kovač, D. (2015). *Growing up Fatherless and Education Outcomes*. Work derived from a doctoral dissertation, presented at Princeton University. <http://www.ers.princeton.edu/events/ers-events/dejan-kovac-princeton-university-%E2%80%9Cgrowing-fatherless-effects-paternal-mortality>

London Communique (2007, May 18th). *Towards the European Higher Education Area: Responding to Challenges in a Globalised World*. EHEA - European Higher Education Area. http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/London_Communique18May2007.pdf

Mattila, M., & Papageorgiou, A. (2016). Disability, perceived discrimination and political participation. *International Political Science Review*, 38(5), 505–519. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512116655813>.

Merriam-Webster (n.d.). Intersectionality. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved July 6th, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intersectionality>

Mihaljević Kosor, M. (2010). Rani odlazak sa studija: determinante nezavršavanja studija u hrvatskom visokom obrazovanju [Leaving Studies Early: Determinants of Not Completing Studies in Croatian Higher Education]. *Revija za socijalnu politiku*, 17(2), 197–213.

Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (n.d.). *A Reasonable Adjustment*. Retrieved June 15th, 2023. <https://posi.hr/pojmovnik/>

Panchenko, L. F., Korzhov, H. O., Khomiak, A. O., Velychko, V. Y., & Soloviev, V. N. (2022). Social dimension of higher education: definition, indicators, models. *CTE Workshop Proceedings*, 9, 124–138. <https://doi.org/10.55056/cte.108>

Puzić, S., Baketa, N., Baranović, B., Gregurović, M., Matković, T., Mornar, M., Odak, I., Šabić, J. (2020). *O podzastupljenim i ranjivim skupinama studenata: prilozi unapređivanju socijalne dimenzije visokog obrazovanja u Hrvatskoj [Underrepresented and vulnerable groups of students: Contributions to*

improving the social dimension of higher education in Croatia]. Institute for Social Research in Zagreb.

Romstein, K., Sekulić-Majurec, A. (2015). Obrnuta inkluzija – pedagoške vrijednosti i potencijali [Reverse inclusion - pedagogical values and potentials]. *Pedagogijska istraživanja*, 12(1-2), 41-52. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/178845>

Salto-Youth Inclusion Resource Centre (2009). *Going International – Opportunities for All*. <https://salto-youth.net/downloads/4-17-397/GoingInternational.pdf>

Sočo, J., Zrnić, L. (2021). Usluge i pomagala za studente s invaliditetom u Knjižnici Filozofskog fakulteta u Zagrebu [Services and aids for students with disabilities in the library of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb]. *Proceedings of the 1st International Artistic and Scientific Conference* (pp. 820 – 831).

Strategy of Education, Science, and Technology National Gazette, No. 124. (2014).

Šćukanec, N. (2020). *The ambitious decade ahead for the social dimension in higher education*. European University Association, Expert voices. <https://eua.eu/resources/expert-voices/171:the-ambitious-decade-ahead-for-the-social-dimension-in-higher-education.html>

Šćukanec, N., Sinković, M., Bilić, R., Doolan, K., Cvitan, M. (2016). *Socijalni i ekonomski uvjeti studentskog života u Hrvatskoj: nacionalno izvješće istraživanja EUROSTUDENT V za Hrvatsku za 2014* [Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Croatia: a National EUROSTUDENT V Research Report for Croatia for 2014]. Ministry of Science and Education. <https://vlada.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/Sjednice/2015/238%20sjednica%20Vlada/238%20-%20204.pdf>

Šimić, A., Kusturin, S., Zenko, A. (2011). *Smjernice za zadovoljavanje potreba mladih izašlih iz sustava skrbi* [Guidelines for meeting the needs of young people who have left the care system]. Association "Igra" and the Forum for Quality Fostercare of Children.

Štambuk, M., Association „Dugine obitelji“, Association Lesbian Organisation Rijeka "LORI" (2022.). *Iskustva i potrebe mladih LGBTIQ osoba u Hrvatskoj. Izvještaj o rezultatima istraživanja*. [Experiences and Needs of LGBTIQ Youth in Croatia. A Research Report]. Lesbian Organisation Rijeka „LORI“.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, December 13th, 2006,
<https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-crpd>

UN OHCHR (2019, October 2nd). *The Inclusion of LGBT people in education settings of paramount importance to "leave no one behind"*. Retrived July 10th, 2023 from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements/2019/10/inclusion-lgbt-people-education-settings-paramount-importance-leaving-no-one>

UNESCO (2017). *A Guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education*. UNESCO.
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002482/248254e.pdf>

University of Zagreb (2014). *Development Strategy for Student Support at the University of Zagreb until 2025*.
http://www.unizg.hr/fileadmin/rektorat/O_Sveucilistu/Dokumenti_javnost/Dokumenti/Javne_rasprave/Pet_strateskih_dokumenata_01.2014/Usvojene_strategije_2014/01_Strategija_razvoja_podrske_studentima_finalno_nakon_javne_rasprave.pdf

Van Hees, V. (2022). *Making mobility more inclusive: towards more targeted support for disadvantaged students*. European University Association, Expert voices.
<https://eua.eu/resources/expert-voices/280:making-mobility-more-inclusive-towards-more-targeted-support-for-disadvantaged-students.html>

Wise, S.J. (2023, July 6th). *Lived Experience Informed Practice: An Alternative to Evidence-Based Practice*. Medium.
<https://medium.com/@livedexperienceeducator/lived-experience-informed-practice-an-alternative-to-evidence-based-practice-23a60e35602f>

International Conference on

‘Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education’ (RUICHSS 2023)

University of Ruhuna

ISSN: 2706-0063

Paper Index

Contents

Diversity, Assistive Technology and Governance in Inclusive Education

Exploring Research Trends on Students With Disabilities in Higher Education: A Bibliometric Analysis

P.D. Wijesekara 1 - 21

Accommodating Inclusive Education in Library and Information Science Research: In the Case of Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS)

H. Koralage, J. J.G. Arachchige, W.P.G.L. Perera 23 - 40

Students With Disabilities in Higher Education in Sri Lanka: Challenges, Impediments, and the Way Forward

Samanmala Dorabawila, Anoma Abhayaratne,
Sakunthala Yatigammana 41 - 56

Diversity, Equity and Inclusive Mechanisms at Sri Lankan Universities and the Way Forwards for Policy Implications

Gunanayagam Vickneswaran, Upali Pannilage 57 - 73

Psycho-Social Behaviour and Spirituality in Inclusive Education

Differences in Emotional Well-Being, Social Inclusion and Academic Self-Concept Between Students With and Without Disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Anamarija Žic Ralić 75 - 93

Investigating the Influence of Colonialism on the Religious Landscape of Sri Lanka and Its Impact on Inclusivity K.M.G. Arjuna Manage, Nuwanthi Dias	95 - 111
An Exploratory Study on the Consequences for Young People of Cyberbullying - the New Form of Online Violence and Aggression Arabela Briciu, Victor-Alexandru Briciu, Eliza-Lorena Bortos	113 - 128
Impact of Urbanisation on Mental Disorders in SAARC Countries Chamath Edirisuriya, Mayangi Serasundera, Pramoth Darampriya, Malshani Weerasooriya, Krishantha Wisenthige, Ruwan Jayathilaka, Udeshika Pathirana	129 - 151
<b style="color: #0070C0;">Social Identity and Inclusive Teaching and Learning Approaches	
Using Flipped Classroom Approach to Enhancing Career and Life Skills: A Study With Mathematics Teachers I.S.K. Eriyagama, B.M.S. Bandara	153 - 162
Teachers’ Perceptions of the Students With Special Educational Needs in an Inclusive Educational Context in the Baddegama Educational Division M.G.S. Poshitha	163 - 185
Inclusive Approach to Students With Disabilities in Academic Setting: The Case of the IncEdu Project Martina Feric	187 – 201

Disabling Barriers and Enabling Opportunities for Social Inclusion

Exploring the Nature of the Influence of Social Media in Professing the Identity of Homosexuals in Colombo, Sri Lanka: A Mixed-Methods Study	
H.W.M. Yohan Wickramasekara	203 - 215
An Exploratory Study of Perceptions of SRH Education Among Female University SWDs: Student Perspectives	
Chandima Jayasena, Ishari Gunarathna, Abhishek Thakur	217 - 240
Breaking Down Barriers: Exploring the Mechanisms for Social Inclusion Within the University of Peradeniya	
H.D.P. Premarathne, I.U. Gunarathna, W.M.S.M.K. Thoradeniya	241 - 257
Learning Loss due to School Closure: A Systematic Review	
V. Agalya, B.P.G.S. Gunarathne	259 - 273
The Perceptions of Peers About Students With Disabilities: An Analysis With Special Reference to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna	
A.J. Jayasekara, I.G.S. Kumari, Upali Pannilage	275 - 292
Aspects of Romanian Students' Attitudes Towards Using Vlogging as a Tool in the Education Process	
Victor-Alexandru Briciu, Arabela Briciu, Dumitrița-Valentina Baciú	293 - 308

International Conference on

'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education' (RUICHSS 2023)

University of Ruhuna

ISSN: 2706-0063

Diversity, Assistive Technology, and Governance in Inclusive Education

Exploring Research Trends on Students With Disabilities in Higher Education: A Bibliometric Analysis

P.D. Wijesekara

International Center for Multidisciplinary Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sri Jayewardenepura

wijesekarapiyoda@gmail.com

Abstract

Education is a fundamental right of all human beings all over the world in all conditions and all ages. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education is one of the challenging goals of the world's agenda for 2030. This study aims to portray the publication trends in relation to students with disabilities (SWDs) in higher education (HE) using a bibliometric analysis by taking academic publications as a key source. The Biblioshiny package in the R software and VOS Viewer tools were used for the statistical computing and visualization of data obtained through the Scopus database. A total of 760 documents (Date acquisition: 23rd April 2023) from all languages were refined from 1993-2022 for the analysis. The results depicted that the annual scientific production of literature was growing in number and accelerated after 2007. The Journal of Disability and Society proved to be the most significant source in the field. The authors with the highest level of productivity originate from Spain. The themes were more diversified after 2004. Students (111), human (73) and disability (57) were the most frequently used keywords. Keywords are grouped into 7 dominant clusters. Scientific production in this area involved contributions from 71 countries, with the most substantial contributions coming from the USA (560), Spain (242), and the United Kingdom (166). There is ongoing research potential in this field, indicating the need for a sustained long-term research agenda to address evolving challenges and opportunities in the global context. There is ample room for further development and exploration in this domain.

Keywords: *Bibliometric Analysis, Biblioshiny, Higher Education, Students With Disabilities, Sustainable Development Goals*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 as part of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SDG 4 aims to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." This goal reflects the importance of education in achieving sustainable development, as education is considered a fundamental human right and a key factor in reducing poverty, promoting health and well-being, and fostering economic growth and social inclusion. The global perspective on inclusion in education has been shaped by the struggle of people with disabilities since 1990. As a result, the right to inclusive education was recognised in Article 24 of the 2006 UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities (UNESCO, 2020).

In higher education, individuals with disabilities such as students, scholars or researchers, continue to be underrepresented as they are among the most marginalised, vulnerable, and excluded groups in higher education institutes (UN, ND). Attention deficit/ hyperactivity disorder, learning disability, visual impairment, autistic, dexterity disability, lack of hearing and speech disability were the most common disabilities among undergraduates (American College Health Association, 2022). To improve outcomes for students with disabilities, it is important to raise awareness about disability laws, counter negative attitudes towards disability, and provide adequate support (Hayes and Bulat, 2017; Park & Kim, 2018).

In line with this perspective, this study aims to conduct a Bibliometric analysis to uncover the trends in research on SWDs in HE. Accordingly, the results of the study are expected to answer the following research questions.

- What is the extent of scholarly output, the rate of research development and citation trends related to the Students with Disabilities (SWDs) within the context of higher education?
- Who are the most prolific authors that have taken research initiative on SWDs in HE?
- What are the primary sources that exhibit high levels of productivity in research concerning SWDs in the context of HE?
- What is the geographical distribution of research advancement in the field of SWD in higher education?
- What are the most used keywords on SWDs in HE and how the themes evolved over time?

To address the above questions, bibliometric methods were employed to deeply explore the existing literature. The bibliometric analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the literature and it is beneficial in understanding the research gaps (Xu, 2021). Bibliometric analysis is a quantitative research practice by nature. This data-driven approach allows researchers to objectively measure the impact of publications, identify influential authors and institutions, and gain insights into the evolution of research topics and the dissemination of knowledge.

Accordingly, the main objective of this research is to portray the publication trends and development of literature on SWDs in HE based on the academic literature.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Source of Data

The Scopus database was used as the source of data for conducting the study. Scopus database contains millions of multidisciplinary records including journals, books, book chapters, conference proceedings etc (Scopus Content Coverage Guide, 2023). The database is used as a citation index too. The following is the retrieval strategy.

Search within- Article title, Abstract, Keywords

Search terms- "Students with Disabilities" AND "Higher Education"

Document type- All documents

Only the final documents were selected by excluding the articles in the press and excluding the documents from 2023, as it is not yet a completed academic year. Accordingly, a total number of 760 articles were refined on 23rd April 2023. After refining it was noted that the Scopus database has publications related to the SWD and HE since 1993. Thus, for a better and broader understanding, all documents from 1993-2022 were taken into account during the analysis.

2.2 Methods Used

Bibliometric analysis is one of the systematic literature reviewing methods which is quantitative in nature. The Biblioshiny package in R software language developed by Prof. Massimo Aria which is a web-based tool was used for the analysis and graphical modeling of the data in this study (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Xie et al, 2020). Performance analysis, science mapping and network analysis techniques of the Biblioshiny software package were used where necessary to achieve the objectives of the study. Further, VOSviewer tool was used for the cooccurrence analysis of keywords to identify the word clusters (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

3. Scope and Significance of the Study

Students with disabilities (SWDs) in higher education face unique challenges that can impact their educational experience and success. These challenges can include physical and environmental barriers to universities, lack of accessibility and accommodations, social isolation, and discrimination (Algolaylat, 2023). However, with the support of disability services SWDs thrive in HE and achieve their academic goals. It is important for higher education institutions to prioritise inclusivity and accessibility to ensure that all students have equal access to education and opportunities (Wolanin & Steele, 2004).

Sri Lanka also has taken initiatives to support SWDs in education by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in the early 2000s (Perera et al., 2019). Further, Perera and

others (2019) stated that 61% of SWDs in Sri Lankan universities were not satisfied with the experiences they faced at the university. The findings also revealed relatively poor awareness of the rights of the SWDs among the academic/nonacademic staff and peers in the university system. It is a timely need to discover the insights of the SWDs in HE to identify the untouched, unspoken areas of the SWDs in HE, which will be significant for the scholars to engage in more outstanding research. This bibliometric analysis provides references and recommendations for future research and deep insights to past research, allowing future researchers to address the gaps in scientific knowledge.

4. Review of the Literature

The individuals with obstacles to inclusion that limit the ability to fully participate, belong, and learn under equal conditions the other students in educational processes are known as students with disabilities (Ainscow, 2019). American College Health Association (2022) states that 12% of college students have Attention-Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). Further, NCES (2022) highlights that 12.6% of individuals with disabilities are dropped out without graduating in the United States suggesting that the policy considerations still have loopholes in providing equal education to all. Further, the rates suggest that there is in need for additional support for SWDs in HE.

Due to many reasons such as lack of awareness of legal rights (Greenberg, 2017) and social stigma (Eccles et al, 2018), 37% of college students do

not report their conditions to the college administrative (NCES,2022) which impact on their inclusive education. Hearing impairment (McNeil & Kelley, 1993), visual impairment (Athanasios,2009; Richardson, 2002) and intellectual disabilities (Safer et al., 2018) are the most commonly addressed physical disabilities among the HE institutes other than psychological disorders. Academic coaching, peer mentoring (Ainscow,2019), and changes in policies (Pivik, 2002) are widely addressed solutions in SWD-related research to enhance the educational and social inclusion of the SWDs in HE.

Bibliometric Analysis typically involves the analysis of publication and citation data, trends in research, patterns of collaboration among scholars and identifying the influence and impact of individual researchers or publications within the field (Aria et al, 2017). Bibliometric analysis uses mathematical and statistical methods to measure and analyse scholarly communications (Derviş, 2019) using digital databases including conference papers, journal articles, books, literature reviews, paper articles, reports and periodicals. Large digital databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, Crossref, ScienceDirect and Pubmed are frequently used in bibliometric studies. The bibliometric analysis procedure comes in 4 steps as follows; 1) Defining the scope and aims for the study. 2) Selecting the relevant techniques to meet the aims and objectives of the study. 3) Defining the search terms according to the scope of the study and selecting a database to cover the scope of the study. 4) Running the bibliometric analysis and findings aligning with the objectives (Donthu, 2021).

The literature highlighted the evolving landscape of SWDs in HE, emphasizing the challenges they face and the evolving support mechanisms in place. While there are remaining gaps and complexities that require further investigation, this study aims to shed light on the evolving trends and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of this critical area using a bibliometric analysis. By building upon the insights gleaned from this review, this research seeks to inform policy, enhance practice, and guide future studies in the field.

5. Results and Findings

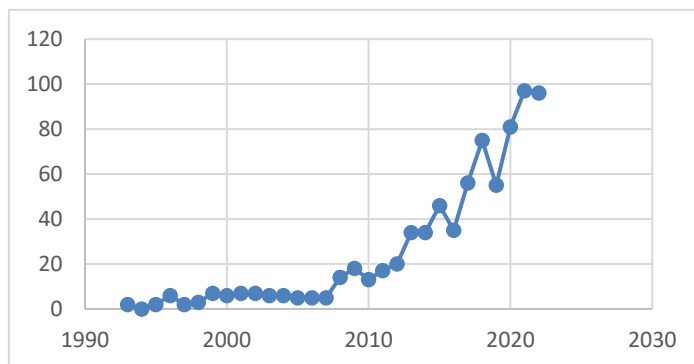
The downloaded bibliographic dataset was composed of 760 documents including 555 (73%) journal articles, 87 (11%) conference papers, 14(2%) books, 52(7%) book chapters and 40(5%) reviews. Further, the majority was written in English (646), Spanish (57) and Russian (30) languages. Documents were not refined by the language as it will provide the readers with the comprehensive nature of the studies related to SWDs in HE. The annual growth rate of the related documents was 14.28% and the average citation per document was 10.36.

5.1 Distribution of Annual Documents

The evolution of literature is tracked year-wise to reflect the trends in annual publications. Accordingly, annual scientific production depicts a clear upsurge starting from 2008 (14). Further, 2015 (46), 2018(75) and 2020(81) are noteworthy as the annual publications reached the peaks. By 2020

publications per year increased nearly 100 indicating a good trend in scientific production. The annual growth rate for scientific production was 14.28%.

Figure 1: Annual Scientific Publications



Note: Developed by Author, 2023 using Biblioshiny tool

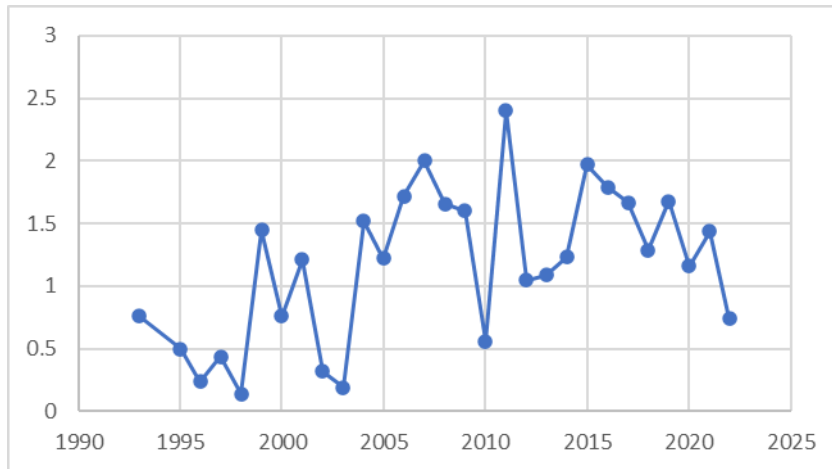
There were no publications in 1994 (0). The year 2021 (97) was highlighted as the year with the highest number of scientific publications.

5.2 Analysis of Cited Papers

5.2.1 Analysis of Annual Citations

Figure 2 depicts the pattern of annual citations in the field. There is a noticeable increase in average citations around 2007 (Mean TCperYear2) and 2011 (Mean TCperYear2.4). Indicating that articles published in those years have had a relatively higher average impact, possibly due to their significance in the field.

Figure 2: Annual Citations



Note: Developed by Author, 2023 using Biblioshiny tool

5.2.2 Mostly Cited Papers in the Field

The paper titled “College students with ADHD: current status and future directions” has made a significant contribution to its field and continues to be influential, as evidenced by its relatively high citation count (Doi: 10.1177/1087054709340650). The paper was authored by George J. Dupaul, Lisa L. Weyandt, Sean M. O'Dell and Michael Varejao in 2009. The paper appeared in the Journal of Attention Disorders. It has received a total of 243 citations since its appearance and approximately 16.2 citations per year. Further, the most total citations per year were occupied by the paper developed by Anabel Moriña (2017) titled “Inclusive education in higher education: challenges and opportunities” which appeared in the European Journal of Special Needs Education. Table 1 depicts the documents with more than a hundred total citations.

Table 1: Top Global Citation Scores

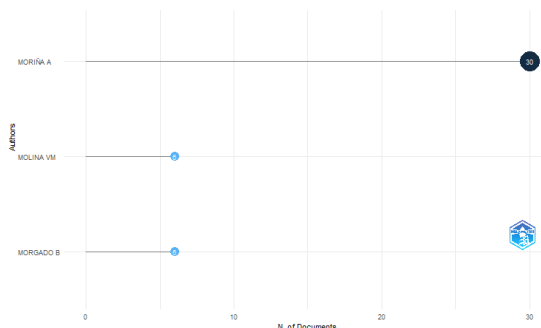
Author & Year of Publishing	DOI	Total Citations	TC per Year
DUPAUL G.J. et al, 2009	10.1177/1087054709340650	243	16.2
MORIÑA A., 2017	10.1080/08856257.2016.1254964	155	22.1428571
GETZEL E.E., 2008	10.1177/0885728808317658	148	9.25
GOODE J., 2007	10.1080/09687590601056204	129	7.58823529
SEALE J.K., 2006	10.4324/9780203969595	129	7.16666667
WOLF L.E., 2001	10.1111/j.1749-6632.2001.tb05792.x	126	5.47826087
BORLAND J., 1999	10.1080/09687599926398	118	4.72
MULLINS L., 2013	10.1080/09687599.2012.752127	112	10.1818182

Note: Developed by Author, 2023 using Biblioshiny tool

5.3 Most Prominent Authors

1708 authors have contributed to the development of scientific production in the studies related to SWDs in higher education. Among those, Professor Anabel Moriña attached to the University of Seville of Spain, is noted as the most prolific author in the field. Her research interests are in higher education, special education and teaching methods. She has contributed 30 documents related to SWDs in HE. She is followed by Prof. Victor M. Molina and Assis. Prof. Beatriz Morgado contributed 6 documents each (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Most Relevant Authors

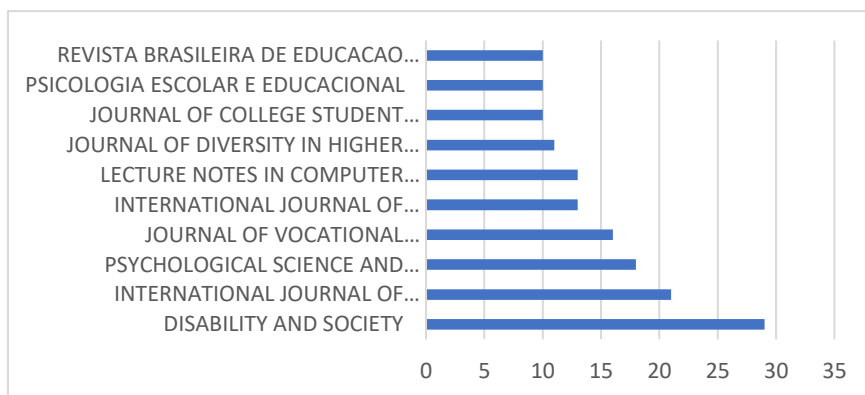


Note: Developed by Author, 2023 using Biblioshiny tool

5.4 Most Prolific Sources

Journal of Disability and Society is the most relevant source in the field and acts as a hub for the dissemination of knowledge in the field. It has been a peer-reviewed journal since 1968 and published by the Taylor & Francis group. International Journal of Inclusive Education and Psychological Science and Education journals are the following most relevant sources. Journal of Disability and Society was also identified as the most cited (522 citations) source.

Figure 4: Top Sources in the Field



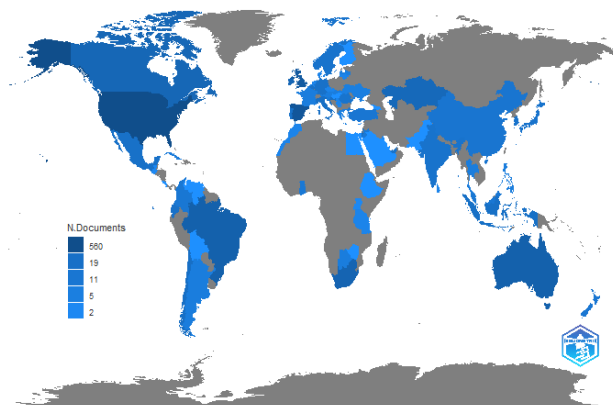
Note: Developed by Author, 2023 using Biblioshiny tool

5.5 Country-Wise Influence for SWD in HE Researches

5.5.1 Distribution of Scientific Production by Country

The USA has contributed the most to the development of the field, with 560 documents within the period of study. Further, Spain (242 docs), United Kingdom (166 docs), Australia (88 docs), Brazil (86 docs), South Africa (63 docs), Ireland (52 docs), Canada (48 docs), Kazakhstan (40 docs) has contributed the most.

Figure 5: Scientific Production by Country to SWD Research



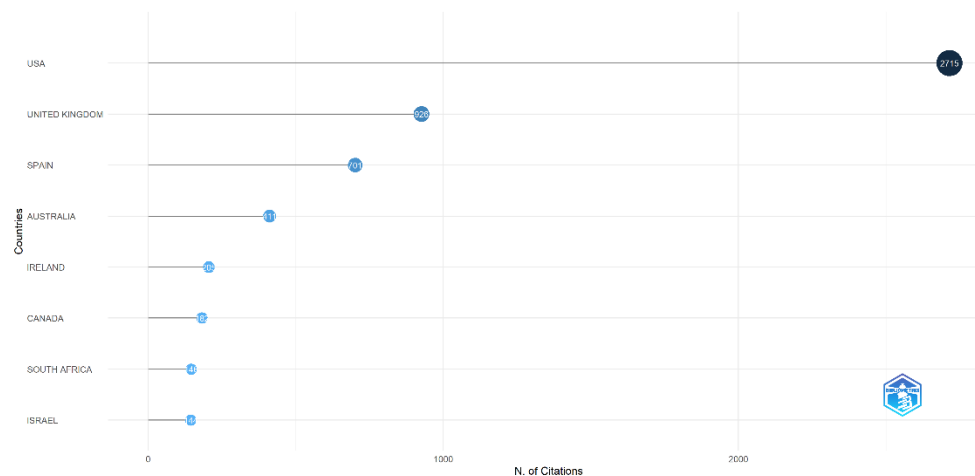
Note: Developed by Author, 2023 using Biblioshiny tool

Figure 5 depicts the contribution by country to the SWDs in HE. Accordingly, the most spread contributions were from North America (USA, Canada, Mexico) and the Latin American region (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Argentina). European region (Spain, UK, Ireland, Italy, Croatia, Germany, Sweden) and Australia. It is noteworthy that most of the countries are English-speaking.

5.5.2 Most Cited Countries

The USA is the most cited (Total Citations 2715) country, while United Kingdom (TC926), Spain (TC 701), Australia (TC 411) and Ireland (TC 205) are the top 5 cited countries in the list. The countries with more than 100 citations are depicted in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Most Cited Countries

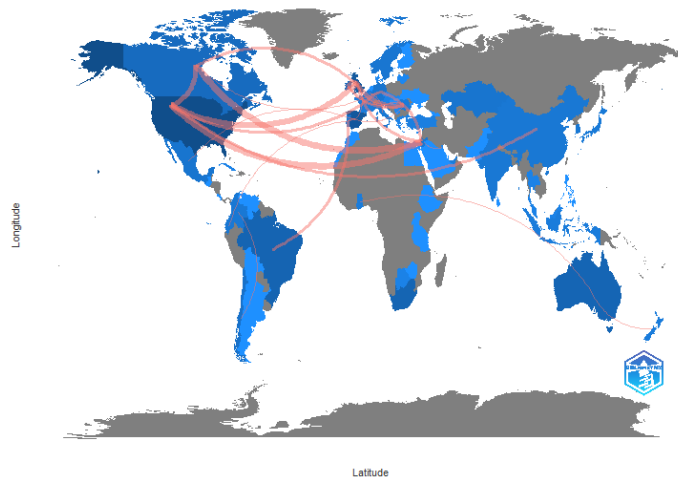


Note: Developed by Author, 2023 using Biblioshiny tool

5.5.3 Country-Wise Collaboration on SWD Research

The United States of America, United Kingdom and Spain mostly collaborated with other countries. Collaborative research is a good trend in the development of scholarly works. Mostly the western part of the world is engaged in research related to SWD in HE (Figure 7). It depicts that the Eastern part of the world lacks collaborative research works.

Figure 7: Collaboration on SWD Research

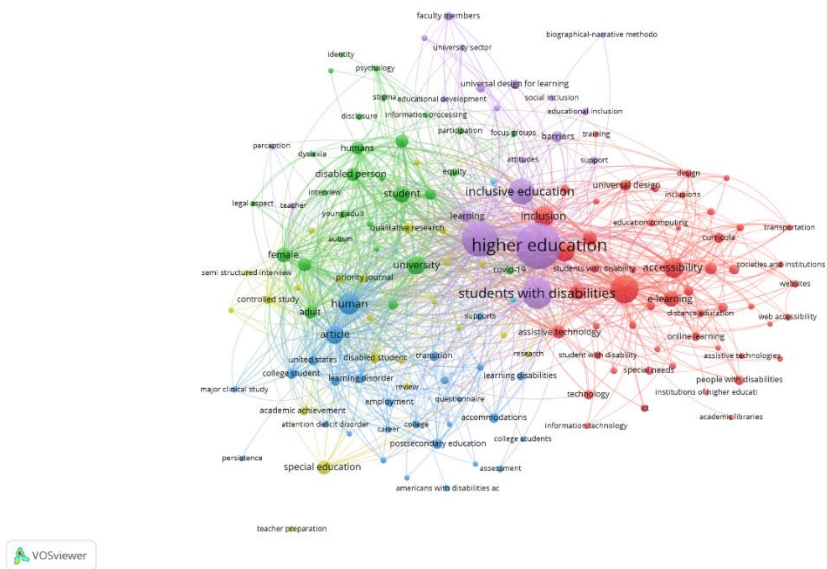


Note: Developed by Author, 2023 using Biblioshiny tool

5.6 High-Frequency Keywords

Word clouds are visual representations of the most frequently occurring words or terms in a dataset and a useful tool for finding the center point of texts (Atenstaedt, 2012). In a bibliometric analysis, these terms can provide insights into the key topics, themes, or concepts that are prevalent in the literature being analysed. Figure 8 depicts the high-frequency keywords in the related research. Students (111), human (73), disability (57), higher education (53), and article (51) were the most frequently used keywords.

Figure 9: Co-Occurrence of Keywords

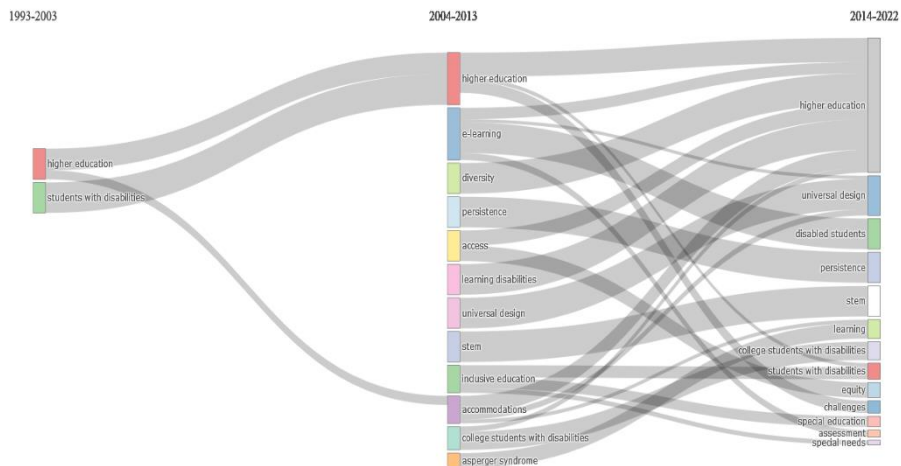


Note: Developed by Author, 2023 using VOSviewer

5.7 Thematic Evolution of Keywords

Figure 10 represents how the research field grew with more advancements in the themes. Between 1993-2003 main themes were SWDs and HE. Most of the themes appeared to be more comprehensive and diversified after 2004 with focus on e-learning, diversity, access, STEM and universal design. After 2014, more themes such as challenges, assessment, and equity were notable providing more diverse space to discuss the matters with SWDs in HE.

Figure 10: Thematic Evolution of the Keywords



Note: Developed by Author, 2023 using Biblioshiny tool

6. Conclusions

Research on SWDs and HE is mostly an untouched area of research by most institutions and academics. In this research Biblioshiny package in R software and VOS Viewer open-source software tools were used to identify and highlight the research trends and growth of the literature of SWDs in HE. Research on SWDs in HE appeared since 1993 depicting a long history of nearly 30 years (1993-2022). Since then, 760 publications appeared in the Scopus database representing an annual growth rate of 14.28%. The production of research in the area within three decades is relatively less. Europe and American regions are distinguished in research related to the SWDs and HE. Future research may scrutinise the application of inclusive

education in the Eastern parts of the world. Further, the need for future research on SWD in HE in every aspect such as social, economic, infrastructure, health, etc is crucial. The current study contributes to the understanding of the research output in the domain of SWDs in fostering interdisciplinary collaborations among educators, researchers, and institutions which may be instrumental in advancing the comprehension and implementation of strategies related to students with disabilities in the context of HE. There is ongoing research potential in this field, indicating the need for a sustained long-term research agenda to address evolving challenges and opportunities. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the implications arising from this study are extensive and multifaceted, and there is ample room for further development and exploration in this domain.

7. References

- Ainscow, M., Slee, R. & Best, M. (2019). Editorial: The Salamanca statement: 25 years on. *International Journal on Inclusive Education*, 23 (7-8), 671–676.
- Algolaylat, A. S., Alodat A. M., Muhidat M. A. & Almadanin H. A. (2023). Perspectives of students with disabilities on inclusive education challenges in higher education: a case study of a Jordanian University, *TEM Journal*, 12(1), 406-413. DOI: 10.18421/TEM121-50
- American College Health Association. (2022). *American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment III: Undergraduate Student Reference Group Data Report*. Silver Spring, American College Health Association.
- Aria, M., & Cuccurullo, C. (2017). Bibliometric analysis: A review of the literature. *Journal of Informetrics*, 11(2), 336-359. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joi.2017.02.007>

- Atenstaedt R. (2012). Word cloud analysis of the BJGP. *British Journal of General Practice*, 62, 148. 10.3399/bjgp12X630142
- Athanasios, K., Konstantinos, P., Doxa, P. & Eleni, K. (2009). *Students with Visual Impairments in Higher Education Institutes*. Paper presented at 7th ICEVI European Conference.
- Derviş, H. (2019). Bibliometric analysis using bibliometrix an R package. *Journal of Scientometric Research*, 8(3):156-160.
- Donthu, N., Kumar, S., Mukherjee, D., Pandey, N. & Lim, W. M. (2021). How to conduct a bibliometric analysis: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*, 134, 682-689. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.03.011>.
- Greenberg, M. A. (2017). Technical Report: Overview of Disability Law for Higher Education. National Center for College Students with Disabilities. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325858518_Overview_of_disability_law_for_higher_education
- Hayes, A. M., and Bulat, J. (2017). *Disabilities Inclusive Education Systems and Policies Guide for Low- and Middle-Income Countries*. RTI Press Publication No. XX-0043-1707. Research Triangle Park, NC: RTI Press. <https://doi.org/10.3768/rtipress.2017.op.0043.1707>
- McNeil, E & Kelley, S. (1993), Case-managed support services for students who are deaf or hearing impaired, *Journal on Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 10(3).
- Park, Y. K. & Kim, J. H. (2018). The effect of disability awareness educational program of university students in the department of physical therapy on reducing prejudices against people with disabilities and increasing positive attitudes toward people with disabilities. *Journal of Physical Therapy Science*, 30. 1030-1033. 10.1589/jpts.30.1030.
- Perera, H., Ariyaratne, H., & Gunawardhana, C. (2019). *A survey on inclusive education practices in Sri Lanka*. University of Peradeniya. <https://arts.pdn.ac.lk/incedu/doc/IncEdu%20Survey%20Report%20.pdf>

- Pivik, J., McComas, J. & Laflamme, M. (2002). Barriers and facilitators to inclusive education as reported by students with physical disabilities and their parents, *Journal of Exceptional Children*, 69(1), 97–107.
- Richardson, J. T. E., Roy, A. W. N., Richardson, J. T. E., & Roy, A. W. N. (2002). The representation and attainment of students with a visual impairment in higher education. *British Journal of Visual Impairment*, 20(1), 37–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026461960202000107>
- Safer, A., Farmer, L., & Song, B. (2018). Quantifying difficulties of university student with disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 31(2), 95-110.
- Scopus Content Coverage Guide, 2023. <https://www.elsevier.com/?a=69451>
- UN. (ND), *Disability and higher education: Workforce preparedness for students with disabilities*. UNO <https://www.un.org/en/disability-higher-education-workforce-preparedness-students-disabilities>
- UNESCO. (2020). *Global Education Monitoring Report Summary 2020: Inclusion and education: All means all*. UNESCO.
- Van Eck N. J. and Waltman L., (2010). Software survey: VOSviewer, a computer program for bibliometric mapping, *Scientometrics*, 84(2), pp. 523–538.
- Wolanin, T. R & Steele, P. E. (2004), Higher Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities; A Primer for Policymakers, The Institute for Higher Education Policy, Washington. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED485430.pdf>
- Xie, H., Zhang, Y., Wu, Z. & Lv, T. (2020). A bibliometric analysis on land degradation: current status, development, and future directions, *Land*, 9 (28). doi:10.3390/land9010028
- Xu, S., Zhang, X., Feng, L., & Yang, W. (2021). Disruption risks in supply chain management: a literature review based on bibliometric analysis. *International Journal of Production Research*, 59(8), 2427-2445. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2020.1839089>.

Accommodating Inclusive Education in Library and Information Science Research: In the Case of Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS)

H. Koralage^{1*}, J.J.G. Arachchige², W.P.G.L. Perera³

SLTC Research University, Sri Lanka^{1*}, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka²,
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka³

hasithako@sltc.ac.lk*

Abstract

The library should allow for inclusive education as a crucial component of instruction to ensure quality and equity. In order to investigate the propensity of library and information science researchers to adapt inclusive education in libraries, this paper reviews ten (10) research abstracts and presentations made at the Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS), organised by the SLTC Research University Sri Lanka. The sample consisted of 25 papers that were submitted to VICLIS conferences by Library and Information Science (LIS) scholars from eight different countries. Following a screening process, 10 articles from India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka were chosen and subjected to theme analysis. The availability of assistive technology devices in university libraries and themes like improving reading and writing skills in visually impaired students were found to be prevalent in LIS research. Other themes included the difficulties faced by users with disabilities, the role of libraries in supporting students with disabilities and repackaging information to meet user needs. The results suggest that the library service should adopt the new theme of "Inclusive Library Service." In addition to providing Braille books, addressing information access problems, promoting accessibility in library buildings, and putting the Marrakesh Treaty into effect to support students who are blind or visually impaired, LIS researchers have advised doing the following things. Libraries have a significant impact on the empowerment of people with special needs. To improve inclusive education, future LIS research should focus on assistive technologies, information literacy for individuals with disabilities, collection development, and professional development requirements in libraries.

Keywords: *Accessibility, Inclusive Library Services, Library Services, Social Inclusion, Special Needs*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

According to UNICEF, inclusive education makes sure that all children, including those who speak minority languages or have impairments, have equal opportunity to access and participate in school (UNICEF, n.d.). In order to develop social cohesion, promote equality, and enable people to realise their full potential, this principle is based on the belief that every individual has a right to be included and respected within the educational community. In order to facilitate inclusive education, the area of library and information science (LIS) is essential (Moirangthem & Phuritsabam, 2022). Assuring that libraries and information centers are open to everyone, regardless of background or ability, is the duty of LIS professionals to provide equitable access to information resources and services. They support the ideas of inclusivity and equal opportunity in school by doing this.

According to Ayoung, Baada, and Baayel (2020), research in LIS is crucial for resolving the difficulties that different populations have in successfully accessing and utilizing information. It strives to identify gaps, develop strategies, and build inclusive policies and practices that benefit all learners. It looks at the role that libraries and information centers play in fostering inclusive education. Inclusionary education research in LIS helps to promote inclusive learning environments by improving the efficiency of library services, creating usable technology, and constructing user-centered information systems.

Every year, researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers from all over the world congregate for the Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS). It acts as a hub for knowledge sharing,

networking opportunities, and developments in LIS-related theory and practice. Information organization, information retrieval, digital libraries, information literacy, information behaviour, the impact of technology on information services, and the library's role in inclusive education were only a few of the themes presented during VICLIS conferences.

The VICLIS conference is usually held online to enable attendees to join from various geographic regions and actively participate in conference activities (VICLIS, 2021). It offers a useful forum for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to stay current on new advancements, share knowledge, and support the development of LIS. To further emphasise the significance of inclusivity and accessibility within library services, VICLIS dedicates a special track to present research findings relating to library services for people with special needs.

Many LIS conferences at the global level have contributed to investigating the role of libraries in enhancing inclusive education. However, it appears that a large number of people attended the conferences in Sri Lanka (Perera et al. 2012). It is crucial to consider how VICLIS has tackled inclusive education through its research as a global conference with a Sri Lankan base. This study focuses on inclusive education in LIS research and conducts a thematic analysis of research abstracts and oral presentations made at VICLIS conferences (VICLIS, n.d.). The study tries to uncover important topics, trends, and views relating to inclusive education from the LIS field by looking at these abstracts and presentations. The study intends to develop inclusive LIS practices, advance equitable access to information sources, and provide guidance for future research practices and directions.

2. Research Methodology

A flexible and organised method called thematic analysis makes it possible to find and understand recurrent themes, patterns, and concepts in qualitative data. It enables in-depth investigation of the research abstracts and gives information on the main ideas and viewpoints about inclusive education in the field of LIS. As a result, the methodology for the investigation in this study was thematic analysis.

The selection and analysis of the research presentations and abstracts took place over the course of various steps. First, a compilation of all available research abstracts from the two VICLIS conferences in 2021 and 2022 was made. The relevance of the research presentations and abstracts to the subject of inclusive education in LIS was then evaluated. The topics of difficulties or initiatives for inclusive education in libraries were the only abstracts and presentations that were taken into consideration for further investigation. To enhance dependability and minimise potential bias, each abstract and presentation was read and coded separately by various researchers. Coding involved systematically identifying and labeling key ideas, concepts, and themes present in the abstracts. The researchers discussed and compared their coding to ensure consistency and addressed any discrepancies through consensus. This collaborative process enhanced the validity and reliability of the thematic analysis. After a vigorous process of reviewing, 10 abstracts out of 25 presented at VICLIS 2021 and 2022 were analysed and compared with a predefined list of themes representing inclusive education extracted from the literature review. The sample represented a variety of countries to provide a global perspective on inclusive education in LIS.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. Identify the key themes related to inclusive education from the literature.
2. Identify the dominant themes related to inclusive education in the research papers presented at the Virtual International Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS).
3. Compare the contribution of VICLIS research with the themes extracted from the literature.
4. Provide recommendations for improving LIS contribution to inclusive education

4. Scope and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyse the role that inclusive education plays in LIS. Despite focusing on LIS research on inclusive education at the worldwide level, this analysis only looked at the abstracts and presentations made at VICLIS conferences. The following findings from this study have important ramifications for the field of library and information science as well as the larger education sector: The study emphasises the significance of including inclusive education in libraries by analysing the recurrent themes in the research papers. It emphasises the necessity for libraries to grant people with special needs fair access to information and services, thereby fostering a more inclusive and accessible learning environment.

The study's conclusions offer insightful information to educators, librarians, and politicians. Practical suggestions for enhancing library services for those with special needs include offering Braille literature, addressing information access problems, increasing accessibility in library facilities, and putting the

Marrakesh Treaty into action. The study acknowledges the crucial function libraries can provide in empowering people with special needs. By putting an emphasis on information literacy, collection development, assistive technologies, and staff training, libraries can better help their users with disabilities, easing their path to education and social inclusion.

Future research should examine accessible technologies, information literacy for people with disabilities, collection development procedures, and professional development requirements for libraries, among other topics. This advice aids in defining the next research and developments in the area of inclusive education in libraries. Overall, the study advances knowledge of inclusive education in library settings and makes actionable suggestions for improving library services for those with special needs, promoting social inclusion, and ensuring fair access to knowledge.

5. Review of the Relevant Literature

The study of inclusive education is becoming increasingly popular in the discipline of library and information science (LIS). This survey of the literature seeks to give readers an overview of the research, essays, and other writings that have already been done on the subject of how libraries might support inclusive education. It will talk about important ideas, philosophies, and frameworks for inclusive education in the context of libraries and highlight the difficulties that users with disabilities have in using the materials available there.

Additionally, it will stress the value of staff education and awareness as well as the topics covered in research abstracts from the Virtual International

Conference on Library and Information Science (VICLIS) under the subtheme "Library Services for People with Special Needs."

More than 21 million people worldwide suffer from disabilities, and libraries should provide access to the information they need via a variety of techniques, according to Nandi, A. (2021). Many studies have shown how important it is for libraries to provide inclusive education. Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which contends that instructional strategies and materials should be developed to accommodate a range of learner demands, is a crucial idea in this setting. The application of UDL principles in library services helps ensure that all users have access to the resources and information they need (Zhong, 2012). Zhong examines the use of UDL in libraries while emphasizing its advantages for inclusive education.

In the context of libraries, inclusion, and accessibility play crucial roles in ensuring that all users have equitable access to information and services. The importance of accessible e-books in academic libraries is emphasised by Jaeger, Wentz, and Bertot (2015), who also note how they have the potential to improve accessibility and inclusiveness. Their research highlights the significance of including accessible formats to satisfy the requirements of various users.

The use of assistive technologies in libraries is essential for facilitating information access for people with varied abilities. In their study from 2021, Odigie and Okube focused on the role that assistive technology plays in the service delivery for patrons with special needs in academic libraries in Kogi State, Nigeria. Their research's conclusions offer insightful information about how these technologies can improve diversity and accessibility.

The contribution of library staff to improving inclusive education is crucial. To guarantee accessible library services, staff education and awareness are essential. Research on the effects of disability awareness training for library workers was undertaken by Forrest (2005), who focused on the advantages it brings in terms of better attitudes, knowledge, and practices. The study emphasises how critical it is to give library workers the talents and information required to offer inclusive services to people with impairments.

The study by Butler (2020) has drawn attention to the need for librarians to become more culturally competent in order to better serve a variety of user communities, including those who have disabilities. According to the study, increasing cultural competence among librarians is crucial for lowering health inequalities and offering inclusive services (Butler et al., 2016). Twaambo et al. (2022) note that it can be difficult to provide services and materials for people with disabilities in libraries. They claim that while libraries have advanced significantly in some regions of the world, they haven't done so in others, which is regrettable. They provide a standard for libraries in higher education by outlining resources and services for people with disabilities.

Despite the quantity of research on inclusive education in LIS, there are still certain gaps and restrictions. In actuality, LIS literature has tended to place more emphasis on conceptual explanations of inclusive education than on empirical studies (Nilholm, 2021). Lack of study particularly addressing the theme analysis of research abstracts presented at conferences is a notable research gap. Users with disabilities are regarded as a vulnerable group that encounters prejudice and barriers to using the library service. The lack of skilled library workers, accessibility to library premises, and difficulty in

accessing available formats of publications and Web pages are some of the impediments (Tinklin, Hall, 1999; Banks, 2017; Wolf, 2001; Phukubje, & Ngoepe, 2017).

In their article from 2021, Lankathilaka and Perera examine the Marrakesh Treaty's implementation as well as the information services offered to students who are blind or visually impaired. The study's objectives are to look at how visually impaired students use various information sources, identify obstacles to information access, and offer Marrakesh Treaty-based solutions. According to the results of their study, undergraduates who are blind or visually impaired prefer audiobooks over printed materials and must rely on others to find information because there aren't many audiobooks available.

The study calls attention to the necessity of putting the Marrakesh Treaty into practice in Sri Lanka to enhance services for visually impaired students, and it suggests expanding audiobook collections and creating unique mechanisms for delivering information services to suit their needs (Lankathilaka & Perera, 2021).

More research is needed, according to the literature, to better understand the difficulties that users with disabilities have in using library resources. Although the significance of accessibility has been highlighted in numerous studies, further research is required to identify the precise difficulties and constraints that various user groups face.

6. Results and Findings

- Through the literature review, key areas to cover inclusive education by libraries are identified and described under dominant themes:

- **Book accessibility:** This subject emphasises how crucial it is to give people with special needs access to books. The research abstracts place a strong emphasis on the necessity for libraries to offer accessible forms, such as Braille books, and address problems with information access.
- **Improving reading and writing skills in visually impaired students:** This theme examines methods and programmes designed to help visually impaired students improve their reading and writing skills. The abstracts and presentations cover methods, tools, and strategies that libraries can use to assist these students in their academic endeavours.
- **Barriers faced by users with disabilities:** This issue focuses on identifying and resolving the barriers that people with impairments encounter when utilising library services. The research abstracts and presentations highlight the difficulties these users face and provide ways to fix them while maintaining inclusion.
- **The importance of libraries in aiding students with disabilities is highlighted by this theme.** Libraries help by offering resources and support to students with disabilities. The summaries go over the different ways that libraries might support these students' academic endeavors, such as by providing specialised services, adaptable technology, and inclusive learning settings.
- **Information repackaging for individual needs:** This subject emphasises the significance of customizing materials to cater to the unique requirements of users with disabilities. The abstracts and talks examined methods for repackaging information to make it more approachable, comprehensible, and appropriate for a variety of consumers.

- Devices for assistive technology are available in university libraries: This theme emphasises the importance of integrating assistive technologies in university libraries to improve inclusion and accessibility. The papers cover the significance of supplying tools and technologies that help people with impairments access information and use library resources.

These topics show that the adaptation of inclusive education in libraries is the primary emphasis of LIS research as a whole. The themes and areas of coverage by VICLIS research are shown in Table 1. As a result, VICLIS research has mostly focused on boosting support for people with disabilities in library settings, addressing difficulties, and improving access. These topics highlight the contribution that libraries provide to fostering social inclusion, ensuring equity, and empowering users with special needs.

Table 1: Comparison of Inclusive Education Themes of the LIS with VICLIS Research

Themes/areas of inclusive education identified in relation to inclusive education from literature	Areas covered by VICLIS Papers	Areas not covered in literature
Accessibility in library services and facilities.	Accessibility to books and resources for all users.	Sensory and learning disabilities.
Diverse and representative collections in libraries.	The importance of diverse and representative collections in libraries.	Digital accessibility.
Inclusive programming for a diverse range of users.	Development of inclusive programming for a diverse range of users.	Social inclusion and community engagement.
Collaboration and partnerships among libraries, schools, educators, and community organizations.	Collaboration and partnership among libraries, schools, educators, and community organizations.	Universal design.
The user-centered approach in providing inclusive library services.	Adoption of a user-centered approach in library services.	Specific recommendations for information literacy and collection development.
The significance of accessible books and technologies in promoting inclusive education.	The provision of Braille books and addressing access to information issues.	
Staff awareness and training for providing inclusive services.	Promotion of accessibility in library buildings.	
The importance of cultural competence among librarians.	Implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty to support visually impaired students.	
Gaps and limitations in existing research on inclusive education in LIS.	Improvement of staff awareness and training.	
Thematic analysis of research abstracts from conferences on inclusive education.	Collaboration with relevant organizations.	
	The role of libraries in empowering users with special needs.	

However, despite the presence of these themes, there are certain gaps or areas of inclusive education that seem to be lacking in the analysed papers. Some potential areas for further exploration and research include:

- Assistive technologies: While there is mention of assistive technologies in university libraries, further research could delve deeper into specific technologies, their effectiveness, and their integration into library services.
- Information literacy for people with disabilities: The abstracts briefly mention the repackaging of information, but information literacy programmes created especially for people with disabilities that emphasise empowering them to effectively navigate information resources merit more attention.
- Collection development: Techniques for ensuring inclusivity are not thoroughly covered in the research abstracts. Future studies might look into how libraries might create collections that meet the various interests and requirements of people with disabilities.
- Professional development requirements: While raising staff awareness and training are briefly mentioned in the abstracts, more thorough research might examine the professional development requirements of library employees in relation to inclusive education. This would ensure that librarians have the abilities and information needed to offer inclusive services.
- Universal Design: Without the need for specialised adaptations, universal design aims to create places, services, and resources that are accessible and useable by as many people as feasible. By incorporating universal design principles into library operations, offerings, and resource selection,

libraries may foster diversity and provide advantages to a variety of users, including those with special needs.

Table 2 proposes the possible themes not covered in either LIS literature or VICALIS research papers. This indicates some research gaps related to inclusive education.

Table 2: Research Gap in LIS Literature on Inclusive Education

Themes/Areas	Covered in Literature	Covered by VICALIS	Not Covered in Literature
Accessibility	Yes	Yes	Sensory and learning disabilities, Digital accessibility
Diverse and representative collections	Yes	Yes	N/A
Inclusive programming	Yes	Yes	Social inclusion and community engagement
Collaboration and partnerships	Yes	Yes	Universal design
User-centered approach	Yes	Yes	Specific recommendations for information literacy and collection development
Significance of accessible books and technology	Yes	Yes	N/A
Staff awareness and training	Yes	Yes	N/A
Cultural competence among librarians	Yes	No	N/A
Gaps and limitations	Yes	No	N/A
Thematic analysis of research abstracts	Yes	Yes	N/A
Role of libraries in empowering users with spec	Yes	No	N/A

By addressing these gaps, future LIS research can further contribute to the adaptation of inclusive education in libraries and strengthen the support provided to individuals with disabilities.

7. Conclusions

The importance of providing inclusive library services and attending to the various needs of people with disabilities is emphasised by the thematic analysis of the research abstracts and presentations. The topics that have been emphasised highlight important areas where libraries may support inclusive

education. The conclusions drawn from the analysis serve as a roadmap for future study and actual application.

For libraries to guarantee equal access to books and information sources, improving accessibility is essential. Braille books, accessible digital resource forms, and the removal of physical barriers in library structures can all help with this. Libraries make it possible for people with disabilities to take full advantage of educational opportunities by putting accessibility first.

To fully understand the possibilities of assistive technologies in libraries, more research is required. This includes examining some technologies' efficacy, incorporating them into library services, and gauging how they affect disabled students' educational experiences. To empower users and foster inclusive learning environments, libraries should invest in a wide variety of assistive technology tools. To give people with disabilities the ability to efficiently explore and critically assess information, tailored information literacy programmes are crucial. Libraries may play a significant role in supporting information literacy so that users with disabilities have better information-seeking skills.

Another crucial element is curating inclusive collections that take into account the various needs and interests of people with disabilities. In order to ensure that users with disabilities have access to pertinent and interesting resources, this includes taking into account a variety of forms, topics, and viewpoints. Strategies for collection development should be inclusive and take into account the particular needs and preferences of these consumers.

Libraries must provide their staff with awareness and training on disability inclusion. Offering staff members training and professional development

opportunities can help them better understand their roles, change their attitudes, and acquire the knowledge and abilities they need to deliver inclusive services. In order to create thorough training programmes for library workers, cooperation with pertinent organizations and experts is essential.

By putting these suggestions into practice, libraries may provide inclusive environments that promote equitable opportunities for people with disabilities. Libraries support social inclusion, empower users with special needs, and ensure that libraries are inviting spaces for everyone through embracing accessibility, assistive technologies, information literacy, inclusive collection development, and staff training.

To investigate specific tactics and interventions for increasing inclusive library services, more study and practice are required. Empirical research can examine the efficiency of various strategies for producing inclusive educational results. The promotion of inclusive education and enabling people with disabilities to realise their full potential depend heavily on libraries. In the educational sector, inclusive education is crucial, and the discipline of library and information science is no exception. LIS professionals help to create equitable learning environments by promoting inclusive education and researching the issues. The VICLIS conferences offer a forum for debating and presenting research on inclusive education, encouraging information sharing, and advancing inclusive practises in the LIS industry, ultimately proving beneficial to all students.

8. References

Ayoung, D. A., Baada, F. N., & Baayel, P. (2020). Access to library service and facilities by persons with disability: Insights from academic libraries in Ghana.

Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 1(14). Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0961000620917723

- Banks, L. M., Kelly, S. A., Kyegombe, N., Kuper, H., & Devries, K. (2017). "If he could speak, he would be able to point out who does those things to him": Experiences of violence and access to child protection among children with disabilities in Uganda and Malawi. *PloS one*, 12(9), e0183736.
- Butler, M., et al. (2016, March). Improving Cultural Competence to Reduce Health Disparities [Internet]. Rockville (MD): Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (US). (Report No.: 16-EHC006-EF). AHRQ Comparative Effectiveness Reviews. PMID: 27148614. Bookshelf ID: NBK361126. Retrieved from [https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27148614/]
- Dewandaru, D. A. K., Susianti, V. A., & Wardani, T. R. K. (2021). Public Library Cooperation for Disability Services in Semarang with BALAI Literasi Braille Indonesia. Proceeding of Virtual International Conference on Library & Information Science [VICLIS 2021]. August 23, Sri Lanka Technological Campus: Colombo, [Online] available at <http://viclis2021.sltc.ac.lk>
- Dewandaru, D. A. K., Susianti, V. A., & Wardani, T. R. K. (2021). Public Library Services for Deaf Users. Proceeding of Virtual International Conference on Library & Information Science [VICLIS 2021]. August 23, Sri Lanka Technological Campus: Colombo, [Online] available at <http://viclis2021.sltc.ac.lk>
- Eromosele, P. O. (2021). Information Repackaging for Special Needs People in Edo State Library, Nigeria. Proceeding of Virtual International Conference on Library & Information Science [VICLIS 2021]. August 23, Sri Lanka Technological Campus: Colombo, [Online] available at <http://viclis2021.sltc.ac.lk>
- Forrest, M. E. S. (2007). Disability awareness training for library staff: Evaluating an online module. *Library Review*, 56(8), 707-715. doi:10.1108/00242530710818036
- Jaeger, P. T., Wentz, B., & Bertot, J. C. (2015). Accessibility, Inclusion, and the Roles of Libraries. In *Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities and the Inclusive Future of Libraries* (pp. 1-8). doi:10.1108/S0065-283020150000040008

-
- Lankathilaka, M. A., & Perera, W. P. G. L. (2021). Information Services for Visually Impaired Undergraduates and the Implementation of Marrakesh Treaty: A Case Study. Proceeding of Virtual International Conference on Library & Information Science [VICLIS 2021]. August 23, Sri Lanka Technological Campus: Colombo, [Online] available at <http://viclis2021.sltc.ac.lk>
- Latifah, R., Azkiya, S. R., & Kiasati, A. I. (2021). The Role of Public Library Services for Children with Special Needs in Yogyakarta. Proceeding of Virtual International Conference on Library & Information Science [VICLIS 2021]. August 23, Sri Lanka Technological Campus: Colombo, [Online] available at <http://viclis2021.sltc.ac.lk>
- Moirangthem, E., & Phuritsabam, B. (2022). Inclusion in the Library: A Case Study of Accessibility in the Central Institutes in the North Eastern Region of India. *Library Philosophy and Practice, Summer*, Article 2380. Retrieved from [<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=14139&context=libphilprac>]
- Nandi, A. (2021). Equitable Library Service for Differently Abled User. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 6(3), 716-719.
- Nayanajith, K., Nirmani, S., & Ranasinghe, W. (2021). Utilization of Books to Improve Reading and Writing in Visually Impaired Students. Paper presented at VICLIS 2021 Conference. Retrieved from [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4899-8029-8_5]
- Nilholm, C. (2021). Research about inclusive education in 2020 – How can we improve our theories in order to change practice?, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 36(3), 358-370, DOI: [10.1080/08856257.2020.1754547](https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2020.1754547)
- Odigie, I. O., & Okube, N. (2021). The Place of Assistive Technologies in the Service Delivery of Special Need Users in Academic Libraries of Kogi State. *Library Philosophy and Practice*. Retrieved from [<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=11362&context=libphilprac>]
- Perera, N. T., Wijerathne, I. S., Wijesooriya, M. M., Dharmarathne, A. T., & Weerasinghe, A. R. (2012, December). ICT based education for students with

- special educational needs in Sri Lanka. In *International Conference on Advances in ICT for Emerging Regions (ICTer2012)* (pp. 156-164). IEEE.
- Phukubje, J., & Ngoepe, M. (2017). Convenience and accessibility of library services to students with disabilities at the University of Limpopo in South Africa. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 49(2), 180-190.
- Salaudhin, N. (2021). Role of Library in Accessibility of Information Resources and Services for Users with Disabilities: A Case Study. Paper presented at VICLIS 2021 Conference. Retrieved from [<http://repo.sltc.ac.lk/handle/1/168>]
- SLTC Research University (10-07-2023), VICLIS 2021 International Library Conference, Retrieved from (<https://shorturl.at/oASY0>)
- Suranjith, A. D. C. (2021). Library Services and User Satisfaction of Differently-abled Undergraduates at Selected University Libraries in Sri Lanka. Paper presented at VICLIS 2021 Conference. Retrieved from [<http://repo.sltc.ac.lk/handle/1/165>]
- Tinklin, T., & Hall, J. (1999). Getting round obstacles: Disabled students' experiences in higher education in Scotland. *Studies in Higher education*, 24(2), 183-194.
- Twaambo, E., Makondo, F. N., & Dhamdhere, S. (2022). Library Services and Facilities to Differently Abled Students in Higher Education. In *Assistive Technologies for Differently Abled Students* (pp. 193-211). IGI Global.
- Wiche, H. I., & Opara, V. C. (Year). Availability and Use of Assistive Technology Devices by Users with Hearing Impairment and Speech Disorders in University Libraries in Rivers State, Nigeria. *International Library Conference of 25th October 2022 SLTC 2022* , P. 59 Retrieved from [https://viclis2022.sltc.ac.lk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/VICLIS-2022_SLTC_Research-University_-Proceedings.pdf]
- Wolf, L. E. (2001). College students with ADHD and other hidden disabilities: Outcomes and interventions. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 931(1), 385-395.
- Zhong, Y. (2012). Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in Library Instruction. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 19(1), 33-45. doi:10.1080/10691316.2012.652549

Students With Disabilities in Higher Education in Sri Lanka: Challenges, Impediments, and the Way Forward

Samanmala Dorabawila*, Anoma Abhayaratne and Sakunthala Yatigammana
Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya
samanmald@yahoo.com*

Abstract

Access to education is well-accepted as a universal right. However, for Students With Disabilities (SWD), providing equal access to higher education and ensuring they can pursue their education on par with their peers without disabilities in universities is still a challenge. This paper aims at identifying the existing facilities for the SWDs in universities, their needs, requirements, obstacles, and challenges faced by them in participating in higher education. The study is based on the data collected in a baseline survey. Data were collected using structured questionnaires from a sample consisting of five groups of stakeholders from four Sri Lankan partner universities of the IncEdu project. Descriptive statistics are used to organise and summarise data. The survey identified several challenges faced by SWDs, including limited access to physical infrastructure, inadequate support services, insufficient availability of assistive technologies, lack of awareness and understanding among stakeholders, and financial constraints that significantly impact academic progress, social integration, self-esteem and the overall well-being of students with disabilities. The absence of reasonable accommodations and inclusive policies creates barriers that hinder their participation and limit their educational opportunities. Implementing appropriate interventions is required to create an inclusive educational environment that ensures equal opportunities. This paper proposes a way forward by highlighting potential strategies to address these challenges including implementing inclusive policies and guidelines, ensuring accessible infrastructure, providing assistive technologies and support services, conducting disability awareness and sensitivity training for faculty and students, and establishing peer support networks. A collaborative effort involving all stakeholders is also important to create an inclusive higher education environment.

Keywords: *Assistive Technology, Higher Education, Inclusive Education, Students With Disabilities*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

Access to education is well-accepted as a universal right. While there has been remarkable progress in education attainment globally, there is still evidence to suggest that many children with disabilities are still being left behind. The participation and completion rates of education of children with disabilities are low compared to their peers without disabilities (World Health Organization and the World Bank, 2011). The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates suggest that globally, children with disabilities make up one-third, or approximately 19 million, of the 58 million out-of-school children. Several factors contribute to the fact that a large number of children with disabilities are out of school. These include; lack of assistive technology, limited skills of teachers on inclusive teaching, lack of appropriate and accessible infrastructure in schools, and limited scope in curricula, among others.

According to the estimates of the WHO, 1.3 billion people – or 15% of the global population – experience a significant disability today (WHO, 2023). The Department of Census Statistics of Sri Lanka (2012) reports that 8.7% of Sri Lanka's population or nearly 1.2 million people have some form of disability. These figures, which are significantly lower than the WHO and World Bank estimates, reflect the underreporting of disability in Sri Lanka. This underreporting points to persistent challenges in identifying and measuring disability, which could lead to a large population of children with disabilities being excluded from education and other social services.

Sri Lanka has made several achievements in providing education for all children since the introduction of the Universal Free Education Policy in

1945 and the Compulsory Education Policy in 1998 which strived to afford equal educational opportunities for all children at all levels. In 2020, the country recorded a 100.3% net enrolment rate with almost 100% of students completing primary education (UNESCO, 2020). Despite the efforts of the Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka in mainstreaming children with disabilities in regular classrooms and special education units in schools, a larger percentage of them continue to face several barriers to access, participation and achievement in education.

As a direct outcome of the low participation in education and the high competition in entering national universities, only a limited number of students enter the universities every year. However, for Students With Disabilities (SWD), providing equal access to higher education and ensuring that they can pursue their education on par with their peers without disabilities in universities remains a challenge.

Understanding the challenges faced by SWDs and implementing appropriate interventions is required to create an inclusive educational environment that ensures the provision of equal opportunities for all learners. This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on inclusive education and provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers supporting SWDs.

This paper also proposes a way forward by highlighting potential strategies to address these challenges. These strategies include implementing inclusive policies and guidelines, ensuring accessible infrastructure, providing assistive technologies and support services, conducting disability awareness

and sensitivity training for faculty and students, establishing peer support networks, and promoting financial assistance programmes for SWDs. The paper also identifies the importance of a collaborative effort involving higher education institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders to create an inclusive higher education environment.

2. Research Methodology

The study is based on the data collected in a baseline survey. Data were collected from the sample using structured questionnaires. The sample of this study included five groups of stakeholders from all four Sri Lankan partner universities (University of Peradeniya, University of Ruhuna, Eastern University and Sri Lanka Technological Campus (SLTC)) of the IncEdu⁴ project. The five groups of stakeholders that were included are SWDs (32), peers of the SWDs (200), parents of SWDs (32), members of the academic staff (200), and administrative staff (100). The total population of SWDs of the four universities was included in the study, as the number of SWDs in the universities is small. For the same reason, the total population of the parents of the SWDs was included in the survey.

A set of five different questionnaires were used to collect data from five groups of stakeholders. All the questionnaires were piloted prior to the main data collection in order to identify the questions that should be eliminated

⁴ IncEdu is an Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher education project on “Developing Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in Sri Lankan Universities” funded by the EU.

or modified due to ambiguities, lack of clarity, contrary to initial expectations, or which turned out to measure something irrelevant.

The questionnaires were administered in two forms; through printed questionnaires and by circulating electronic copies using Google Forms. In analyzing data, descriptive statistics are used to organise and summarise data to easily determine what information they contain and describe what the data shows.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to identify the existing facilities for the SWDs, raise awareness of their needs among peers and university academic and non-academic staff, and parents of the SWDs.

4. Scope and Significance of the Study

It is expected that the findings of the survey will provide a clear understanding of the needs and requirements of the SWDs to provide them opportunities for higher education on equal terms with their peers without disabilities. Additionally, the survey aims to identify obstacles in providing access to higher education and the improvements required in physical, technical, and human capacities. The outcome of this survey will guide activities that aim to develop a system of support to equalise opportunities for SWDs in Sri Lankan universities.

5. Review of the Relevant Literature

The inclusion of SWDs in higher education has globally increased in recent years (Majoko, 2018). In Sri Lanka, a limited number of SWDs are annually admitted to the state universities, with only a slight gradual increase in the enrollment rate over the years (University Grants Commission, Sri Lanka, 2013). In these circumstances, the sustainable development of inclusive education in higher education will be more favorable and afford more opportunities for SWDs.

However, the emergence of challenges together with this process is unavoidable. These include attitudes of the society, accessibility, awareness of the needs of the disabled, unavailability of assistive technology, lack of resources (physical and human), intervention of stakeholders, and employability.

Social acceptance is directly related to the attitudes of different stakeholders in society, which directly affects inclusive education. The attitudes of society toward individuals with disabilities are mainly influenced by people's knowledge of the disability and their contact with individuals who have disabilities (Wang et al., 2021).

Attitudinal barriers include negative attitudes of students without disabilities towards those with disabilities (Chikwature et al., 2016; Jenjekwa et al., 2013; Liasidou, 2014) and disablist practices and attitudes of staff in higher education institutions (Macleod & Cebula, 2009; Madriaga, 2010). Past studies have indicated that teachers require in-service training to be equipped with the positive attitudes, knowledge, skills,

competencies and understanding to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities in higher education institutions (Chiparaushe et al., 2010; Phiri, 2013). Most importantly, social change in the attitudes of students and faculty toward people with disabilities is necessary for social inclusion and equal opportunities for SWDs (Saches et al., 2011).

The accessibility barriers that the SWDs encounter can be mainly of three forms: structural barriers, attitudinal barriers, and technical barriers (Alsalem et al., 2018). Structural barriers include barriers in admission to programmes as well as physical barriers. The solution to these barriers solely depends on the responsible authorities such as the legislators, UGC, policymakers, and administrators in higher education. It is important to have proper coordination among these personnel while having a clear understanding of the SWDs' requirements.

In the context of accessibility, enrolment rates of SWDs in higher education institutions are used to measure rights to inclusive education in a country. As stated above, the 2012 Population Census recorded that only 0.8% of the total persons with disabilities are engaged in post-secondary education programmes in Sri Lanka.

Technical barriers occur when technology cannot be adopted into another format that can be accessed by assistive devices (Whiteneck et al., 2004). Today, technology has become an important component of all our lives, without which none of us would have survived the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, SWDs in developing countries encounter many technological barriers due to financial constraints.

Much research identifies the inadequacies in facilities and trained personnel, ineffective and inefficient use of technology, lack of funding, and lack of support to teachers practicing inclusion as barriers to implementing inclusion (Furuta, 2009). Parveen (2018) points out many problems such as a lack of well-educated teachers, ill-planned curriculum, inadequate resources, lack of good infrastructural facilities, lack of awareness, negative attitudes, and poor policies as hurdles for extending the concept of inclusive education. However, no studies have been conducted to identify the existing facilities for the SWDs in universities in Sri Lanka, assess the awareness of their needs among peers, university academic and non-academic staff, and parents of the SWDs and the requirements for providing them with a conducive learning environment at the Universities. This study aims to fill this gap.

6. Results and Findings

Among the overall findings, the most significant factor of the study was that the majority of the SWDs were confined to Humanities and Social Sciences. The majority of the academic staff members have had some experience in teaching for SWDs except the Faculty of Veterinary Science. One of the notable factors found in this study was 97% of the academics agreed that equal access to higher education should be made available for SWDs. Furthermore, 74% of academics agreed that they did not use any special mechanism for teaching, for SWDs. Apart from that, 81% of the academics agreed to have SWDs attending their lectures online, if attending physically is difficult. There was more than 50% agreement among the academics on

the majority of the attributes related to willingness to provide special accommodation to SWDs other than providing programmes for raising awareness, as stated in the survey. Only 13% of the academics obtained feedback on their teaching from their students. In the sample, 79% of them agreed that their subjects are suitable to teach for SWDs. However, University of Peradeniya (UoP) had the highest number of academics (13%) who felt their subjects were not suitable for SWDs while this percentage in the University of Ruhuna, SLTC and Eastern University were 2%, 2% and 1% respectively.

The survey revealed that all SWDs were admitted to the university through special intake except for only one student. Around 40% received guidance in selecting universities and 65% of them managed to follow a degree programme of their preference. The survey disclosed that the most common and the rarest disability among SWDs were blind/visual impairments (43%) and mental disability (4.3%), respectively. 52% of the SWDs felt that their disability had a negative impact on their academic life. Only 39% of SWDs were aware of the availability of a Special Needs Resource Center (SNRC) in their universities. 84% of them used at least 01 form of technology available to support their studies. The majority of the SWDs found difficulties in mobility as the greatest barrier to learning at the university.

However, gaining admission to a university is not the only barrier that an SWD will encounter in entering higher education; maintaining regular attendance in classes is another barrier they face, just like the other students. There should be a conducive environment for them to learn within the university. One of the main requirements for most SWDs is physical

accessibility to the university. For instance, although the University of Peradeniya caters to the largest number of SWD admissions in the university system in Sri Lanka, until last year there was not even a disabled-accessible ramp to enter a classroom for learning. Whenever an SWD enters a classroom, either the parents or the peers walk them to the classroom or carry them.

Lack of awareness about the needs of SWDs could be highlighted as another major issue among all stakeholders. Disability awareness is important for academic staff members as a professional development strategy. Furthermore, administrators and nonacademic staff members also need to be educated on disabilities in order to have a more positive attitude and to create an inclusive environment for all students. Research findings also found that awareness programmes are essential for all stakeholders as they would develop positive attitudes toward SWDs (Morin et al., 2008).

According to the data gathered from the SWDs' parents, monthly household income was less than Rs. 31,000, with 40% of them earning less than Rs. 10,000. Around 22% of the parent's occupation was farming and 22% reported being unemployed. Furthermore, the parents disclosed that neither the government nor universities supported them except for the Mahapola Scholarship and bursaries provided to all eligible university students. Their immediate family (83%) was found to be the major supporting source for their disabled children. Parents' opinion on services provided by Universities/Institutes shed light on the importance and the dire need of making access to storied buildings, and provision of toilets suitably designed for SWDs to use. However, negative and uncertain responses

outnumbered the positive responses received for securing a job after graduation. The majority of parents thought that the university experience would have a positive impact on their child's future.

Among the suggestions for improvement of SWDs' studies at universities, providing more opportunities to improve Information Communication Technology (ICT) and English skills, offering financial assistance, guidance to follow postgraduate degrees, and upgrading existing services and facilities in accordance with local and international treaties and conventions were notable.

According to the responses received for the attributes, peers of all universities were highly supportive of the academic rights of SWDs. 97% showed a high willingness to extend their support to mobilise them physically and 90 % enjoyed interacting with them in their studies. From the sample, 81% and 85% of peers of University Peradeniya (UoP) and SLTC, respectively did not know about the existence of SWDs in their classes. However, peers of Ruhuna (46%) and Eastern Universities (44%) were more familiar than UoP and SLTC. The majority of the UoP peers did not feel comfortable sharing rooms with SWDs.

Only 30% of the peers were aware of the existence of an SNRC in their respective universities. Prior to entering the university, 67% of them had some form of contact with SWDs. Overall, 61% of the peers in the sampled group have had some encounters with SWDs in their universities. The highest observed type of disability among the SWDs in class according to the peers was Blind/Visually impaired (43%). Of the overall sample of

peers, 69% felt that they were comfortable in learning with SWDs in class. Of the sample, 84% of the peers were willing to obtain training on facilities to be provided for SWDs. The majority of the peers were unaware of whether the lecturers used special teaching techniques to teach with SWDs.

The majority of the sampled peers stated that they felt comfortable sharing their rooms with SWDs. Most of the peers expected to develop friendships, talk with the SWDs, and help them whenever possible. The majority of the peers were of the opinion that educational facilities for SWDs have to be improved, and lecturers should pay more attention to SWDs' needs and honor the importance of equal rights for free education. Peers felt that they are not disabled, but they are differently abled and multi-talented persons.

Concerning the higher Education for SWDs, the attitudes of different stakeholders may vary, and it has been changed from time to time. For instance, if the relevant stakeholders can pay attention to the development of support systems and learning technologies, that will open more learning opportunities for SWDs. This can be noted as a positive change in stakeholders' attitudes towards the SWDs. This change has created a favorable learning environment in elementary and high schools, which enabled more SWDs to successfully complete school examinations and enter higher education. Gradually, this influence resulted in a growing demand for higher education by SWDs. In response, all higher education institutions began to develop support systems and learning technologies, which helped individuals with disabilities.

Invariably, the Blind/Visually impaired (51%) sector was the most catered sector of all universities by university authorities. Staff agreeing to undergo continuous special education training programmes (68%) was an encouraging sign as it would improve understanding of the requirements of SWDs, the nature of disabilities, and different approaches to cater to SWDs. Except for the University of Peradeniya, other universities have not conducted research seminars and workshops. However, the survey revealed that none has published research related to SWDs in the universities. UoP was the only institute that had collaborated with both local and international organizations. SLTC conducted recreational events for SWDs.

7. Conclusions

The main challenges faced by the SWDs that limit their opportunities in higher education are limited access to physical infrastructure, inadequate support services, insufficient availability of assistive technologies, lack of awareness and understanding among stakeholders, and financial constraints. These challenges significantly impact the academic progress, social integration, self-esteem, and overall well-being of SWDs. The absence of reasonable accommodations and inclusive policies also creates barriers that hinder their participation and limit their educational opportunities.

Accessibility-related obstacles faced by the SWDs at admission to universities are a direct outcome of the teaching-learning facilities at the school level. The facilities required for offering science stream subjects at

school prevent students from sitting for the GCE (A/L) examination in science streams. The small number of SWDs who are admitted to the universities through “special intake” are admitted only to the disciplines of social sciences and humanities at universities and are allowed to offer only a few selected disciplines such as languages, and history. That has a negative impact on the job market opportunities for the SWDs after graduation and on their lives in the long run.

Within the universities, physical infrastructure, teaching methods, facilities for learning of SWDs, and evaluation methods are not conducive for them to successfully complete their studies. Further, awareness of their existence, needs, requirements and rights is not at a satisfactory level, and there is a need for considerable improvement in the attitudes of both peers and staff towards them.

A substantial proportion of the SWDs including those with visual, hearing, and physical impairments come from low-income families. Therefore, these families are not in a position to support these students with any equipment or assistive technology that are not provided by the universities and that will be useful in their studies.

It is recommended to improve the education and facilities for SWDs to undertake their studies at universities, raise awareness of the existence and needs of SWDs among all stakeholders, increase available facilities for SWDs, conduct continuous professional training programmes on special education for staff and peers, and establish suitable accommodation and

teaching and assessment mechanisms as agreed by academics and pointed out by peers and parents as well.

The most important aspect of activating and sustaining inclusive education in the higher education system is increasing awareness of the existing national as well as institutional policies, the specific needs of SWDs, and available assistive technologies. There should be a mechanism that identifies the level and method of disseminating this awareness among teaching and non-teaching staff. In order to fulfill this, the authorities from top to bottom should be sensitised to the requirements of the SWDs at every level. If all these initiatives are put into action, it can positively contribute to reaching the expected levels of sustainable development goals.

8. References

- Chiparaushe, B., Mapako, O., & Makarau, A. (2010). *A survey of challenges, opportunities and threats faced by students with disabilities in the post-independent era in Zimbabwe*, Students Solidarity Trust, Harare.
- Department of Census Statistics. (2012). *Census of Population and Housing – 2012*, Department of Census Statistics, Sri Lanka.
- Furuta, H. (2009). 'Responding to Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities: Care and Education in Special Pre-Schools in the North Western Province of Sri Lanka', *Japanese Journal of Special Education*, 46(6), pp. 457–47.
- Majoko, T. (2018). 'Participation in Higher Education: Voices of Students with Disabilities.' *Cogent Education*, 5 (1), 1542761–1542717. <https://doi:10.1080/2331186X.2018.1542761>.
- Madriaga, M., Hanson, K., Heaton, C., Kay, H., Newitt, S., & Walker, A. (2010). 'Confronting similar challenges? Disabled and non-disabled students' learning and assessment experiences. *Studies in Higher Education*, 35(6), 647–65.

- Moriña, A. (2017). Inclusive education in higher education: challenges and opportunities, *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 32:1, 3-17, DOI: 10.1080/08856257.2016.1254964
- Parveen, A. (2018). 'Inclusive education and the challenges', *National Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 3(2).
- UNESCO. (2020). Inclusion and Education, *Global Education Monitoring Report*.
- Wang, Z., Xu, X., Han, Q., Chen, Y., Jiang, J., & Ni, G. X. (2021). Factors associated with public attitudes towards persons with dis-abilities: A systematic review. *Bmc Public Health*, 21(1), 1058. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11139-3>
- World Health Organization. (2023). *Global report on health equity for persons with disabilities*, World Health Organization, Geneva.
- World Health Organization and The World Bank. (2011). *World Report on Disability*, World Health Organization, Geneva.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusive Mechanisms at Sri Lankan Universities and the Way Forwards for Policy Implications

Upali Pannilage^{1*}, Gunanayagam Vickneswaran²,
Department of Sociology, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka¹
Department of Social Sciences, Eastern University, Sri Lanka²
upannila@gmail.com*

Abstract

There are certain mechanisms under the institutional academic and administrative systems, common to all state universities in Sri Lanka that could facilitate to satisfy the requirements of Student with Disabilities. This paper evaluates the effectiveness of those mechanisms in meeting the needs of students with disabilities to investigate the research problem of whether there are effective and established mechanisms in state universities in Sri Lanka to address the need of inclusive education. It focuses on specific areas of teaching and learning, academic administrative structures, staff development, financial allocation and monitoring and evaluation. The overall objective of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of existing academic and welfare mechanisms in state university education for students with learning disabilities, and to identify the gaps in policy orientations and the practicalities in the available mechanisms. The study was a cross sectional study based on cases study method and the study is also based on explanatory type in its nature using qualitative methods. The study is confined its case location in two state universities: Eastern University of Sri Lanka and University of Ruhuna. In both universities, the study universe is confined to students of arts, humanities, and social sciences. Sri Lankan state universities have centrally directed policy mechanisms for teaching and learning and well-established mechanisms of student welfare systems. Even though the universities have sufficient academic and administrative structural arrangements, functions of those arrangements are ineffective due to various reasons to serve the special needs of students with disabilities. Beyond the reality that certain policy mechanisms are to be newly implemented to sustain technological and financial resources, existing mechanisms can be operated effectively with the available resources to meet the academic and welfare needs of students with disabilities.

Keywords: *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Students With Disabilities*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

Notion of Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) are not new attributes to Sri Lankan cultures. Those aspects are the prime values of cultures practices by the Sri Lankan communities irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, or gender. However, Sri Lankans like other South Asian nations failed to sustain those traditionally attributed values due to the socio-economic changes taken placed specially during last four decades. Thus, diversity, equality and inclusion became as the western concepts, introduced to Sri Lankans through the international conventions and other mechanisms. In this point of view, Sri Lanka recorded a remarkable and historically significant achievements in ensuring legal provisions related with equality and inclusion to its people from the British colonial rule onwards. Universal Franchise of the 1931 Donoughmore constitution and the section 29 (II) of the 1947 Soulbury constitution are the internationally recognizable provisions ensuring DEI under the British rule. Considering DEI policy and legal frameworks in education, Sri Lankan policies and related constitutional laws were largely influenced and shaped by international conventions. Sri Lanka became a state party in the 1989 convention on the rights of child. Sri Lanka rectified the 2006 UN convention on Persons with Disabilities in 2016.

When looking into the post-independent policy developments, Article 12.2 of the 1978 Constitution, which was amended in 2015, promotes education for all citizens and prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, and place of birth, but it does not explicitly articulate non-discrimination in education on the ground of

disability (Government of Sri Lanka, 2015). Nonetheless, Sri Lanka enforced the Protection of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28 in 1996, laying the foundation for non-discrimination in education and guaranteeing compulsory and free education for all through the Compulsory Education Ordinance 1997 (Government of Sri Lanka, 1996). In pursuit of greater disability inclusion, the 2003 National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka provides a comprehensive framework for persons with disabilities to be included in all aspects of society. Inclusive education was explicitly defined in the policy, demonstrating the country's commitment to include children with disabilities in general education through learner-centered teaching approaches. (Ministry of Education, 2009).

However, those policies and procedures have not been implemented up to a satisfactory level to meet the needs and aspirations of the Students with Disabilities (SWDs) specially in the state universities in Sri Lanka.

Even though there are notable developments in policy formation and establishments of legal frameworks in ensuring equality and inclusion in primary and secondary education, there has been not any national policies and mechanisms introduced in tertiary educational sector in Sri Lanka. A policy to safeguard the rights of SWDs is yet to be created for the Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) in Sri Lanka. However, there are certain mechanisms under the institutional academic and administrative systems, common to all state universities that could facilitate to satisfy the requirements of SWDs in the universities despite of the absence of a national policy for SWDs for universities. This paper evaluates the effectiveness of those mechanisms in serving SWDs to meet their needs in universities.

2. Research Methodology

The study was a cross sectional study based on a case study method and explanatory type in its nature using qualitative methods. The study is confined its case location in two state universities namely the Eastern University of Sri Lanka and the University of Ruhuna. In both universities, the study universe is confined to students of arts, humanities, and social sciences. Thus, the study focused on the situations of students from Faculty of Arts and Culture at the Eastern University of Sri Lanka and Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Ruhuna (FHSS). Purposively selected 16 students, 10 academics and 04 administrative officers were included in the sample. Two types of interviews were employed to gather qualitative information from students and staff: Key Informant Interviews (KII) and in-depth interviews. KIIs were conducted among the staff of both academic and administrative positions mainly dealing with SWDs and those who have long working experience in the university staff positions in both universities.

In-depth interviews were used to collect partly the case histories of the respondents (students) as well as hands-on experiences of staff engaged in service deliveries and facilitation for SWDs. The primary data were verified and analysed using secondary sources where necessary. During the data verification process, key thematic areas were identified, and the data analysis was done using the thematic analysis method.

3. Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of existing academic and welfare mechanisms in state university education for students with disabilities in Sri Lanka, and to identify the gaps in policy orientations and the practicalities of the available mechanisms.

Accordingly, specific objectives of this study are:

- a). to identify what mechanisms and policies that are currently available to facilitate special needs or inclusive education at state universities in Sri Lanka.
- b). to investigate the drawbacks and potentialities of the existing academic and administrative arrangements of state universities in assisting teaching, learning and welfare provisions to SWDs.
- c). to make recommendations to improve the existing DEI mechanisms and to implement new policy decisions in order to improve inclusive education in Sri Lanka.

4. Scope and Significance of the Study

The present study has investigated an important subject of inclusive education from a dimension of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. It has looked at several thematic areas which are directly relevant to the subject matter such as teaching and learning, academic administrative structures, curricular and evaluation, staff development, financial allocation.

This study can be considered as one of the most significant studies which evaluate existing DEI mechanisms of the Sri Lankan's state universities

from a critical social science perspective. The study has also made significant conclusions which can be considered in future studies and as well as in implementing policy measures for implementing inclusive education mechanisms and systems in higher education sector in Sri Lanka in particularly, and elsewhere in general term.

The primary data collection of the study has been limited to a sample of two faculties in the state university system of Sri Lanka. Therefore, generalization of its findings and conclusion to a larger population has some limitations.

5. Review of the Relevant Literature

Inclusive education has been globally accepted as one of the best methods in special need education or in other words educating people with disabilities. As the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education specify, inclusion in the context of education is based on the idea that all children should learn together, regardless of differences or disability (UNESCO, 1994). Scholars such as Abeywickrama et al., (2013), Alwis (2005), Ellepola (2016), and Nunan et al., (2020) have emphasised that the experience, knowledge, and attitude of teachers and other professionals are beneficial and crucial for the implementation of inclusive education.

Dhanapala (2006) has highlighted that there should be strategies and action plans to encourage and increase diversity and equality for staff and students, regardless of ethnicity, religion, ability, sexual orientation, or gender.

In 2013, the education first policy reaffirmed the inclusion of children with disabilities in education, and, to the extent possible, should be taught in regular classrooms. The Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) 2018–2025 promotes inclusive education in parallel with strengthening special education. It specifically focuses on strengthening special education, inclusive education, and non-formal education (Abeywickrama et al., 2017).

Sri Lanka has adopted the Disabled Persons (Accessibility) Regulations, No. 1 of 2006 which clearly indicates, “all existing public buildings, public places and places where common services are available, shall within a period of three years from the coming into operation of these regulations, be made accessible to persons with disabilities in compliance with the provisions of these regulations” (The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 1996).

As Khasnabis et al., (2015) highlighted assistive technologies are deemed as mechanisms to promote individual functioning and independence and to impact on the wellbeing of the persons with disabilities. In the meantime, resource centers are the perfect mechanism to accommodate learning requirements of SWDs with various special needs (Affleck et al., 1988).

6. Discussion, Results and Findings

The results and findings of the study have been discussed under six sub themes identified through both the primary and secondary data validation and analysis process.

6.1. Conducive Infrastructure Facilities

The physical structure of the lecture halls and other facilities of the universities are expected to be easily accessible for different types of SWDs. The study observed that the infrastructure facilities of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka is somewhat conducive for SWDs mainly due to the geographical location of the university. The physical structure of the buildings has accessible facilities to almost all types of disabled persons. New buildings of the university were constructed with accessible ramps, lifts, handrails and grab bars and the lecture halls are also facilitated with accessible seating arrangements. Even in old buildings, it is observable that renovations were made to incorporate accessible facilities for the disabled persons.

However, the study found that the infrastructure facilities of the University of Ruhuna are different to that of the Eastern University. The university of Ruhuna is situated in a hilly terrain and most of the buildings of the faculty of H&SS are not accessible to the physically disabled students. Some especial facilities such as the library, the canteens and lecture halls were not constructed conductively for the SWDs.

It was found that in both universities, very few classrooms are equipped with assistive facilities to support learning activities of SWDs in the universities. Although assistive technologies facilitate and promote individual functioning and independence of SWDs, there is obviously a deficit in assistive technologies in lecture halls and labs to enable SWDs actively engage in learning activities. It is indeed the reality that state universities in

Sri Lanka have neither pullout lecture halls and labs to deliver special care to SWDs in teaching nor full inclusion lecture halls or laboratories where SWDs can have assistive technologies to equally engage in leaning activities like other students. Except a very few cases, where some technologies has been in placed with outside funding (eg. EU funded IncEdu project) most of the state universities are unable to technologically modify the lecture halls with modern assistive technologies. Therefore, it is understandable that SWDs in lecture halls and other common places without assistive technologies struggle for their individual functioning and independent learning.

6.2. Learning Support Systems

Under the learning support systems for SWDs in state universities, the study first concentrates on peer tutoring support services for SWDs in the undergraduate programmes. It mainly scrutinised whether the handbooks of degree programmes in the state universities selected for the study include specific evaluation methods for SWDs. Based on Sri Lanka Qualification Framework (SLQF), both universities adopted several new modes of Continues Assessment Tests (CAT) based on principles of Knowledge, Skills, Attitude and Mindset paradigm (KSAM). Both universities have moderately shifted from traditional mode of interim assessment methods, tutorial submissions. However, it was found that much less concern has been given to the consistency of the modes with special needs of SWDs. It was identified that there is a lack of mechanisms used to identify the suitable methods of the evaluation for different types of SWDs and their different

abilities to comply with those methods. Secondly, the study considers the learning accommodations available for the SWDs in the universities. Both universities recently established Disability Resource Centres (DRC). Despite the deficiency of other accessible academic arrangements, DRCs equipped with modern accessible technologies could facilitate learning activities of SWDs in the universities. In addition to the academic facilitation, DRCs are the establishments to contribute to policy decisions and administrative implementations related with welfare of SWDs to promote their inclusive and equal engagement in learning. Nonetheless, DRCs have not developed integrated coordination parallel with lecture hall activities. However, both student and academic representatives of the sample mentioned that the DRCs have not been adequately integrated to the normal teaching- learning and evaluation systems of both universities, except that some students of the both sample universities mentioned that they use DRCs for their general academic activities since they were provided computer and seating facilities at the DRCs.

6.3. Curriculum Design

SWDs in the study reflected their opinion that not all course structures of the undergraduate degree programmes offered by their faculties are suitable for them. However, students at the University of Ruhuna entertain their own liberty to select suitable courses based on their preferences since the faculty of H&SS has introduced a new curricular and degree programmes which allow students to enroll for four-year honours degree programmes as per the will of the students. It is evident that the flexible course structure enables

SWDs to select courses suitable to their abilities. Even though a wide range of subjects across different fields were offered by the Faculty of Arts, Eastern University, considering the number of students, the faculty had limited the choice of students in selecting subjects. Introducing “basket system” in the course selection which allows students to select certain subjects that are grouped into a category, the faculty had restricted students’ freedom in selecting subjects which they prefer. SWDs perceive this system incompatible with their interests that selecting courses suitable to their abilities and specific needs.

The SLQF has indicated that course structure of every degree programme at the undergraduate level should have fallback options. The system benefits students who are unable to pass examinations throughout the entire academic year to gain a certification for their engagement during their study programme. It explicitly benefits SWDs who have more difficulties in succeeding examinations due to the lack of accessible facilities, assistive technologies, and specific modes of evaluations. It was observed that both universities have introduced fallback options in the undergraduate course structure. However, during the interviews of the sample students, most of them were not very clear whether to get the fallback options. Only 03 out of 16 students interviewed mentioned that they would interest to obtain the fallback options and complete the education as soon as they can.

A major drawback observed in the curriculum design and course structure is that universities have no credit transfer system. The credit transfer system enables students to follow some semesters in one university and follow further semesters in another university. When enquired about this aspect

from the students who interviewed, majority of them of the views that they prefer universities close to them but have not been given that opportunity due to the current system followed by the University Grant Commission to select students to the universities. The system is preferable for SWDs to follow courses in a degree programme in a university and transfer it to the same nature of the degree in another university. It enables them to continue studies in their accessible universities. However, despite many changes in the course designs, the system has not been implemented in any state universities yet.

6.4. Academic-Administrative Structure

Considering the policy decisions and implementations, universities as semi-governmental institutions are independent to establish centres or sub-administrative bodies and to form By-Laws and operational procedures. Universities can establish policies to ensure equality, inclusion, and diversity. There are several policies related to diversity of other types, but very few universities have formed a policy for SWDs. Notably these two universities Eastern University of Sri Lanka and the University of Ruhuna have recently established SWD policy for their universities because of their partnership in EU funded IncEdu project. The policy is instrumental to enforce further academic and welfare administrative facilitation to SWDs in these universities.

There are administrative units commonly established in all state universities under the ordinance of University Grants Commission in Sri Lanka to look after the student welfare requirements. There is a generally approved

structures of student welfare system in all state universities; notably, Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Office for Student Support Service and Student Welfare, Office of the Senior Student Counsellor and Student Affairs Department generally known as student welfare offices. All these academic administrative bodies are responsible for catering to the welfare needs of students including SWDs. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of delivering welfare services in coordination with catering to the special needs of SWDs is in question. Except for a few disciplinary inquiry processes, each unit engages separately in attending welfare issues of students. There are no formal coordinating arrangements among these units to respond to the welfare affairs of the students. It does not mean that each unit is ineffective to attend welfare issues of students without coordination among them, but it is evident from the data collect from both students and staff that there are issues taken up by one of these units left incomplete due to lack of coordination.

There are approved bodies of student representations and committees for various purposes under this student welfare system. Student unions are independent entities which play pivotal role in addressing issues of students, particularly welfare issues. There are committees established to respond to the needs and issues of students in general. However, it was observed that no committee has been formed for SWDs as an approved entity within the student welfare system in these universities. It leads to the perception that SWDs have no room to address their specific needs and let alone SWDs with the sense of being marginalised.

6.5. Staff Development

Almost all state universities established their own Staff Development Center (SDC) for the purpose of training academic, administrative and non-academic staff to enhance their qualities as to efficiently serve the system. It is an innovative avenue to offer training programmes and short courses on DEI.

SDCs in universities specifically conduct induction courses on teaching methodology; a compulsory course to train newly recruited academics in teaching methods, namely the Certificate Course on Professional Development in Higher Education (CCPDHE). All permanent academics in all state universities must complete this course as it is mandatory for them to get confirmed in their position. The study found that though the course is specifically aimed to train academic staff in teaching methods for university students, the course curriculum poorly incorporates concerns about SWDs. In both universities, the induction course on CCPDHE does not consist of course contents to train candidates on specific methods in teaching SWDs and to disseminate knowledge about the special needs of SWDs. When inquired about this from the sample respondents of the staff, they mentioned that only the available course modules are being thought of in the SDC courses. It is also identified that there is no general curriculum developed in common for all universities for the course. Although there is a suggested manual with course modules, each university designed their own curriculum for the CCPDHE course. Considering the drawback, a policy guideline is thus necessitated to streamline the course contents to incorporate teaching methods for SWDs.

6.6. Financial Allocation

There are certain financial provisions being extended to the universities by the Ministry of Higher Education through the UGC. Universities are given financial allocations based on the number of students in a single intake. Diversity doesn't matter here, but only the numbers are considered. Even though universities receive financial allocations based on students' number, no financial allocations are made for SWDs from the UGC; SWDs are enumerated as normal intakes in financial allocations and no special financial provisions for welfare of the SWDs are set to be allocated yet. Even though, some faculties such as the FHSS of Ruhuna enroll SWDs under the disabled students' category, there is no special financial allocation from the government to accommodate those students. Therefore, it is quite difficult for state universities to provide special facilities for SWDs. This non allocation of financial resources was identified as one of the main barriers when addressing specific teaching- learning needs of SWDs.

7. Conclusions

Sri Lankan state universities have centrally directed policy mechanisms for teaching and learning and well-established mechanisms of student welfare systems. Even though the universities have sufficient academic and administrative structural arrangements, functions of those arrangements are ineffective due to various reasons to serve the special needs of SWDs. Beyond the reality that certain policy mechanisms are to be newly implemented to sustain technological and financial resources, existing

mechanisms can be operated effectively with the available resources to meet the academic and welfare needs of SWDs.

It is the responsibility of all university stakeholders to foster a culture that offers an adaptable and equitable environment. Additionally, it is professional, cordial, and polite while abstaining from harassment and prejudice. The university needs to foster an accepting environment for DEI. They cherish and respect the power that comes from difference, and they take delight in it.

It is essential that DRCs should integrate its activities with normal teaching and learning activities of the universities to cater to special requirements of SWDs who face the difficulties. The DRCs should also work in connection with examination centers to enable SWDs to access supportive technologies to respond to the evaluations. Otherwise, the difficulties remain intact.

The study concluded that although some policies are available, they have not been implemented or practiced to the level of requirements. To facilitate such processes and mechanisms, there should be clearly defined policies and procedures directed to the universities from the national level. Policy decisions are required to facilitate additional financial allocations to the universities to accommodate the needs of SWDs.

8. References

Abeywickrama, S.P., Jayasinghe, I.K. and Sumanasena, S.P. (2013) Excluded in inclusive schools: Experiences of children with disabilities, their families, and teachers in Sri Lanka. *Disability, CBR & Inclusive Development*, 24(1), pp.115-129.

- Affleck, J., Madge, S., Adams, A., & Lowenbraun, S. (1988). Integrated classroom versus resource model: Academic viability and effectiveness. *Exceptional Children*, 54, 339–348.
- Alwis. K.A.C. (2005) Children with Hearing Impairment in the Regular Classroom. *Sri Lankan Journal of Educational Research*. 9(1), pp. 45-69.
- Ellepola, Y. (2016) Sri Lanka's Invisible Children: The Need for Inclusive Education for Children with Special Needs. Retrieved from: <<https://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2016/04/25/sri-lankas-invisible-children-the-need-for-inclusive-education-for-children-with-special-needs/>>.
- Dhanapala, T. (2006). Success of Inclusion in Sri Lanka. ICEVI.
- Government of Sri Lanka (1996). Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996.
- Government of Sri Lanka (1978). Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.
- Khasnabis, C., Mirza, Z., & MacLachlan, M. (2015). Opening the GATE to inclusion for people with disabilities. *Lancet* (London, England), 386(10010), 2229–2230. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)01093-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)01093-4).
- Ministry of Education (2009). Framework of Action for Inclusive Education in Sri Lanka.
- Nunan, T., George, R., McCausland, H. (2000). Inclusive Education in Universities: Why it is important and how it might be achieved. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. 4. 63-88. 10.1080/136031100284920.
- The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996, The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, No. 1,467/15, 17th OCTOBER 2006.
- UNESCO. (1994). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. Salamanca, Spain, 7- 10 June 1994.

International Conference on

'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education' (RUICHSS 2023)

University of Ruhuna

ISSN: 2706-0063

Psycho-Social Behaviour and Spirituality in Inclusive Education

Differences in Emotional Well-Being, Social Inclusion and Academic Self-Concept Between Students With and Without Disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Anamarija Žic Ralić

Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, University of Zagreb,

Zagreb, Croatia

anamarija.zic.ralic@erf.unizg.hr

Abstract

Social and emotional development of all students is one of the important goals of inclusive education. The aim of this research is to examine differences in emotional well-being, social inclusion, and academic self-concept between students with and without disabilities from the perspective of teachers in the inclusive educational context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Teachers assessed their students in grades one to eight, including students with disabilities (N=53) and students without disabilities (N=54), all from the same class, representing both genders with an average age of 11.2 years. The assessment was conducted using the teacher's version of the Perception of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ-T). The results show statistically significant lower levels of emotional well-being, social inclusion, and academic self-concept among students with disabilities when compared to their peers without disabilities. The results indicate the need for further improvement in the implementation of inclusive education, especially regarding inclusive teaching that, according to previous research, could have a positive impact on social, emotional, and academic inclusion of students.

Keywords: *Academic Self-Concept, Emotional Well-Being, Social Inclusion, Students With Disabilities*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

The implementation of inclusive education is a common goal in European countries that requires the availability of support for students with special education needs and their teachers, the enhancement of teachers' competences for inclusive education (Žić Ralić, et. al, 2020), and the adoption of educational adaptations and new teaching methods in schools which consider the individual differences and needs of students. Within an inclusive context, teachers are not only asked to enhance students' learning outcomes, but also to support their social and emotional development.

Social and emotional competencies are important for success at school and in life, including the ability to understand and manage emotions, achieve positive goals, show caring and concern for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (Mahoney et. al, 2020). They are related to academic achievement, prosocial behaviour, and positive attitudes toward school, self, and others (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011). Therefore, the development of social and emotional competencies of all students is one of the important goals of inclusive education.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH), inclusive education started in 2004, primarily focusing on placing the students with mild disabilities in a general education classroom, and providing the necessary support concerning academic needs of children with disabilities (Dizdarević et al., 2017). The legislation regarding inclusive education is positive and affirmative, but implementation faced many obstacles. Bišćević et al. (2017) have reported that regular education teachers believe that the greatest obstacle to inclusion is the shortage of experts in regular schools who are professionally trained to work

with students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). It is of utmost importance to support regular education teachers in their efforts to support all students in their classes. Many (48.5 %) teachers in that study also pointed to the need for additional training in inclusive education (Bišćević et al., 2017). Insufficient resources for the implementation of inclusive education are reflected in the lower quality of education (Žic Ralić, et al., 2020), which can affect the academic, social, and emotional outcomes of inclusive education. Therefore, continuous research into the implementation of inclusive education and the outcomes achieved is needed.

2. Objectives of the Study

Inclusive education as a major change in the education system needs to be evaluated to determine the advantages and identify challenges in its implementation. There is a lack of research focusing on the social and emotional outcomes of inclusive education in low-income countries where there are limited resources for its implementation. According to the GDP, BIH belongs to low-income countries. BIH is a European country with about 3.5 million inhabitants, with a complex political structure. The country has 13 political entities, with 13 Ministries of Education, and with no Ministry of Education at the state level. Nevertheless, there are similar resources for providing inclusive education across the country. This research was conducted in three (out of 13) administrative entities in BiH located in the south of the country: Herzegovina-Neretva County, West Herzegovina County and Herzegovina-Bosnia County.

The aim of this research is to examine differences in social inclusion, emotional well-being, and academic self-concept between students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities from the perspective of teachers in the inclusive educational context of BIH. In this study, emotional inclusion refers to the student's emotional well-being in schools, especially as an indicator of how much a student likes school, which is considered one facet of school well-being. Social inclusion refers to the student's peer relationships in class, and it includes friendships as a positive indicator and feelings of loneliness as a negative indicator. Academic self-concept refers to the teacher's perception of students' general academic abilities, i.e., related to working speed and ability to solve tasks (Venetz et al., 2014). Since the social and emotional competencies of students are key to achieving the goals of inclusive education, the findings of this research seek to provide insight into implementation of inclusive education and difficulties in socio-emotional development of students with disabilities at schools in three counties of BIH.

3. Scope and Significance of the Study

There is a dearth of available studies providing insight into the inclusion of students with developmental disabilities in BIH society, as well as insight into their social and emotional development. The lack of knowledge and understanding about the importance of encouraging the social and emotional development of students in the school context negatively affects the implementation of education in BIH, both for students with and without disabilities. The results of this research will provide evidence of the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classroom communities and raise awareness about students' academic learning and performance as well as their

general satisfaction and development. Most of the conducted research on social and emotional inclusion and academic self-concept was based on the self-assessment of students, while this research intends to provide insight into teacher's assessment.

4. Review of the Relevant Literature

4.1. Students' Well-Being in School

Well-being has been defined in different ways, typically including reference to individuals' happiness, life satisfaction, and positive affect (Diener, 1984). Duckett et al. (2010) describe that the concept of student well-being begins with the idea that if the school members feel happy and secure at school, they will actualise their potentials. The students' well-being positively influences their learning process and outcomes. The students feeling satisfied with their schools will develop positive attitudes towards learning-teaching process and improve their achievements (Jarvela, 2011).

The study of Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim (2020) revealed links between students perceiving that their teacher cares about them, and their self-esteem, well-being, and engagement in school, indicating the role of student-teacher relationships in mediating these connections. Alnahdi et al. (2022) and Pozas et al. (2021) have indicated that students' rating of their teachers' differentiated instruction practice is positively associated with their well-being in school.

Regarding the emotional well-being of students with SEN, some studies have shown weaker emotional well-being in these students compared to those with typical development (Alnahdi et al., 2022; Pozas et al., 2021; McCoy & Banks,

2012; Skrzypiec et al., 2016), whereas other studies have found no differences between groups (Zurbriggen et al. 2018).

4.2. Social Inclusion

Although students with disabilities are present in schools today, their presence does not imply their social inclusion. Social participation in the school context implies the involvement of students in the life of the peer group, which means, for example, interaction with peers, acceptance by peers, being part of a dyad and/or friendship network within the class and a sense of belonging to that peer group (Schwab et al., 2021). More recent reviews of the literature indicate a lower level of social participation of students with disabilities, as well as a lack of friendships (Hassani et al., 2020). Students with disabilities achieve social interactions significantly lesser than students without disabilities, are less accepted by others and form fewer social relationships, which increases the risk of their social marginalization within the class (Hassani et al., 2020).

Two recent studies of inclusive education (Alnahdi et al., 2022; Pozas et al., 2021) showed significant differences in social inclusion between students with special educational needs and their peers without SEN and found that a higher level of inclusive teaching practice is associated with more positive social inclusion of students.

4.3. Academic Self-Concept

In a general sense, academic self-concept can be defined as one's academic self-perceptions or one's perception of one's general ability in school (Shavelson et al., 1976). It can vary across academic disciplines and can be affected by past academic performance. Students with high levels of academic

self-concept are those students that feel they can do well in their schoolwork. In the context of inclusive education, a positive connection was established between academic self-concept and the assessment of teachers' differentiated instruction practice (Alnahdi et al., 2022, Pozas et al., 2021). Research also shows that students with SEN have a lower academic self-concept compared to students without SEN (Alnahdi et al., 2022; Pozas et al., 2021).

5. Research Methodology

To gain insight into the inclusion of students with disabilities in their inclusive classes, the teachers assessed the social inclusion, emotional well-being, and academic self-concept of their students with and without disabilities.

The criteria for the teacher's participation in the research are that he/she teaches in an inclusive class within a mainstream school in the three mentioned counties, that the parents have given their consent for the teacher to assess their children with and without disabilities, and that the teacher agrees to participate in the research. The definition of the inclusive class concept holds that there is at least one student with a diagnosed developmental disability in the class. The sample consists of teachers (N=53) who met the stated criteria. There are 50 female teachers and 3 male teachers in the sample. The sample includes classroom teachers (N=24) and subject teachers (N=29). Teachers report that they receive support in their work from the professionals of the school, or from the local community; pedagogues (68.5%), speech and language pathologist (44.4%), special education professionals (42.6%), psychologists (35.2%) and social pedagogue (7.4%).

The criteria for selecting a sample of students with disabilities involve having a diagnosed disability, falling within the age range of 7 and 13, attending classes in an inclusive class in a mainstream school in the specified counties, obtaining consent from both their parents the participating teacher. The criteria for selecting a sample of students without disabilities involve being in the same age and gender group as students with disabilities, attending classes together (where they are evaluated by the same teacher for this research), and obtaining parental consent for their assessment made by the teacher.

Teachers assessed social inclusion, emotional well-being, and academic self-concept of their first to eighth-grade students (N=106) who met the stated criteria for participation in the research. The sample of students includes female (N=47) and male (N=56) students. Mean age of students is 11.2 years, with students aged 10 and under (N=45), and students aged 11 and over (N=60). The sample of students is divided into two subsamples equalised by age, gender and class: students with disabilities (N=53) and students without disabilities (N=53). The sample of students with disabilities consists of students with various mild disabilities: learning disabilities (N=22), speech-language disorders (N=10), intellectual disability (N=8), attention deficit/hyperactive disorder (N=7), autistic spectrum disorder (N=5), motor disorders (N=5), visual impairment (N=4), hearing impairment (N=1). Regarding the educational programme, 11 students (20.76%) participated in the regular programme with individualised procedures, 31 students (58.5%) participated in the regular programme with content adjustment and individualised procedures, while there was no information available about the educational programme for 8 students (15%).

5.1. Measuring Instrument

The teachers first filled out a questionnaire providing general information about themselves. General information about the students was provided by the parents. Social inclusion, emotional well-being, and academic self-concept were measured by Perception of inclusion questionnaire, teacher version PIQ-T (Venetz, et al., 2015). The PIQ-T consists of 12 items that measure three central dimensions of subjectively perceived inclusion in school: emotional well-being in school (e.g., He/she likes going to school), social inclusion in class (e.g., He/she has a lot of friends in his/her class) and the academic self-concept (e.g., He/she does well in his/her schoolwork). Answers are provided on a 4-point scale: 1=*not at all true*, 2=*rather not true*, 3=*somewhat true*, and 4=*certainly true*. The PIQ is freely available in several language versions, including Croatian language, which is one of the official languages in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The psychometric properties for the teachers' version of PIQ have been confirmed in the study by Venetz et al. (2019) for secondary school teachers and by Schwab et al. (2020) for primary school teachers. Cronbach's Alpha values for each subscale were determined on the sample of this research: social inclusion $\alpha = .87$; emotional well-being $\alpha = .80$; academic self-perception $\alpha = .75$.

5.2. The Study Procedure

The survey was conducted online during the spring of 2021. After obtaining the consent of the Ministries of Education in three counties, 43 schools from these counties of BIH were contacted by e-mail or telephone and explained the idea and purpose of this research. The criteria for choosing a school are that it is a mainstream school in the mentioned counties and that it is attended

by students with disabilities. Due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the increased workload in occasional distance teaching, communication with schools was difficult. 28 schools agreed to participate. Professional associates contacted all teachers in their school who have students with disabilities in their class and gave them written information about the research. If the teacher agreed to participate, written information about the study was sent to the parents of students with disabilities in his class. If the parents agreed for the teacher to evaluate their child with disabilities, the selection process for students without disabilities began. For every student with disabilities, teachers find a couple, i.e., a student of typical development who is of the same sex and age with the student with disabilities and attend the same class. The selection of a child without disabilities was carried out by taking the seventh student in alphabetical order in the diary with a change of ± 2 students if the seventh in a row is not of the same sex as the child with disabilities, or if the parents did not give their consent. Parents of students with and without disabilities confirmed their consent by providing information about their child via the survey link. To ensure anonymity, student names were coded. Parents and teachers used the child/student code when providing information/assessment.

6. Results and Discussion

Descriptive analysis of the teacher's assessment of inclusion shows that both groups of students achieve the highest level of inclusive education related to social inclusion, and the lowest level in academic self-concept (Table 1). The distribution of results for emotional well-being and social inclusion in both groups of students shifted towards higher values (theoretical mean for the scales is $M=8$). Since the arithmetic means of the results are higher than the

theoretical average, it can be said that students with and without disabilities in three counties of Bosnia and Herzegovina achieve positive social inclusion and emotional well-being. However, the distribution of results for academic self-concept shifted towards lower values for students with disabilities, but not for students without disabilities. Arithmetic means of the results indicate that students without disabilities achieve a positive academic self-concept, while students with disabilities have a slightly lower academic self-concept than the theoretical average. However, high mean scores do not automatically imply that all students are reaching satisfying levels of social and emotional outcomes of inclusive education. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to students who are at risk of not achieving social and emotional well-being in school and to implement appropriate prevention and intervention strategies.

The teachers estimated that students with disabilities compared to students without disabilities achieve lower results on all three dimensions (Table 1).

Table 1: Descriptive Analyses of Results on Perception of Inclusion Questionary (PIQ) for Students With Disability and Their Typical Peers

PIQ-T	Pupils	MIN	MAX	MEAN	Stand. Dev.	Shapir o-Wilk	Kolmogorov-Smirnov
Emotional well-being in school	Disability	4	16	12,62	2,683	,003	,000
	Typical	8	16	13,68	2,119	,000	
Social inclusion	Disability	5	16	13,23	2,658	,000	,000
	Typical	8	16	14,64	1,882	,000	

Academic self-concept	Disability	4	14	7,74	2,647	,034	,096
	Typical	7	16	12,96	2,557	,000	

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the results of all pupils and the Shapiro-Wilk test for the sample of students with disabilities and for the sample of students without disabilities showed that the distributions of results on almost all PIQ-T subscales deviated statistically significantly from normal. The nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to test the significance of the differences between the results.

Table 2: The Significance of the Difference in Results on PIQ-T Between Groups of Students With Disabilities and Typical Students With Mann-Whitney U Test

PIQ-T	Pupils	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Emotional well being	Disability	47,25	2504,50	1073,5	,034
	Typical	59,75	3166,50		
Social inclusion	Disability	44,55	2361,00	930,0	,002
	Typical	62,45	3310,00		
Academic self-concept	Disability	31,60	1675,00	244,0	,000
	Typical	75,40	3996,00		

Teachers estimate that students with disabilities achieve statistically significant lower level of inclusion in comparison with their peers without disabilities (Table 2). It was found that students with disabilities achieve significantly lower results on the subscales of emotional inclusion, social inclusion, and academic self-concept.

Results of this research are in accordance with previous studies of Alnahdi et al. (2022) and Pozas et al. (2021) whose results indicated that for all three dimensions (emotional well-being, social inclusion, and academic self-concept) students with SEN scored lower levels of inclusion compared to their peers without SEN.

The determined lower emotional well-being of students with developmental disabilities indicates that, according to the teacher's assessment, they like school less than students without disabilities, which confirms the results of previous research (Alnahdi et al., 2022, Pozas et al., 2021; McCoy & Banks, 2012; Skrzypiec et al., 2016). Bearing in mind the importance of the teacher-student relationship for emotional well-being (Lavy and Naama-Ghanayim, 2020), it is possible that the insufficient education of teachers for inclusive education and the insufficient support of special education professionals (Bišćević et al., 2017) are related with a possible distance in the relationship between students with disabilities and their teachers, that is, less care and attention of teachers about the emotional well-being of students with disabilities compared to students without disabilities. Further research is needed to gain a clearer insight into this possible connection. Furthermore, previous research has established a significant connection between students' emotional well-being and an inclusive teaching practice that considers individual differences and students' needs (Pozas et al., 2021, Alnahdi et al., 2022). By applying this method of teaching, students feel respected, they experience that the teachers care about them, which is reflected in their well-being at school. Given that available research on inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina points to the need for teachers to be additionally educated to work in inclusive conditions (Bišćević et al., 2017), it is possible that the lack

of such an approach contributes to the established differences between students with and without developmental disabilities. According to recent research (Schwab et al., 2022), emotional well-being is significantly related to the teacher's positive feedback on the student's behaviour and his achievement, with positive feedback on behaviour having a stronger influence. The established difference in emotional well-being in this research can be explained by possible less frequent positive feedback to students with disabilities compared to students without disabilities.

Regarding social inclusion, the results show that students with disabilities have fewer interactions with their peers in class than students without disabilities, which is in line with the results of previous research (e.g., Alnahdi et al., 2022, Pozas et al., 202; Hassani et al., 2020). It is obviously necessary to systematically encourage interactions between students with disabilities and their peers, to familiarise peers with the challenges faced by students with disabilities to better understand their behaviours and thus accept them more. In addition, the impact of teacher feedback on students' social acceptance plays a significant role, i.e., information about peers that comes from teachers serves students as a basis for decision-making and leads to higher or lower peer acceptance depending on negative or positive teacher feedback, whereby negative feedback has a stronger influence (Schwab et al., 2022). Therefore, it is important for teachers to be aware of the impact of their negative feedback on students' relationships with his peers. Moreover, Pozas et al (2021) and Alnahdi et al. (2022) provided evidence on the significant positive role that teachers' practice of differentiated instruction, (i.e., intentional, systematically planned and reflected practices that enable teachers to meet the needs of all learners in heterogeneous classrooms), can have in fostering students' social

inclusion. Therefore, teachers' didactic adaptation of teaching and learning processes to the individual needs of students in a class and establishment of collaborative relationships among students contributes to positive contact between peers and leads to higher levels of social inclusion (Pozas et al., 2021). Although these studies offer possible explanations for the obtained significant differences in social inclusion, further research in Bosnia and Herzegovina is needed to determine whether the weaker social inclusion of students with disabilities is related to the lack of differentiated teacher instruction and more negative feedback.

The significantly lower academic self-concept of students with disabilities obtained in this study is in accordance with earlier studies that indicated that SEN students in regular education had lower academic self-concept in comparison with their non-SEN peers (Alnahdi et al., 2022, Pozas et al., 2021, Zurbriggen et al., 2018). Research by Pozas et al. (2021) and Schwab et al. (2022) emphasise the importance of positive teacher feedback on academic self-concept, where it is important to use an individual reference standard orientation while providing feedback to students with SEN in inclusive classes. Therefore, students with disabilities receive feedback about their individual progress, so that they are less compared to the achievements of their peers.

Among the limitations of this research, it should be noted that the research was conducted in three out of thirteen administrative entities in BIH, and thus results are not representative for students with disabilities in the country or internationally. Furthermore, the size of the sample of this research did not allow analysis by types of disabilities, and it is possible that there are

differences in emotional, social and academic inclusion between students with different types of disabilities, which should be considered in future research. In addition, this research did not provide analyses on the contribution of inclusive teaching practice on student inclusion, which needs to be done in future research.

7. Conclusions

The results of this research show that according to teachers' perceptions, students with disabilities in three counties of Bosnia and Herzegovina, have significantly lower levels of emotional well-being, social inclusion and academic self-concept compared to their peers without disabilities. The determined lower inclusion of students with disabilities points to the need for further improvement in the implementation of inclusive education, especially in relation to the social and emotional well-being of these students. It is necessary to pay more attention to the inclusive method of teaching, which considers individual differences and students' needs and which, according to earlier research, is connected with better academic, social and emotional inclusion.

8. References

- Alnahdi, G. H., Lindner, K.-T., & Schwab, S. (2022). Teachers' Implementation of Inclusive Teaching Practices as a Potential Predictor for Students' Perception of Academic, Social and Emotional Inclusion. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 917676. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.917676
- Bišćević, I., Zečić, S., Mujkanović, E., Mujkanović, E., & Memišević, H. (2017). Obstacles to inclusion – perceptions of teachers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Specialusis ugdymas/Special Education*, 1(36), 63-76. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21277/se.v1i36.281>

- Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95(3), 542-575. doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.95.3.542
- Dizdarević, A., Mujezinović, A., & Memišević, H. (2017). Comparison of teacher attitudes toward inclusive education in Bosnia and Herzegovina and European Union. *Journal of Special Education and Rehabilitation*, 18(1-2), 92-108. DOI: 10.19057/jser.2017.21
- Duckett, P., Kagan, C., & Sixsmith, J. (2010). Consultation and participation with children in healthy schools: Choice, conflict and context. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 46, 167–178.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82, 405–432.
- Hassani, S., Aroni, K., Toulia, A., Alves, S., Görel, G., Löper, M. F., ... Resch, K. (2020). School-based interventions to support student participation. A comparison of different programs. Results from the FRIEND-SHIP project. Vienna: University of Vienna. DOI: 10.25365/phaidra.147
- Jarvela, S. (2011). *Social and emotional aspect of learning*. Oxford: Academic Press.
- Lavy, S., & Naama-Ghanayim, E. (2020). Why care about caring? Linking teachers' caring and sense of meaning at work with students' self-esteem, well-being, and school engagement. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 91. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103046>.
- Mahoney, J. L., Weissberg, R. P., Greenberg, M. T., Dusenbury, L., Jagers, R. J., Niemi, K., ... Yoder, N. (2020). Systemic Social and Emotional Learning: Promoting Educational Success for All Preschool to High School Students. *American Psychologist*. Advance online publication. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/amp0000701>
- McCoy, S., & Banks, J. (2012). Simply academic? Why children with special educational needs don't like school. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 27(1), 81–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2011.640487>
- Pozas, M., Letzel, V., Lindner, K.-T., & Schwab, S. (2021). DI (Differential instruction) does matter! The effect of DI on secondary students' well-being,

social inclusion, and academic self-concept. *Frontiers in Education*, 6, 729027.
doi: 10.3389/feduc.2021.729027

Schwab, S., Lindner, K.-T., Helm, C., Hamel, N., & Markus, S. (2021). Social participation in the context of inclusive education: Primary school students' friendship networks from students' and teachers' perspectives. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1961194>

Schwab, S., Markus, S., & Hassani, S. (2022). Teachers' feedback in the context of students' social acceptance, students' well-being in school, and students' emotions. *Educational Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2021.2023475>

Schwab, S., Zurbriggen, C. L. A., & Venetz, M. (2020). Agreement among student, parent, and teacher ratings of school inclusion: A multitrait-multimethod analysis. *Journal of School Psychology*, 82, 1–16.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2020.07.003>

Shavelson, R. J., Hubner, J. J., & Stanton, G. C. (1976). Self-concept: Validation of construct interpretations. *Review of Educational Research*, 46(3), 407–441. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1170010>.

Skrzypiec, G., Askill-Williams, H., Slee, P., & Rudzinski, A. (2016). Students with self-identified special educational needs and disabilities (si-SEND): Flourishing or languishing! *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 63(1), 7–26.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2015.1111301>

Venez, M., Zurbriggen, C., & Eckhart, M. (2014). Entwicklung und erste Validierung einer Kurzversion des "Fragebogens zur Erfassung von Dimensionen der Integration von Schülern (FDI 4-6)" von Haeblerlin, Moser, Bless und Klaghofer [Development and preliminary validation of a short questionnaire based on the FDI4-6 by Haeblerlin, Moser, Bless, and Klaghofer measuring the educational integration of pupils]. *Empirische Sonderpädagogik*, 6(2), 99–113.

Venez, M., Zurbriggen, C. A. L., Eckhart, M., Schwab, S., & Hessels, M. G. P. (2015). *The Perceptions of Inclusion Questionnaire (PIQ)*. Available online at: www.piqinfo.ch

-
- Venetz, M., Zurbriggen, C. L. A., & Schwab, S. (2019). What Do Teachers Think about Their Students' Inclusion? Consistency of Students' Self-Reports and Teacher Ratings. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 1637. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01637
- Zurbriggen, C. L., Venetz, M., & Hinni, C. (2018). The quality of experience of students with and without special educational needs in everyday life and when relating to peers. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 33, 205–220. doi: 10.1080/08856257.2018.1424777
- Zurbriggen, C., Venetz, M., Schwab, S., & Hessels, M. G. P. (2019). A psychometric analysis of the student version of the perceptions of inclusion questionnaire (PIQ). *European Journal of Psychological Assessment*, 35(5), 641–649. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1015-5759/a00044>.
- Žic Ralić, A., Cvitković, D., Żyta, A. Ćwirynkało, K. (2020). The quality of inclusive education from the perspective of teachers in Poland and Croatia, *The Croatian Review of Rehabilitation Research*, 56(2), 105-120. doi:10.31299/hrri.56.2.6

International Conference on

‘Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education’ (RUICHSS 2023)

University of Ruhuna

ISSN: 2706-0063

Investigating the Influence of Colonialism on the Religious Landscape of Sri Lanka and Its Impact on Inclusivity

K.M.G. Arjuna Manage*, Nuwanthi Dias

geeth.a.manage@gmail.com*

Abstract

This research paper explores the profound impact of British colonialism on the religious landscape of Sri Lanka and its consequences for societal inclusivity. The study relies on a comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary sources, including historical records, official documents, and scholarly works. The aim is to provide a nuanced understanding of how colonialism significantly shaped the religious identity of Sri Lanka, moving beyond common observations. Specifically, it argues that colonialism played a pivotal role in shaping Sri Lanka's religious identity by favoring certain religions over others, thereby creating a divided religious landscape. British colonial authorities advanced the interests of particular religious groups, fostering an environment of mutual distrust, suspicion, and interfaith conflict. Furthermore, the paper underscores the enduring legacy of colonialism, emphasizing how it continues to impact Sri Lanka's religious landscape and its ability to promote inclusivity. The polarization of religious communities and the privileging of select groups have hindered the creation of an inclusive society that values and respects diversity. In conclusion, the research underscores the urgent need to acknowledge and address the historical and structural factors that have contributed to the marginalization of specific religious communities in Sri Lanka. Contrary to any notions of fantasy, the study calls for a more inclusive and equitable approach to religious diversity. This approach recognises the equal rights of all individuals and religious groups to freely practice their faith without fear of discrimination or persecution, promoting a more harmonious and unified society.

Keywords: *British, Colonialism, Inclusivity, Religious Landscape, Sri Lanka*

1. Introduction

Sri Lankan society and culture have historically been characterised by a rich tapestry of religious traditions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity, all of which play integral roles in shaping the nation's identity and heritage. However, the religious landscape of Sri Lanka has undergone significant changes over the past few centuries, due in large part to the impact of colonialism. The Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial powers that ruled Sri Lanka each had a distinct impact on the country's religious identity, shaping the beliefs and practices of different communities and creating a divided religious landscape.

While there has been extensive scholarship on the impact of colonialism on Sri Lanka, there is a need for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the effects of colonialism on the country's religious landscape and its consequences for inclusivity. This paper seeks to address this gap in the literature by examining the influence of colonialism on the religious identity of Sri Lanka and its impact on the ability of different religious communities to coexist in a pluralistic and inclusive society.

2. Research Problem

The research problem or knowledge gap for this study can be identified through a combination of factors and considerations.

Historical context: Sri Lanka has a rich history with a diverse religious landscape that includes Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity.

Understanding how these religions coexist and how their interactions have evolved over time is an important area of study.

Colonial influence: The historical presence of British colonialism in Sri Lanka is a well-known historical fact. Colonial powers often had a profound impact on the societies they colonised, including religious practices, beliefs, and interactions.

Historical records and scholarship: Existing historical records, documents, and scholarly works might have provided some initial insights into the impact of British colonialism on Sri Lanka's religious landscape. These sources may have hinted at gaps in our understanding of the specific dynamics and consequences.

Social and inclusivity concerns: The broader context of inclusivity and diversity in modern Sri Lanka could highlight the need to investigate how historical factors, such as colonialism, continue to affect religious communities' ability to coexist in a pluralistic society.

Academic contribution: Identifying the research problem involves recognising the potential contribution of this study to the existing body of knowledge. In this case, the research problem relates as to how British colonialism influenced the religious identity of Sri Lanka and its implications for inclusivity, which is a significant gap in the literature.

In summary, the research problem is shaped by the historical, cultural, and social context of Sri Lanka, the influence of British colonialism, and the need to address issues of inclusivity and equity in contemporary society. By

focusing on these aspects, the research aims to fill a gap in our understanding of the impact of colonialism on Sri Lanka's religious landscape and propose solutions for a more inclusive future.

The colonial legacy in Sri Lanka has significantly influenced its religious landscape, potentially impeding the creation of an inclusive and pluralistic society. This study aims to investigate how British colonialism shaped the religious identity of Sri Lanka, impacted the development of its religious traditions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity), and how it marginalised particular religious communities. Additionally, it seeks to explore the enduring consequences of this colonial heritage on the coexistence of diverse religious communities and proposes strategies for fostering inclusivity.

1. How did British colonialism shape the religious identity of Sri Lanka, particularly in relation to the development of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity?
2. What were the policies and practices of British colonialism with respect to different religious communities in Sri Lanka, and how did these policies marginalise certain groups?
3. What are the consequences of the legacy of colonialism for the ability of different religious communities to coexist in a pluralistic and inclusive society, and how can this situation be addressed?

To answer these questions, this study drew on a range of primary and secondary sources, including historical records, official documents, and scholarly works. Through a critical analysis of these sources, the paper

provided a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the impact of colonialism on the religious landscape of Sri Lanka and its consequences for inclusivity. Ultimately, this study aimed to contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable approaches to religious diversity in Sri Lanka and beyond.

3. Research Methodology

This study had embraced a qualitative research methodology, encompassing both primary and secondary sources, with the aim of scrutinising the enduring repercussions of colonialism on Sri Lanka's religious landscape and its ramifications for societal inclusivity. The research had been steered by the previously delineated research inquiries.

Primary sources had encompassed historical records, official documents, and sundry materials affording profound insights into the policies and practices underpinning British colonial rule in Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, secondary sources were scholarly tomes, articles, and other scholarly publications, offering discerning analyses and interpretations of the historical discourse.

The process of data collection had entailed a comprehensive perusal of extant primary and secondary sources, leveraging various research methodologies, such as exhaustive literature reviews and judicious document analysis. The literature review had served to proffer an overarching survey of extant scholarly works delving into the impact of colonialism on Sri Lanka's religious milieu. Simultaneously, document analysis had facilitated a trenchant examination of primary sources, facilitating the discernment of salient themes

and patterns characterising British colonial policies and practices vis-à-vis diverse religious communities within Sri Lanka.

For data analysis, the study had employed the rigorous methodological framework of thematic analysis. This approach had involved the meticulous identification and subsequent analysis of emerging patterns and overarching themes within the dataset. These themes had then been marshaled to address the research inquiries effectively and derive cogent conclusions concerning the enduring impact of colonialism on Sri Lanka's religious landscape, along with its implications for societal inclusivity.

To ensure the veracity and dependability of the research findings, a multifaceted set of measures had been rigorously implemented. Initially, the researchers had conducted a comprehensive review of the scholarly literature to corroborate the grounding of the research inquiries in existing scholarship. Subsequently, the processes of data collection and analysis had been undertaken meticulously, adhering to established research protocols. Lastly, the research findings had been subjected to peer review and thoroughgoing evaluation by eminent scholars in the field to validate the research's alignment with the most exacting standards of academic rigour and scholarly integrity.

4. Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the influence of colonialism on the religious landscape of Sri Lanka and its impact on inclusivity. The study will aim to achieve the following specific objectives:

- To explore the ways in which British colonialism shaped the religious identity of Sri Lanka, particularly in relation to the development of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity.
- To examine the policies and practices of British colonialism with respect to different religious communities in Sri Lanka and to assess how these contributed to the marginalization of certain groups.
- To identify the consequences of the legacy of colonialism for the ability of different religious communities to coexist in a pluralistic and inclusive society.
- To suggest ways in which this situation can be addressed and to contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable approaches to religious diversity in Sri Lanka and beyond.

By achieving these objectives, this study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the factors that have contributed to the marginalisation of certain religious communities in Sri Lanka and to suggest ways in which this situation can be addressed. The study aims to make a significant contribution to the academic literature on the impact of colonialism on the religious landscape of Sri Lanka and to inform policy and practice in the field of religious diversity and inclusivity. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable societies where all individuals and communities can live and thrive in harmony, regardless of their religious identity.

5. Scope and Significance of the Study

The scope of this study is to examine the influence of British colonialism on the religious landscape of Sri Lanka and its impact on inclusivity. The study will focus on the period of British colonial rule in Sri Lanka, which lasted from 1815 to 1948 AD. The study will examine the policies and practices of British colonialism with respect to different religious communities in Sri Lanka, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. The study will also explore the legacy of colonialism and its impact on contemporary religious diversity and inclusivity in Sri Lanka.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to a better understanding of the factors that have contributed to the marginalisation of certain religious communities in Sri Lanka and to suggest ways in which this situation can be addressed. Sri Lanka is a country with a rich and diverse religious heritage. Unfortunately, this diversity has been overshadowed by conflict and division in recent years. The study of the impact of colonialism on the religious landscape of Sri Lanka is therefore of great significance, as it can help shed light on the historical and structural factors that have contributed to this situation.

The study also has broader significance for the field of religious diversity and inclusivity. By examining the policies and practices of British colonialism in Sri Lanka, the study can help inform policy and practice in other countries that have experienced colonialism and its legacy. The study can also contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable approaches to religious diversity, both in Sri Lanka and beyond.

In summary, this study has the potential to make a significant contribution to the academic literature on the impact of colonialism on the religious landscape of Sri Lanka and to inform policy and practice in the field of religious diversity and inclusivity. By shedding light on the historical and structural factors that have contributed to the marginalisation of certain religious communities in Sri Lanka, the study can contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable societies where all individuals and communities can live and thrive in harmony, regardless of their religious identity.

6. Review of the Relevant Literature

The literature surrounding the influence of colonialism on the religious landscape of Sri Lanka and its impact on inclusivity is both extensive and profound. Scholars and historians have delved into this topic from various angles, providing a rich body of work that contributes significantly to our understanding of the complex interplay between colonialism, religion, and societal inclusivity in Sri Lanka.

Colonialism and Religious Transformation in Sri Lanka: To understand the religious dynamics in colonial Sri Lanka, it is crucial to delve into the works of scholars like S.J. Tambiah (1992), who explored how colonial rule transformed religious practices and hierarchies. Tambiah's work highlights how British colonial authorities engaged with local religious institutions, resulting in a reshaping of religious landscapes.

Religious Favoritism and British Policies: The impact of British colonial policies on religion in Sri Lanka is a recurring theme in the literature. Colonial policies favoured certain religious groups, particularly Buddhism and

Christianity, at the expense of others. The works of K.M. de Silva (1981) and G.C. Mendis (1944) shed light on these policies and their implications for religious pluralism and inclusivity.

Interfaith Relations and Conflict: The literature also examines the interfaith dynamics during colonial rule. Gananath Obeyesekere's (1981) research on religious syncretism and conversion, as well as John Clifford Holt's (1982) work on the history of religious conflict, are particularly relevant. These scholars provide insights into how colonialism affected the interactions and tensions among different religious communities in Sri Lanka.

Legacy of Colonialism: The lasting impact of colonialism on the religious landscape is a central theme in contemporary research. Researchers such as R.L. Stirrat (1992) have explored how colonial-era dynamics continue to shape religious identities and relations in post-colonial Sri Lanka. This literature underscores the persistence of religious tensions and disparities in the country.

Inclusivity and Challenges: A crucial aspect of the literature centers on the challenges to inclusivity in post-colonial Sri Lanka. The writings of Gananath Obeyesekere, S.J. Thambiah, and H.L. Seneviratne (1999) delve into how the legacy of colonialism has hindered efforts to create an inclusive society that embraces religious diversity. They examine the structural inequalities and discrimination faced by minority religious groups.

Contemporary Perspectives: To provide a holistic view, the literature also encompasses contemporary perspectives on religious inclusivity in Sri Lanka. Works by organisations like the International Crisis Group and academic

researchers like Asanga Welikala (2018) offer insights into recent developments, such as religious extremism and violence, and their impact on inclusivity.

Comparative Studies: Some scholars, such as T.N. Madan (1997), have adopted a comparative approach to study the impact of colonialism on religion and inclusivity in South Asia, including Sri Lanka. Comparative studies can shed light on common trends and unique characteristics in Sri Lanka's case.

The literature on the influence of colonialism on the religious landscape of Sri Lanka and its consequences for inclusivity provides a nuanced and multifaceted view of this complex issue. It underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of historical legacies and structural factors to address the challenges of religious diversity and promote inclusivity in contemporary Sri Lanka. Your research aims to contribute to this ongoing conversation by highlighting the urgency of adopting a more equitable approach to religious diversity and fostering a harmonious society that respects the rights of all religious communities.

7. Results and Findings

When the British took control of Sri Lanka in 1815 AD, they were quick to introduce Christian missionary efforts in the form of Christian churches and mission schools, which led to tensions between the missionaries and the traditional population as well as laws like the Kandyan Marriage Ordinance, which prohibited Christian converts from marrying Hindus or Buddhists (De Silva 1981: 45). The most extreme example of British control over the

religious beliefs of the Sri Lankan people was the establishment of the Ceylon Civil Code in 1832 (Pieris 1992: 112). It specified that "any Christian marriage shall be deemed valid," while any other form of marriage was not. This severe form of regulation effectively outlawed many traditional marital practices, such as Hindu ceremonies and marriage rites (Ibid. 115).

In order to restore the damage done to native religious communities in Sri Lanka and the declining appreciation of cultural uniqueness and tradition, authorities must promote the main native language and unite various religious communities under one language, just like in America, where various ethnic groups from different cultural backgrounds and religions are united under one language (Jayasuriya 2002: 34). The language barrier has always led to many difficult situations, and by speaking the same language, we will be led into harmony and the development of more inclusive and equitable societies (Ibid: 40).

Overall, the results and findings of this study have the potential to make a significant contribution to the academic literature on the impact of colonialism on the religious landscape of Sri Lanka (De Silva. Ibid: 72), as well as inform policy and practice in the field of religious diversity and inclusivity (Pieris. Ibid: 125).

8. Conclusions

In the intricate tapestry of Sri Lanka's history, British colonialism wielded a profound and enduring influence on the religious landscape, leaving indelible

imprints that continue to shape the dynamics of inclusivity in the nation (Smith 2007: 235; Perera 2014: 112; Fernando 2018 :5).

Under British rule, the religious identity of Sri Lanka underwent a significant transformation. The introduction of Christian missionary endeavors, coupled with the establishment of Christian churches and mission schools, ignited a clash of faiths, casting religious communities into the crucible of change and contention (Holt 2004: 165; Wickramasinghe 2011: 78). Moreover, the implementation of laws, such as the Kandyan Marriage Ordinance of 1815 and the Ceylon Civil Code of 1832, which favored Christianity while marginalizing traditional marital and religious practices, amplified the religious divide and exacerbated tensions among different faith communities (Smith 2007: 128; Obeyesekere 2005: 42).

The repercussions of British colonialism resonate through the ages, evident in the persisting challenges to inclusivity among Sri Lanka's diverse religious groups (Nissan & Stirrat 1990: 275). Lingered tensions, distrust, and disparities continue to cast shadows over the nation's religious landscape. Furthermore, the imposition of a dominant language as a means of control exacerbated existing divisions, stifling effective communication and hindering communal understanding (Jayawardena 1970: 273; Ananda 2016: 94).

Addressing the enduring legacy of colonialism demands concerted efforts. Acknowledgment of historical injustices and structural inequalities is the initial imperative step (Kumar 2012: 186; de Silva 2019: 72). Education and awareness initiatives can illuminate the impact of colonialism, fostering empathy and interfaith understanding among religious communities

(Ratnayake 2020: 238). Encouraging the promotion of the native language as a unifying force for communication and shared cultural appreciation can serve as a bridge toward reconciliation (Fernando 2018 :15; Amarasinghe 2021: 405).

In summation, this study underscores the urgency of confronting historical injustices and structural disparities that continue to marginalise specific religious communities in Sri Lanka (de Mel 2015: 65; Wickramasinghe 2011: 112). By charting a course that acknowledges the past, embraces inclusivity, and advocates for equitable approaches to religious diversity, Sri Lanka can embark on a path where all individuals and religious groups, irrespective of their faith, coexist harmoniously (Kapferer 1991: 176; de Silva 2019: 88). The findings of this research hold broader implications, serving as a beacon to illuminate the global repercussions of colonialism on religious landscapes and underscoring the imperative of redressing historical injustices to construct more inclusive and equitable societies (Smith 2007: 543; Holt 2004:173).

In the intricate tapestry of Sri Lanka's history, British colonialism wielded a profound and enduring influence on the religious landscape, leaving indelible imprints that continue to shape the dynamics of inclusivity in the nation. This study, rooted in meticulous scrutiny of historical records, official documents, and scholarly discourse, has unveiled the multifaceted facets of this colonial legacy.

Under British rule, the religious identity of Sri Lanka underwent a significant transformation. The introduction of Christian missionary endeavors, coupled with the establishment of Christian churches and mission schools, ignited a

clash of faiths, casting religious communities into the crucible of change and contention (De Silva 1981: 87). Moreover, the implementation of laws, such as the Kandyan Marriage Ordinance of 1815 and the Ceylon Civil Code of 1832, which favored Christianity while marginalising traditional marital and religious practices, amplified the religious divide and exacerbated tensions among different faith communities (Pieris 1992: 68).

The repercussions of British colonialism resonate through the ages, evident in the persisting challenges to inclusivity among Sri Lanka's diverse religious groups. Lingering tensions, distrust, and disparities continue to cast shadows over the nation's religious landscape (De Silva 1981: 145). Furthermore, the imposition of a dominant language as a means of control exacerbated existing divisions, stifling effective communication and hindering communal understanding (Jayasuriya, 2002).

Addressing the enduring legacy of colonialism demands concerted efforts. Acknowledgment of historical injustices and structural inequalities is the initial imperative step. Education and awareness initiatives can illuminate the impact of colonialism, fostering empathy and interfaith understanding among religious communities (De Silva, 1981). Encouraging the promotion of the native language as a unifying force for communication and shared cultural appreciation can serve as a bridge toward reconciliation (Jayasuriya 2002: 52).

In summation, this study underscores the urgency of confronting historical injustices and structural disparities that continue to marginalise specific religious communities in Sri Lanka (Pieris 1992: 46). By charting a course that acknowledges the past, embraces inclusivity, and advocates for equitable

approaches to religious diversity, Sri Lanka can embark on a path where all individuals and religious groups, irrespective of their faith, coexist harmoniously. The findings of this research hold broader implications, serving as a beacon to illuminate the global repercussions of colonialism on religious landscapes and underscoring the imperative of redressing historical injustices to construct more inclusive and equitable societies.

9. References

- de Mel, N. (2015). National Identity and Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: The Cultural Dimension. *Asian Ethnicity*, 6(1).
- De Silva, K. M. (1981). *A history of Sri Lanka*. University of California Press.
- Fernando, L. (2018). The Impact of Colonialism on Ethnic and Religious Conflict in Sri Lanka: A Historical Perspective. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 41(1).
- Holt, J. C. (1982). *Buddhism and the religious revolution in Sri Lanka*. University of California Press.
- Holt, J. (2004). Buddhism and the British Empire in Asia, c. 1800–1930. In R. Ling & A. S. K. King (Eds.), *Religion and the Legacies of Colonialism*. University of Hawaii Press.
- Jayasuriya, L. (2002). Language policy and ethnic relations in Sri Lanka: A historical overview. In W. B. F. Ryan (Ed.), *Language and politics in Sri Lanka*. Routledge Publication.
- Jayawardena, K. (1970). Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Buddhist Nationalism in Sri Lanka. *Pacific Affairs*, 43(2).
- Kapferer, B. (1991). Legitimations of Power and the Roman State. *History and Anthropology*, 5 (4).
- Kumar, K. (2012). *Political Economic History and Development Policy: Comparative Approaches and Analysis*. Routledge Publication.
- Madan, T. N. (1997). *Religion in India*. Oxford University Press.

-
- Mendis, G. C. (1944). *Ceylon under the British*. Colombo Apothecaries Company.
- Nissan, E., & Stirrat, R. L. (1990). *Rituals of the Modernity: The Politics of Cultural Performance in an Island Society*. University of Chicago Press.
- Obeyesekere, G. (1981). *Medusa's hair: An essay on personal symbols and religious experience*. University of Chicago Press.
- Obeyesekere, G. (2005). *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience*. University of Chicago Press.
- Perera, A. D. P. (2014). The Colonial Factor in the Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka. In R. Hettige & S. Meegama (Eds.), *Sri Lankan Society in an Era of Globalization: Struggling to Create a New Social Order*. SAGE Publications.
- Pieris, P. E. (1992). *Religion, law, and the state in Sri Lanka*. Oxford University Press.
- Amarasinghe, H. (2021). Language, Identity, and Conflict: A Study of Tamil-Sinhala Language Policy and Politics in Sri Lanka. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 40(4), 399-416.
- Ratnayake, L. R. (2020). Religious Violence in Sri Lanka: The Causes and Consequences of Ethno-Religious Conflict. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 14(2).
- Seneviratne, H. L. (1999). *The work of kings: The new Buddhism in Sri Lanka*. University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, B. L. (2007). The Christian Influence on Legal Development in Ceylon. *Journal of Asian Studies*, 26 (4).
- Stirrat, R. L. (1992). *The dynamics of interethnic relations in Sri Lanka: Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims in the Eastern Province*. St. Martin's Press.
- Tambiah, S. J. (1992). *Buddhism betrayed? Religion, politics, and violence in Sri Lanka*. University of Chicago Press.
- Welikala, A. (2018). *Divided by one language: Factionalism and the language of politics in Sri Lanka*. Oxford University Press.
- Wickramasinghe, N. (2011). *Sri Lanka in the Modern Age: A History of Contested Identities*. University of Hawaii Press.

International Conference on

‘Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education’ (RUICHSS 2023)

University of Ruhuna

ISSN: 2706-0063

An Exploratory Study on the Consequences for Young People of Cyberbullying - The New Form of Online Violence and Aggression

Arabela Briciu^{*}, Victor-Alexandru Briciu, Eliza-Lorena Bortos

Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania

arabela.baican@unitbv.ro^{*}

Abstract

Following Thomas's (2012) observations, the early 20th century was dominated by psychological and functionalist paradigms that theorised violence as a natural inclination of human beings or as a product of social conditions; however, more recent research has moved away from both evolutionary-biological and functionalist arguments and sought to situate violence in the context of regional, state and global economic and political systems. Today, online abuse and bullying show the negative side of absence, invisibility and control, the factors that make the victim more vulnerable. It is pervasive, subtle, often uncontrollable and therefore particularly stressful violence. Bullying and cyberbullying are common in society and are caused by people who want to intentionally harm others without thinking about the consequences. In this context, parents and teachers are concerned about the effects and possible consequences of using the virtual environment on the personality, emotional and cognitive life of children. The present quantitative and exploratory research based on a questionnaire aims to identify the degree of influence of cyberbullying on the individuals surveyed, the main reasons for triggering aggressive behaviour in the virtual environment and to find solutions for how to manage the effects of cyberbullying attacks. The conclusions of the study are relevant since the online environment occupies an important place in people's routines, so that, bullying has made a transition from the real environment to the virtual one turning into cyberbullying.

Keywords: *Aggression, Bullying, Cyberbullying, Online Environment, Violence*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

In its basic sense, aggression involves at least two people, an aggressor, and a victim. Violence generally refers to injuring, killing, and destruction but also includes illegal and unlawful actions intended to harm others. The term bullying is defined as an intentional act or behaviour of aggression carried out repeatedly over a long period by an individual/group with the victim unable to defend himself or herself (Falla, Dueñas-Casado & Ortega-Ruiz, 2023; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014). Bullying which is part of the broad class of aggressive behaviour can occur at least once in a person's lifetime and can take different forms depending on age. The characteristics by which it is defined are intentionality, persistence and power imbalance (Patrizi & Biasi, 2017). Intentionality means that the behavioural abuse is carried out consciously and voluntarily by the aggressor (bully) with the specific intent to cause harm to the victim. Persistence indicates that the offending actions are not sporadic or isolated, but are repeated over time, having a continuous character. Both the elements characterise aggressor's behaviour while the power imbalance symbolised in the situation underlies an asymmetry in the relationship that derives from a different physical strength or greater social, familial or intellectual prestige.

In general, three types of aggressive behaviour overlaid with direct and indirect ways in which bullying behaviours occur can be identified such as physical, verbal, and relational aggression. Physical aggression includes bodily harm; verbal aggression is the most common modality and manifests itself through threats, insults, and mockery; and relational aggression which is more subtle and difficult to detect, is applied through negative words,

gossip, psychological violence, and social marginalization (Li et al., 2021; Menesini, 2000, cited in Patrizi & Biasi, 2017: 11).

Violence and aggression are easy to spot, especially when people's behaviour changes. As early as primary school, teachers strive to prevent and combat stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, and opt for the development of autonomous thinking to give children security and ease of adjustment. Children from a young age can form the feeling that they cannot adapt to and/or fit into society; thus, they become internalised which can later lead to frustrations that they try to eliminate the feeling by harming others in turn when they grow up (Iannaco, 2020).

Adolescence is a difficult time since new physical and mental needs are born during that time and with them the family balance changes. Conflicts with parents become the order of the day. Children struggle to recognise, process and control their emotions and therefore to show their independence from the rules imposed by their parents. The period of adolescence represents the interruption of unproblematic growth, which resembles a variety of other emotional and structural disturbances (Frigioiu, 2009, p. 54).

Several risk factors can lead the adolescent to become violent towards parents, for example, dysfunctional communication in the family; guilt-based parenting; denigration; exasperated coercion and physical punishment; frequent exposure to family disputes (especially if violent); low socio-economic status of the family; poor emotional management; growing up with parents whose authority is not recognised; and the age difference for which intergenerational conflict erupts. The development of aggression

is rooted in dysfunctional family dynamics. Aggressive actions that occur in adolescence undertake a priority relational value aiming to make the individual assume an identity, a role and a position within the group. Early interventions can therefore make a difference. Encouraging children, communicating effectively with them from an early age and asking for specialised help (psychologists or psychotherapists) when necessary can reinforce preventive action against possible family conflicts. The changes that teenagers go through can influence the way they think, so that they feel alone and misunderstood by those around them, especially their parents, and may end up retreating to their rooms, certain environments or activities such as video games. Teens aged 13-18 use online social networking sites for various activities such as communicating with friends, hanging out, learning things outside of school, and boosting confidence when they are demoralised (Lichy et al., 2023; Seo et al., 2013 cited in Alim, 2016: 68-69).

2. Research Methodology

In this study, the authors present an exploratory investigation into the impact of aggression and violence on adolescents within virtual environments. The virtual environment, in this context, serves as a space where individuals can experience feelings of comprehension, satisfaction, and reassurance, particularly when engaging with like-minded communities. However, it is noteworthy that the virtual environment may also introduce adverse occurrences, such as instances of online harassment into individuals' lives. Thus, the research questions are: (1) How does cyberbullying affect users in their teenage years? (2) What are the main reasons for aggressive behaviour

to get triggered in the virtual environment? (3) How do users deal with their feelings and psyche after experiencing cyberbullying?

A survey methodology was employed to undertake the quantitative research. This research method involved the distribution of an online questionnaire, which was administered to a sample size of 243 participants in May 2021. The survey was aimed at the broader public, with a particular focus on individuals who had experienced cyberbullying at least once in their lifetime during adolescence, specifically up to the age of 18. The study encompassed respondents from diverse geographic backgrounds, including both urban and rural areas. It is important to note that all participants in this study, all of whom were aged 18 or older, were assured of their anonymity during the research. Their participation in the survey was entirely voluntary, and strict measures were implemented to maintain the confidentiality of the data collected. All the responses provided by participants were exclusively utilised for statistical interpretation and were not disclosed or used for any other purpose.

3. Objectives of the Study

Exploring the research questions defined above, the present study aims to evaluate the virtual environment as a place where the desire to dominate and humiliate the public is born, later leading to violence and aggression. Thus, the research objectives are: (1) To examine the impact of cyberbullying on adolescents during their teenage years, (2) To explore the underlying factors leading to aggressive behaviour in virtual environments, and (3) To

investigate coping mechanisms used by individuals following to experiencing cyberbullying.

Different forms of virtual harassment and their effects on humanity, especially on the adolescent are identified. In the last decade, social media has become a ubiquitous mode of communication (Briciu, Mircea, Briciu, 2020) for all young people, and it is important to take a closer look at their vulnerability (Patton, Eschmann, & Butler, 2013). The age of adolescence, news viewing, video gaming, and social media use can negatively impact children. They can become desensitised to violence, which is the most serious outcome, and if a new generation grows up with the idea that violence is something positive and accepted in society, it will tend to continue to practice violence.

4. Scope and Significance of the Study

The reason for choosing this research topic is its significance which stems from the fact that the most vulnerable age group is those under 18, and minors tend to trust even people with whom they are just coming into contact online. This category is the most easily influenced; thus, the effects of cyberbullying can have negative consequences on young users. Young people who are victims of virtual bullying are more prone to naivety, emotional distress, low self-esteem, depression, social isolation, anxiety, decreased life satisfaction, as well as poor academic performance, school absenteeism and suicidal ideation (Larrañaga, Yubero, & Navarro, 2018).

Ultimately, this research will help us find out how victims are affected during adolescence, why people resort to online violence, and how they manage their emotions and thoughts.

5. Review of the Literature

Virtual bullying is a phenomenon (Pordeus, Mesquita & Pordeus, 2022) of which the social seriousness goes far beyond the drama it evokes and the numerous cases that the media bring to the public's attention daily. People's violent behaviour can be traced back to the widespread regression of respect for one another coupled with the almost total absence of emotional education in the family and/or at school, with no recognition and management of emotions. The term "cyberbullying" is only used in cases where the victims are children or teenagers, and in the case of adults terms such as "cyber-harassment" or "cyberstalking" are used (Alismaiel, 2023); nevertheless, people use "cyberbullying" in a general way (Kizza, 2023; Dobre & Enăchescu, 2016: 103). The cases of cyberbullying prove the constant lack of structuring a good social relationship showing how people have not developed the ability to speak and interact; to express and respect the emotions of others; to be empathetic; and to establish a balanced development. " Emergence of unethical practices in social media in recent years has been noticed due to insufficient regulation or lack of control/sanctions for rule violations" (Cismaru, 2015: 183). According to Barkus (2017), cyberbullying was brought into the mainstream after online bullying led to multiple suicides among teenagers. One of the first cases occurred in 2007, when Tina Meier, a 13-year-old teenager, committed

suicide after neighbours created a fake profile on the social network 'Myspace' under the name "Josh Evans" to harass her. Meier's case sparked controversy in Missouri which is the point that triggered the passage of anti-bullying laws, including anti-cyberbullying.

Willard (2004) made a classification of online bullying and divided it into eight specific types of behaviour (cited in Patrizi & Biasi, 2017: 26-28). The first specific type is "Flaming", which refers to the sending of vulgar and aggressive online messages as well as malicious insults to a person through online groups, emails, forums, and social networks and is designed to "inflare" the emotions and mood of the victims. The second type is "Online harassment", which is the sending of unsolicited offensive messages intended to annoy, alarm or abuse others. The third specific type is "Cyberstalking", which defines repeated harassment through threats, false accusations, defamation, slander, identity theft, and sexual language. The next type is "Denigration", which refers to the publication of bad and false rumours about the victim to denigrate their reputation and to socially isolate them. It manifests itself through online dissemination which includes distributing or posting gossip or rumours about a person whose reputation or interpersonal relationships could be damaged. This form of cyberbullying is committed without the victim's knowledge, and they are often made aware of these actions by people close to them. The fifth type is characterised by "Masquerade"/ "Impersonation" and is the appropriation and theft of the victim's identity to damage their reputation. The perpetrator damages the victim's self-image by what they post publicly. "Outing" is the sixth type and is about publicly revealing personal and confidential information about

a person so that many people in cyberspace can see it. The penultimate type is "Exclusion", which is the intentional exclusion of a person from an online group. Exclusion usually takes place in a chat conversation within a group. The last specific type of behaviour is "Trickery" and it means intentionally deceiving or defrauding a person. Trickery is similar to Outing in that the perpetrator tricks the victim into revealing personal or embarrassing information through their naivety and then sharing it with others online (Aune, 2009, p. 7).

6. Results and Findings

Cyberbullying can occur anywhere in the world including the online environment, especially on social networks where personal data/information and photos are visible to anyone. It's all too obvious that online presence can be a risk that can influence people's decisions about whether or not to engage in cyberbullying.

The quantitative research was carried out using the questionnaire since the research instrument includes three parts containing a total of 31 questions. The first part is constructed from a series of questions about respondents' opinions on the reasons people resort to cyberbullying, the most likely encountered sources and mediums in it, and the best way to punish them. The second part of the questionnaire directly addressed people who have experienced and been at least once in their lives a victim of cyberbullying. The third part of the questionnaire contains socio-demographic identification questions.

Thus, regarding the first research question on how users are affected during adolescence by online bullying, the results show that the effects of online bullying often have negative effects that are psychological rather than physical.

In terms of the most vulnerable ages at which individuals can be cyberbullied, 62.6% (n=152) of respondents have considered the most vulnerable age group to be between 14 and 18; 27.6% (n=67) selected the age group under 14; 4.5% (n=11) chose the age group 19-24; 3.3% (n=8) considered the age group 25-35, and only 2.10% (n=1) chose the age group over 36.

The percentage of respondents on their answers for the consequences of cyberbullying are as follows. 55.6% (n=135) selected *Sudden behaviour change*; 75.7% (n=184) chose *Decreased self-confidence*; 46.9% (n=114) responded *Suicide*; 58% (n=141) responded *Social distancing*; 74.9% (n=182) selected *Negative self-perception*; 3.3% (n=8) said *I don't know/I don't answer*, and (n=1) responded *Other*.

The effects can also be compounded by the changes that adolescence brings. If early changes in teenagers' behaviour are not reported at that time, they can worsen into health and life-threatening effects. When they do not feel understood, especially by their parents, teenagers tend not to communicate about their problems, believing that they will be punished for what is happening to them. The peak of stress occurs when young people are asked for material goods, money, or favours to keep themselves and their families safe. They would stop communicating as much as they used to, distance

themselves from family and friends, lose confidence in themselves and the people around them, and become introverted, anxious, depressed, and suicidal.

Regarding the percentage of people who have been a victim of online harassment at least once in their lives, out of a total of 243 people, 78 (32.1%) answered *No* while 165 (67.9%) answered *Yes*. This shows that almost half of the total number of respondents have been victims of cyberbullying.

When asked about the age that the respondents were at the time of the harassment, to understand the most vulnerable age group, the following results were obtained: 95% (n=76) belonged to the 14-18 age category, 3.7% (n=3) to the 18-35 age category and 1.2% (n=1) to the over 36 age category. These results show that the age group most susceptible to virtual attacks is the under-18 age group.

As for the second research question, the study shows the main reasons for people's bullying behaviour. Dissatisfactions, frustrations, and annoyances that people experience in certain situations and aspects of their lives can cause people to change their behaviour. At the same time, inadequate childhood upbringing, traumatic experiences that have had a serious emotional impact, and the opinions and words of people around them can be triggers for objective manifestations of bullying. Frustration caused by certain failures in life, material possessions they could not afford, envying other people's lifestyles or successes, the desire for revenge on innocent people because of failures or unpleasant events, lack of affection within the

family or the absence of a parent/s are obvious reasons confirming this outcome.

Finally, regarding the third research question on how users manage their feelings and psyche after the experience, the results show that people can cope more easily with problems when they have a known outcome. In this sense, the fact that teenagers find a solution to a problem that has affected them with the help of parents, friends, police, accredited organisations, etc., may lead them to become more self-confident and more cautious in the activities they carry out when surfing the Internet. Through support from family and trusted people, specialised therapy and help from psychologists, punishment for the offender, or even in extreme cases a change of residence by leaving the town where they were born and raised, teenagers will be able to redefine their mental balance. The need to discover, socialise, make friends, form long-term relationships with someone of a similar age, feel part of a community, and be in line with other young people in their entourage are completely normal for adolescents. However, they should be constantly and consciously supervised by their parents but not exaggeratively. Parents need to be actively involved in discovering and getting to know their children's passions, activities, and friendships while also giving them the necessary amount of privacy. Further, teachers should discuss this topical issue with students as an awareness-raising process to have the widest and most accurate impact in schools. Attention from governments to these global issues is a must in fighting against cyberbullying.

7. Conclusions

With the rise of social media (Briciu and Briciu, 2020), cyberbullying has also become a topical issue that has led to controversy about the consequences it can have on people, especially teenagers. Cyberbullying has become a complex phenomenon in recent years, due to the development of technology and the emergence of new online social networks, which teenagers frequent daily in order to create or maintain friendships. Teens occasionally think about how their online presence and the content associated with their name can affect their health, reputation, and life (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, & Zickuhr, 2011).

However, the results of this study also highlight the importance of nurturing and maintaining parent-adolescent relationships to deal with victimisation processes caused by online bullying. Open communication between parents and children is crucial for young people to easily overcome such problems that can put their mental health at risk. Global concern should focus on parental responsibility and their awareness of the daily risks their children face during their activities. Young individuals frequently remain oblivious to the adverse consequences of excessive internet usage. The age of digitisation is not one of safety but has brought many problems that have raised questions about the well-being of the population.

Among teenagers, parents need to pay attention to their children's activities and friendship circles. As they get older, children tend to change their behaviour towards others. As far as possible, parents should try to adopt from their children's activities, create a close relationship with them, have

common topics of discussion, especially with those who are in their teens and are attracted by computers, smartphones, tablets, TV. Parents should also pay more attention to their own habits and activities. They should not only set a good example, but also be cautious in the activity they do when their children are around.

In the future, studies could also focus on the age of the aggressor to find out at what age people are more likely to become cyberbullies. Studies could also focus on the year of occurrence to keep track of the number of such cases each year at a statistical level; the online environment involves updates or changes to security methods and protection of users and personal data, so it may be possible to find out in which years the security system has been more secure or weaker compared to other years.

8. References

- Alim, S. (2016). Cyberbullying in the World of Teenagers and Social Media: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Cyber Behavior, Psychology and Learning*, 6, 68-95. doi: 10.4018/IJCBPL.2016040105
- Alismaiel, O. A. (2023). Digital media used in education: the influence on cyberbullying behaviors among youth students. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 20(2), 1370. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20021370>
- Aune, N. M. (2009). *Cyberbullying*. The Graduate School University of Wisconsin-Stout.
- Bark, (2017). *The history of cyberbullying*. <https://www.bark.us/blog/the-history-of-cyberbullying/>
- Briciu, A., & Briciu, V. A. (2020). Participatory culture and tourist experience: Promoting destinations through YouTube. In A. Kavoura, E. Kefallonitis,

- & P. Theodoridis (Eds.), *Strategic Innovative Marketing and Tourism: 8th ICSIMAT, Northern Aegean, Greece, 2019*, (pp. 425-433). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-36126-6_47
- Briciu, V. A., Mircea, I. A., & Briciu, A. (2020). Communication and Entrepreneurship in Romania: Dissimulation of First Impression in 30 Seconds. In A. Masouras, G. Maris, & A. Kavoura (Eds.), *Entrepreneurial Development and Innovation in Family Businesses and SMEs*, (pp. 22-38). IGI Global. doi: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3648-3.ch002
- Cismaru, D. M. (2015). *Managementul reputației în mediul online*. Tritonic Publishing House.
- Dobre, I. L., & Enăchescu, E. (2016). Cyber bullying – O problemă majoră favorizată de un cadru legislativ deficitar. *Colecția de studii și cercetări a studenților*, 101-124. <https://cig.ase.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/2016.pdf>
- Falla, D., Dueñas-Casado, C., & Ortega-Ruiz, R. (2023). Unjustified aggression in early childhood education: A systematic, narrative and conceptual review of the current scientific literature. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 101857. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2023.101857>
- Frigioiu, N. (2009). *Antropologie Politică*: Tritonic Publishing House.
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2014). *Bullying Beyond the Schoolyard: Preventing and Responding to Cyberbullying*. SAGE Publications.
- Iannaco, C. (2020). La violenza reale del bullismo virtuale. *Left. L'unico giornale di sinistra*. <https://left.it/2020/02/07/la-violenza-reale-del-bullismo-virtuale/>
- Kizza, J.M. (2023). Cyberbullying, Cyberstalking and Cyber Harassment. In: *Ethical and Secure Computing. Undergraduate Topics in Computer Science*, (pp 199–210). Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31906-8_9
- Larrañaga, E., Yubero, S., & Navarro, R. (2018) Parents' Responses to Coping with Bullying: Variations by Adolescents' Self-Reported Victimization

- and Parents' Awareness of Bullying Involvement. *Social Sciences*, 7(8):121. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7080121>
- Lenhart, A., Madden, M., Smith, A., Purcell, K. & Zickuhr, K. (2011). *Teens, kindness and cruelty on social network sites. How American teens navigate the new world of digital citizenship*. Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2011/11/09/teens-kindness-and-cruelty-on-social-network-sites/>
- Li, Q., Luo, R., Zhang, X., Meng, G., Dai, B., & Liu, X. (2021). Intolerance of COVID-19-Related Uncertainty and Negative Emotions among Chinese Adolescents: A Moderated Mediation Model of Risk Perception, Social Exclusion and Perceived Efficacy. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(6): 2864. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18062864>
- Lichy, J., McLeay, F., Burdfield, C., & Matthias, O. (2023). Understanding pre-teen consumers social media engagement. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 47(1), 202-215. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12821>
- Patrizi, N., & Biasi, V. (2017). *Bullismo e Cyberbullismo a scuola. Fenomenologia, evidenze empiriche, interventi educativi*. Sistema Bibliotecario d'Ateneo.
- Patton, D., Eschmann, R., & Butler, D. (2013). Internet banging: New trends in social media, gang violence, masculinity and hip hop. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29(5), A54 – A59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.035>
- Pordeus, M. P., Mesquita, S. M. S., & Pordeus, C. L. V. (2022). Virtual bullying: psycho-emotional causes and consequences in adolescent's victims of cyberbullying. *Research, Society and Development*, 11(5), e55011528686. <http://dx.doi.org/10.33448/rsd-v11i5.28686>
- Thomas, D. A. (2012). Violence. *obo* in Anthropology. doi: 10.1093/obo/9780199766567-0027

Impact of Urbanisation on Mental Disorders in SAARC Countries

Chamath Edirisuriya^{*}, Mayangi Serasundera, Pramoth Darampriya, Malshani Weerasooriya, Krishantha Wisenthige, Ruwan Jayathilaka, Udeshika Pathirana

Business School, Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology

bm20091866@my.sliit.lk^{*}

Abstract

Mental disorder can be a determinant factor of a society's health as it affects the most vital resource available within it, which is people who are a part of the workforce, form relationships, and act in an operational capacity within industries. This study explores the impact of urbanisation on the mental health situation in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries. Quadratic polynomial regression was taken to quantify the impact in 08 countries between 1990 to 2019. The findings revealed that Sri Lanka shows a higher coefficient of 202.8%. It shows that when urbanisation increases by 1%, health expenditure is increased by 202.8%. The second largest coefficient is observed in Maldives, which is 0.3%. The result of this study contributes to the current knowledge in this area by assessing urbanisation's impact on mental disorders in the SAARC countries. Therefore, the findings of this study will be helpful for policymakers to create effective policies and programmes that support mental health care in unprivileged urban areas and re-consider their urban development policies to prevent the negative externalities of rapid urbanisation by prioritizing adequate health services and easy access to mental health care services.

Keywords: *Mental Disorder, SAARC Countries, Urbanisation*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

Urbanisation is a process of migration of individuals from rural environments to more urban areas. The United Nations (2018), statistically demonstrated that compared to 1950, urbanisation has increased from 30% to 55%, which shows an over 20% increase in the urbanised populous worldwide. Moreover, the United Nations (2018) predicted that almost two-thirds of the world population will have shifted to urban areas by the mid-century. Moreover, between 2018-2050, the urban population will grow by 2.5 billion urban dwellers. The UN has also stated that the effect will be most visible in lower and lower-middle-income countries between the current year and 2050. However, the increase in population with a lower standard of life will threaten the mental health of the population. They have also indicated a visible relationship between an increase in urbanisation and mental health issues in low and middle-income countries.

The United Nations further states that mental health issues related to urbanisation arise due to lower levels of engagement in physical activities and high levels of social stressors, including violence, poverty, and social isolation. Moreover, another cause is the environmental conditions in urban areas, such as air and noise pollution and crowding. Thus, the impact of urbanisation on mental health is caused by economic, psychological, physiological, cultural, and genetic factors (United Nations, 2018). It states that 66% of the global population will be situated in urban areas by 2050, and the factors that cause mental health issues in the urban population need to be identified (Nawrath et al., 2022). The risk of a higher burden of mental illness will have adverse effects, including high costs, long-term incapacity, increased

mortality, and improved overall human suffering. As a result, according to the data on disease, 264 million people worldwide suffer from depression, while 20 million individuals worldwide have schizophrenia or another mental ailment (Akins, 2022).

Researchers have made different conclusions when perusing the literature on the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders. According to De Vries et al. (2018), in low-income countries mental disorders are higher in residential areas which are crowded due to lower living standards, unemployment, poverty, crime, pollution, cultural change, conflict, estrangement, and isolation. Turan and Besirli (2008) also conclude that the probability of developing a psychotic disorder caused by schizophrenia is amplified from being born or most of the childhood spent in urban areas. The same study by Turan and Besirli (2008) indicates that the rapid urbanisation rate increases the psychosis and depression rate for both men and women due to the social stress, environmental pollution, and noise arising from higher population densities reported within urban areas. Another study by Adli (2011) shows that the urban population has a 20% higher risk of developing an anxiety disorder and a 40% risk of developing a mood disorder.

According to studies by Kumar et al. (2005), mental health issues are prevalent in underprivileged urban areas, with factors such as limited access to mental healthcare, poverty and economic stress, violence and crime, substance abuse, inadequate housing and homelessness, social isolation, environmental stressors, limited educational opportunities, discrimination and stigma, and community and family support playing crucial roles in exacerbated mental

health problems. Therefore, this study mainly focuses on underprivileged urban areas and the associated mental disorders.

The literature in this area proves the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders in different countries in the world. Accordingly, it is opportune for the researchers to examine the effect of urbanisation on mental disorders, specifically focusing on SAARC countries. Therefore, the study examines urbanisation's effects on mental illnesses in SAARC countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka) from 1990 to 2019. Furthermore, a special attention was given to the SAARC countries since South Asian nations show a high prevalence of mental disorders (Naveed et al., 2020). The polynomial regression model was utilised to examine the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders using time series data from 1991-2019.

The rest of the research paper is structured as follows. First, variables are introduced and the justification for adopting them in the study is discussed. Second, a summary of the primary literature used in the study is presented. Third, the study's methodology, results, and discussion are presented and the conclusion is given in the fifth section.

2. Research Problem

As discussed in the previous section, the increasing global population increases urbanisation. In turn, increasing urbanisation leads to the emergence of mental issues compared with rural areas. Moreover, the literature provides

that mental disorders are more common in developing nations (Patel & Kleinman, 2003).

When looking at Asia, the Asian population is expected to grow from 1.4 billion to 2.6 billion between 2000-2030, making the Asian population figure double. As seen in the literature, such an increase in the Asian population may impact mental disorders caused by social stressors, air and noise pollution, etc. When looking at the levels of urbanisation and mental disorders in the SAARC region, it is explicit that the prevalence of mental disorders among South Asian nations is very high (Trivedi et al., 2008). As highlighted by David et al. (2017), services integrated within primary care must be established for mental health and psychosocial issues for the conflict-affected population in South Asian countries. Owioye and all (2011) demonstrate the lack of studies that prioritise the relationship between mental illness and internal migration, specifically internal urban-to-rural migration in a contextual background of economic and political benefits. Therefore, considering the aforementioned problem area and filling an empirical research gap, this study aims to examine the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders in the SAARC countries.

3. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to examine and analyse how urbanisation impacts mental disorders in the SAARC countries, with a particular emphasis on understanding the socio-demographic, economic, and environmental factors associated with mental health outcomes in rapidly urbanizing areas. In addition, it will provide evidence-based insights and recommendations for

policymakers, healthcare providers, and relevant stakeholders to address mental health needs in unprivileged urban areas.

4. Scope and the Significance of the Study

This study will examine the impact of urbanisation on mental health in the SAARC countries. It will cover a range of factors, including urban infrastructure, population density, socioeconomic disparities, cultural shifts, and access to mental health services. It will use quantitative analytical methods to analyse data.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to generate valuable insights into the impact of urbanisation on mental health in the SAARC countries. As urbanisation continues to accelerate in the region, understanding its effects on mental well-being is crucial for policymakers, urban planners, healthcare professionals, and communities. By identifying the specific challenges and opportunities associated with urbanisation, the study can inform evidence-based interventions and policies that prioritise mental health support in urban areas.

Also, the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders is a critical and underexplored area of research, especially in South Asian countries. This study fills this gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of eight SAARC countries. By examining the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders across different countries, the study provides valuable insights for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders seeking to enhance sustainable urbanisation, economic stability, and adequate health services. This research significantly

contributes to the existing literature and offers a solid foundation for evidence-based decision-making.

5. Review of Literature

Global urbanisation is causing an increase in several health issues, including mental health. The literature review aims to investigate the relationship between urbanisation and mental disorders in the SAARC countries.

Mental disorders are highly prevalent in the SAARC countries with a high disease burden and limited access to mental health services. For example, according to a study undertaken in Nepal, the prevalence of mental disorders among adults was 15.5%, and within that figure, depression is the most common mental disorder (Thapa et al., 2018). On the other hand, anxiety is the most common type of mental disorder among adults in India, where the prevalence of mental disorders among adults is 10.6%. Similarly, anxiety was found to be the most common mental disorder in Pakistan, where the prevalence of mental disorders was estimated to be 16% (Afzal et al., 2014).

Numerous studies have shown that mental disorders are highly prevalent in urban areas compared to rural areas (Peen et al., 2007; Turan & Besirli, 2008; Ventriglio et al., 2021). According to Ventriglio et al. (2021), urbanisation affects mental health through social, environmental, and economic factors. Under these three main areas, issues of social disparities, social insecurity, poverty, pollution and minimal access to green spaces are the root causes for the high prevalence of common mental disorders in cities. Similarly, Sahadevan and Mathews (2023) observed that mental disorders such as

anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia have increased in urban areas compared to rural areas due to bad urban planning. According to the descriptive analysis of Trivedi et al. (2008), poverty and mental health have a multidimensional relationship due to the fringe population. This review is cognizant of the causes of urbanisation on mental disorders in urban areas.

A study by Hilario et al. (2014) highlights that most Southeast Asian youth face mental disorders with migrations, such as depression, due to a lack of social connectedness. According to its findings, the family connection appears to have the most substantial effect on emotional distress. Furthermore, studies show that people with high perceived insecurity report social isolation, face difficulties in making relationships, and report suffering from mental disorders (Dean, 2017; Earnshaw et al., 2016). Thereby, social disconnection and fewer social networks caused by urbanisation are the main social factors that cause mental disorders.

High rates of mental problems are caused by environmental variables in urban areas. Increasing levels of urbanisation increase the risk from environmental variables for more immigrants, such as increased levels of air pollution, lack of green space, and lack of social safety. As it has been demonstrated that not only physical and social settings have a substantial influence, the environmental factors may affect mental health and well-being (Qiu et al., 2019). According to studies on rapid urbanisation, Kathmandu is facing many environmental problems, such as air and noise pollution and less urban green space (Haack, 2009). In addition, most of the immigrant population lives in slums near Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers. The living conditions of slum

dwellers are poor, and do not have adequate services and facilities and mainly suffer from poor mental health (Nielsen & Khanal, 2021).

Several studies show limited accessibility, availability, and affordability of mental health services in urban areas. For example, a study by Karim et al. (2004) highlighted that the number of trained mental health professionals is deficient compared to the population size. Also, it was reported that mental health specialist services are almost nonexistent in Pakistan. Consequently, rapid urbanisation causes many challenges when providing sufficient mental health services to the urban population in the SAARC countries.

Consideration of how cultural factors could be associated with mental disorders with the rapid urbanisation process in the SAARC countries is vital. Cultural factors such as beliefs, norms, values, perceptions, expressions, and other behaviours are related to mental disorders. People showing variations in sexual orientations, religions, races, beliefs, etc., face discrimination and social marginalization through immigration (Ventriglio & Bhugra, 2015). A quantitative study by Williams et al. (2018) in Bangladesh demonstrated that cultural attitudes have affected women who live in urban slums. Moreover, they face emotional stress through violence and financial crises.

According to the literature analysis, urbanisation significantly affects mental disorders in the SAARC countries. Urbanisation, related psychosocial stressors, lack of access to mental health treatments, migration, and cultural variables all have a role in the increased prevalence of mental disorders in urban communities. However, further study is required to comprehend the

intricate relationship between urbanisation and mental health in the SAARC countries.

6. Research Methodology

Study used the secondary data sources and the data file used for the study is presented in the S1 Appendix. The data analysis was done using polynomial regression, which included observations of eight SAARC countries. A secondary source of data on urbanisation and mental disorders were collected from the World Bank and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) from 1991 to 2019. The IHME and World Bank are well known in the field of public health research for their extensive and thoroughly collected health-related databases. As evidence that the use of IHME data is consistent with accepted methods within the research community, it can be shown that numerous studies in this field of study have used IHME and World Bank data to support the conclusions. This broad use of IHME and World Bank data highlights its validity and importance for our investigation.

The data was collected for the 08 SAARC countries, namely, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The independent variable considered in this study is 'Urbanisation' which is estimated from the urban population as a percentage of the total population. According to national statistical authorities, the term "urban population" refers to those who reside in urban regions. Urban ratios from the United Nations World Urbanisation Prospects and population projections from the World Bank are used to generate the indicator. The percentage of people who live in an area that is considered to be "urban" out of every 100 people. The dependent

variable of this study is mental disorders measured by the prevalence of mental disorders which is estimated as the number of people with mental disorders as a percentage of the total population.

The polynomial regression is used in this study to examine the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders as follows,

Equation 1:

$$MD_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 URB + \beta_2 URB_i^2 + \varepsilon_i$$

This study focuses on the SAARC countries with considerable identification of mental disorders to get a deeper understanding of how urbanisation impacts mental disorders. Equation 01, a polynomial regression model, was used to investigate the impact of urbanisation on the mental disorders of 8 SAARC countries. Accordingly, MD_i represents the value of the dependent variable in the i country. URB_i represents the value of the independent variable of country i . β_0 is the intercept of the regression equation. β_1 is the coefficient for the linear variable of $URB1$ indicating how much the dependent variable changes for one-unit change in $URB1$. β_2 is the coefficient for the squared term of $URB1$, indicating the impact of the quadratic (squared) relationship between $URB1$ and the dependent variable.

At the initial phase of the study, scatter plots were constructed using the data that were collected for the two variables of urban population as a percentage of the total population and number of people with a mental disorder as a percentage of the total population for the period of 1990-2019. From the constructed scatter plot lines, the best-fit line needed to be identified, which was suggested by the polynomial regression model. This was a clear choice

because the estimation taken from the linear relationship when compared to the estimation taken from the quadratic polynomial regression the R squared value was comparatively higher for the polynomial model. Thus it was utilised to illustrate all of the countries.

7. Results and Discussion

Table 1 and 2 provides descriptive statistics for the two variables (urbanisation and mental disorders) in SAARC countries. Table 2 shows the number of observations (Obs), mean, standard deviation (SD), minimum (min), and maximum (max) values of each variable in each SAARC country. From 1990 to 2019, there were 232 total observations with 30 observations corresponding to SAARC countries.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Urbanisation in SAARC Countries

	Urbanisation							
	Countries							
	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Obs.	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Mean	22.9	27.32	29.50	29.405	32.315	14.7087	33.83	18.3608333
SD	1.407	5.50	7.9292	2.719	5.419	3.386	1.870	0.11234371
Min	21.17	19.81	16.388	25.547	25.58	8.854	30.576	18.196
Max	25.75	37.405	41.612	34.472	40.238	20.153	36.907	18.585

Note: obs, mean, SD, min and max represent observations, standard deviation, minimum and maximum values, respectively.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Mental Disorders in SAARC Countries

	Mental Disorders							
	Countries							
	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Obs.	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Mean	16.043	11.19036	11.98249	13.3457	12.38905	12.6100	10.19382	11.46382
SD	0.6300	0.274231	0.48337	0.211688	2.833233	0.6973	0.520662	0.212074
Min	15.31	10.92276	11.34904	12.89017	9.652664	11.7479	9.652664	11.13546
Max	18.11	11.77431	12.8022	13.73745	21.60837	13.7176	11.51938	11.72761

As shown in Table 2, Pakistan has the lowest mean number of people with mental disorders as a percentage of the total population at 10.19 and Afghanistan has the highest mean number of people with mental disorders as a percentage of the total population which is 16.04. Furthermore, Nepal has the lowest mean urban population as a percentage of the total population which is 14.70. The highest mean of urban population as a percentage of total population, which is 33.83 is observed in Pakistan. Considering the SD, it measures the variability or spread of data from the mean. If the SD shows a larger value, it indicates more variability. According to the results, SD varies across the countries and variables, mental disorder is generally low for all the SAARC countries. The analysed results give valuable insight into the variation

in health sectors across the SAARC countries. The third largest mean of urbanisation is shown in India and compared to that when considering the mean of mental disorders in India is at the second highest. Thereby, it can be concluded that with the highest urban population, the prevalence of mental disorders is higher in India which represents the second largest mean of mental disorders. Same as that Maldives depicts the same result when analyzing the means of urbanisation and mental disorders. Thereby, these insights will be useful for policymakers and researchers to make informed decisions to increase the concerns of mental health in developing regions.

Figure 1 shows each country's estimated polynomial regression models. Based on the results, the R2 value of the polynomial regression model is higher compared to the estimated simple linear regression model. Thereby, the best fitting model, which is the polynomial regression model was selected for the analysis of urbanisation's impact on mental disorders in the SAARC countries.

Figure 1: Relationship Between Urban Population (% of Total Population) and Number of People With Mental Disorders (% of Total Population)

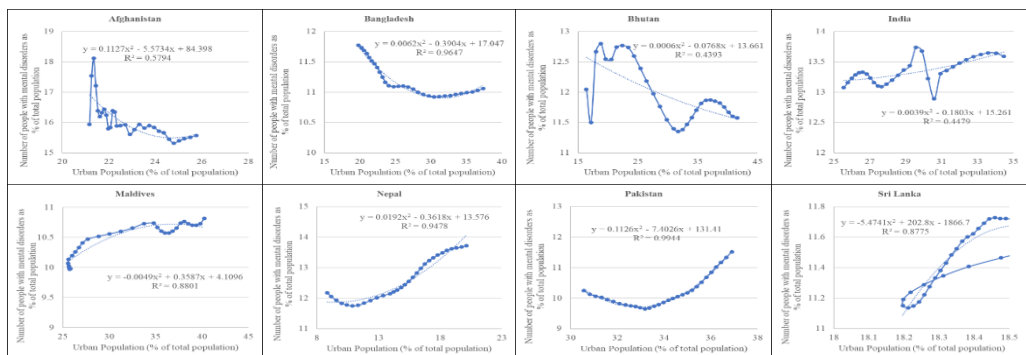


Table 3: Results of Polynomial Regression Model of the Study

	Polynomial Regression Results of SAARC Countries							
	Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Bhutan	India	Maldives	Nepal	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Constant	84.398 8	17.0467 2 ***	13.661 ***	15.261 **	4.10959 1 ***	13.57 63 ***	131.41 ***	- 1865.98 ***
	(32.431)	(.25795 02)	(1.4839 6)	(4.6034 33)	(.97309 82)	(0.764 4)	(2.8221 3)	(505.30 12)
URB	- 5.5734 68	-.39038 ***	- .07683 0	- .180287 3	.358703 ***	- 0.361 8 ***	-7.402 ***	202.725 ***
	(2.7293 9)	(.01930 83)	(.09948 3)	(.31025 89)	(.06125 9)	(.1094)	(.16556 5)	(55.043 41)
URB ²	.11269 79	.006199 ***	.00063 14	.003883 9	-.00486 ***	0.019 1 ***	.11256 ***	- 5.47189 ***
	(.05726 7)	(.00034 85)	(.00158 8)	(.00515 96)	(.00094 35)	(.0038)	(.00242 3)	(1.4989 56)
R ²	0.5794	0.9647	0.4393	0.4479	0.8801	0.947 8	0.9944	0.8775

Note: The symbols *, **, and *** represents 10%, 5%, and 1% significance level, respectively. Parentheses represent the robust standard error.

The results of quadratic polynomial regression in Table 3 present the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders in the SAARC countries. The results show the period between 1990 to 2019 of both variables.

According to the results of polynomial regression, Sri Lanka shows the highest coefficient of 202.72, which means when urbanisation increases by 1% the mental disorder will be increased by 202.72%. The lowest positive coefficient is shown in Maldives (0.35), which indicates when urbanisation increases by 1% mental disorders increase by 0.35%. This negative impact might be caused by stress, environmental pollution, and noise arising from higher population densities reported within urban areas, being born, or most of the childhood spent within urban areas (Turan & Besirli, 2008). Furthermore, as support to such a positive impact, Minas et al. (2017) indicate that, after the Tsunami and terrorist attack, mental disorders increased, and a focus was given to improving psychiatric hospitals and small inpatient units in rural Sri Lanka. Thereby, it shows during the terrorist attack the people must have gone through mental trauma and mental disorders. These can be the reason for getting the highest coefficient in Sri Lanka since the people have gone through mental instabilities and stressful lives due to natural disasters and terrorist attacks. Due to the non-linearity of the impact, there exists a point that the effect reaches its maximum in those countries, as shown in Figure 1. Later, the significant negative coefficient for URB^2 implies that urbanisation's impact on mental disorders eventually decreases in Maldives and Sri Lanka. Such a decrease might be attributable to increased access to and availability of mental health carerelated medical facilities.

India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh show a negative coefficient which shows that mental disorders decrease with a 1% increase in urbanisation. Pakistan has the highest negative coefficient of -7.4. It implies that when urban population increases by 1%, mental disorders decrease by 7.4%. The lowest negative coefficient is shown in India which shows when

urbanisation increases by 1% mental disorders decrease by 0.18%. This might be due to increased access to medical treatment for mental disorders and improved awareness of the mental disorders from which people tend to recover from such disorders. According to the trend line after a pivotal moment, mental disorders have shown a significant increase in Pakistan, Nepal, and Bangladesh. According to Khan et al. (2012) Pakistan's urban issues stem from policies focusing on the dichotomy between rural and urban areas, often neglecting the complex dynamics of rural-urban interactions and interdependencies. Policymakers must understand the complex nexus of urban-rural livelihoods, focusing on linkages across space and sectors. Policies should also consider the influence of globalization on social, economic, and ecological aspects of the urban-rural nexus, which has been often ignored in Pakistan.

Considering the legislation and mental health laws in South Asian countries, it lacks the emphasis on human rights and community-based approaches, and implementation flaws, leaving mentally ill individuals vulnerable to abuse and violation of rights. (Tripathi & Kumar, 2015). The region's policies focus on community mental health care, primary care integration, medication availability, user involvement, and equity of access. Countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka have made progress in implementing these components. Nepal focuses on basic medication, protecting human rights, and raising awareness. The Maldives lacks a policy, legislation, or plan. Studies show a large number of untreated patients in the community, leading to seeking help from religious and traditional healing sites (Thara & Padmavati, 2013). Thereby, along with more trained labor, better resource allocation, and enhanced services, reform of the legal framework

governing mental health is crucial. It is crucial to conduct a community needs assessment to allocate resources and focus community-based efforts.

However, there is a significant negative relationship between urbanisation and mental disorders before a pivotal point in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. After the pivotal moment, the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders is positively significant only in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. The positive impact may be due to the rapid urbanisation rate increases the psychosis and depression rate for both men and women owing to social stress, environmental pollution, and noise which arise from higher population densities reported within urban areas or either being born or most of the childhood is spent within urban areas (Trivedi et al., 2008). As supporting the positive impact, a study found that residents in Dhaka mega city were living in inadequate housing areas with insufficient infrastructure and lack of proper drainage, sanitation, and garbage disposal services which led to a lack of self-reported mental disorders (Fahmida et al., 2009). In addition, Tabassum et al. (2000) study states that Pakistan's families face mental disorders due to cultural background and attitudes in the urban society. Thereby with the supporting literature the country faces high mental disorders due to economic, social, and environmental changes. The overcrowding effect makes people more stressed and their living standards get low. According to past studies, Bangladesh has inadequate services and the prevalence of mental disorders is very high. Therefore, living in a crowded, unhygienic environment with no access to essential services can exacerbate helplessness, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. Men and women in Pakistan may face distinct expectations and pressures due to traditional gender norms. The difficulties with gender-specific mental health may be influenced by these assumptions. Men may feel

pressure to be the main breadwinners, whilst women may experience stress connected to household duties.

8. Conclusions

The SAARC countries are in the region that has the highest prevalence of mental disorders. Many research studies have been conducted to determine the impact of urbanisation in some specific regions and countries. However, the present study sheds light on urbanisation and mental disorders and their relationship. Therefore, this study focused on examining the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders in the SAARC countries. The study is analyzing the period from 1990 to 2019. The analytical technique utilised to investigate the impact of urbanisation on mental disorders polynomial regression. The findings infer that with a highest positive coefficient and 1% increase in urbanisation, Sri Lanka stands out as having a significantly higher rate of mental disorders. This outcome can be linked to a history of terrorism and natural calamities that have had a lasting effect on the population's mental health. The stress and trauma brought on by these occurrences undoubtedly have a significant role in the reported rise in mental diseases. In contrast, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh exhibit negative coefficients, suggesting that the prevalence of mental diseases tends to decline as urbanisation rises. Pakistan has the most notable negative coefficient, which indicates that as urbanisation increases, mental problems have significantly decreased. This might be a result of increasing awareness and easier access to mental health care.

Addressing mental health challenges in SAARC countries requires a holistic approach that considers cultural, social, and economic factors while prioritizing accessibility, awareness, and quality of care. Policymakers should promote mental health awareness, increase access to mental health services, provide cultural competency training for mental health professionals, support community-based initiatives, develop gender-specific programmes, encourage family-centered care, implement workplace mental health programmes, and implement mental health legislation. Research and data collection should be invested to better understand the prevalence and determinants of mental health issues within different cultural and demographic groups in SAARC. International collaboration with international organizations and mental health experts can access best practices, technical assistance, and funding for mental health initiatives. Telehealth and e-mental health services should be explored to expand access to mental health care, particularly in remote and underserved areas. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be implemented to assess the effectiveness of mental health programmes and policies. By working collaboratively with healthcare professionals, community leaders, and mental health advocates, policymakers can create a comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and accessible mental health support system that supports the mental well-being of the population.

9. References

- Adli, M. (2011). Urban stress and mental health. *LSE Cities*.
- Afzal, S., Sarfraz, S., & Hassan, S. (2014). Prevalence of generalized anxiety disorder in adolescents and youth in Lahore urban community Pakistan. *Healthmed*, 8(10), 1192-1198.

- Akins, N. (2022). Stress and the City: The Impacts of City Living and Urbanisation on Mental Health. *Scripps Senior Theses*, 1802. https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/1892
- David, S., Gazi, R., Mirzazada, M. S., Siriwardhana, C., Soofi, S., & Roy, N. (2017). Conflict in South Asia and its impact on health. *bmj*, 357.
- De Vries, E., Rincon, C. J., Martínez, N. T., Rodriguez, N., Tiemeier, H., Mackenbach, J. P., Gómez-Restrepo, C., & Guarnizo-Herreño, C. C. (2018). Housing index, urbanisation level and lifetime prevalence of depressive and anxiety disorders: a cross-sectional analysis of the Colombian national mental health survey. *BMJ open*, 8(6), e019065.
- Dean, C. E. (2017). Social inequality, scientific inequality, and the future of mental illness. *Philos Ethics Humanit Med*, 12(1), 10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13010-017-0052-x>
- Earnshaw, V. A., Rosenthal, L., Carroll-Scott, A., Santilli, A., Gilstad-Hayden, K., & Ickovics, J. R. (2016). Everyday discrimination and physical health: Exploring mental health processes. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 21(10), 2218-2228.
- Fahmida, A., Wahab, M., & Rahman, M. (2009). Pattern of psychiatric morbidity among the patients admitted in a private psychiatric clinic. *Bangladesh journal of medical science*, 23-28.
- Haack, B. (2009). A History and Analysis of Mapping Urban Expansion in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. *The Cartographic Journal*, 46(3), 233-241. <https://doi.org/10.1179/000870409X12488753453417>
- Hilario, C. T., Vo, D. X., Johnson, J. L., & Saewyc, E. M. (2014). Acculturation, gender, and mental health of Southeast Asian immigrant youth in Canada. *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*, 16, 1121-1129.
- Karim, S., Saeed, K., Rana, M. H., Mubbashar, M. H., & Jenkins, R. (2004). Pakistan mental health country profile. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 16(1-2), 83-92.
- Khan, N., Ghafoor, N., Iftikhar, R., & Malik, M. (2012). Urban Annoyances and Mental Health in the City of Lahore, Pakistan. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 34, 297-315. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9906.2011.00585.x>

- Kumar, S., Jeyaseelan, L., Suresh, S., & Ahuja, R. C. (2005). Domestic violence and its mental health correlates in Indian women. *Br J Psychiatry*, 187, 62-67. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.187.1.62>
- Minas, H., Mendis, J., & Hall, T. (2017). Mental health system development in Sri Lanka. *Mental health in asia and the pacific: Historical and cultural perspectives*, 59-77.
- Naveed, S., Waqas, A., Chaudhary, A. M. D., Kumar, S., Abbas, N., Amin, R., Jamil, N., & Saleem, S. (2020). Prevalence of Common Mental Disorders in South Asia: A Systematic Review and Meta-Regression Analysis. *Front Psychiatry*, 11, 573150. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.573150>
- Nawrath, M., Elsey, H., & Dallimer, M. (2022). Why cultural ecosystem services matter most: Exploring the pathways linking greenspaces and mental health in a low-income country. *Science of The Total Environment*, 806, 150551. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2021.150551>
- Nielsen, B. F., & Khanal, P. (2021). A theory of change for cleaner cooking: building a health belief model for service design starting with the slums of Kathmandu. 2021 IEEE Global Humanitarian Technology Conference (GHTC),
- Owoeye, O., Khawaja, M., Kinsella, A., & Russell, V. (2011). Counter-urbanisation during Ireland's 'Celtic Tiger' period—mental health implications. *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine*, 28(3), 124-128.
- Patel, V., & Kleinman, A. (2003). Poverty and common mental disorders in developing countries. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 81, 609-615.
- Peen, J., Dekker, J., Schoevers, R. A., Have, M. T., de Graaf, R., & Beekman, A. T. (2007). Is the prevalence of psychiatric disorders associated with urbanisation? *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol*, 42(12), 984-989. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-007-0256-2>
- Qiu, Y., Liu, Y., Liu, Y., & Li, Z. (2019). Exploring the linkage between the neighborhood environment and mental health in Guangzhou, China. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(17), 3206.
- Sahadevan, V., & Mathews, A. J. (2023). A Conceptual Study In Understanding The Critical Impact Of Urbanisation Towards Mental Health Of The Individuals.

Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science, 11(3), 268-272.
www.questjournals.org

- Tabassum, R., Macaskill, A., & Ahmad, I. (2000). Attitudes towards mental health in an urban Pakistani community in the United Kingdom. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 46(3), 170-181. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/002076400004600303>
- Thapa, D., Visentin, D., Kornhaber, R., & Cleary, M. (2018). Prevalence of mental disorders among older people in Nepal: a systematic review. *Kathmandu Univ Med J*, 16(62), 181-190.
- Thara, R., & Padmavati, R. (2013). Community mental health care in South Asia. *World Psychiatry*, 12(2), 176-177. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20042>
- Tripathi, A., & Kumar, J. (2015). *Mental Health in South Asia: Ethics, Resources, Programs and Legislation* (Vol. 58). <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9017-8>
- Trivedi, J. K., Sareen, H., & Dhyani, M. (2008). Rapid urbanisation-Its impact on mental health: A South Asian perspective. *Indian journal of psychiatry*, 50(3), 161.
- Turan, M. T., & Besirli, A. (2008). Impacts of urbanisation process on mental health. *Anatolian Journal of Psychiatry*, 9(4), 238-243.
- United Nations, D. o. E. a. S. A., Population Division. (2018). *World Urbanisation Prospects: The 2018 Revision*. United Nation. Retrieved May 16, 2018 from <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/>
- Ventriglio, A., & Bhugra, D. (2015). Social justice for the mentally ill. In (Vol. 61, pp. 213-214): SAGE Publications Sage UK: London, England.
- Ventriglio, A., Torales, J., Castaldelli-Maia, J. M., De Berardis, D., & Bhugra, D. (2021). Urbanisation and emerging mental health issues. *CNS spectrums*, 26(1), 43-50.
- Williams, A., Sarker, M., & Ferdous, S. T. (2018). Cultural attitudes toward postpartum depression in Dhaka, Bangladesh. *Medical anthropology*, 37(3), 194-205.

International Conference on

‘Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education’ (RUICHSS 2023)

University of Ruhuna

ISSN: 2706-0063

International Conference on

'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education' (RUICHSS 2023)

University of Ruhuna

ISSN: 2706-0063

Social Identity and Inclusive Teaching and Learning Approaches

Using Flipped Classroom Approach to Enhancing Career and Life Skills: A Study With Mathematics Teachers

I.S.K.Eriyagama^{1*}, B.M.S.Bandara²

G/Amarasuriya Teachers' College. Unawatuna, Sri Lanka.¹

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Rajarata, Sri Lanka.²

shamalieriyagama@gmail.com*

Abstract

Along with technological advancements, there has been a transformative shift in educational practices due to a new paradigm. In this context, there is an increased focus on blended learning models where technology is used to enhance universal design for the learning-teaching paradigm. The flipped classroom approach is a popular blended learning pedagogical practice in mathematics education, providing students with opportunities to enhance 21st century skills to learn at their own pace and from anywhere. In 2017, Steve and Kaarb stated that the flipped classroom has evolved into a more active, participatory environment, contributing to improved creativity and the development of life and career skills in learners, which aligns with the demands of the 21st century, shaped by pedagogy and technological advancements. This study adopted a mixed method design; the data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires were administrated to 244 mathematics teachers in the Galle education division, and face-to-face interviews were conducted with 10 mathematics teachers who were selected randomly from the sample. Data were analysed quantitatively using SPSS (Version 25) software. It is clear that the majority of teachers (78.3%) perceived that the flipped classroom approach fosters flexibility and adaptability in students. Additionally, 69.6% of teachers revealed that they are able to respond to students' social interaction needs in the flipped classroom. This means that the majority of teachers in the sample have positive attitudes toward the flipped classroom as a suitable method for the development of social interactions among students. Also 70.5% of the teachers believe that the flipped classroom promotes leadership skills among both teachers and students. However, only 58.6% of the sample agreed that the flipped classroom approach encourages students to take accountability for their learning. Interview results revealed that the teachers expressed positive attitudes toward the potential of the flipped classroom model to develop career and life skills in students. However,

teachers also highlighted barriers to implementing this portal in Sri Lanka, such as insufficient technological resources both at school and home, and the weak internet connections.

Keywords: *The Flipped Classroom, Mathematics, Career and Life Skills*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

Recently, a paradigm shift in educational practice has taken place as a result of the introduction of a new instructional approach driven by technological advancements. With the revolution of new technology, mathematics teachers are turning their attention to blended learning models which use technologies to enhance learning-teaching paradigm. Among them, the flipped classroom approach is a popular pedagogical practice in mathematics for it provides opportunities for enhancing 21st century skills, while allowing students to learn at their own pace and from anywhere.

According to Strayer (2012), and Xu and Yeli (2018), the flipped classroom approach is relatively a new teaching method that relies on constructivism. It consists of two parts: interactive learning activities conducted during class and individual computer-based learning using technological equipment outside the classroom. It is also described as a model in which students access online videos, lecture notes, pictures, and other materials uploaded by the teacher before the classroom, and subsequently, they use class time for engaging in meaningful activities and discussions (Hughes, 2012; Fauth, 2015). The role of the teacher in a flipped classroom is to support students in constructing knowledge and serve as a facilitator and collaborator of students' learning. Therefore, the flipped classroom approach is a student-centered learning

method which draws heavily from constructivist theories. As a result, the role of teachers in the flipped classroom is transformed into a transaction role.

Bergmann & Sams (2012) defined the flipped classroom (FC) approach as “a blended learning model, which aims to facilitate teachers to make better use of the face-to-face sessions through minimizing teacher lecture and increasing students’ active learning, collaboration and scaffolding”. In 2019, Umam and Mulyono stated that most teachers have been successful in getting into the flipped classroom approach as a transaction role, to elicit change in their classroom instruction towards career and life skills in mathematics education.

As a preliminary step, the Mathematics Department of the Ministry of Education in Sri Lanka initiated a pilot programme based on the flipped classroom approach in 2018. The pilot study was launched with grade six students and teachers from 20 schools in the Piliyandala Zonal Education Division. Students are asked to prepare for the lesson before coming to the classroom based on activities related to the textbook. Teachers' reflections in this pilot study revealed that the flipped classroom approach was effective in many ways in enhancing students' self-learning as well as career and life skills through intrinsic motivation leading to learning mathematics.

Therefore, the Department of Mathematics of the Ministry has recommended the flipped classroom approach to develop students’ career and life skills, which are most important for the learning-teaching process of mathematics in the 21st century. The values of career and life skills are also emphasised in the framework from the partnerships for 21st Century skills framework (P21, 2014). Extensive research has been conducted in the areas of teacher perceptions related to flipped classrooms, and how this approach can be

developed (Bajunury, 2014; Mull, 2012; Kim, Khera, and Getman, 2015). It was also shown by Kutahnecioglu and Balakrishnan (2018) that teachers' perceptions and teacher behaviours impact more on the implementation of the flipped approach and students' achievement in mathematics. However, in Sri Lanka, only a few research studies have been conducted on teacher perceptions of this flipped classroom approach and its implementation. According to the literature review, the Southern province has not yet been undertaken in research related to the topic under study: the flipped classroom approach. Therefore, the Galle Education Zone of Southern province was selected as the research area to fill this research gap.

2. Research Methodology

This study is a descriptive sample survey study based on the mixed method. To achieve the objectives of the study, multiple research tools were used including questionnaire and face-to-face interviews. The use of these tools enabled the researcher to validate the study results and get more reliable findings. A face-to-face interview was conducted with 10 mathematics teachers who were randomly selected, to triangulate the data obtained from the questionnaires. In order to construct the Likert scale questionnaire, the components of life and career skills exposed by the Partnership for 21st Century Learning framework were initially considered. The survey questionnaires were distributed to 244 mathematics teachers with pre-training in the flipped classroom, from secondary schools in the Galle zonal educational division under purposive sampling method according to the researcher's convenience.

Table 1: Sample of the Teachers

Type of school	Number of teachers		Total
	Male	Female	
1AB	31	97	128
1C	22	48	70
Type 2	31	15	46
Total	84	160	244

The quantitative data collected through the questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS: Version 25). Means, frequencies, standard deviations, t-tests and One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used.

3. Objectives of the Study

This study was undertaken to;

1. examine mathematics teachers' perceptions of fostering career and life skills expected in the 21st century through the flipped classroom approach.
2. identify the obstacles for the mathematics teachers to enhance their experience in flipped classroom approaches.

4. Scope and Significance of the Study

As this study aimed to investigate the perceptions of mathematics teachers on flipped classroom approach towards the career and life skills, it has been revealed that mathematics teachers' attitudes and perceptions are critically

important for empowering the implementation of the innovative teaching approach in mathematics education. Therefore, mathematics teachers represent one major beneficiary of this study. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education can benefit from the results to plan for training courses and workshops to publicise the effectiveness of flipped classroom approach. These results can also contribute to the design of training courses and workshops to disseminate the effectiveness of the flipped classroom.

5. Review of the Relevant Literature

According to Xu and Yeli (2018), flipped classroom approach is relatively a modern teaching method that relies on constructivism. It consists of two parts: interactive learning activities conducted during class, and individual computer-based learning using technological equipment outside the classroom. It is also described as a model in which students first access online videos, lecture notes, pictures, and other materials uploaded by the teacher before the classroom and then they engage in meaningful activities and discussions during class time. The role of a flipped classroom teacher is to support students with the construction of knowledge and foster a student-centered learning method drawing heavily from constructivism theories. As a result, the role of teachers in the flipped classroom is transformed into a transaction role. In light of this situation, and the influence of social needs in the 21st century, there should be a transformation of the current mathematics teacher and the textbook-centred learning environment in order to promote the development of students' skills.

According to Warner and Kaurb (2017), the flipped classroom environment has been transformed into a more active, participatory environment, improving learners' creativity and career and life skills. This transformation is in line with 21st-century skills influenced by pedagogy and technologies. Furthermore, he affirms the value of developing 21st century skills through student-centred learning that emphasises 2T2C model. Also, he stated that real-world mathematics enhances the quality of learning by developing student participation, self-learning experiences outside the classroom based on technology, and encouraging problem-based learning to develop career and life skills. In 2018, Park revealed that learners improved their responsibility, problem-solving ability, creative thinking, cooperative ability, and career and life skills through the flipped learning approach.

Furthermore, Umam and Mulyono (2019) conducted an in-depth study on the implementation of the flipped classroom involving mathematics teachers, and they stated that teachers perceived this as an approach that could improve life and career skills, and a deeper understanding of new concepts and products in mathematics. Since the development of skills in students is essential to the economy of the society, it is contextually important to examine the teacher's perceptions of acquiring those skills through a flipped approach.

6. Results and Findings

It was revealed that the majority (78.3%) of teachers were in the view that flipped classrooms improved students' flexibility with engaging activities. It is clear that the majority of teachers perceive that the flipped classroom approach creates flexibility and adaptability skills in students. Furthermore, 66% of the teachers agreed that students can reflect critically on past

experiences in order to inform self-direction in flipped classrooms. In addition, 69.6% of them revealed that flipped classroom enables teachers to act in response to students' social interaction needs. This means that the majority of teachers in the sample have positive attitudes towards creating social interaction in students through the flipped classroom. Additionally, 75% of the sample indicated that flipped classroom reverses the role of the student from a passive observer to an active participant.

Furthermore, the majority of teachers (88.6%) stated that the flipped classroom helps students to deliver effective learning outcomes (Productivity) and 80% of the teachers reported that the flipped classroom strengthens students' preparation before coming to class. 87.65% of teachers agreed that the flipped classroom develops responsibility skills for each student by encouraging students to complete the pre-preparation activities before coming to the classroom. Also, 70.5% of the teachers are in view that flipped classrooms promote leadership skills in both the teachers and students. But only 58.6% of the sample agreed that the flipped classroom approach promotes students' accountability for their learning. The interview results revealed that the majority of teachers believe that the flipped classroom approach leads students to self-learning before coming to class. As a result, students are more likely to develop responsibility, inquiry-based learning, collaboration with peers and leadership skills. It has been revealed that there is a significant difference between the mean of perceptions of male and female mathematics teachers towards the life and career skills at $\alpha \leq 0.05$, ($t_{242} = 0.000$ $p < 0.05$). When examining the reasons for this attitudinal difference between males and females, the interview results revealed that the inability of female teachers to use technology in the learning and teaching process was affected by it.

Furthermore, the ANOVA test results are at $F=3.973$, $p=.009 < .05$. It was revealed that the type of school where the teachers are currently working has influenced teachers' perceptions.

However, the interview results revealed that most teachers have a positive attitude towards the fact that life and career skills can be developed in students through the flipped classroom model. However, teachers also highlighted barriers to bringing this portal to a practical level such as the insufficient technological resources at school and home, and the weak internet connection.

7. Conclusions

The study results demonstrated that the sample was well aware of the importance of the flipped classroom approach towards enhancing career and life skills. By changing the perceptions of the mathematics teachers, the concern about the lack of technology can be reoriented and simple learning management systems, worksheets, or a study guide can be introduced as alternative suggestions. Therefore, appropriate strategies should be developed to improve teacher training in the flipped classroom and action plans should be developed to implement context-based solutions that teachers themselves can design and implement to change the self-responsible attitudes in students about mathematics learning.

8. References

Kutahnecioglu, N., & Balakrishnan, K. (2018). *Flipping perceptions, engagements, and realities: A Case study*. Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE, 20(1), Article 13. Retrieved from ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3778-3585>.

- Partnership for 21st century skills [PCS]. (2009). *Framework definitions*. Retrieved from www.p21.org/documents/P21_Framework_Definitions.pdf.
- Park, J. (2018). Application of professor learning model customized for flipped learning for enhancing basic ability of work-focused on freshman students in radiology department of specialized colleges. *J. Korean Soc. Radiol.* 12, 225–231. doi: 10.7742/jksr.2018.12.2.225
- Sletten, S. R. (2017). Investigating Flipped Learning: Student Self-Regulated Learning, Perceptions, and Achievement in an Introductory Biology Course. *Journal of Science Education and Technology*, v26 n3 p347-358.
- Umam, K., & Mulyono, H. (2019). An Application of Flipped Classroom in Mathematics Teacher Education Programme. *International Journal of Interactive Mobile Technologies, (IJIM)*13(3): 68-80. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijim.v13i03.10207>.
- Warner, S., & Kaurb, A. (2017). The perceptions of teachers and students on a 21st century Mathematics instructional model. *International electronic journal of mathematics education*, ISSN: 1306-3030. 2017, Vol. 12, NO.2, 193-215. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b>.
- Xu, & Yeli. (2018). Application of Constructivist Theory in Flipped Classroom — Take College English Teaching as a Case Study. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 8(7), 880. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0807.21>

Teachers' Perceptions of the Students With Special Educational Needs in an Inclusive Educational Context in the Baddegama Educational Division

M. G. S. Poshitha

Faculty of Education, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

mgsujani2012@gmail.com

Abstract

Inclusive education promotes the integration of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) into regular classrooms, fostering an environment where all learners can thrive together. This study explored the teachers' perceptions of teaching students with SEN in government schools in the Baddegama Educational Division. Two national schools and one junior secondary school (1 C) were visited, and 35 teachers were interviewed. The findings of the study revealed that inclusive education offers numerous advantages, such as promoting social integration, enhancing academic achievements, developing empathy and tolerance among students and preparing all learners for an inclusive society. However, the practice of teaching students with SEN within a regular classroom also presents challenges. And it is a complex but rewarding endeavour. The study has suggested that various strategies and modifications should be implemented to address these challenges. Teachers may encounter difficulties in meeting individualised learning needs and handling diverse abilities and behaviours especially due to lack of facilities. The outcomes of the inclusive education for students with SEN were diverse and multifaceted. The participants suggested that having proper training with the support of the school administrators, implementing appropriate modifications and strategies in an inclusive education context and teaching students with SEN within the regular classroom would be more beneficial. By fostering a culture of inclusivity, teachers could create an environment where students with SEN will be able to develop academically, socially, and emotionally while benefiting their peers in the regular classroom setting.

Keywords: *Difficulties, Inclusive Education, Perception, Regular Classroom, Special Educational Needs*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

Inclusive Education is the capacity of education system to respond to diverse needs and abilities of children, without considering their disabilities. It is a child – focused approach in the field of education. It has been found that the attitudinal barriers among teachers and parents of the students without SEN became a challenge to the enrolment of students with SEN within the regular classroom in the mainstream context. (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014).

Teaching students with SEN within the regular classroom has been identified as challengeable. Implementing the curriculum, managing the classroom activities and instructional materials would be rather difficult. Additionally, the lack of appropriate resources, specialised training and support systems could further impact the effectiveness of inclusive practices. When mainstreaming students with SEN, there is a necessity for modified strategies that the teachers could implement in their regular classrooms. Those strategies include differentiated instruction, individualised support plans, collaboration with special education professionals, peer tutoring, assistive technologies, and fostering a positive and inclusive classroom culture. Many researchers suggested that inclusive practices can lead to improve academic performance, enhanced social and emotional development, increased self-esteem, and greater participation in classroom activities. The benefits of inclusive education extend beyond students with SEN, positively impacting their typically developing peers by promoting acceptance, empathy, and diversity appreciation.

Inclusive Education in Sri Lankan Context

In 1997, the government brought out the General Education Reforms by including a magnificent change to the curriculum, pedagogies, and vision of the education in Sri Lanka. With reference to special education, the opportunities for education were expanded with wider access through the programmes which were formed to facilitate inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) into mainstream education (UNICEF, 2013).

The first integrated education started in 1979 in Colombo district as a special unit in a government school. After passing the Compulsory Education Act in 1997, the reforms made impacts on students with SEN. Special needs in education are diverse among those students. Most of the students with SEN are children with intellectual disabilities, hearing/ visual impairments, or physical disabilities. It is reported that 59.5% boys and 40.5% of girls with disabilities accessing education in Sri Lanka. (UNICEF, 2013).

In 2003, the National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka was introduced by the Ministry of Social Welfare. Inclusive education was explicitly defined in the policy and it highlighted the importance of including students with disabilities in general education through learner-centered teaching approaches. In 2013, the Education First Policy reaffirmed the inclusion of students with disabilities in education, and to the extent possible, should be taught in regular classrooms. (UNESCO,2020). Recently the government has created a plan called 'The Inclusive Plan 2019-2030' with the intention of articulating five major areas in inclusive education in Sri Lanka. Those five areas are, policy, curriculum development, human resources

development, infrastructure development and awareness on inclusive education. According to the report commissioned by UNICEF in 2016, 23.5% of children with disabilities aged between 5-14 were excluded from mainstream education.

Table 1: Enrolment of Students With SEN in Regular and Special Education Units in Schools in 2012

Special educational need	Number of students
Learning difficulties	17,253
Visual impaired (including low vision)	10,447
Intellectually impaired	9,172
Multiple disabilities	3,912
Behavioural difficulties	3,216
Hearing impaired	3, 074
Physical disabilities	2,610
Other disabilities	1,981

Source: Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) 2013-2017, Ministry of Education Policy and Planning Branch, Battaramulla, 2012.

The Inclusive Education Plan 2019-2030 proposed the legal framework to be established in the country with regard to teaching students with SEN within the regular classroom.

To answer the problem of inadequate teacher training on inclusive education, the government implemented various training programmes around the country through different institutions. National College of

Education, The Open University of Sri Lanka and National Institute of Education are some of them.

A number of discussions have emerged with regard to teaching students with SEN within the regular classroom due to many difficulties faced by the teachers. Previous studies done by researchers highlighted that teachers' roles and their understanding about inclusive education were essential to identify the presence of students with SEN in the regular classroom in Sri Lankan educational setting.

Statement of the Research Problem

The study aimed to find the perceptions of regular class teachers on teaching students with SEN within the regular classroom in an inclusive education context in Baddegama Education Division. The study focused on the following research questions.

1. Do the class teachers recognise the presence of the students with SEN?
2. Do the regular class teachers have an awareness/ training regarding inclusive education?
3. How do the class teachers cope with the students with SEN within the regular classroom?
4. What are the difficulties faced by the class teachers in teaching the students with SEN within the regular classroom?
5. What are the perceptions of class teachers on teaching the students with SEN within the regular classroom?

2. Research Methodology

The research questions were addressed through a semi-structured interview. 25 teachers from the secondary section and 10 teachers from the primary section responded to the study voluntarily. Two national schools which are in Baddegama were visited and one of the Junior secondary schools in Baddegama area was visited to interview the teachers. Among the national schools selected for the research, one was a Girls' school and another one was a Boys' school. Junior secondary school which was visited for the study was a mixed school in the area. And it was a 1C school. The ages of all the participants were between 24 and 40 and among the 35 teachers, 29 were trained teachers from National Colleges of Education and others were graduate teachers.

Table 2: Outline of the Participants

School Type	Gender	Section	Number of participants
National School 01	Female	Secondary	6
	Female	Primary	4
	Male	Secondary	3
	Male	Primary	2
National School 02	Female	Secondary	6
	Female	Primary	4
	Male	Secondary	2
	Male	Primary	2

1C Junior Secondary School	Female	Secondary	3
	Female	Primary	2
	Male	Secondary	1
	Male	Primary	-

Questions were formed to derive answers for the main questions of the study. Those questions were varied to find the teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, awareness of the teachers regarding the presence of students with SEN within their regular classroom, educational implications and difficulties faced by class teachers in handling students with SEN within the regular classrooms.

The collected data were analysed manually by taking percentages and inserting them into charts, graphs, and tables.

3. Objectives of the Study

This study mainly focused on finding the perceptions of the class teachers who work in the regular classroom setting on inclusive education and teaching students with SEN within their regular classrooms. The research objectives were as follows:

1. To find the teachers' awareness of inclusive education;
2. To find how the class teachers cope with students with SEN in Sri Lankan context;
3. To find the difficulties and problems of practising inclusive education with regard to students with SEN;

4. To find the teachers' perceptions of teaching students with SEN within regular classrooms.

4. Scope and Significance of the Study

During the last few decades, special education has been shifted from segregated instruction to integrated education. The government has taken major actions to include all under the mainstream of a regular school. However, inclusive education remains much debated. Inclusive education addresses the learning needs of all children, and its purpose is to move from segregated teaching and learning contexts to the inclusion of students with SEN within the general classroom (Florin, 2009).

However, Countries with less resources such as Sri Lanka has many doubts when implementing this process. This study focused on the teachers' perceptions of teaching students with SEN within regular classrooms. It was identified that this topic should be discussed and the study should be expanded furthermore to find out effective strategies pertaining to inclusive education. This study highlighted the different perceptions of teachers who were working as class teachers (primary & secondary). The study investigated only the Baddegama Education Division which belongs to the Galle Education Zone in Sri Lanka.

5. Review of the Relevant Literature

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education has featured prominently in worldwide educational discourse and reform efforts over the past 30 years (Berlach & Chambers, 2011, Forlin, 2006). Inclusive education is based on a philosophy that stems from principles of social justice, and is primarily concerned with mitigating educational inequalities, exclusion, and discrimination (Anderson & Boyle, 2015, Booth, 2012; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013).

The United Nations Children's Fund (2009) reported there were 200 million children with disabilities in the world. Inclusion is the process of educating children in a way that benefits all students and involves clear participation (Ciobanu, 2017). It is considered to be the education for all.

Inclusive education seeks to address the learning needs of all children, young people and adults, with particular emphasis on those vulnerable from the point of view of marginalization and social exclusion (UNESCO, 1994). Inclusive education is the opportunity to learn together and is the most natural thing in an everchanging society (Ciobanu, 2017).

The rationale behind inclusion is that a child with a disability will best be able to cope in a typical world by being able to adapt in a regular school environment. (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Inclusive education in a broad sense is to include the child's presence, participation, acceptance by others and achievements in mainstream schools (Booth & Ainscow, 2000).

Perceptions of Teachers on Inclusive Education

Positive teacher attitudes towards inclusion are essential to the successful implementation of an inclusive classroom (Cologan, 2012; Costello & Boyle, 2013). Inclusion depends on the willingness of class teachers to accept and provide instruction to students with disabilities (Priyadarshini & Thangarajathi, 2016; Underwood, Valeo & Wood, 2012). Teachers' role is very important for the process of education. According to research done by the UNESCO in 1980s', it was discovered that the regular class teachers were willing to have students with SEN in their classes. Although law and policy emphasised the inclusive practices in mainstream classrooms worldwide, the success of inclusive education is still dependant on the class teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education and their acceptance of students with SEN in their regular classrooms. Teachers are the individuals that adapt the pedagogy of teaching and learning process in order fulfil the various needs of students (Avramids & Norwich, 2002).

A case study done by Yilmaz, R.K in 2021 in India has revealed that most teachers do not create diversity in terms of assessment and evaluation to address individual differences and needs of students with SEN within regular classrooms. Accordingly, the students with SEN also received the same papers, materials and exams as other students.

The role of the teacher is a critical determinant in the implementation of inclusive education and its success, and the teachers need a positive attitude, motivation, and fundamental support in enhancing the outcomes of teaching (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). There were many factors which affected the perception of teachers on inclusive education. In general, evidence reports

that some teachers especially older teachers had negative attitudes towards inclusive education as they might had limited or no trainings on inclusive education (Monsen, Ewing & Kwoka, 2013).

It is challengeable to handle students with SEN in regular classrooms as the regular class teachers have to face various barriers (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002, Furuta, 2009. Gronlund, Lim, & Larsson, 2010).

6. Results and Findings

The study investigated the perceptions of 35 teachers in the Baddegama Education Division from three schools. The Baddegama Education division belongs to Galle district and Galle Education Zone.

Data were collected based on the voluntary participation of the teachers, through a semi- structured interview. The interview was done in Sinhala to avoid any confusion. All interview questions were created in an easy way to make the respondents comfortable to provide answers easily.

Table 3: The Interview Schedule

Part	Content
Part 01	Basic information including age, professional and education qualifications, gender, section (primary or secondary), training and years of experience in teaching
Part 02	Awareness on the presence of students with SEN within their regular classroom and diversity of those students' special educational needs

Part 03	Knowledge of the term 'Inclusive Education' and details about the teacher trainings regarding inclusive education
Part 04	Classroom experiences in teaching students with SEN and how they cope with students with SEN within the regular classroom setting
Part 05	Difficulties faced by the class teachers when handling the regular classrooms with both students with and without SEN
Part 06	Teachers' attitudes towards and perceptions of the placement of students with SEN in the regular classroom
Part 07	Suggestions of teachers for the betterment of inclusive education in Sri Lankan context

In this study, only the class teachers from both primary and secondary sections were interviewed. Among them, all the participants had an awareness of students with SEN in their classrooms. They knew the presence of students with SEN in their classrooms.

Table 4: Identified Number of Students With SEN Within Regular Classrooms

Scho ol type	Particip ants	Num ber of stude nts with SEN	Scho ol type	Particip ants	Num ber of stude nts with SEN	Sch ool type	Particip ants	Numb er of studen s with SEN
Natio nal Scho ol 01	P -1	2	Natio nal scho ol 02	P - 16	2	1 c scho ol	P - 30	3
	P – 2	1		P - 17	2		P- 31	4
	P – 3	3		P -18	1		P- 32	0
	P – 4	1		P - 19	4		P - 33	2
	P – 5	2		P -20	3		P - 34	1
	P – 6	2		P - 21	1		P -35	1
	P – 7	1		P - 22	2			
	P – 8	4		P - 23	4			

	P – 9	0		P - 24	3			
	P – 10	2		P - 25	2			
	P – 11	1		P - 26	1			
	P – 12	4		P - 27	1			
	P – 13	3		P - 28	1			
	P – 14	2		P - 29	2			
	P - 15	3						

All the participants except two teachers have identified the presence of students with SEN within their regular classroom. Only two teachers answered that they do not have any student with SEN in their current classrooms, but they stated that they had previous experiences of students with SEN.

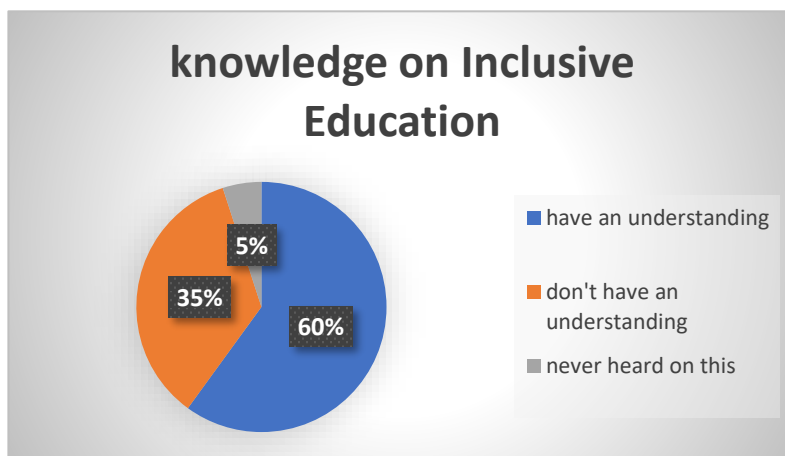
The respondent teachers identified various categories of disabilities of students. Those categories are as follows:

Table 5: Categories of Students With SEN

Category of students with SEN	Number of teachers who identified students belonging to the category
Physical disabilities	8
Emotional disorders	6

Hearing impairment	7
Visual impairment	8
Slow learners	12

Figure 1: Knowledge of Teachers on ‘Inclusive Education’

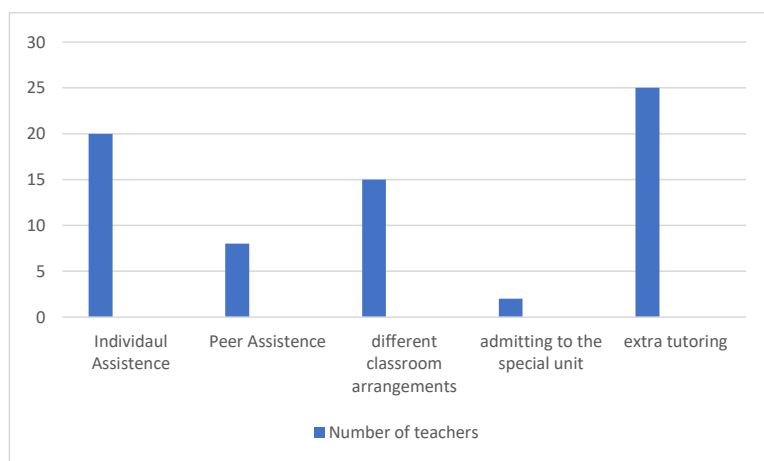


The teachers were asked to define the meaning of the term ‘Inclusive Education’ at the interview. But most of the teachers defined it in an incorrect way. However, they stated that they have an understanding of inclusive education as shown in the above pie chart. 60% percent of teachers answered that they have an understanding of inclusive education while 35% of teachers expressed that they do not have an understanding of the term ‘Inclusive Education.’ A few teachers answered that they have never heard that word before. It was clear that the term ‘Inclusive Education’ was not widely known to teachers, but they had an awareness of students with SEN in their regular classrooms.

In line with the objectives of the study, teachers were asked how they cope with students with SEN in their regular classrooms and their teaching

experiences related to inclusive education. Teachers had to play different roles in the classrooms in order to fulfil various needs of SEN students. Teachers followed various methods to cope with students with SEN within the regular classroom.

Figure 2: Methods Followed by Teachers in Teaching Students With SEN



To minimise the difficulties faced by the teachers when teaching SEN students within the regular classroom, most of them used extra tutoring for such SEN students. Among the investigated schools, only one school had a special unit. So, admitting to the special unit was not common practice.

Difficulties in Teaching Students With SEN Within the Regular Classroom

The teacher respondents had encountered several difficulties in teaching students with SEN within the regular classroom. They pointed out that it was difficult to fulfil the needs of students with SEN and without SEN at

the same time as their needs were diverse. Teachers believed that they have a heavy workload to complete in school. There was a strong pressure to complete the vast syllabus. Balancing the teaching learning process with slow learners might be doubtful. Teachers need more time to assist students with SEN. However, teachers had only 40 minutes to stay in one classroom in the secondary section. On the other hand, conducting extra lessons for students with SEN was rather difficult with the situation in the country. Some teachers had parental barriers from other students. Furthermore, teachers mentioned that the family support provided for those students with SEN in mainstream classroom is not sufficient. As the parental support is one of vital factors on education, lack of parental involvement in school activities regarding the students with SEN has become a major barrier. Most of the teachers expressed that the lack of communication between teachers and parents who have children with SEN is challenging when organizing a common learning environment in the regular classroom.

Most of the teachers did not have proper training regarding inclusive education and the provided training was not adequate. Without having a clear understanding about students with SEN, it was difficult to implement modifications and accommodations in teaching.

Another problem identified by the teachers was the difficulty in looking after the students with behavioural disabilities within the regular classroom. Large size classrooms also created many problems. The problems encountered by the teachers were as follows.

- Difficulty in fulfilling the needs of students with and without SEN at the same time

- High pressure to cover the vast syllabus
- No identified modification in practice yet
- Allocating extra time
- Barriers and complaints from other students' parents
- Lack of teacher trainings and knowledge related to inclusive education
- Manging classroom activities during the inadequate time
- Lack of support from the administrators of the school

The Teachers' Perception on Teaching Students With SEN

The study focused on two categories regarding the attitudes of teachers towards teaching students with SEN in the regular classroom context. First, the importance and acceptance of teaching students with SEN within the regular classroom was investigated. Among 35 teachers, 28 teachers were completely positive about teaching students with SEN. 26 teachers directly said that the students with SEN can learn with peers. Peer assistance, motivation and co-operation with other students are very important. The second category focused on the human rights related to students with SEN. The teachers believed that the students should not be discriminated or labelled. The administrators should support the class teachers when teaching students with SEN.

Some teachers pointed out that the students with SEN were dominated by the students without SEN in the regular classroom. The class teachers had a great role to play in order to teach the students with SEN within the regular classroom. The teachers stated that teaching students with SEN within the regular classroom was more beneficial than separating them into a special

unit. The teachers mentioned that there were many legal facts and laws regarding inclusive education, but in practise they could not find any active method or strategy.

Suggestions Made by the Teachers

- The principal and the administrators should be supportive.
- Parental support should be increased.
- New strategies should be introduced by the administrators to work with SEN students.
- The size of the class should be considerably declined.
- The effectiveness of teaching students with SEN within the regular classroom needs to be emphasised.
- Teachers should be provided with proper trainings and workshops related to inclusive education.

7. Conclusions

This study revealed that most participants identified the presence of the students with SEN within their regular classrooms. Most of the teachers had an awareness of inclusive education but they found it difficult to define the term 'inclusive education' correctly. They did not have proper programmes, workshops, and trainings regarding the methodologies and strategies on inclusive education. The teachers found that the students with SEN have different types of disabilities. And within the regular classroom, the teachers had to cope with these different types of needs. Some teachers had students with multiple needs. In that case, most of the teachers faced a number of

difficulties when teaching and managing the classroom with such students. As the mainstream classroom consists of students with and without SEN, teachers were under pressure when organizing classroom activities. Handling a student with SEN within a class comprising a large number of students was a major problem faced by the teachers. It was also challenging for the teachers as they had to focus on covering syllabuses rather than developing much needed skills and attitudes of the students in adhering to the teaching learning process in Sri Lanka. Although the paradigm shifted to a student-centred approach, the teachers encountered many doubts in implementing classroom activities for the students with SEN. All the participants were positive about the presence of the students with SEN in their regular classroom and they emphasised the necessity of a proper strategy to enhance expected outcomes of inclusive education in Sri Lanka. All the teacher respondents accepted the right to education in an equal setting and inclusion of the students with SEN into regular classrooms rather than separating them into a special unit.

8. References

- Anderson, J., & Boyle, C. (2015). Inclusive education in Australia: Rhetoric, reality and the road ahead. *Support for Learning*, 30(1), 4-22. <http://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12074>
- Avramids, E., & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of literature. *European Journal of Special Education*, 17(2), 129-147. doi: 10.1080/08856250210129056
- Barnes, M.C., & Gaines, T. (2015). Teachers' attitudes and perceptions of inclusion in relation to grade level and years of experience. *Electronic Journal for Inclusive Education*, 3(3).

- Bhatnagar, N., & Das, A. (2014). Regular school teachers' concerns and perceived barriers to implement inclusive education in New Delhi, India. *International Journal of Instruction*, 7(2), 89-102.
- Berlach, R.G., & Chambers, D.J. (2011). Interpreting inclusivity: An endeavour of great proportions. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 529-539. <http://doi.org/10.1080/13603110903159300>
- Booth, T., & Ainscow, M. (2000). *Index for inclusion: Developing learning & participation in schools*. Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education website: <http://www.eenet.org.uk/resources/docs/index/20english-pdf>
- Booth, T. (2012). Creating welcoming cultures: The index for inclusion. *Race Equality Teaching*, 30(2), 19-21. <http://doi.org/10.18546/RET.30.2.07>
- Ciobanu, N.R. (2017). Integrated education and inclusive education. *Romanian Journal of School Psychology*, 10(20), 35-39.
- Cologan, K. (2012). Confidence in their own ability: Postgraduate early childhood students examining their attitudes towards inclusive education, 17(2), 129-147-doi: 10.1080/08856.
- Costello, S., & Boyle, C. (2013). Pre-service secondary teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(4), 129-143.
- Das, A.K., Kuyini, A.B., & Desai, I.P. (2013). Inclusive education in India: Are the teachers prepared? *International Journal of Special Education*, 28(1), 27-36.
- Eleweke, C.J., & Rodda, M. (2002). The challenge of enhancing inclusive education in developing countries. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 6(2), 113-126. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13603110110067190>.
- Furuta, H. (2009). Responding to educational needs of children with disabilities: Care and education in special pre- schools in the North-western province of Sri Lanka. *Japanese journal of special Education*, 46(6), 457-471.
- Forlin, C. (2006). Inclusive education in Australia ten years after Salamanca. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 21(3), 265-277. <http://doi.org/10.1007/BF03173415>

- Forlin, C., & Chambers, D. (2011). Teachers' preparation for inclusive education: increasing knowledge but raising concerns. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(1), 17-32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2010.540850>
- Gronlund, A., Lim, N., & Larsson, H. (2010). Effective use of assistive technologies for inclusive education in developing countries: Issues and challenges from two case studies. *International Journal of Education and Development of Information and Communication Technology*, 6(4), 5-26. <http://www.editlib.org/p/42264>
- Jayaweera, S. (1999). Gender, education, development: Sri Lanka. In D. Heward & S. Bunwaree (Eds.), *Gender, education, and development: Beyond access to employment* (173-188). Zed books.
- Ministry of Education, Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESFP) 2013-2017, Ministry of Education, Policy and Planning Branch, Battaramulla, 2013.
- Monsen, J., Ewing, D., & Kawoka, M. (2014). Teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education, perceived adequacy of support and classroom learning environment. *Learning Environment Research*, 17(1), 113-126. doi:10.1007/s10984-013-9144-8
- Priyadarshini, S., & Thangarajathi, S. (2016). Effect of selected variables on regular school teachers' attitude towards inclusive education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 10(3), 28-38. <http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz/ehost/detail?vid=7&sid=f9c2o11f-1074-4337-b964>
- Underwood, K., Valeo, A., & Wood, R. (2012). Understanding inclusive early childhood education: A capability approach. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 13(4), 290-299. <http://doi-org.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz/10.2304/ciec.2012.13.4.290>.
- UNESCO (1994). The Salamanca statement and framework for action on special needs education (Salamanca, Spain, 7-10th June, 1994). *World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality*. <http://www.scribid.com/document/194828650/UNESCO-Salamanca-Statement-1994>.

- UNICEF (2013). Out-of-school children in Sri Lanka: Country Study. <http://www.uis.unesco.org/education/documents/srilanka-00sci-report-2013.pdf>.
- UNESCO (2020). Institute for Statistic, 'Education and Disability: Analysis of Data from 49 countries', information paper No. 49. <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/ip49-education-disability-2018-en-pdf>.
- Waitoller, F.R., & Artiles, A.J. (2013). A decade of professional development research for inclusive education: A critical review and notes for a research programme. *Review of Educational Research*, 83(3). 319-356. <http://doi.org/10.3102/0034654313483905>
- Yilmaz, R.K., (2021). Who and how do I include? A case study on teachers' inclusive education practices. *International Journal of Progressiveness Education*, 17(2). <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1293337.pdf>

Inclusive Approach to Students With Disabilities in Academic Setting: The Case of the IncEdu Project

Martina Feric

Faculty of Education and Rehabilitation Sciences University of Zagreb,
Croatia

martina.feric@erf.unizg.hr

Abstract

The educational programme "Inclusive Approach to Students with Disabilities in Academic Setting" for teaching and non-teaching staff was developed under the project Developing Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in Sri Lankan Universities, IncEdu (supported by the EU Cooperation for Innovation and the exchange of good practices - Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education, 2019-2023). The objective of the education was to improve the competencies of teaching and non-teaching staff to teach or interact with students with disabilities, and in this way contribute to the overall goal of the project - to develop a system of support to promote equal opportunities for students with disabilities in Sri Lankan universities. The educational programme was implemented in late 2022 for 48 teaching and 27 non-teaching staff from four universities in Sri Lanka. The evaluation was conducted using an online survey (self-assessment). The evaluation questions were related to the quality of programme implementation and the learning outcomes achieved. The evaluation involved 43 participants from the teaching staff group (89% of all participants) and 25 participants from the non-teaching staff group (92% of all participants) were involved. Data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods. Evaluation results showed that learning outcomes were largely achieved, and participants were highly satisfied with the education. The educational programme has great potential to be disseminated in all universities in Sri Lanka, contributing to the development of staff competencies to improve the process of inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education.

Keywords: *Inclusion, Higher Education, Staff Competencies, Students with Disabilities*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

Inclusive education could be defined as a model that proposes an educational model in which all students are able to learn, participate, and are welcomed as valuable members of the university (Morgado et al., 2016). Implementing the principles of inclusive education in higher education can be challenging (Moriña, 2017), but at the same time it is a necessity if we want to create a democratic society in which all people have equal access to all resources, that is, if we want to create a society in that recognise that we do not all have the same starting point and recognise the need to acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances. Social inclusion is important to a person's dignity, security, and opportunity for a better life. Therefore, the extent to which social inclusion is provided in higher education affects the prosperity of the entire country/society. The right to education is a right guaranteed by legal acts in many countries, but many young people with disabilities still have no or very limited access to higher education.

National universities in Sri Lanka enrol only a small number of students with disabilities compared to the total number of students, and their inclusion is limited to social science and humanities courses. The low number of students with disabilities is mainly due to the lack of awareness and capacity of faculty, administrators, and society, in general, to deal with their needs and requirements, as well as organisational barriers (Yatigammana, Dorabawila, & Abhayaratne, 2021). These same barriers are mentioned in a number of studies around the world (e.g., Hadjidakou & Hartas, 2008; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Márquez & Melero-Aguilar, 2022;

Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011; Mullins & Preyde, 2013;). As one of the responses to this situation, the University of Peradeniya gathered a team of interested professionals and successfully applied for the Erasmus+ project with the support of European partners. The project "The Developing Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in Sri Lankan Universities" (IncEdu") was approved in 2019 and supported by the EU Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practises - Capacity Building in the field of Higher Education. The project aims to develop a support system to promote equal opportunities for students with disabilities in Sri Lankan universities. Four universities from Sri Lanka (University of Peradeniya, University of Ruhuna, Eastern University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Technological Campus) and four European universities (University of Zagreb, Croatia; Masaryk University, Czech Republic; Transylvania University of Brasov, Romania; Uppsala University, Sweden) are involved in the project. The project is carried out in seven work packages: (WP1) baseline study on needs assessment for students with disabilities in Sri Lankan universities, (WP2) establishment of a model centre for SWDs in Sri Lankan universities, (WP3) development of staff competencies, (WP4) creation of community awareness, (WP5) quality assurance, (WP6) dissemination and exploitation, and (WP7) management of the project.

With the aim of improving the competencies of teaching and non-teaching staff in Sri Lankan universities, the educational programme "Inclusive Approach to Students with Disabilities in Academic Setting" for teaching and non-teaching staff was developed within the framework of work page 3 "Development of Staff Competencies" (led by the University of Zagreb,

Croatia). Many studies in the field of inclusion of people with disabilities in higher education have shown that investment in staff competencies (knowledge, attitudes, skills) is an important factor in promoting the creation of an inclusive environment in higher education (Blinov, et al., 2018; Collins, Azmat & Rentschler, 2019; Lalor, Madaus & Dukes, 2020).

In addition to the development of the educational programme, extensive training of 12 colleagues (from each Sri Lankan partner university) was conducted to train them as educators, i.e., they were trained to conduct educational programmes for teaching and non-teaching staff at their universities in the future. In this way, the sustainability of the educational programme will be ensured.

The educational programme "Inclusive Approach to Students with Disabilities in Academic Setting" is an interactive training conducted in 20 hours for teaching staff and 10 hours for non-teaching staff. The programme included lectures followed by exercises and discussions. Also, participants were encouraged to look for creative solutions to effectively overcome various barriers to the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. Higher engagement leads to greater learning gains and better retention of the material by the participants (Al-Natour et al., 2022; Kondratenko et al., 2016). In this way, active participation was ensured and good conditions for learning were created.

Table 1 lists the learning outcomes and topics for teaching and non-teaching staff.

Table 1: Educational programme “Inclusive Approach to Students With Disabilities in Academic Setting” - Learning Outcomes and Topics

	Topics	Learning outcomes
Teaching staff	Modern approach to persons with disabilities	Demonstrate a modern approach to individuals with disabilities Interpret the term person with a disability
	Students with disabilities and their needs in higher education system	Identify the needs of students with disabilities in the higher education system
	Teaching students with disabilities	Select appropriate teaching methods for students with disabilities Propose adjustments in teaching that do not interfere with established learning outcomes
	Universal design	Argue the importance of universal design in higher education Explain the principles and guidelines of universal design in higher education Describe the process of applying universal design in the context of higher education
	Advocacy	Identify what advocacy is and how it works Make an advocacy plan
	Diversity and inclusion in higher education	Discuss the diversity of the student population at university education
	Strategies for overcoming resistance to change	Explain strategies for overcoming social barriers for inclusive higher education Discuss some reasons for resistance to change Explain strategies for overcoming resistance to change

	Equity and inclusion in higher education	Argue the importance of empowering and engaging young people in developing an inclusive society
	International mobility in the context of youth participation	Discuss the possibilities of implementing some of the EU recommendations into the Sri Lankan higher education system
Non-teaching staff	Modern approach to persons with disabilities	Demonstrate a modern approach to individuals with disabilities
	Students with disabilities and their needs in higher education system	Interpret the term person with a disability
	Universal design	Argue the importance of universal design in higher education Explain the principles and guidelines of universal design in higher education Describe the process of applying universal design in the context of higher education
	Diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education	Discuss the diversity of the student population at university education Explain strategies for overcoming social barriers of inclusive higher education
	International mobility in the context of youth participation	Argue the importance of empowering and engaging young people in developing an inclusive society Discuss the possibilities of enhancing the internationalization process on the national/ institutional level

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Instrument

The evaluation was conducted using an online survey (self-assessment). The evaluation questions were related to the learning outcomes achieved, the participants' satisfaction with the programme implementation (the usefulness of the topics presented, the level of preparation of the instructors, the time management by educators, the level of interaction, their participation) and the overall satisfaction with the education. Achievement of learning outcomes was rated on a scale from "to a small extent" (1) to "to a very large extent" (4). The usefulness of the topic presented/discussed was rated on a scale from "not useful at all" (1) to "very useful" (5). Participant satisfaction in other aspects of programme implementation was rated on a scale from "definitely not" (1) to "definitely yes" (5). In addition, participants were asked at the beginning of the education about their expectations of education, and at the end of the education, the participants reflected on the extent to which their expectations had been met.

2.2. Participants

The Inclusive Approach to Students with Disabilities in Academic Setting" educational programme included 48 participants from the teaching staff group (in three groups) and 27 participants from the non-teaching staff group (two groups) from all four partner universities in Sri Lanka (University of Peradeniya, University of Ruhuna, Eastern University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Technological Campus). The online survey included 43

participants from the teaching staff group (89% of all participants) and 25 participants from the non-teaching staff group (92% of all participants).

2.3. Methods of Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics.

3. Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the "Inclusive Approach to Students with Disabilities in Academic Setting" educational programme. Specific goals are: (1) to determine the quality of programme implementation, (2) to determine the learning outcomes achieved, (2) to make some recommendations for future implementation of the programme based on the evaluation results to ensure sustainability.

4. Results and Findings

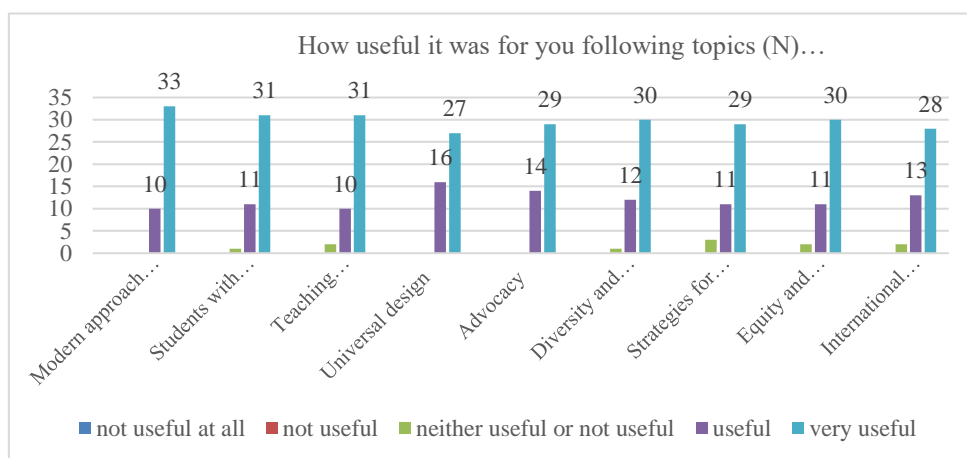
Results

4.1. Teaching Staff

Most participants rated most topics as "useful" or "very useful" (40 participants/93%) (Figure 1). The topics rated as most useful were "Modern approach to persons with disabilities", "Advocacy" and "Universal Design". Not a single topic was rated as "not useful at all" or "not useful". Two participants (4,7%) rated "Teaching students with disabilities", "Equity and inclusion in higher education" and "International mobility in the context of youth participation" in the "neither useful nor not useful" category. In the same category, three participants (6,9%) rated the topic "Strategies for

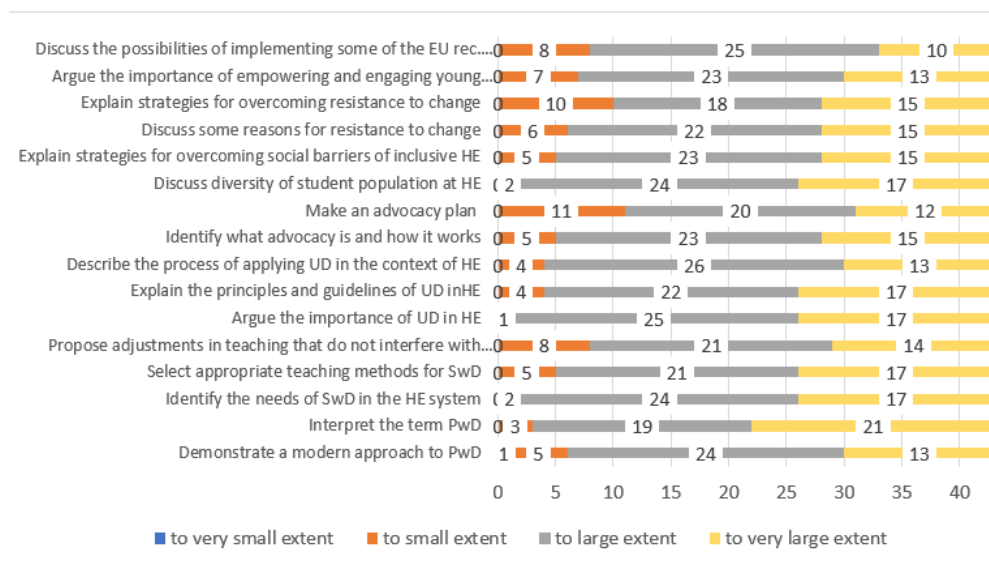
overcoming resistance to change" and one participant rated the topic "Students with disabilities and their needs in the higher education system".

Figure 1: Usefulness of the Presented/Discussed Topics - Teaching Staff



In terms of learning outcomes, most participants (32 participants, 74,4%) indicated that the learning outcomes were met "to a large extent" or "to a very large extent" (Figure 2). The learning outcome "Argue the importance of universal design in higher education" had the highest score, followed by "Identify the needs of students with disabilities in the higher education system" and "Discuss the diversity of the student population at university education". The lowest score was for the learning outcome "Make an advocacy plan". Achieving this learning outcome requires some advanced skills and practice, and it is not surprising that this learning outcome was rated the lowest (11 participants (25, 6%) rated that these learning outcomes were met "to a small extent" and 32 of them rated (74,4%) that the learning outcomes were met "to a large extent" or "to a very large extent").

Figure 2: Achievement of Learning Outcomes - Teaching Staff



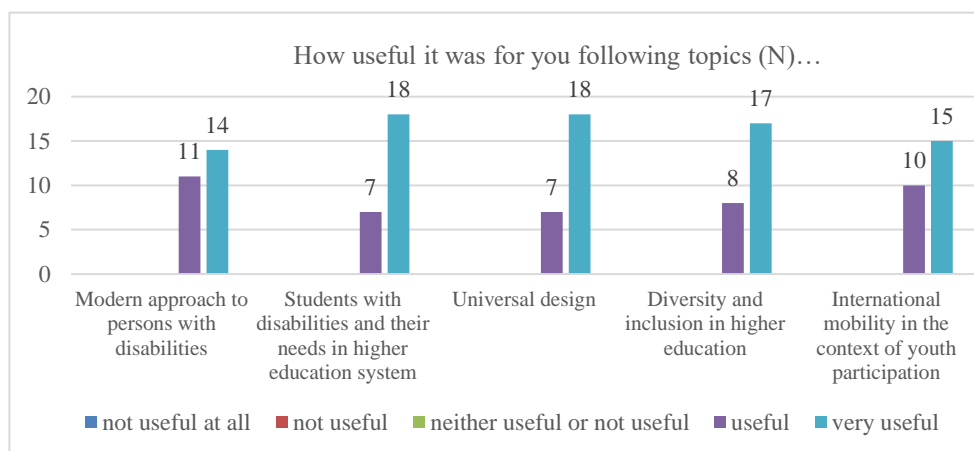
The mean score for participants' satisfaction with their participation was 4.63, for the level of interaction among participants was 4.58, for time management by educators 4.51, and for the level of instructor preparation was 4.49. Satisfaction with the education overall had a mean score of 4.47.

On the first day of the education, participants were asked about their expectations for the education. Participants' expectations were related to acquiring new knowledge, raising awareness of issues facing students with disabilities in higher education, improving the quality of teaching, the support system for students with disabilities, creating a safe and encouraging learning environment, and learning about "best practises" in other countries. Participants' expectations were discussed at the end of the education, and according to participants' feedback, most expectations were met.

4.2. Non-Teaching Staff

Regarding the usefulness of the topics covered in the training, all participants rated all topics as "useful" or "very useful" (Figure 3).

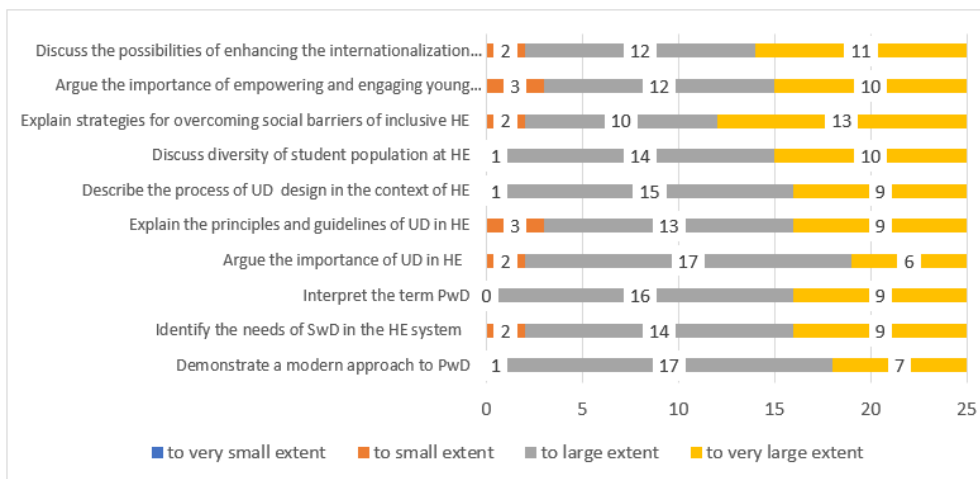
Figure 3: Usefulness of the Topics Presented/Discussed - Non-Teaching Staff



Most participants (22 participants, 88%) rated that all learning outcomes were met "to a large extent" or "to a very large extent" (Figure 4). The learning outcome "Interpret the term "person with disabilities"" had the highest score, followed by "Demonstrate a modern approach to people with disabilities", "Discuss the diversity of the student population at university education" and "Describe the process of applying universal design in the context of higher education". The lowest scoring learning outcomes were "Explain the principles and guidelines of universal design in higher education" and "Argue the importance of empowering and engaging young people in the development of an inclusive society" (three (12%) participants rated that these learning outcomes were met "to a small extent" and 22 of

them (88%) rated that the learning outcomes were met "to a large extent" or "to a very large extent").

Figure 4: Achievement of Learning Outcomes – Non-Teaching Staff



The mean score for participants' satisfaction with their participation was 4.32, for the level of interaction among participants was 4.36, for the time management by educators 4.36, and for the level of instructor preparation was 4.40. Satisfaction with the education overall had a mean score of 4.40.

Participants' expectations related to gaining new knowledge, learning how to support students with disabilities, understanding what (administrative) services can be developed to provide maximum support to students with disabilities, and what challenges need to be addressed. Participants' expectations were discussed at the end of the education, and the feedback was positive.

5. Conclusions

The evaluation results show that both groups of participants gave high scores to the overall satisfaction with the education as well as the usefulness of the topics covered in the education. Regarding the learning outcomes achieved, most participants indicated that they were achieved to a great or very great extent. Some of the learning outcomes that were achieved to a somewhat lesser extent, such as "Make an advocacy plan" (teaching staff), require engaging in advocacy activities and gaining experience in this way to develop the skills to create a successful advocacy plan. Therefore, it is not unexpected that this learning outcome was rated as the least achieved. The lower assessment of the learning outcome "Explain the principles and guidelines of universal design in higher education" by non-teaching staff can be explained by the fact that relatively little time was devoted to this extensive topic in education, while achieving the learning outcome "Argue the importance of empowering and engaging young people in the development of an inclusive society" requires a broader knowledge than that acquired in education.

The educational programme "Inclusive Approach to Students with Disabilities in Academic Setting" for teaching and non-teaching staff has big potential and good results. The quality of the educational programme can be further improved by allocating more time (hours) for exercises and group discussions to improve knowledge, but also positive attitudes towards people with disabilities and skill development. Investing in the competencies of teaching and non-teaching staff related to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in higher education will contribute to a more

inclusive environment in Sri Lanka's universities and thus will contribute to the achievement of the project's objective - the development of a support system to promote equal opportunities for students with disabilities in Sri Lanka's universities.

6. References

- Al-Natour, A., Al-Natour, A., Ali, R. A., Alzoubi, F., H Almomani, M., & ALBashtawy, M. (2021). Students' perceptions and experiences in a health promotion course using interactive learning. *Heliyon*, 7(6), e07192. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07192>
- Blinov, L. V., Blinova, Lubov N., Makarova, I. A., & Shafranova, O. E. (2018). Psychological and Pedagogical Support of Inclusion in Higher School as an Aspect of Supplementary Professional Education of Academic Staff. *International Journal of Special Education*, 33(3), 592-615.
- Collins, A., Azmat, F., & Rentschler, R. (2019). 'Bringing everyone on the same journey': revisiting inclusion in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44(8), 1475–1487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1450852>
- Hadjidakou, K., & Hartas, D. (2008). Higher education provision for students with disabilities in Cyprus. *Higher Education*, 55(1), 103–119. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-007-9070-8>
- Kondratenko, E. V., Biryukova, N. A., Kondratenko, I. B., Mashtakova, L. Y., Dyatlova, K. D., & Kolesova, T. V. (2016). Interactive learning in the system of future teachers' training: experience, problems and prospects. *The Social Sciences (Pakistan)*, 11(8), 1653–1657.
- Lalor, A. R., Madaus, J. W., & Dukes, L. L. (2020). Disability-related competencies for student affairs generalists: A Delphi study. *College Student Affairs Journal*, 38(2), 198–214. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csaj.2020.0014>

- Lourens, H., & Swartz, L. (2016). Experiences of visually impaired students in higher education: Bodily perspectives on inclusive education. *Disability & Society*, 31(2), 240–251. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2016.1158092>
- Márquez, C., & Melero-Aguilar, N. (2022). What are their thoughts about inclusion? Beliefs of faculty members about inclusive education. *Higher Education*, 83(4), 829–844. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00706-7>
- Morgado, B., Cortés-Vega, M. D., López-Gavira, R., Álvarez, E., & Moriña, A. (2016). Inclusive education in higher education? *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs: JORSEN*, 16, 639–642. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12323>
- Moriña, A. (2017). Inclusive education in higher education: challenges and opportunities. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 32(1), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2016.1254964>
- Moswela, E., & Mukhopadhyay, S. (2011). Asking for too much? The voices of students with disabilities in Botswana. *Disability & Society*, 26(3), 307–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2011.560414>
- Mullins, L., & Preyde, M. (2013). The lived experience of students with an invisible disability at a Canadian university. *Disability & Society*, 28(2), 147–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.752127>
- Yatigammana, S., Dorabawila, S., & Abhayaratne, A. (2021). Developing inclusive education for students with disabilities in Sri Lankan universities: INCEDU needs assessment survey report. Retrieved May 24, 2023, from <https://arts.pdn.ac.lk/incedu/doc/IncEdu%20Survey%20Report%20.pdf>

International Conference on

‘Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education’ (RUICHSS 2023)

University of Ruhuna

ISSN: 2706-0063

International Conference on

'Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education' (RUICHSS 2023)

ISSN: 2706-0063

University of Ruhuna

Disabling Barriers and Enabling Opportunities for Social Inclusion

Exploring the Nature of the Influence of Social Media in Professing the Identity of Homosexuals in Colombo, Sri Lanka: A Mixed-Methods Study

H.W.M. Yohan Wickramasekara

mithunosb@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates how social media influences Sri Lankans' perceptions of homosexuality. The study looks at how LGBTQ+ people in Sri Lanka have interacted with social media and how it has affected their sense of self, sense of community, and encounters with stigma and prejudice. The study also looks at how social media is utilised in Colombo to support or counteract anti-LGBTQ+ prejudice. Through a quantitative research phase, stratified random sampling surveyed 300 LGBTQ+ individuals (non-heterosexuals) in Colombo's metropolis. This approach, embracing diverse identities and experiences, bolsters research integrity. The survey explores social media use, stigma, prejudice, and its impact on identity. To gain more in-depth and nuanced insights into survey respondents' experiences with social media, the qualitative component conducts in-depth interviews with a sample of 30 survey respondents. The research further scrutinises the discourse and pertinent content pertaining to homosexuality within the realm of social media. It examines both the prevalence and content richness of pro-LGBTQ+ and anti-LGBTQ+ social media profiles. A thorough investigation including 300 LGBTQ+ people (non-heterosexuals) in the Colombo city revealed a startling 58% prevalence of discrimination. The research also explored the link between social media use and cultural constructs of homosexuality, accentuating the intricate interrelationship between digital platforms and conventional sexual orientation beliefs. The uncovered insights highlight the necessity of promoting accepting attitudes and provide crucial factors for the design of strategic initiatives to create a culture of acceptance and inclusion within Sri Lanka's LGBTQ+ population.

Keywords: *Discrimination, Homosexuality, LGBTQ+, Social Media, Stigma*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

People increasingly use social media as a forum to express their identities through profile curation, content sharing, discussions, and engagement. and interact with others who share their interests. However, social media may be a crucial tool for publicising one's identity and seeking support for those who identify as homosexual in nations where homosexuality is stigmatised or forbidden. People who identify as gay frequently experience discrimination and societal stigma in Sri Lanka, where homosexuality is illegal under Section 365A of the Penal Code (UNHCR, 2020). Notwithstanding these challenges, an escalating number of LGBTQ+ individuals in Sri Lanka are leveraging social media for interpersonal engagement and identity assertion. Nevertheless, the dynamics of utilising social media to propagate homosexuality within the Sri Lankan context remain unexplored.

The influence of social media in formation of the identity of homosexual persons in the Colombo metropolis is the issue this study attempts to explore. Despite the fact that LGBT+ people are becoming more visible on social media in Sri Lanka, little is known about how social media is being utilised in this country to promote homosexuality. In antecedent scholarly inquiries (e.g., Vrangalova et al., 2017), scrutiny into the role of social media in professing LGBTQ+ identities due to its global reach, fostering self-expression and community connection. Nonetheless, the extant disparities in culture and jurisprudence imply the incongruity of such findings in the Sri Lankan milieu. Consequently, this research endeavors to discern, via a mixed-methods paradigm, the influence of social media on the portrayal of homosexuality within the confines of the Colombo metropolis.

This study specifically addresses the following research questions: (1) How do LGBT+ people in Sri Lanka utilise social media to express and ensure their identities are recognised? (2) How is the use of social media in Sri Lanka to promote homosexuality influenced by social and cultural factors? By identifying possible techniques to use social media to promote LGBT+ persons' identities and assist community formation, the study's findings may help shape the creation of policies and interventions targeted at promoting the well-being and social inclusion of LGBT+ individuals in Sri Lanka. Apparently, it is important to note that the impact of social media in ensuring the identity of homosexuality in Sri Lanka is a complicated and understudied subject. This study seeks to address this knowledge deficit by investigating the manner in which individuals of non-heteronormative orientations employ social media platforms for the purpose of articulating and advocating their identities. Additionally, it aims to delineate the challenges and benefits inherent in this endeavor. The discernment of efficacious strategies to employ social media for identity advocacy and community advancement holds the potential to yield profound implications for the amplification of social integration and the overall welfare of the LGBTQ+ populace within the Sri Lankan context.

2. Research Methodology

Epistemologically grounded, this study adopts a mixed-methods paradigm, blending quantitative and qualitative methodologies to meticulously investigate the intricate interplay between social media and the promotion of the identity of homosexuality within Sri Lanka. Deliberate purposive sampling is employed to discern fervent LGBT+ users of Facebook, Instagram, and

Twitter, via social media platforms and web forums. The study's quantitative facet employs a self-administered online survey, incorporating closed-ended inquiries to ascertain demographic particulars, and to gauge the frequency and intensity of LGBT+ individuals' social media engagement in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the qualitative arm of the study employs semi-structured interviews to glean profound insights into the utilisation of social media by Sri Lankan LGBT+ individuals to articulate and bolster their identities. Drawing from extant literature and study themes, interview questions are fashioned. To ensure linguistic adeptness and respondent ease, interviews are conducted in participants' native tongue, recorded, and transcribed verbatim for meticulous scrutiny.

The amassed data extracted from the survey and interviews will be scrutinised individually, and subsequently integrated to offer a comprehensive understanding of the role played by social media in amplifying the identity of homosexuality in Sri Lanka. Quantitative data shall be subjected to descriptive statistics, delineating the prevalence and vigor of social media use by Sri Lankan LGBT+ individuals. In tandem, qualitative data will be methodically examined through thematic analysis to unearth emergent patterns and insights concerning the utilisation of social media to foster LGBT+ identities within Sri Lanka. This mixed-methods inquiry holds the promise of a nuanced exploration into the dynamic interface of social media and identity propagation of homosexuality. By encapsulating the frequency, intensity, challenges, and benefits associated with social media engagement for Sri Lankan LGBT+ individuals, this study strives to inform both policy and practice. The outcomes possess the potential to identify effective social media strategies that underpin LGBT+ identities and facilitate social inclusion in Sri

Lanka, rendering noteworthy ramifications for both theory and application.

3. Objectives of the Study

This research seeks to comprehensively comprehend the social media usage encounters of Sri Lankan LGBT+ individuals, considering the impacts of social and cultural dynamics on these encounters. The primary objectives encompass investigating how LGBT+ individuals employ social media to connect with others and convey their identities. The overarching intention is to establish a profound comprehension before embarking on the initiation of their social affiliations. The survey questions tried to learn more about how often and what kind of social media users use them, as well as whether or not social media has made it easier or harder for them to express their sexual orientation online. The survey questions hope to learn more about how this has impacted their usage of social media and online presence. The study aims to investigate how social and cultural elements affect LGBT+ people's use of social media in Sri Lanka. In-depth interviews with LGBT+ people will serve to further understand the potential influences that Sri Lankan social and cultural issues may have on how LGBT+ people utilise social media.

4. Scope and Significance of the Study

In order to understand the experiences and perspectives of LGBT+ people in a nation where same-sex relationships are illegal; it is important and pertinent to examine the role that social media plays in promoting the identity of homosexuality in Sri Lanka. By studying how LGBT+ people use social media to express their identities and interact with like-minded people, this study adds

to the body of knowledge on LGBT+ issues in Sri Lanka. A thorough knowledge of the experiences and opinions of LGBT+ people in Sri Lanka on the use of social media in promoting their identities is made possible by the study's mixed-methods approach. The results of this study have important policy and practice ramifications because they emphasise how crucial it is to provide LGBT+ people in Sri Lanka with safe spaces and welcoming surroundings. According to the study, social media gives LGBT+ people a platform to express themselves and find support, which can improve their well-being and social inclusion. The research did note, however, the difficulties and dangers of promoting LGBT+ identities on social media, such as the possibility of discrimination and exposure to hate speech.

According to one of the key findings of the study, social media is vital in raising the visibility and knowledge of LGBT+ problems in Sri Lanka. As per the study, LGBT+ people may use social media as a platform to raise awareness of LGBT+ rights and challenges in Sri Lanka, which may boost the visibility and comprehension of LGBT+ identities and experiences. This result is in line with other research that showed how social media may help marginalised populations become more visible and well-known (McMillan & Morrison, 2006; Sánchez & Magno, 2016). The study's other key result is that social media gives LGBT+ people a platform to interact with like-minded others and find support. The study discovered that social media gives LGBT+ people a secure area to create and maintain a sense of community, which can improve their well-being and social inclusion. This conclusion is in line with other research that showed how social media may help marginalised populations by fostering supportive settings (Kavadias & Lerman, 2019; Rai, 2018).

The research did note, however, the difficulties and dangers of promoting LGBT+ identities in Sri Lanka using social media. According to the survey, LGBT+ people are at risk for mental health problems, are exposed to hate speech and negative comments, and are in fear of being recognised and subjected to discrimination. These results underline the requirement for laws and other measures to address the difficulties and dangers of utilising social media to promote LGBT+ identities in Sri Lanka. For instance, adopting anti-discrimination laws and programmers, offering mental health care for LGBT+ people, and establishing safe spaces and friendly settings for LGBT+ people on social media platforms. In a nutshell, this study offers a thorough knowledge of how social media in Sri Lanka promotes the identification of homosexuality. The results of this study have important policy and practice ramifications because they emphasise how crucial it is to provide LGBT+ people in Sri Lanka with safe spaces and welcoming surroundings. By exploring how LGBT+ people use social media to express their identities and interact with like-minded people, the study also adds to the body of knowledge on LGBT+ issues in Sri Lanka. The study's conclusions may help shape policies and actions that enhance the welfare and social inclusion of LGBT+ people in Sri Lanka

5. Review of the Relevant Literature

Social media has assimilated into modern culture and has made it possible for people to interact and communicate with others on a worldwide scale. Social media thus has the potential to be very influential in defining people's identities and fostering societal change. A particularly effective instrument for

advancing the rights and visibility of marginalised people, such as the LGBTQ+ community, is social media (Levina & Aricak, 2017). Many LGBTQ+ people still experience prejudice and marginalisation, despite the global trend towards the acceptance of LGBTQ+ people and the decriminalisation of homosexuality in a number of nations (Gnanadason, 2019). Same-sex sexual behaviour is prohibited in Sri Lanka and has a maximum ten-year jail penalty (Equaldex, 2021). Because of this, LGBTQ+ people in Sri Lanka frequently experience harassment and violence in addition to considerable societal stigma (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

An important topic of enquiry is the influence of social media in promoting the identification of homosexuality, given the difficulties LGBTQ+ people in Sri Lanka confront. According to Duguay (2016), social media has the ability to help LGBTQ+ people connect with others, access resources and support networks, and express their identities. However, little research has been done on how social media may be used to promote homosexuality in Sri Lanka.

Previous studies have emphasised social media's ability to advance LGBTQ+ visibility and rights. For instance, a research done in the United States has demonstrated that social media has significantly contributed to raising awareness of LGBTQ+ people and advocating their rights. According to a study done in India, social media has made it possible for LGBTQ+ people to express themselves, connect with others, and access resources and support networks (Kumar & Srikantan, 2017).

6. Results and Findings

6.1. Quantitative Results

The survey results showed that 96% of participants use social media to express their identities as LGBT+ individuals. The most used social media platforms were Facebook (87%), Instagram (53%), and Twitter (27%). Participants reported using social media to connect with other LGBT+ individuals (81%), express their feelings and thoughts about their identities (77%), and find support and understanding (67%). Additionally, 62% of participants reported that social media has helped them in their journey of self-discovery and acceptance as LGBT+ individuals. Evidently, these findings substantiate the cultivation of a nuanced awareness regarding non-heteronormative individuals among a substantial portion of social media users. Manifestly, this delineates the intricate mechanisms through which individuals of diverse sexual orientations employ personalised social media platforms to foster connections with like-minded individuals.

The outcomes of the survey underscored that the principal advantages derived from leveraging social media for the propagation of the identity of homosexuality, pertain to fostering social inclusion authentically, unmasking one's non-heterosexual orientation without pretense, increased visibility and awareness of LGBT+ issues (74%), the ability to connect with like-minded individuals (62%), and the opportunity to express oneself freely (55%). However, participants also reported some challenges associated with using social media including the fear of being identified and facing discrimination (58%), exposure to negative comments and hate speech (42%), and the potential for negative impact on mental health (32%).

6.2. Qualitative Results

The semi-structured interviews were used to provide more in-depth insights into the experiences and perceptions of the participants regarding the role of social media in promoting their identities as LGBT+ individuals in Sri Lanka. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed three main themes. The first theme was "Visibility and Awareness." Participants discussed the role of social media in increasing the visibility and awareness of LGBT+ issues in Sri Lanka. Participants highlighted that social media provided a platform to express their identities and raise awareness about LGBT+ rights and issues in Sri Lanka. One participant stated, "Social media has helped us to show people that we exist and that we have rights." The second theme was "Challenges and Risks." Participants discussed the challenges and risks associated with using social media to promote their identities. The most reported challenge was the fear of being identified and facing discrimination. Participants also reported experiencing negative comments and hate speech on social media, which had a negative impact on their mental health. The third theme was "Community and Support." Participants discussed the importance of social media in building and maintaining a sense of community and finding support. Participants highlighted that social media provided a safe space to connect with like-minded individuals and receive support and understanding. One participant stated, "Social media has helped me to find a community of people who understand me and accept me for who I am."

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that social media plays an important role in promoting the identity of homosexuality in Sri Lanka. While social media provides a platform for LGBT+ individuals to express their identities

and connect with like-minded individuals, it also presents challenges and risks. The findings of this study could inform the development of policies and interventions aimed at improving the well-being and social inclusion of LGBT+ individuals in Sri Lanka.

7. Conclusions

This comprehensive mixed-methods investigation yields noteworthy revelations, notably advocating equitable societal standing irrespective of one's sexual orientation and personal sexual identity, which must be approached with deference and equitable opportunities devoid of generating societal disarray. The study's revelations elucidate that social media constitutes a pivotal instrument for LGBT+ individuals to articulate their identities, procure alliances and reinforcement, and establish connections with kindred spirits who espouse akin principles. The findings of the study also show that social media contributes to greater visibility and understanding of LGBT+ problems in Sri Lanka. According to the quantitative data, most participants utilised social media to express their identities, interact with other LGBT+ people, and seek assistance. Qualitative research also shows that social media is crucial for creating and sustaining a feeling of community, which is crucial for the welfare of LGBT+ people in Sri Lanka. The study also finds that utilising social media comes with dangers and difficulties, such as exposure to hate speech and criticism, and the fear of discrimination.

Overall, this study mitigates potential discord arising from the prevailing societal scrutiny encompassing one's sexual orientation, regardless of whether it is homosexual or heterosexual. By maintaining such discretion, the broader

social fabric could ostensibly remain undisturbed, thereby upholding a semblance of equilibrium in social dynamics while preserving the equilibrium inherent in the natural realm. Interventions should be created to address the difficulties and dangers of social media use, and to guarantee that LGBT+ people are shielded from prejudice and hate speech. Sri Lanka can provide a more welcoming atmosphere for LGBT+ people to express their identities and fully participate in society by encouraging social inclusion and acceptance. The study's findings which emphasise both the potential advantages and difficulties of social media use for LGBT+ people, provide light on the significance of social media in promoting the identity of homosexuality in Sri Lanka. The study's conclusions have repercussions for decision-makers, interested parties, and advocates who fight to advance the welfare and social inclusion of LGBT+ people in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.

8. References

- Duguay, S. (2016). Hegemonic masculinity and online news comment forums: A diachronic analysis of trolling in a Canadian newspaper. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 41(3), 415-436.
- Equaldex. (2021). LGBT Rights in Sri Lanka. Retrieved from <https://www.equaldex.com/region/sri-lanka>
- Gnanadasan, A. (2019). Understanding the experiences of LGBTQ individuals in Sri Lanka: A scoping review. *Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development*, 29(1), 24-35.
- Human Rights Watch. (2020). Sri Lanka: Discrimination, violence against LGBT people. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/30/sri-lanka-discrimination-violence-against-lgbt-people>
- Kavadias, D., & Lerman, R. I. (2019). Inferences from cross-group comparisons on LGBT political attitudes: An empirical examination. *Political Research*

Quarterly, 72(4), 929-942.

Kumar, P. & Srikantan, A. (2017). LGBT rights in India: social media, law, and social change. *Journal of Social Issues*.

McMillan, J. H., & Morrison, M. (2006). Fundamentals of Educational Research. *Allyn and Bacon*.

UNHCR. (2020). UNHCR Sri Lanka factsheet - January 2020.
<https://reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/unhcr-sri-lanka-factsheet-january-2020>

Vrangalova, Z., Sevelius, J., & Rule, W. (2017). Social media and sexual minority youth: Racing to connect and share with the world. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 32(6), 691-705. doi: 10.1177/0743558416676697

An Exploratory Study of Perceptions of SRH Education Among Female University SWDs: Student Perspectives

Chandima Jayasena^{1*}, Ishari Gunarathna² and Abhishek Thakur³

Department of Social Work, Pondicherry University¹

Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya²

Department of Social Work, University of Delhi³

chandimaij@yahoo.com^{1*}

Abstract

Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education is a fundamental component of health education, integral to the well-being of individuals across diverse communities. Ensuring its accessibility to all, regardless of disabilities, is paramount. In Sri Lankan Sinhala society, the confluence of social constructs regarding disability and gender significantly influences the experiences of students with disabilities and their access to SRH education. The research problem addressed in this study is to explore female students' perspectives of perceptions, and barriers to the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) education for female university Students With Disabilities (SWDs). Utilizing a qualitative research approach, this study employed telephone interviews, one focus group Zoom interview, interviews of two key informants, and a snowball sampling method to delve into the lived experiences of university female students with disabilities regarding their access to SRH education. This study involved students with full and partial visual impairment and locomotor disabilities. The study included a diverse sample of 11 female and four male students with disabilities, with thematic analysis as the chosen method for data analysis. This research reveals substantial barriers hindering university students with disabilities, particularly females, from accessing SRH education. The exclusion of these students from SRH education emerges as a pressing concern demanding immediate attention. This study underscores the imperative to dismantle the prevailing social constructs that intersect disability and gender, ensuring that SRH education is universally accessible. In conclusion, this study underscores the critical importance of providing inclusive SRH education to promote the health and well-being of all individuals, transcending age, gender, or ability. It emphasises the urgency of addressing the unique challenges faced by female

university students with disabilities to foster a more equitable and inclusive educational environment. Ultimately, promoting comprehensive SRH education for all is not just a matter of health but social justice and equality.

Keywords: *SRH Education, Female Students With Disabilities, Qualitative Research Approach, Perception*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

In recent years, there has been growing international concern about the sexual and reproductive health of young people. Despite progress in SRH services in various countries, significant gaps remain. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim for universal access to reproductive healthcare by 2030, but this goal faces challenges in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). A survey of 70 LMICs revealed that a tiny percentage of teenage women in these countries visit health centers for family planning information (Vincent et al., 2022, p.102). Debates and campaigns addressing the SRHR of people with disabilities are now increasingly common and of public relevance. They are frequently fronted by statements that imply a commonality of global experience for people with disabilities in the failure of society to recognise them as sexual beings (Adlakh et al., 2017).

According to the United Nations, persons with disabilities include those with long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. The drafters of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities were clear that disability should be seen as the result of the interaction between a person and his or her environment (United Nations, 2006).

Sexual and reproductive health is essential for human well-being but often stigmatised, especially in Asian countries like Sri Lanka. This is particularly true for persons with disabilities, who face additional challenges due to cultural and religious taboos, discrimination, and physical barriers (Adlakh et al., 2017; ISPA, 2022). The research problem of this study is to explore the perceptions and barriers to the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) education for female university students with disabilities (SWDs). The researchers therefore aimed to explore the perceptions of female university students with disabilities regarding the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of SRH education.

Identifying the specific barriers and experiences of students with disabilities in the context of SRH education and identifying the role of educational institutions and policies in addressing the specific needs and barriers faced by students with disabilities in SRH education is also essential in focusing on the perspectives and experiences of students with disabilities. The study also emphasises creating a more authentic and nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities in promoting sexual and reproductive health among these vulnerable populations. The knowledge generated from this study will help professionals in the field of disability, including social workers, to improve their practical interventions.

2. Research Methodology

A qualitative, phenomenological research approach was used to investigate the gendered socialization and disability, as well as attitudes, to the sexual and reproductive health education experiences of university students with

disabilities in Sri Lanka and how they perceive sexual and reproductive health education. Data saturation is used to obtain sufficient information in qualitative research to cover the main research objectives.

Accordingly, a sample consisting of 04 male and 11 female participants aged 18 and above identified as undergraduate students with disabilities at a public university in Sri Lanka was selected using the snowball sampling method. Students with partial visual impairment and locomotor disabilities participated in this. Male students with disabilities involved in this study were used to comparatively investigate whether mainstream students have greater access to sexual and reproductive health education due to their gender and disability status.

A study group was formed, and the leading researcher occasionally contacted the students who participated in this study to guide them to university education before the study. It was possible to reduce the problems of dealing with a sensitive topic and to build research trust in that relationship. Researchers were aware of the limitations of telephonic interviews, noticing visual cues and non-verbal information. Based on the research problems and objectives, the telephonic interview method was chosen regarding accessibility, convenience for participants, and any other relevant factors. During the Covid-19 period in January and February 2022, the option of conducting telephonic interviews was considered. Therefore, the respondents were selected from university students with disabilities and their friends belonging to the study as mentioned in the above group. The students involved in the study were from the faculty of the University of Colombo.

Data were collected through telephone interviews and Zoom focus group discussions, and with two key informants who closely work with students with disabilities. Data were collected through informal conversations, encouraging participants to discuss the issues without any influence from the researchers. Data were analysed thematically using qualitative analysis techniques, and secondary source literature, including published articles and online resources related to sexual and reproductive health, were used for the literature review. Research ethics were strictly adhered to in obtaining information. The study was conducted with their prior consent. In this study, non-participation of students with disabilities and speech and language impairments in other universities can be a limitation.

2.1. Participants' Background Information

The study participants were students enrolled in the University of Peradeniya and the University of Colombo who were categorised as fully visually impaired, semi-visually impaired, or locomotor impaired based on the International Classification of Functioning Disability and Health. The sample consisted of male and female students with fully and semi-fully impaired vision and only female students with locomotor impairments. It should be noted that excluding students with speech and hearing impairments may have implications for the generalizability of the study findings. Furthermore, the participants were drawn from diverse backgrounds, including rural and urban settings, particular educational backgrounds, and those admitted to the university through a particular intake.

2.2. Objectives of the Study

The Main Objective of the Study

To explore the perceptions of female university students with disabilities regarding the accessibility, quality, and effectiveness of SRH education.

The study had two specific objectives:

- To identify the specific barriers and experiences of female students with disabilities in the context of SRH education.
- To identify the role of educational institutions and policies in addressing the specific needs and barriers faced by female students with disabilities in SRH education.

3. Scope and Significance of the Study

The scope of this study is to explore the sexual and reproductive health education experiences of university students with disabilities in Sri Lanka, focusing on identifying existing socio-cultural barriers and proposing interventions for individual needs. The current discourse on disability in Sri Lanka primarily focuses on the welfare, health, and education of persons with disabilities, with limited attention given to their social conditions and the human dignity and value they deserve (Liyanage, 2022; Emanuel, 2017; Sheren, 2022; Kandasamy et al., 2016, Hettiarchchi et al., 2014; UNFPA, 2017). While the Charter of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities mentions the right to marriage and sexual rights, there is a lack of dialogue on the sexual rights of persons with disabilities for their holistic development (The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, 2006). In Sri Lankan

culture, disability is understood through a charitable lens, characterised by distinct vocabulary delineating between "normal" and "disabled" individuals. Terms like "arbadita" and "arbaditaya" are used to describe disability, while more specific terms like "andha," "golu," and "bihiri" are employed to refer to specific impairments. These linguistic distinctions create a hierarchical divide, with able-bodied individuals considered "normal" and those with disabilities labeled as "abnormal" or "ill-being," often carrying a stigma that leads to discrimination (Liyanage, 2017, p. 251; ICF, 2001).

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring the experiences of students with disabilities at public universities in Sri Lanka. By identifying the existing socio-cultural barriers that hinder their access to sexual and reproductive health education, this study aims to propose interventions that cater to their individual needs. The study also highlights the importance of addressing the social constructs surrounding disability and gender to ensure that all individuals can access this critical aspect of health education. The findings of this study can inform policy and practice to improve the accessibility of sexual and reproductive health education for university students with disabilities in Sri Lanka.

4. Review of the Literature

Sexual and reproductive health is integral to overall health, well-being, and quality of life. It is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being concerning sexuality and not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity (World Health Organization, 2019). Essential steps in this transitional process are several critical life events such as puberty, initiation to

sexuality, marriage, and childbearing. These events' timing, sequence, and context have immediate and long-term repercussions for sexual and reproductive health. Generally, adolescence is associated with rapid physical growth, in which a gradual development of reproductive organs occurs, along with the appearance of gender-specific secondary sex characteristics and menarche in girls (Suranga, 2019).

Disability, when viewed from a charitable perspective, is typically defined as a physical or intellectual impairment, often intertwined with the concept of karma, which justifies inequalities among individuals. This construct profoundly impacts all aspects of the daily lives of people with disabilities. Discrimination against this group often begins within families and is perpetuated by more comprehensive social institutions (Liyanage, 2017). The socio-cultural framing of disability significantly influences the experiences of students with disabilities, forcing them to navigate exclusion from family, community, school, and university settings.

Their lives are based on compassion, not full empowerment of persons with disabilities. According to the study's findings, although there is an opportunity to provide education, individuals with disabilities have no idea how to enter into a married life or lead a social life. As a result, families need to pay more attention to the teachings of body changes required to lead an independent life, and they need to understand the essential skills that can be given to a person to lead an independent life.

Sexual and reproductive health is identified as a target of the Sustainable Development Goals. As per the World Health Organization (WHO), by 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services,

including family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies (WHO, 2022). Although UHC pledges to “leave no one behind,” disability is not a focus of Universal Health Coverage despite being an essential dimension of inclusion for the SDGs (UNFPA & WHO, 2019; World Bank, 2019). The situation of sexual and reproductive health education and awareness, therefore, is complex and requires due attention and a systematically designed approach to reach the target communities.

Studies conducted on the persons with disabilities field in Sri Lanka have primarily focused on education, health, welfare, and issues related to war-related disabilities (Liyanage, 2022; Emanuel, 2017; Sheren, 2022; Kandasamy et al., 2016; Hettiarchchi et al., 2014). In general, students with various forms of disabilities necessarily need to be identified and accommodated in an inclusive education to succeed in higher education and attain social mobility (Addlakha, 2013; Booth, 2000; Liyanage, 2017; Herath, 2014; Herath, 2015). Favorable changes have taken place for disabled university students in public universities through inclusive education policy and a rights-based approach. For example, establishing separate centers and various projects has allowed disabled students to collectively discuss their progressive plans to receive good education and opportunities during their academic tenure (Liyanage, 2022; Oliver, 1996). These included accessibility for disabled people, technical programmes for disabled people, provision of technical equipment, and teaching and learning some social skills. Nonetheless, it was identified that there was no attempt to provide at least primary education on sexual and reproductive health for university students (Annual Report, 2012). Moreover, the consideration of youth with disabilities

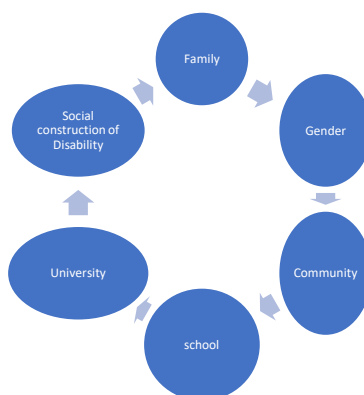
is also essential as they enter the active labour force, as well as holding civic and household responsibilities in the long term (Addlakha, 2013). However, in Sri Lanka, research on SRH issues among university students as the youth of Sri Lanka with disabilities has yet to be addressed. Knowing about sexual and reproductive health issues is very important in the social interaction of students with disabilities. Until now, sexual and reproductive health issues and awareness of students with disabilities have not been paid sufficient attention. Hence, drawing due attention and promoting knowledge is indispensable (UNFPA & WHO, 2019; World Bank, 2023).

5. Results and Findings

5.1 Barriers that Influence SRH Education

An analysis of the overall study findings highlighted that multiple factors influence the sexuality and reproductive health education of university students with disabilities.

Figure 1: Multiple Factors that Influence Sexual and Reproductive Health Education



Based on the literature review, parents in rural areas do not discuss sexual and reproductive health with their children and often assign the responsibility of caring for children. Interest in sexual and reproductive health education in schools was also low, with little emphasis on providing life skills necessary for independence (Suranga, 2019). This same condition affects children with disabilities in a much more comprehensive way. Although sexuality and reproductive health among youth is a covered topic due to the family, gender, community, school, social construction of disability, social, cultural, and legal status in Sri Lanka, non-disabled youth often have access to knowledge. In contrast, the youth with disabilities faces additional challenges due to prevailing socio-cultural constructs making discussions on sexuality and reproductive health more of a taboo within this population.

The study also found that interest in sexual and reproductive health education in school was very low. Although education can be seen as the transmission of values and accumulated knowledge in a society, schools tend not to teach the life skills necessary for a person to be independent. The majority of the students in the study who received inclusive education revealed little interest in providing sexual and reproductive health knowledge for students.

"The teacher assigned for science lessons told us to ask the health teacher when we have questions about sexual and reproductive health" (P3, 24 Female, 24, Fully Visually Impaired).

In Sri Lanka, teaching sexuality and reproductive health education is not exclusively taught by female teachers, which affects the socio-cultural context. Due to the existing socio-cultural teaching methods, teachers do not advance the sex education conversation in an interactional education setting or in a

unique education setting where teachers are shy. Students with disabilities in inclusive education experience a lack of unique skills and competition. Teachers do not advance the sex education conversation, and students in special education have higher knowledge due to NGO programmes. In interactive education, students are exposed to unfavorable conditions in the socio-cultural environment, where sexual and reproductive health is considered taboo.

The study included students from university-accredited groups who received special education and those who entered university through inclusion education. The experience of sexual and reproductive health in those groups was unique. Students with disabilities in particular education backgrounds have more interaction within the disability community compared to those from inclusive education backgrounds. Respondents in the study reported high levels of romantic relationships among students with disabilities, which sometimes resulted in unintended pregnancies due to a lack of knowledge about safe sex and contraception. It further revealed that students with disabilities often come to university with limited sexual and reproductive health education from their families and schools. They mentioned that there is more sleep in the university environment.

"It was unbelievable the spaciousness of the university. After coming to university, I was able to roam with my friends, and that was amazing." (P6, 23, Female, Visually Impaired).

A visually impaired assistant lecturer (Key Informant1, Female, 28) and a visually impaired student representative (Key Informant2, Female, 27) who participated in the study commented that disabled students often form close

relationships, interact frequently, and share personal and academic matters. This increase in intimacy can lead to the development of intimate relationships, leading to unintended pregnancies due to the lack of knowledge about safe sex and contraceptives. They mentioned examples in their university student life in this regard.

“Visually impaired university students gather in the room reserved for students with disabilities during non-lecture hours and nothing beyond that. This is where all relationships are built, and breakups happen. They do not know about sexuality and reproductive health. Girls are more affected (Key Informants2, Female, Partial Visually Impaired).”

“Most of the time, visually impaired students gather in the room reserved for them and make connections between them. However, locomotor-impaired students become self-isolated. They do not participate in the programmes organised by the university (Key Informants1, Female, Fully Visually Impaired).”

The study highlighted the perception that persons with disabilities do not need marriage and sexual relationships, reinforcing the stereotype that persons with disabilities should be under constant supervision and care, leading to a lack of independence.

The female students with disabilities who participated in this study perceived a negative attitude toward love, marriage, and sexuality. It was confirmed through the experiences of locomotor-impaired students.

I have already considered living away from home and somewhere that accommodates people like us. (P8, Female 24. Locomotor impairment)

The study confirmed that sexual curiosity is common to all individuals, including those with disabilities, and they have the right to experience sexuality, have sexual relationships, and access information on the sexual functioning of their bodies in an accessible form, according to Rule 9.2 of the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Persons with Disabilities. Therefore, it is crucial to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education to students with disabilities to ensure their sexual and reproductive rights are protected.

Another factor from this study was the perception of sexuality and reproductive health.

"I have a sister in my family. She is married and has two daughters. She always says, 'I should have sister's two daughters. These two will take care of you when you get old.' They always have the same perception. Marriage and sexuality are not for us." (P4, Female, 24, Fully Visually Impaired)

The fourth participant of the study above explains that marriage is not even necessary for people with disabilities because sexual and reproductive health is more of a concern. The disabled community is constantly under the supervision of others and loses their body language. This interview confirms that their lives are lived under the care of another, protected and isolated and that they are no longer independent. Although they are given opportunities to climb the social ladder through university education, the society in which they are built is not ready to accept them as independent people.

They found that sexual curiosity is common to all individuals, with sexual stimulation occurring throughout the life span, hormone changes, attraction to the opposite sex, etc. Rule 9.2 of the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization

of Persons with Disabilities argues that disabled people have the right to "experience sexuality, have sexual relationships, and access information in accessible form on the sexual functioning of their bodies." (UN, 2006)

The focus on issues related to stigma and gender discrimination elicited the following response:

"Students with disabilities indicated that love, sex, and parenting were a no-go zone, including taboo." (Research Data, 2022)

This was more frequently observed among female students with disabilities. According to their view, Students with disabilities, particularly girls, often lack understanding about safe sex practices due to societal taboos and, therefore, do not use contraceptives like condoms. They resort to natural methods, leading to risky sexual behaviour and severe complications like STDs/HIV, pregnancy, and abortion.

Four locomotor-impaired female students and four fully visually impaired students participated in this study and received inclusive education. The experience of all these people was that they did not receive education about sexual and reproductive health in the schools where they received inclusive education. They stated that the family and the school have been given less importance based on society's sociocultural facts. When the non-disabled students also miss the opportunities for sexual and reproductive health, the students with disabilities have never had the opportunity for it due to the minimal social conditions.

This is a question often asked in research related to students with disabilities. Are you getting inclusive education? We study together at the university, that

is all. We also attend such programmes. Never ask questions on sexual and reproductive issues. Even non-disabled students do not get a fair chance to ask. Male students may get the opportunity to get this kind of education in an informal way through peer groups, mainly in the company of friends in their hostel. We become evil women if we ask these questions, even from an ordinary female student. We constantly question whether we are included in sexual and reproductive health education in inclusive education.

(Informal conversation through a focus group interview)

When studying the impact of gender on access to sexual and reproductive health education, both females and males with disabilities lost opportunities to access education.

The response of one of the male students with disabilities in the study was,

"We do not know what the female body is and what the difference is between the two of us. Can you tell us the difference? We did not even know the difference that everyone knows when we live a social life. It does not come from the family or educational institutions." (P11, Male, 23, Fully Visually Impaired)

Although male students with disabilities are more able to interact with the external society, they also need to acquire more information. Curiosity and enthusiasm were observed during the interviews.

"When it comes to sex topics, I open my mouth and listen to them. I have so much curiosity about sexuality." (P12, Male, 23, Visually Impaired)

According to the perception of male students with disabilities, sexual harassment faced by female students with disabilities is more than sexual violence faced by male students with disabilities due to insecurity in society.

I am a third-year Sociology student, aged **23**, enrolled in a special intake at a Sri Lankan university. I grew up with my grandparents since childhood, as my parents could not care for me and my disabled younger sister. While my grandmother educated me about menstruation, she avoided discussing topics like rape, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. One day, I asked my grandfather about rape, but my grandmother immediately intervened, insisting that such subjects would not be discussed with me. As a member of the disabled community, I believe that sexual education should be provided to all individuals, regardless of their abilities. Unfortunately, such education is currently unavailable to us, which limits our knowledge about critical health and safety topics.

(P1, Female, 23, Visually Impaired).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the lives of university students, particularly in terms of their leisure time and social activities. The study revealed that most students had limited opportunities for activities such as reading books, watching movies, and socializing with friends due to pandemic restrictions and spent most of their free time attending online lectures. This has affected how students acquire social knowledge, with many feeling that their options for learning in a university setting have been greatly diminished. However, the socially constructed ideologies, myths, and negative attitudes towards people with disabilities continue to be reflected in university education systems. The Orientation programme at universities was found to

be a brief awareness about sexuality and reproductive health and not enough to improve safe and protective practices of sexual and reproductive health.

As one respondent noted,

"Their attitude was that we do not need love, marriage, and sexuality, and parenting skills. Sometimes we do not even know the skills required for sex"
(P1, Female, 24, Visually Impaired)

This highlights the importance of sexual and reproductive health education, particularly in university settings where romantic relationships are common. It is important to note that sexual desire is a subjective feeling triggered by a range of internal and external factors and may or may not result in overt sexual behaviour.

5.2. Nature of Programmes Organised by Universities

The research revealed that while the university organised various programmes on sexual and reproductive health along with collaborative associations for university students, they were mainly targeted at the entire student body.

“A session on sexual and reproductive health is conducted for all students during student orientation in the first year of university. We participated in it. In addition, there is a course on sexual and reproductive health by the community science department of the Faculty of Arts. During COVID-19, students were informed about sexual and reproductive health by the Faculty of Arts and the Sociology Alumni Association of the University of Colombo. However, in no place did they pay much attention to students with disabilities. Even if we have questions, we do not hesitate to ask. The teaching methods

they use are not suitable for students with disabilities” (Informal conversation through a focus group interview).

The liberal atmosphere of the university has failed to provide sexual and reproductive education to the students in general. A one-hour discussion on sexual and reproductive health for higher education students is sufficient to promote sexual and reproductive health knowledge (P4, male, 23, Visually Impaired).

This approach made addressing sensitive issues in large lecture halls with broad audiences challenging. The study found that even "all" students faced sexual and reproductive health issues, but many programmes only addressed macro-level issues. Therefore, small group discussions and simulations were identified as crucial to address the diverse needs of different target groups. The study recommends that universities prioritise and differentiate between macro- and micro-level themes, guide resource pool selection, and ensure audiences' clarity before conducting any awareness programme.

5.3. Recommendations for Policy Implications

The perceptions of female students with disabilities who participated in the study were that there are still misconceptions about the inability to have sex and body ugliness. Sexual and reproductive health literacy is neglected in family, school, and university settings. Students with disabilities feel they have limited opportunities to receive sexual and reproductive education, and the epidemic has made that even more complicated. Orientation programmes conducted at university entry were not sufficient to improve their safe and secure practices of sexual and reproductive health in the educational setting.

Students with disabilities do not get to raise their voices during orientation, and programmes should be conducted targeting them.

The study recommends valuing people with disabilities with dignity and worth and providing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education for students with disabilities. The study underscored the need for carefully planned projects to educate students with disabilities about sexuality and reproductive health, as respondents had limited knowledge and understanding of these issues. The study recommends programmes targeting students with disabilities to allow them to open up their stories in a healthy environment.

The study also pointed to a lack of sexual and reproductive health education for students with disabilities, who are more likely to face negative attitudes toward love, marriage, and sexuality. The study highlighted the importance of removing these negative attitudes and empowering the disabled community.

Education on sexual and reproductive health is also essential to reduce sexual harassment faced by girls with disabilities living alone. Knowing about sexual and reproductive health issues is also very important to know about the changes in girls' bodies and reproductive problems that occur with age.

In addition, sexual and reproductive health education is essential as they prepare for marriage and parenthood in the future. Counseling and soft skills awareness programmes are recommended to fill the knowledge gap related to sexual and reproductive health for students with disabilities. In addition, independent life should be organised at the individual and group levels within the university system.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study highlights the urgent need to provide inclusive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education to female university students with disabilities in Sri Lanka. It sheds light on the significant barriers these students face in accessing SRH education, stemming from societal constructs related to disability and gender. To ensure equitable and inclusive education, it is imperative to address these challenges and promote comprehensive SRH education for all individuals, transcending age, gender, or ability.

This exploratory study highlights the critical need to address the perceptions and barriers surrounding sexual and reproductive health education among female university students with disabilities in Sri Lanka. The study highlights the existing socio-cultural constructs that contribute to the marginalization of this group, emphasizing the importance of tailored interventions and policy changes to ensure equitable access to sexual and reproductive health education. With sexual and reproductive health being a crucial aspect of overall well-being and sustainable development, this research underscores the imperative to leave no one behind, especially those with disabilities, in achieving universal access to comprehensive healthcare services.

The study reveals multiple factors significantly impact the sexual and reproductive health education of university students with disabilities in Sri Lanka. These factors include societal taboos surrounding sexuality, lack of comprehensive school education, and the misconception that individuals with disabilities do not require or should not engage in romantic relationships and sexual activities. To uphold the sexual and reproductive rights of these individuals, it is imperative to provide inclusive and accessible sexual

education that empowers them with knowledge and choices regarding their bodies and relationships.

This study underscores the critical need for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education for individuals with disabilities, particularly in university settings. The findings reveal that societal taboos and misconceptions persist, preventing students with disabilities from accessing essential knowledge and resources. Despite limited attempts at awareness programmes, the existing approach falls short of meeting the diverse needs of this group. Universities must prioritise inclusive and tailored sexual and reproductive health education to empower all students, regardless of their abilities, and bridge the existing knowledge gap.

7. Acknowledgments

We want to acknowledge the motivational groups of students with disabilities at the University of Colombo (2020-2022) for their invaluable contribution of rich data to this research.

8. References

- Addlakha, R., Price, J., & Heidari, S. (2017). Disability and sexuality: claiming sexual and reproductive rights. *Reproductive Health Matters*, 25(50), 4-9.
- Addlakha, R. (2013). Disability studies in India: *Global discourses, local realities*. London: Routledge.
- Annual Handbook. (2012). University Grants Commission, New Delhi.
- Booth, T., Ainscow, M., Black-Hawkins, K., Vaughan, M., & Shaw, L. (2000). Index for inclusion: developing learning and participation in schools (Bristol, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education). *Ainscow et al. Inclusion and the Standards Agenda*, 27. Compulsory Education Ordinance of Sri Lanka No. 1003/5 of 1997. (1997). Parliament of Sri Lanka.

- United Nations. (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>
- Emmanuel, S., & Saroor, S. (2022). Experiences of Gendered Norms and Mobilizing for Rights of Women Living With Disabilities in the Post-war Context in Sri Lanka. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 7, 715240.
- Hettiarachchi, S., & Das, A. (2014). Perceptions of 'inclusion' and perceived preparedness among school teachers in Sri Lanka. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 43, 143-153.
- Herath, S. (2015). The politics of aesthetics in negotiating identity among university students with disabilities in Sri Lanka. *Teorija in Praksa*, 52(4), 777-791.
- Herath, S. (2014). Negotiation of self-identity and the contingency of self-actualization among the students with disabilities striving for higher education in Sri Lanka. 53(3-5), 217.
- International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF). (2001). [https://www.physio-pedia.com/International_Classification_of_Functioning_Disability_and_Health_\(ICF\)](https://www.physio-pedia.com/International_Classification_of_Functioning_Disability_and_Health_(ICF))
- International School Psychological Association. (2022). <https://ispaweb.org/resources/learning-learning-disabilities-inclusion>.
- Kandasamy, N., Soldatic, K., & Samararatne, D. (2017). Peace, justice and disabled women's advocacy: Tamil women with disabilities in rural post-conflict Sri Lanka. *Medicine, conflict and Survival*, 33(1), 41-59.
- Liyanage, C. (2022). Inclusivity of children with disabilities and downsides of welfare-oriented service delivery system in Sri Lanka with special reference to rural areas in Galle district. *University of Colombo Review*, 3(1).
- Liyanage, C. (2017). Sociocultural Construction of Disability in Sri Lanka: Charity to Rights-based Approach.
- Oliver, M. (1996). Understanding disability: from theory to practice. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan.

- UNFPA, (2017). *Population Matters*.
https://srilanka.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pubpdf/NEW%20CRHE%20Policy%20Brief%20%283%29_0.pdf
- Suranga, S. (2019). *Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Research in Sri Lanka; Current Status, Challenges and Future Directions*.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337945339_Youth_Sexual_and_Reproductive_Health_Research_in_Sri_Lanka_Current_Status_Challenges_and_Future_Directions
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2006).
https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convention_accessible_pdf.pdf
- World Health Organization, (2019). *Sexual and Reproductive Health Definitions*.
<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Life-stages/sexual-and-reproductive-health/news/news/2011/06/sexual-health-throughout-life/definition>
- Vincent, R., & Krishnakumar, K. (2022). School-based interventions for promoting sexual and reproductive health of adolescents in India: a review. *Journal of Psychosexual Health*, 4(2), 102–110.

Breaking Down Barriers: Exploring the Mechanisms for Social Inclusion Within the University of Peradeniya

H.D.P Premarathne *, I. U. Gunarathna, W.M.S.M.K Thoradeniya

Department of Sociology, University of Peradeniya

pri.hapuarachchi@arts.pdn.ac.lk*

Abstract

Promoting social inclusion within higher education settings is crucial. However, despite the growing concern about social inclusion, there are barriers that prevent students, including those with disabilities (SWDs), from fully participating in university life. This study aims to explore the obstacles to inclusive environments in higher education settings and the mechanisms for social inclusion, using the University of Peradeniya as a case study. This qualitative study postulates three research questions: What are the barriers to social inclusion for students, including SWDs, in the University? What mechanisms promote social inclusion in this environment, and how can the University improve its efforts to promote social inclusiveness? Five in-depth interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data, aiming to understand how different stakeholders in the University experience social inclusion, their perceptions of the University's efforts to promote it, and their suggestions for improvements. The respondents were selected using convenience sampling with their voluntary participation. Research ethics were maintained, and the data were analysed thematically. The study found that limited access to resources and opportunities, social isolation, financial difficulties, lack of awareness, and social stigma as common barriers to social inclusion. While addressing the above-mentioned common barriers, the study recommends providing resources, creating a welcoming and inclusive university culture, and promoting social inclusion through awareness and existing adaptive mechanisms. Multidisciplinary teamwork including research and interventions can further enhance the creation of an inclusive university culture.

Keywords: *Disability, Empowerment, Higher Education, Social Inclusion, Students With Disabilities*

1. Introduction and Research Problem

Promoting social inclusion within higher education settings is crucial. True social inclusion means tackling the root causes of social exclusion and promoting equity and fairness for all community members. Moreover, social exclusion refers to insufficient social involvement, absence of social integration, and lack of power, which have a negative impact on both individuals' quality of life and the equity and cohesion of society in general (Room, 1999; Kronborg Bak, 2018). Conversely, social inclusion entails enhancing individuals' abilities and opportunities to participate completely in society, encompassing economic, social, psychological, and political aspects (The World Bank, 2013). Overall, social inclusion ensures greater participation in decision-making processes that affect the overall quality of life and promotes fundamental rights.

According to the context of this research, social inclusion is a multi-dimensional process that ensures equitable access to essential resources and support for all students, irrespective of their backgrounds or circumstances, to succeed and fully participate in university life. This process creates an inclusive environment that enables students to thrive and excel in higher education, research, and scholarly activities across different disciplines. In line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 2006, we define students with disabilities (SWDs) as individuals with chronic or acute impairments that restrict their full participation in learning and other life activities (United Nations, 2006). In this study, social inclusion for SWDs entails valuing their diversity and empowering them to lead independent lives in all aspects of university life, including education and social activities,

without encountering any barriers or discrimination. This definition is crucial because social inclusion has a positive impact on academic achievements, learning experiences, student satisfaction, and overall well-being (Gidley et al, 2010). Therefore, promoting social inclusion in higher education is a necessary step towards achieving a more equitable and just society that values diversity and respects the rights of all individuals.

Despite the growing recognition of the significance of social inclusion, various barriers still impede the complete participation of students in university life, including those with disabilities. As a result, higher education institutions bear a heightened responsibility to foster social inclusion and overcome these hindrances to guarantee that all students possess equal prospects for success and full engagement (Barnett, 2016). In Sri Lanka, the higher education system has faced criticisms for being inaccessible to specific social groups including those experienced by SWDs, due to factors such as language barriers, remote geographical locations, and financial constraints (INCEDU Need Assessment Survey Report, 2021; Abayasekara, 2018). Thus, higher education institutions hold a greater obligation to promote social inclusion and address these barriers to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, have equal opportunities for success and full participation.

To address this complexity and void, this paper examines the obstacles to inclusive environments in higher education settings and the mechanisms for social inclusion, using the University of Peradeniya as a case study. Hence, this study aims to identify barriers and explore existing mechanisms adopted by the University. By understanding these mechanisms, this study aims to provide insights into how institutions of higher education can promote social

inclusion and address barriers to inclusion more broadly, particularly in similar settings where the need for social inclusion is particularly acute.

2. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the barriers to social inclusion within the University of Peradeniya and explore the existing mechanisms to address barriers and create effective strategies for promoting social inclusion. The University of Peradeniya, the largest and oldest university in Sri Lanka, was selected as a case study due to its efforts to accommodate the highest number of SWDs and create an inclusive academic environment.

To identify stakeholders for the semi-structured interviews, the purposive sampling technique was employed, and five stakeholders who were familiar with the University's efforts to promote social inclusion were invited to participate voluntarily. The study participants included an academic, an administrator, two students, and a psycho-social worker in the University setting. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected purposive sample using an interview guide, and research ethics were maintained in all phases of the research. Confidentiality and anonymity of the information were ensured, and verbal consent was obtained before data collection.

The data were analysed using a thematic analysis approach to identify common themes, which provided a deeper understanding of the examined topic.

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the mechanisms that foster social inclusion within the University of Peradeniya. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Identify existing mechanisms employed by the University to promote social inclusion
- Identify the barriers to social inclusion at the University of Peradeniya
- Propose strategies for enhancing the University's efforts to promote social inclusion

4. Scope and Significance of the Study

From a sociological and social work perspective, this study holds great significance. Firstly, it will make a valuable contribution to the existing literature on social inclusion in higher education; and secondly, it will investigate the experiences of students in general, particularly those who are marginalised at the University of Peradeniya. Thirdly, the study will offer recommendations for enhancing the University's social inclusion efforts, which could be utilised by other universities in Sri Lanka and beyond. Lastly, this study will shed light on future research possibilities regarding social inclusion in higher education in Sri Lanka.

5. Review of the Relevant Literature

'Social Inclusion' is defined as an attempt to break down barriers that prevent full participation (Caidi and Allard, 2005). According to Gidley et al. (2010),

social inclusion can be understood through three dimensions: access, participation, and empowerment. Sri Lanka has implemented policies to ensure equal educational opportunities for all children, regardless of their background. However, children with disabilities still face various barriers to accessing and achieving education, such as inadequate inclusive teaching skills of teachers, inaccessible school infrastructure, and limited curriculum scope. These issues persist in higher education as well.

Social inclusion is crucial for equitable growth and development in any society. Sri Lanka has made progress in providing access to education, including higher education, but significant disparities still exist among various population groups, leading to social exclusion. Language barriers, geographic locations, and financial constraints, including those faced by students with disabilities, are some of the factors that make the higher education system inaccessible to marginalised groups. INCEDU Need Assessment Survey Report (2021) noted that the lack of diversity in the higher education system perpetuates a culture of exclusion, making it challenging for students from different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds to find a sense of belonging. Moreover, Liyanage (2017) critiques the charity-based perspective on disability in Sri Lanka, which uses the ideology of *karma* to justify inequality. Despite the National Policy on Disability, enforcement gaps exist, and a shift to a rights-based approach, which requires an integrated approach, and the involvement of the government and civil society organisations is needed.

Moreover, some studies have shown that social inclusion in higher education positively impacts student outcomes, academic achievements, and overall

well-being (INCEDU, 2021; Shukran & Alwi, 2018). However, effective mechanisms for breaking down barriers to social inclusion in universities remain unclear. INCEDU's 2021 report reveals that students with disabilities (SWDs) are predominantly from the Humanities and Social Sciences fields. Surprisingly, 74% of academics do not use special teaching methods for SWDs, hindering their full participation. Moreover, most university peers are unaware of SWDs in their classes, leading to a lack of support and understanding. Universities must prioritise the inclusion of SWDs, implement accommodations, and ensure equal access to education for a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. Thus, this study seeks to identify the mechanisms that promote social inclusion in the higher education system in Sri Lanka and explore the mechanisms to address the barriers to social inclusion.

6. Results and Findings

This section presents the study's findings based on its sub-objectives, which are to discuss the existing mechanisms employed by the University to promote social inclusion, evaluate the effectiveness of social inclusion initiatives, identify barriers to social inclusion, and suggest strategies for enhancing social inclusion efforts. The findings are presented thematically to facilitate the discussion.

6.1. Existing Mechanisms for Promoting Social Inclusion

The University of Peradeniya has implemented several initiatives that promote social inclusion and respect the diversity of its students. One notable initiative

is the approval of a policy on Students with Disabilities (SWDs) in 2021. While most SWDs are enrolled under the 'special provisions' category, mainly in the Humanities and Social Sciences disciplines, the University remains committed to providing an inclusive learning environment that offers opportunities and facilities necessary for SWDs to protect their rights, participate fully in university life, and be free from discrimination. The University has also made reasonable adjustments, such as the installation of access ramps and elevators in old buildings, to provide accessibility for resources and places.

To ensure that students with disabilities are provided with equitable opportunities during their exams, the University of Peradeniya recommends alternate arrangements based on standard practices that consider the impact of their disability on their academic performance. These adjustments may include options such as submitting assignments and assessments in braille code, time extensions, the use of assistive technology, a separate exam room, the assistance of a reader or a computer, an ergonomic chair, alternative formatting of exam papers, negotiation of an alternative assessment, or any other reasonable adjustments that may be necessary.

Furthermore, the University has designated rooms for students with disabilities during exams and provides specialised medical care for those in need at any time. The Special Needs Resource Center (SNRC) offers a wide range of facilities and services to students with disabilities, including exam preparation training, mediating with the University staff to resolve student issues, providing support and guidance to complete academic and important

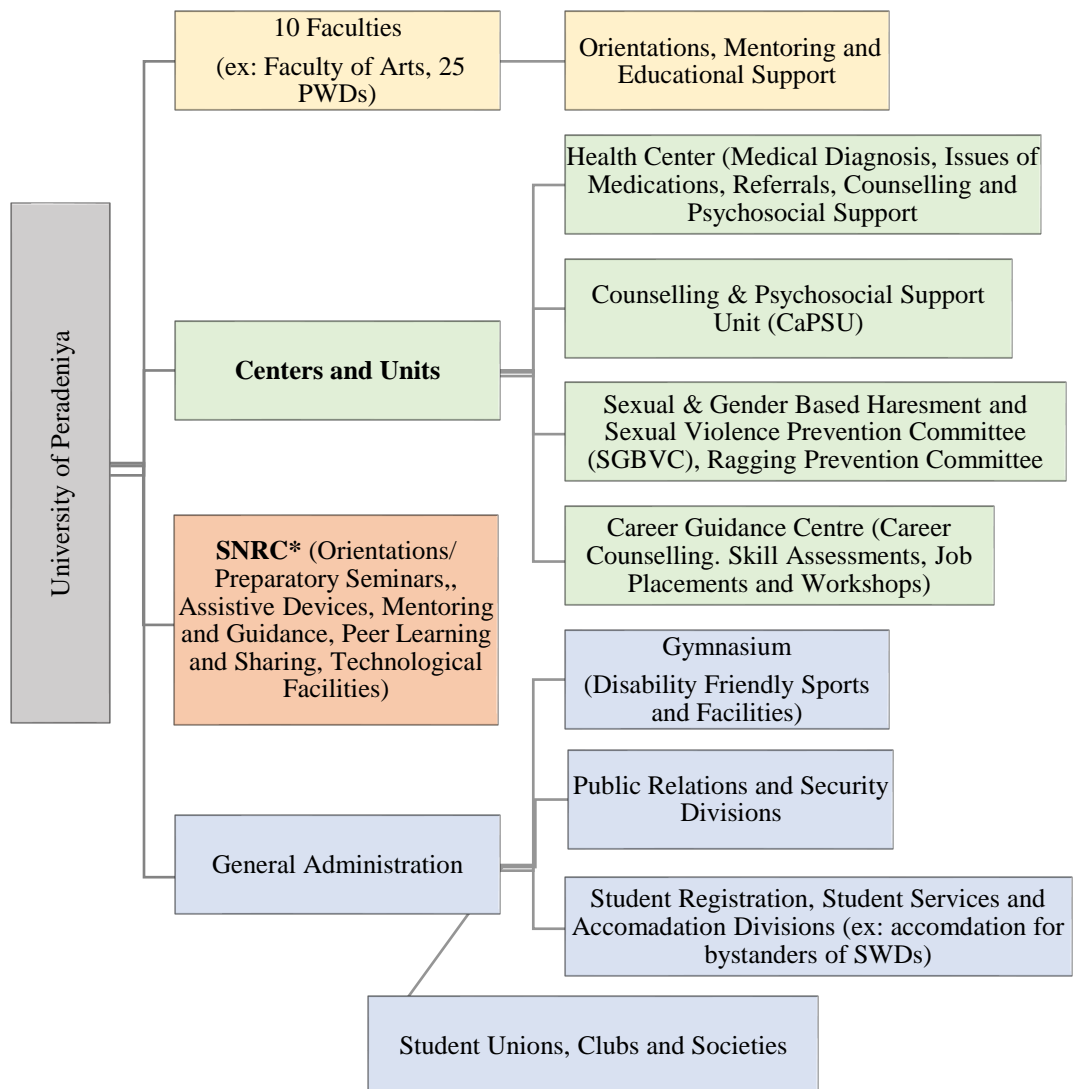
documents, assigning a buddy for lecture halls and examination centers, and offering recreational facilities within the center for students with disabilities.

The University of Peradeniya has taken several steps to create an inclusive environment for all students irrespective of their diverse backgrounds. During the Faculty orientation for new entrants, the University provides information on student services and welfare facilities. Additionally, the University introduces them to student unions and recognised student associations to help them become familiar with the University culture and make use of the available resources. Student unions and other societies extend their hands to newcomers and engage them in their activities. For instance, Pera Wings Club, Roberosia Club, Rotaract Club, etc., provide all students, including SWDs, with the opportunity to develop their personalities and social capital and represent them in the larger student body. The Health Center provides medical and psychosocial support to students, and the Career Guidance Unit provides facilities for students to develop their skills and abilities to compete in the job market in Sri Lanka and overseas. Gymnasium facilities are provided to all the students, including those with disabilities, to promote extracurricular activities including sports, and create opportunities for them to participate in inter-university games and Mini Olympics. In addition, Faculty members are well-informed about the needs of students with disabilities and strive to create inclusive classrooms by pairing them with non-disabled students.

Moreover, the University offers staff development programmes (ex: CTHE) to promote inclusive teaching practices. The aim is to encourage the Faculty to create an inclusive classroom environment that pairs SWDs with non-disabled students (buddy system). Furthermore, the general administration of

the University of Peradeniya provides some special provisions for SWDs. For example, sometimes, bystanders of students with severe physical impairments who need one-to-one support are also allowed to stay with the students within the University residence halls. The following figure illustrates some of these mechanisms and initiatives.

Figure 1



*SNRC= Special Needs Resource Center, Faculty of Arts.

Note: Developed by the authors (2023)

There is a mix of positive and negative feedback from students when evaluating the effectiveness of current social inclusion initiatives at the University. While students are exposed to various opportunities to enhance their university experience, there are still areas where the University and Faculty administration can improve support systems for all students. Students and staff positively evaluate the provision of scholarships and financial aid, the creation of support groups and networks, and the promotion of cultural diversity and awareness. Additionally, the study found that several individuals and groups within the University actively work towards promoting social inclusion.

6.2. Barriers to Social Inclusion

The study findings have shown that, despite successful mechanisms in place, there are several barriers to social inclusion within the University of Peradeniya. It is concerning to note that students belonging to marginalised groups such as low-income backgrounds, women, and students from ethnic and religious minorities face additional challenges in achieving social inclusion. Moreover, the study has revealed that students with disabilities (SWDs) are experiencing discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes.

“I had to reconsider my application for my specialised degree because it wasn't always my passion and frequently depended

on the department's ability to instruct individuals like me”
(Female SWD, 2nd Year)

“Due to the higher workload and a large number of students,
sometimes we are unable to provide specific attention to
SWDs. As a result, they might feel left behind” (Lecturer, FoA)

They also lack access to resources and support, making it difficult for them to fully participate in academic programmes. For instance, some academic programmes are not accessible due to their technicalities, and SWDs do not have access to the most pertinent information in suitable formats, such as Braille assignments and feedback for students with visual impairments. The study has also revealed that SWDs have limited participation in co-curricular activities, and the COVID-19 pandemic and online education transformation have led to segregation and isolation. In addition, the social support system that students once relied on has become weaker due to the economic crisis.

Unfortunately, the University's policies and procedures are not always effective in addressing these barriers and promoting social inclusion. The scarcity of resources, sustainability of the existing mechanisms, a lack of trained human resources, inadequate policy for addressing all the barriers mentioned above, and addressing social stigma, prejudices, and discrimination are among the issues that need to be tackled.

6.3. Strategies for Enhancing Social Inclusion Efforts

The results of this study highlight the importance of promoting social inclusion within the University of Peradeniya. The mechanisms identified in

the study, such as scholarships, support groups, and awareness programmes, can be further strengthened and expanded to provide greater support to students. Additionally, the University should continue to address discrimination and prejudice through the implementation of effective policies and procedures.

This study emphasises the importance of addressing barriers to social inclusion for marginalised students. The university must foster an inclusive environment with equal access to resources and support for all students.

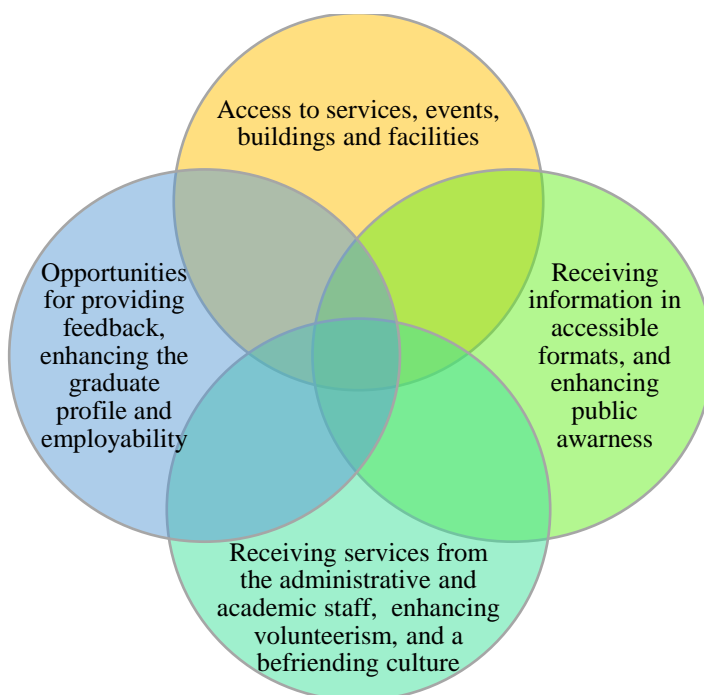
The findings of this study align with previous research on social inclusion in higher education. A study by Nunan, George, & McCausland (2000) also found that students who feel socially connected to their peers and faculty have higher levels of academic achievement and satisfaction. Similarly, according to INCEDU's study conducted in 2021, support networks and mentorship programmes have been found to be effective in promoting social integration and improving student retention in higher education. Furthermore, the study's findings align with Hofstede's (2001) concept of a significant power distance in the Sri Lankan education system, which highlights the hierarchical relationship between teachers and students (INCEDU, 2021; Hofstede, 2001).

Creating an inclusive classroom environment that fosters equal opportunities for all students to engage in discussions, ask questions, and seek clarification can significantly enhance the learning experience. Furthermore, providing short-term training for staff on disability and teaching SWDs, technical facilities, and identifying and developing strengths and competencies of SWDs can enhance their career counseling services, including job placements,

personality and skill assessments, and intervention for personality development. Workshops on personality development can also be organised to promote self-advocacy and independent living. Moreover, increasing the capacity of the SNRC and connecting it with other available services, can further enhance their support.

Lastly, promoting a befriending, volunteering, and an inclusive university culture creates a more inclusive environment. To promote social inclusion and respect for diversity, several actions can be taken within the university system. Involving students and student unions during the faculty orientation, developing the faculty for inclusive teaching, and offering technical support for formative assessments, enhance support for all students. Providing technical support for formative assessments enhances learning. Increased SWD participation in co-curricular activities fosters inclusivity. Updated laws, policies, and awareness campaigns change negative attitudes toward marginalised groups. A monitoring mechanism suitable for the entire higher education system in Sri Lanka can be developed to ensure continued progress. Furthermore, engaging SWDs in mainstream activities, including decision-making processes, such as student welfare society meetings and hall meetings, can be implemented using a bottom-up approach. Finally, enhancing the graduate employability and profile of SWDs can benefit the individual and the overall university community.

Figure 2: The overall strategies to enhance social inclusion



7. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study emphasises the importance of promoting social inclusion within the University of Peradeniya by identifying the barriers and mechanisms to social inclusion. By addressing these issues and creating an inclusive environment, marginalised groups, including SWDs, can feel valued and included. It is crucial to create policies that prioritise and promote social inclusion to ensure equal opportunities and access to education and resources, leading to a more diverse and inclusive university community. Moreover, We emphasise the need to utilise available data to advocate for the prioritisation and effective implementation of identified policy measures, aligning them

with the existing legal framework. This step is crucial for making progress toward bridging the gap between policy intentions and on-the-ground practices in disability-inclusive education in Sri Lanka.

8. References

- Abayasekara, A. (2018). How Disability-Inclusive is Education in Sri Lanka? A Preliminary Look. *Talking Economics*. Retrieved from <https://www.ips.lk/talkingeconomics/2018/12/05/how-disability-inclusive-is-education-in-sri-lanka-a-preliminary-look/>
- Barnett, R. (2016). Understanding higher education: International perspectives on theory, policy, and practice. *Routledge*.
- Caidi, N., & Allard, D. (2005). Social inclusion of newcomers to Canada: An information problem? *Library & Information Science Research*, 27(3), 302–324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2005.04.003>
- Gidley, J. M., Hampson, G. J., Wheeler, L., & Bereded-Samuel, E. (2010). From Access to Success: An Integrated Approach to Quality Higher Education Informed by Social Inclusion Theory and Practice. *Higher Education Policy*, 23(1), 123–147. <https://doi.org/10.1057/hep.2009.24>
- Hofstede, G. (2002). Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations across Nations. *Academy of Management Review*, 27(3), 460. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4134391>
- Kronborg Bak, C. (2018). Definitions and Measurement of Social Exclusion- A Conceptual and Methodological Review. *Advances in Applied Sociology*, 8, 422-443. <https://doi.org/10.4236/aasoci.2018.85025>
- Liyanage, C. (2017). Sociocultural Construction of Disability in Sri Lanka: Charity to Rights-based Approach. In *Disability in the Global South* (pp. 267-281). *Springer*. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-55224-8_16
- Nunan, Ted & George, Rigmor & McCausland, Holly. (2000). Inclusive Education in Universities: Why it is important and how it might be achieved. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. 4. 63-88. 10.1080/136031100284920.

- Room, G. J. (1999). Social exclusion, solidarity and the challenge of globalization. *International Journal of Social Welfare*, 8(3), 166-174. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2397.00080>
- Shukran, A., & Alwi, A. (2018). The Inclusion of Cultural Diversity in Higher Education Curriculum Design. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 5, 87-94. <https://doi.org/10.33200/ijcer.479054>
- The Millennium Development Goals Report 2014. (2014). *United Nations*, Sri Lanka, 2015, <http://lk.one.un.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/05/Millennium-Development-Goals-Country-Report-2014.pdf>.
- The World Bank. 2013. Inclusion Matters: The Foundation for Shared Prosperity. *New Frontiers of Social Policy*, Washington, DC. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-0010-8_ch1
- United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.
- Yatigammana, S.E, Dorabawila S, & Abhayaratne, A., (2021). Developing Inclusive Education for Students with Disabilities in Sri Lankan Universities – *INCEDU Need Assessment Survey Report*. University of Peradeniya.

Learning Loss due to School Closure: A Systematic Review

V. Agalya*, B.P.G.S. Gunarathne
National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka
agalyavino29@gmail.com*

Abstract

In Sri Lanka, students have faced multiple instances of school closures, stemming from various factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Easter attacks, teachers' strikes, and the economic crisis. Existing research has consistently indicated that even planned school holidays can lead to significant learning loss among students. This study aims to provide a review of the literature on learning loss resulting from school closures in diverse contexts, with a focus on understanding the potential impacts on education. The study employs a qualitative methodology, conducting a systematic literature review. Articles published in English between January 1, 2022, and August 31, 2022, were included in the initial search, with a specific focus on primary and secondary education while excluding tertiary education. Key electronic databases such as Google Scholar, the Education Resources Information Center, and the Cochrane Library served as the primary sources of reference. The search incorporated keywords such as "school closure," "learning loss," and "education gap." Inclusion criteria involved studies that conducted student analyses and reported on the effects of school closure on learning progress, whether positive, negative, or negligible. After applying these criteria, six articles were selected for analysis. These articles were coded based on various parameters, including the nation of study, the duration of school closures, the educational level, the subject, observed effects of learning loss, impacts of equality, and the sample size. Of the six studies analysed, five highlighted learning loss in subjects such as Mathematics and Languages, while one study found no significant overall learning loss due to school closure. Two articles underscored the substantial influence of economic status on learning loss, while three indicated that students from lower economic backgrounds did not experience distinct learning setbacks. The study identifies several contributing factors to learning loss, encompassing parental qualifications, student grade level, subject matter, the duration of school closures, and the economic status of the country. It is recommended that future research delve deeper into the nuances of learning loss, explore regional disparities, and investigate the multifaceted factors influencing this phenomenon.

Keywords: *Education Gap, Learning Loss, School Closure*

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed society, exacerbating economic and social inequality. The COVID-19 pandemic was not only a health crisis, but also an educational crisis, as 1.5 billion children did not have access to proper common schooling (The World Bank, 2020). Attempting to stop its spread, governments worldwide suspended face-to-face teaching in schools; it affected around 95% of the world's student population and caused the biggest disruption to education in history (United Nations, 2020).

The students in Sri Lanka experienced school closure not only due to COVID-19, but also due to the Easter attacks, teachers' strikes, and the economic crisis. According to survey results, children had spent much less time studying during the lockdown (Andrew et al., 2020; Bansak & Starr, 2021).

The World Bank Report (2022) emphasises that without immediate intervention, a Grade Three student who has missed one year of school due to the pandemic might eventually lose up to three years' worth of knowledge. It also states that the learning volume lost due to the crisis will have a high economic cost. According to a recent estimate, today's pupils would lose \$17 trillion of lifetime earnings, if immediate corrective actions are not taken (UNESCO, 2021). Engzell et al. (2021) state that the most common causes of learning loss are lengthy gaps or discontinuities in a student's education.

The Effects of Past School Closure on Education

The Education Endowment Foundation (2020) indicates that any gap in schooling, even routinely scheduled holidays, can cause a significant learning loss. Slade et al. (2017) state that in Malawi, transitional breaks from Grade

One to Two, and Grade Two to Three lead to an average reduction of 0.4 standard deviations on four different measures of reading skills.

According to Baker (2011), during a 20-day school closure due to teachers' strikes in Ontario, Canada, a learning loss occurred in the Mathematics test scores, equal to half (0.5) of a standard deviation. Wills (2019) discovered that, in South Africa, students' performance in subjects taught by a teacher who did not engage in strikes was approximately 0.1 standard deviations higher than the subjects taught by a teacher who struck. According to studies examining the effects of closing schools due to severe weather and natural catastrophes, there are significant negative effects on learning due to school closure.

In the United States, Marcotte and Hemelt (2008) discovered that for each day schools were closed due to snow, the performance of students in Reading and Mathematics decreased by 0.5%; in a year with five consecutive days of snowfall, it lessened by approximately 3%. Similarly, Andrabi et al. (2020) state that the school closure of nearly 3.5 months in Pakistan after an earthquake caused a learning loss that is equivalent to 1.5 school grades.

There were prolonged school closures during 2013–2014 due to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa which caused a severe effect on education. This learning loss is associated with poor school attendance, a higher dropout rate, and increased social violence such as child abuse, early pregnancy, child labour, and nutritional deficiencies (Bakrania et al., 2020).

2. Methodology

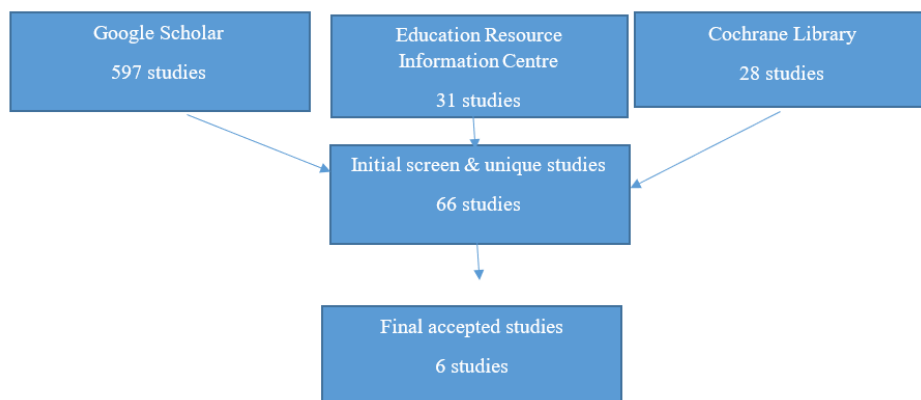
Search and Review Strategy

The preliminary study was conducted using articles that were written in English and published between January 1, 2022, and August 31, 2022. General education, i.e. primary and secondary education were considered, and university education was ignored. For the purpose of facilitating a comprehensive and interdisciplinary search, the following electronic databases were accessed: Google Scholar, the Education Resources Information Center, and the Cochrane Library.

The search was conducted using the keywords: “School Closure”, “Learning Loss”, and “Education Gap”. During the search analysis, a substantial volume of publications were retrieved; nevertheless, the majority of these pertained to anticipated or projected learning loss. Thereafter, article abstracts were screened to narrow down the studies.

Studies that analysed student performance and reported the effect on learning (either positive, negative, or insignificant) due to school closure were included. After the vigorous inclusion and exclusion process, six articles were selected (Table 1). The articles that did not have proper analyses or recorded impacts, that only focused on remedial actions and hypothesised results were eliminated.

Figure 1



Definitions

Huong et al. define the term ‘Learning Loss’ as “any specific or general loss of knowledge and skills or reversals in academic progress, most commonly due to extended gaps or discontinuities in a student’s education” (2020, 79). Another popular definition of Learning Loss by Ari (2005) is the “inability to retrieve acquired information from memory”. Slade et al. (2017) define Learning Loss as “going beyond the determined planning, not gaining or missing the desired competencies, and naturally experiencing problems in reaching educational goals”.

Characteristics of the Sample

Among the six studies examined, five reported that their sample consisted of students. Specifically, one study focused solely on primary students, two studies encompassed secondary students, while the remaining two encompassed both primary and secondary educational levels. In one instance, the sample was drawn from the teacher cohort. Regarding the subjects of the

analyses, four of the six studies conducted assessments of learning loss in both Mathematics and Languages, while one study exclusively examined Mathematics and another exclusively evaluated language proficiency. In terms of geographical distribution, five out of the six studies were conducted in European nations, while the remaining study originated from North America.

Analytical Study

Following a rigorous selection procedure, a total of six articles were subjected to coding procedures, employing a standardised framework that encompassed key parameters. These parameters included the geographical location (nation), the temporal duration of school closures, the educational level, the observed effects of learning loss, the resultant impact on equality, and the size of the sample. This systematic approach was integral to ensuring a comprehensive and structured analysis of the selected articles within the research study.

The comprehensive examination process yielded notable findings, with five out of the six studies reporting substantial learning losses in specific subject areas. To elucidate, Felipe et al. (2022) observed a significant learning loss across all grade levels in Reading. Çigdem et al. (2022) identified various factors contributing to learning loss among middle school students in Turkey. Nicola (2022) discovered a pronounced learning loss in both Reading and Mathematics, with the most pronounced effects observed in students in Grades Eight and 13. Furthermore, it was revealed that even though Grade Five students exhibited learning loss, it was comparatively less severe than that was observed in Grade Eight and Grade 13 students.

Andreu's study (2022) delved into the examination of learning loss in Mathematics, the Basque language, and the Spanish language. The results indicated that Mathematics exhibited a higher degree of learning loss compared to the two language subjects. Notably, since the Basque language served as the second language for students, experienced a greater extent of a learning loss when compared to the first language, Spanish.

Turker's (2022) research also noted a significant difference in the scores between the subjects of Mathematics and Turkish language due to school closures. Interestingly, one of the six articles in the study reported no discernible learning loss when assessing reading skills in Swedish primary schools before and during the pandemic.

3. Discussion

Table 1

Authors	Title
Felipe J. Hevia, Samana Vergara-Lope, Anabel Velasquez-Duran, David Calderon (2022)	"Estimation of the fundamental learning loss and learning poverty related to COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico"
Çigdem Haser, Oguzhan Dogan, Gonul Kurt Erhan (2022)	"Tracing students' mathematics learning loss during school closures in teachers' self-reported practices"
Nicola Bazoli, Sonia Marzadro, Antonio Schizzerotto & Loris Vergolini (2022)	"Learning Loss and Students' Social Origins During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Italy"
Andreu Arenas Lucas Gortazar (2022)	"Learning Loss One Year After School Closures: Evidence from the Basque Country"

Anna Eva Hallin, Henrik Danielsson, Thomas Nordstrom, Linda Falth (2022)	"No learning loss in Sweden during the pandemic: Evidence from primary school reading assessments"
Turker Toker (2022)	"Detecting Possible Learning Losses due to COVID -19 Pandemic: An Application of Curriculum-Based Assessment"

Table 2: The Terms Used to Classify the Articles and the Descriptions

Term	Description
Nation	The country of the sample
Length of School Closure	The number of days students do not study face-to-face.
Level of Education	Participants' grades
Subject	The name of the subject
Effects of Learning Loss	The mentioned level of learning loss among the participants
Impact on Equality	Differences in the level of loss
Size of the sample	The size of the sample obtained for the study

Table 3

Authors	Country	Closure length	Education level	Subject	Learning loss	Equality impact	Sample size
Felipe J. Hevia, Samana Vergara-Lope, Anabel Velasquez-Duran, David	Mexico	Many weeks	Children between 10 and 15 years	Reading and Arithmetics	0.34–0.45 standard deviation in Reading, and 0.62–0.82 standard deviation	Yes	3161 students

Calderon (2022)					in Mathematics		
Çigdem Haser, Oguzhan Dogan, Gonul Kurt Erhan(2022)	Turkey	7 weeks	Middle school students	Mathematics	-	Yes	28 mathematics teachers
Nicola Bazoli, Sonia Marzadro, Antonio Schizzerotto & Loris Vergolini (2022)	Italy	25 weeks	Fifth, Eighth and Thirteenth graders	Reading and Mathematics	For students in Grades 13 and 8 the learning loss is significant ; for students in Grade 5, it is less significant and only has an impact on Mathematics.	Yes	National Examination results
Andreu Arenas & Lucas Gortazar (2022)	Spain	one year	Primary and Secondary Levels	Mathematics and Language	A 0.045 standard deviation; an average learning loss	Yes	5621 students

Anna Eva Hallin, Henrik Danielsson, Thomas Nordstrom, Linda Falth (2022)	Sweden	No	Primary Level	Decoding and Reading Comprehension	No learning loss	No	97,073 students (Grade 1-3)
Turker Toker (2022)	Turkey	Not mentioned	Eighth grade students	Turkish and Mathematics	The Math exam's score variation between 2016 and 2020 was 10.32 points or 50% of the test's standard deviation. Additionally, there was a 10.91-point discrepancy between the Turkish test results from 2016 and 2020, which is about half of the	Yes	4.501 students

					standard deviation.		
--	--	--	--	--	------------------------	--	--

As Table 3 shows, learning loss exists due to school closure. The findings of five studies show that students experience learning losses. Even though Anna et al. (2022) state that there was no learning loss, Sweden was the country that did not close schools during the pandemic. However, researchers emphasise that even though Sweden didn't close the schools, the attendance of teachers and students was significantly affected.

The learning loss is not similar among all the subjects. Andreu (2022) states that, compared to the language subjects, Mathematics has a higher learning loss. Likewise, Anna and Linda (2022), and Nicola and Loris (2022) revealed that learning loss is not significantly different among the different socioeconomic statuses, but Felipe et al. (2022) state that learning loss is severe among students of low socioeconomic statuses. Gender is also one of the factors affecting learning loss. As Turker (2022) states, girls are the most vulnerable group to experience learning loss during the closure of schools.

Most of the studies indicate that students experiencing learning loss in academic subjects have a severe loss of socio-emotional well-being compared to learning loss in subjects (Andreu, 2022). Most of the studies indicate that the family background, especially the mothers' education, is the most affecting factor for learning loss during school closures.

Because this subject is relatively new, education researchers have begun to study how students are affected by learning loss. However, a stronger understanding of how COVID-19 school disruptions have affected student

learning, is still needed. To support this, further studies are needed. Additionally, the current studies are limited in their geographical span.

There is no proper study conducted in the developing countries; especially in the Sri Lankan context. It is crucial that researchers continue to look at the degree of learning loss associated with COVID-19 in countries where there is little study done, since educational institutions vary greatly between countries in terms of quality, duration of school closures, and distance learning tactics. There were a few samples in several of the research examined in this systematic review. Policy-makers should prioritise research that properly reflects larger groups of samples of which the information supplied by these studies is pertinent to the observed samples. Therefore, research examining representative student groups is necessary.

4. Conclusions

This systematic review offers a thorough assessment of the current research on learning loss related to COVID-19. This was accomplished by conducting a detailed examination of published learning-loss studies spanning from January 2022 to August 2022. Following an extensive filtering process, six articles were analysed. Among these, one study reported no evidence of learning loss, while the remaining five studies provided indications of learning loss among the participants. Notably, two of these studies also highlighted an increase in educational inequality, with students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experiencing more significant learning setbacks. To gain a deeper understanding of learning loss and develop effective remedial strategies, further research is imperative. This necessitates the utilisation of

appropriate assessment tools, larger and more diverse student samples, broader geographical coverage, and integration with insights from Neuroscience.

5. References

- Andrabi, T., Daniels, B., & Das, J. (2021). Human capital accumulation and disasters: Evidence from the Pakistan earthquake of 2005. *Journal of Human Resources*, 0520-10887R1.
- Andrew, A., Cattan, S., Costa Dias, M., Farquharson, C., Kraftman, L., Krutikova, S., & Sevilla, A. (2020). Inequalities in children's experiences of home learning during the COVID-19 lockdown in England. *Fiscal studies*, 41(3), 653-683.
- Arenas Jal, A., & Gortázar, L. (2022). Learning Loss One Year After School Closures: Evidence From The Basque Country. *IEB Working Paper 2022/03*.
- Ari, A. (2005). *İlköğretim Okulu Öğrencilerinin Yaz Tatilindeki Öğrenme Kayıpları [Learning Losses of Primary School Students During Summer Vacation]*. Gazi University, Ankara
- Baker, M. (2013). Industrial actions in schools: strikes and student achievement. *Canadian Journal of Economics/Revue canadienne d'économique*, 46(3), 1014-1036.
- Bakrania, S., Chávez, C., Ipince, A., Rocca, M., Oliver, S., Stansfield, C., & Subrahmanian, R. (2020). Impacts of Pandemics and Epidemics on Child Protection: Lessons learned from a rapid review in the context of COVID-19. *UNICEF Office of Research*.
- Bansak, C., & Starr, M. (2021). Covid-19 shocks to education supply: how 200,000 US households dealt with the sudden shift to distance learning. *Review of Economics of the Household*, 19(1), 63-90.
- Bazoli, N., Marzadro, S., Schizzerotto, A., & Vergolini, L. (2022). Learning Loss and Students' Social Origins During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Italy. *FBK-IRVAPP Working Papers*, 3.

- Cooper, H., Nye, B., Charlton, K., Lindsay, J., & Greathouse, S. (1996). The effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores: A narrative and meta-analytic review. *Review of educational research*, 66(3), 227-268.
- Education Endowment Foundation. (2020). Impact of school closures on the attainment gap: Rapid Evidence Assessment, London: *Education Endowment Foundation*.
- Engzell, P., Frey, A., & Verhagen, M. D. (2021). Learning loss due to school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118(17), e2022376118.
- Hallin, A. E., Danielsson, H., Nordström, T., & Fälth, L. (2022). No learning loss in Sweden during the pandemic: Evidence from primary school reading assessments. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 114, 102011.
- Haser, Ç., Doğan, O., & Erhan, G. K. (2022). Tracing students' mathematics learning loss during school closures in teachers' self-reported practices. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 88, 102536.
- Hevia, F. J., Vergara-Lope, S., Velásquez-Durán, A., & Calderón, D. (2022). Estimation of the fundamental learning loss and learning poverty related to COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 88, 102515.
- Huong, L. T., & Jatturas, T. N. (2020). The COVID-19 induced learning loss—what is it and how it can be mitigated. In *The Education and Development Forum*. 1(1). 79.
- Marcotte, D. E., & Hemelt, S. W. (2008). Unscheduled school closings and student performance. *Education Finance and Policy*, 3(3), 316-338.
- United Nations. (2020). Education during COVID-19 and beyond. *Policy Brief*.
- Slade, T. S., Piper, B., Kaunda, Z., King, S., & Ibrahim, H. (2017). Is 'summer' reading loss universal? Using ongoing literacy assessment in Malawi to estimate the loss from grade-transition breaks. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 12(4), 461-485.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1745499917740657>
- The Glossary of Education Reform. (2013). Learning Loss. *Great Schools Partnership*. <https://www.edglossary.org/learning-loss/>

- The World Bank. (2020). Remote Learning and COVID-19: The use of educational technologies at scale across an education system as a result of massive school closings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to enable distance education and online learning. *World Bank Group*. Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/266811584657843186/pdf/Rapid-ResponseBriefing-Note-Remote-Learning-and-COVID-19-Outbreak.pdf>
- The World Bank. (2022). Learning Loss Must be Recovered to Avoid Long-term Damage to Children's Wellbeing and Productivity, New Report Says. *World Bank Group*. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2022/01/26/learning-loss-must-be-recovered-to-avoid-long-term-damage-to-children-s-wellbeing-and-productivity-new-report-says>
- Toker, T. (2022). Detecting Possible Learning Losses Due to COVID-19 Pandemic: An Application of Curriculum-Based Assessment. *International Journal of Contemporary Educational Research*, 9(1), 78-86.
- Wills, G. (2020). Teachers' unions and industrial action in South African primary schools: Exploring their impacts on learning. *Development Southern Africa*, 37(2), 328-347.

The Perceptions of Peers About Students With Disabilities: An Analysis With Special Reference to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna

A.J. Jayasekara^{1*}, I.G.S. Kumari², Upali Pannilage³
Department of Economics^{1&2} and Department of Sociology³, University of
Ruhuna, Matara
anne@econ.ruh.ac.lk*

Abstract

A good tertiary education is linked to broad socio-economic advantages when students with disabilities enrol in higher education. Their overall academic performance, retention rates, and graduation rates are similar than ever to those of their non-disabled classmates. A student can be considered as having special education needs if he or she is suffering from learning difficulties or a disability and cannot work equally as peers. The broad problem of the study was what are the existing barriers that hinder the educational inclusion of students with disabilities in the higher education sector in Sri Lanka. Hence, the key objective of the research was to identify the barriers that hinder the educational inclusion of students with disabilities through the perceptions of undergraduates about their peers with disabilities. The study is a non-experimental, descriptive, and association design between variables using multivariate statistical techniques using 184 sample units from the Humanities and Social Science Faculty, University of Ruhuna. It was found by exploratory factor analysis that the elements that had the most impact on the situation were accessibility and resources that universities must facilitate inclusion; academic staff's willingness to meet the needs of students with disabilities; real implementation of the curricular adjustments; and relationships and participation of students with disabilities and peers. The findings of the study suggest that universities should execute targeted programmes to address the knowledge gap about students with disabilities and the operation of care and support services for them.

Keywords: *Factor Analysis, Higher Education; Inclusive Education; Perceptions, Students With Disabilities*

1. Introduction

Scholars including (Morgado et al., (2016), and Caidi and Allard, (2005) have defined inclusive education as an educational model in which all students can learn, participate, and are welcomed as valuable members of the university. Also, it is an attempt to break down barriers that prevent full participation in social life.

Recognizing the trends, expansion and challenges of inclusive education has become a major concern in the modern era. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights has established education as a basic human right for all⁵. Article 24 of the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which requires States Parties to improve their educational systems and take other steps to ensure that people with disabilities have access to high-quality inclusive education, contributed to the global movement towards inclusion (United Nations, 2006). Similarly, *Goal four* of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (United Nations, 2012). Under this recommendation, several national and regional level projects were implemented to upgrade Inclusive Education which covers the equal rights of the Students with Disabilities (SWDs) in the college and university levels.

According to the definition based on national laws and regulations, "a person with a disability means any person who, as a result of any deficiency in his physical or mental capabilities, whether congenital or not, is unable

⁵ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

by himself to ensure for himself, wholly or partly, the necessities of life". However, according to the international definition, "Disability results from the interaction between people with impairments and behavioural and environmental barriers that prevent their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others"⁶. Here, the students with special education needs will become a focal topic to be discussed. SWDs refer to students with learning, physical, and developmental disabilities; behavioural, emotional, and communication disorders; and learning deficiencies⁷. A student can be considered as having a disability if he or she is suffering from a learning problem or a disability and cannot work equally as peers. Since the adoption of the Universal Free Education Policy in 1945 and the Compulsory Education Policy in 1998, Sri Lanka has fought for equal access to education for all students⁸. In 1994, the government signed an agreement to develop inclusive education because of the Salamanca Conference (Jayawardena & Abeyawickrama, 2016). In 1996, Sri Lanka enforced the Protection of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act No. 28. This was a major initiation to address the issues faced by persons with disabilities. Throughout the Drafted National Policy on Inclusive Education in 2009, the Ministry of Education (MoE) expected to create equality among students with and without disabilities by providing more attention to students with SWDs (Ministry of Social Welfare, 2003). MoE launched the Framework of Action for inclusive education in the same year

⁶ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006

⁷ Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28, 1996

⁸ UNICEF, Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Sri Lanka, 2021

it drafted the national policy on inclusive education. Recently, Sri Lanka developed the Inclusive Education Plan for 2019–2030 to strengthen the SWDs aligning with the SDGs (United Nations, 2022).

2. Research Problem

Though there are several implementations to strengthen and protect the equal rights of the SWDs, some barriers still exist to overcome the issues related to the day-to-day activities of those students at the college and university levels. However, we could find that more research should be done at the university level to understand the barriers to inclusive education since the government of Sri Lanka, particularly the Ministry of Education has yet failed to adequately implement a proper mechanism to address the issues of SWDs. Therefore, the present study focused on the ground-level objectives to be achieved as the first stage of ongoing research. Accordingly, this study has investigated the barriers that hinder educational inclusion for students with disabilities through understanding the perceptions of peers.

3. Research Methodology

The study is a non-experimental, descriptive, and association design between variables using multivariate statistical techniques. The population in the study is the undergraduates of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka excluding the 1000 level (first year) students since they lack experience as newcomers to the university. The population consists of 1,841 units representing 697 from the 2000 level (second year), 742 from the 3000 level (third year) and 402 from the 4000

level (fourth year) registered under the 2022/23 academic year. To guarantee the representativeness of the sample out of a total of 1,841 undergraduates, the sample was made up of 10% of the population with 184 sample units proportionately, whose distribution by levels is the one shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Sample of the Study

Level (Year of study)	Population	Sample
2000 level	697	70
3000 level	742	74
4000 level	402	40
Total	1,841	184

Source: FHSS_UOR, 2023 & Authors' calculation, 2023

The questionnaire, which was based on the scale created by Rodriguez-Martin and Alvarez-Arregui, was adopted. It consists of a series of items related to the educational response towards undergraduates concerning their peers with disabilities and uses a Likert-type scale with four response options based on the degree of agreement (from lowest to highest) (Martín & Arre, 2013). The instrument has shown satisfactory psychometric qualities of validity and reliability.

It served as the study's initial section and contained basic information identifying items organised by gender, year of study, number of peers with educational needs they are engaged with and whether they have received any training activities related to the support of peers with educational needs after they got registered in higher education. In the second part, twenty-eight

items were used to identify the barriers that hinder educational inclusion into SWDs.

The sample frame of the study was based on the students' registration list of the faculty under the 2022/23 academic year. The primary data collected through an online Google form representing each level and the required units were selected by using a two-stage stratified random sampling approach under the probabilistic sampling method. As they were deemed appropriate resources for this research, after the sample questionnaire was filled out, the data analysis was carried out using the software programme Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS version 26), following the analytical approach utilised.

To display, arrange, simplify, and summarise the obtained data in the most relevant manner, descriptive information of the data was identified using descriptive statistics approaches. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy were used to evaluate if the data were appropriate for exploratory factor analysis. Overall consistency and repeatability have been assessed using the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient.

4. Objectives of the Study

The key objective of the research is to identify the barriers that hinder educational inclusion for students with disabilities through the perceptions of undergraduates in relation to peers with disabilities. The study formulated

two specific objectives which cover different levels of barriers to inclusive education. They are:

- I. to investigate the availability of training for applying measures to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education institutes.
- II. to analyse challenges encountered by the university/higher education institute when implementing curricular adaptation for inclusive education.

5. Scope, Significance and Limitations of the Study

A good tertiary education experience is linked to broad social and economic advantages after individuals with disabilities are enrolled in higher education. The kind and calibre of interactions a student has with their peers influence their academic performance to some extent. Therefore, peers have a significant role in determining the calibre of undergraduates with disabilities in higher education since they are individuals who deliver academic instruction and contribute to establishing the university atmosphere.

The post-secondary success of SWDs may be impacted by a variety of university peers' priorities and behaviours, including their understanding of pertinent law, their willingness to make accommodations, their use of effective instructional strategies, their familiarity with disability characteristics, and their observance of proper disability etiquette. There may be significant discrepancies between instructors' views, attitudes, and their actual actions. Considering this, it is crucial to look at how seriously

undergraduates take the challenges in connection to educating peers with disabilities.

It is expected that this study's findings will address a research vacuum in the Sri Lankan higher education context while also offering insightful information on how inclusive education for SWDs is progressing in Sri Lankan universities.

However, the population of the study has been limited to one faculty of a university and the sample respondents were only 168 undergraduates. Therefore, the study has its own limitations when generalizing its findings and making conclusions.

6. Review of Literature

Jessica L. Sniatecki, Holly B. Perry, and Linda H. Snell conducted a study about faculty attitudes and understanding towards college students with various forms of impairments. Three primary research topics investigated here were: What current views do faculty members have regarding SWDs? What degree of expertise does the faculty have in SWDs and service delivery? Are academics interested in SWD-related professional development opportunities? These questions have been graded on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with the response alternatives "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree." The results were analysed using the Cronbach alpha reliability test, and one-way ANOVA was utilised to examine faculty replies to survey questions on their views regarding SWDs. Based on the type of handicap, post-hoc analysis identified the disparities in teacher reactions. The findings

indicate that while faculty members typically have good attitudes regarding SWDs, they are more likely to have negative attitudes toward learners and students with mental health disabilities than they are toward those with physical impairments. This study has also uncovered several misunderstandings and information gaps about offices of disability services and accommodation provision that may have a detrimental effect on students (Sniatecki et al., 2015).

In a collaborative study, Sheila Garca-Martn, Rosa-Eva Valle-Flórez, Ana Mara de Caso Fuertes, and Roberto Balelo discussed how academics saw the inclusion of university students with impairments in 2021. The study's main goal was to examine the challenges academics face while advocating for inclusive education and tailoring training to students' needs. It was decided to use the scale created by Rodriguez-Martin and Alvarez-Arregui. Several issues linked to the educational response to SWDs were included in the survey, and a Likert-type scale with four response alternatives was used to gauge respondents' levels of agreement (from lowest to highest). The Mann-Whitney U analysis and Cronbach alpha reliability test were used to see whether there were any differences between men and women.

A Kruskal-Wallis analysis was conducted using the seven distinct age groups to see whether there were statistically significant differences based on the participants' age ranges. According to the data, there are statistically significant variations in the criteria listed by sex, age group, teaching experience, and experience working with kids who need extra help in school. The study's findings are accompanied by several recommendations

to enhance the training required of university professors to advance inclusive education (Valle-Flórez, et al. 2021).

7. Results and Findings

The sample was made up of 85% female students and 15% male students (Table 03). The results have emphasised that the highest percentage in the level of studying corresponds, in 38% of the cases, to the 2000 level (second year), nearly 40% of the respondent sample is in the 3000 level (third year) and 22% of respondents are in the 4000 level (fourth/final year). Regarding the number of peers with educational needs engaged, there were 40% of respondents under the “none” category. However, a significant percentage of the respondents (50%) have engaged in helping 1 to 3 peers. 8% of respondents have engaged in helping 4 to 6 peers who were in the educational need category. However, only 2% responded that they have engaged in helping more than 6 peers. In the meantime, it was found that none of the respondents had received any training activities related to supporting a peer with educational needs after they got registered for higher education.

Table 2: Sample Description

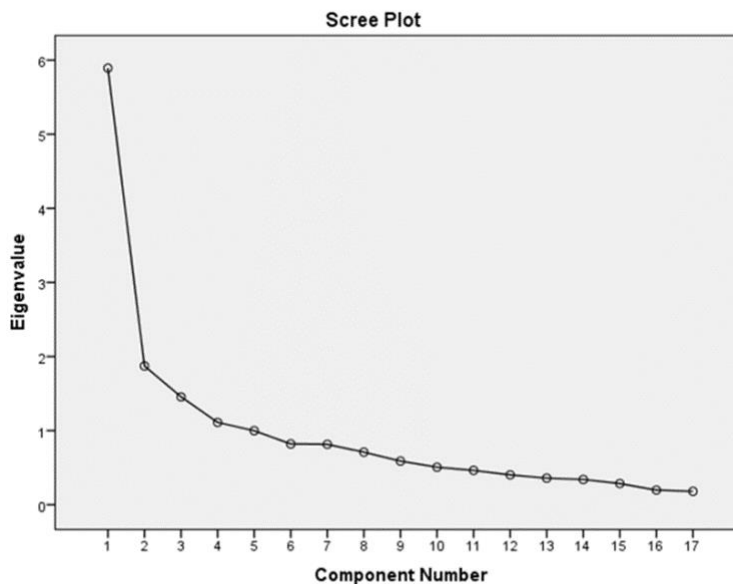
Type	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	28	15%
	Female	156	85%
Level of studying	2000 level	70	38%
	3000 level	74	40%
	4000 level	40	22%
	None	73	40%

Number of peers with educational needs that the respondents engaged in helping	Between 1 and 3 peers	92	50%
	Between 4 and 6 peers	15	8%
	More than 6 students	04	2%
Whether received any training activities related to supporting a peer with educational needs after registering for the higher education	Yes	00	0%
	No	184	100%

Source: Authors' calculation, 2023

The Bartlett's test significance level was 0.001 and the KMO value was 0.843, indicating that the data may be used for factor analysis. The framework's latent variables are then extracted from the survey results using the principal axis factoring procedure with varimax rotation. We utilised the Kaiser eigenvalue-greater-than-one criteria as an assessment criterion to establish the right number of latent variables to be extracted during the component analysis. One latent variable's intermediate value was discovered in the data because of a mismatch between the indicated number of latent variables to be extracted based on parallel analysis and the eigenvalue test.

Figure 1: Scree Plot of the 28 Items



Source: Authors' calculation, 2023

On a screen graph, the component number and eigenvalue are shown. Four components were the only ones extracted for analysis after looking at Figure 01: screen plot. This would allow us to propose that the variation in the data may be explained by four major components. On their respective constructions, each indicator (factor) substantially loaded over 0.50 ($p < 0.001$). They were maintained in the measurement model because they had large factor loadings. These results confirmed the robust uni-dimensionality and convergent validity of the measurement model (Hair, et al., 2010).

Additionally, Hair Jr., Black et al. suggested that the reliability test be conducted before starting the construct validity study and that the constructs

are considered reliable when Cronbach's alpha is 70 or above (Hair, et al., 2010).

Table 3: Results of Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Test

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha Value
Scale	28	0.82
Factor I	08	0.74
Factor II	06	0.76
Factor III	06	0.80
Factor IV	08	0.79

Source: Authors' calculation, 2023

Table 03 shows that all estimated construct values were higher than the recommended value (0.70), indicating good internal consistency and dependability in the model's link measures.

For the first factor, the following statements (FI.1 to FI.8) showed markedly higher positive loadings.

FI.1. There are architectural barriers in the faculty.

FI.2. Transport method is provided from the main gate to the faculty to peers with educational needs.

FI.3. Some classrooms favour access/mobility.

FI.4. The classroom space allows group work.

FI.5. The classroom equipment is adapted.

FI.6. There are "Special Educational Needs" (SWDS) support technologies in the faculty.

FI.7. Auxiliary support staff is needed.

FI.8. SWDs do not have the facilities to carry out external internships.

The first factor accounted for 19.893 per cent of the total variation and was identified as “accessibility and resources that universities have to facilitate inclusion”.

For the second factor, the following statements (FII.9 to FII.14) showed strong positive factor loadings.

FII.9. There is coordination between university administration and academics.

FII.10. Academics must adapt the ACTIVITIES of their courses.

FII.11. Academics must adapt the MATERIALS.

FII.12. Academics must adapt the METHODOLOGY of teaching.

FII.13. Academics must adapt the evaluation system.

FII.14. Academics show awareness about the Universal Design of Learning (UDL)

The second factor accounted for 15.764 per cent of the total variation and was identified as the “academic staff’s willingness to meet the needs of SWDs factor”.

For the third factor, the following statements (FIII.15 to FIII.20) showed strong positive factor loadings.

FIII.15. There are certain objectives of modules to SWDs.

FIII.16. There are modifications and/or deletions activities.

FIII.17. There are modifications to the improved resources for SWDs.

FIII.18. There are modifications in the methodology to SWDs.

FIII.19. There are special practical activities for SWDs.

FIII.20. SWDs have more time for exams/work deadlines.

The third factor accounted for 15.672 per cent of the total variation and was identified as the “real implementation of the curricular adjustments” factor.

For the fourth factor, the following statements (FIV.21 to FIV.28) showed strong positive factor loadings.

FIV.21. The relationship between SWDs and their peers is good.

FIV.22. My relationship as a peer with SWDs is good.

FIV.23. In general academics–SWDs are fluid.

FIV.24. There are adequate diversity awareness campaigns.

FIV.25. SWDs participate in extracurricular activities.

FIV.26. SWDs have more difficulties in practices (e.g. Laboratories/ field visits)

FIV.27. SWDs have the same academic problems as their mates.

FIV.28. There are volunteer peers for support tasks.

The fourth factor accounted for 13.253 per cent of the total variation and was identified as the “relationships and participation of SWDs and peers” factor.

8. Conclusions

The overall aim of the present research was to identify the barriers that hinder educational inclusion for SWDs through the perceptions of undergraduates concerning their peers with disabilities: with special

reference to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Ruhuna. Based on the descriptive statistical analysis, results emphasised that the majority of the students help their SWDs peers, but they have not obtained any training related to supporting peers with educational needs after getting registered for university education. Since the majority of the respondents are in the 2000 and 3000 levels, such activities to understand the SWDS as peers should be introduced or implemented.

Therefore, it can be concluded that universities have not executed the required programmes to address the knowledge gap about SWDs and the operation of care and support services for SWDs. To increase knowledge of certain problems and make them public, it suggests awareness campaigns targeted largely at selected target groups. The same condition was supported by the research findings of Rosa-Eva Valle-Flórez, Ana Mara de Caso Fuertes, Roberto Balelo, Sheila Garca-Martn, Jessica L. Sniatecki, Holly B. Perry, and Linda H. Snell (Sniatecki et al2015) & (Valle-Flórez, et al., 2021).

The results of the factor analysis highlighted four categories that should be addressed since they include varying degrees of impediments to inclusive education in relation to the research location. The first factor (F1), which consists of eight factors, is accessibility and resources available in institutions to support inclusion. Six factors make up the second factor (F2), which is about the academic staff's readiness to accommodate SWDs' requirements. Six elements make up the third factor (F3), which is the actual implementation of the curriculum modifications. Eight factors make up the fourth component (F4), which is the interactions and engagement of SWDs

and their classmates. Through those elements, each component emphasised how it was developed to address the primary challenges that needed to be conquered. By 2021, Rosa-Eva Valle-Flórez, Ana Mara de Caso Fuertes, Roberto Balelo, and Sheila Garca-Martn conducted prior studies that support this theory, which is also supported by the findings of this study. We may infer that higher interest and a stronger desire to care for SWDs via the study programme in the faculty would result from the integration of the training activities and the acknowledgement of the curriculum adaptations.

To confirm the results and verify the components in other social circumstances, further studies might be conducted. Then, it would also be beneficial to carry out additional research on how to accommodate the growth of disability-inclusive education in higher education.

9. References

- Akin, D., & Huang, L. M. (2019). Perceptions of College Students with Disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 32(1), 21-33.
- Baker, K. Q., Boland, K., & Nowik, C. M. (2012). A Campus Survey of Faculty and Student Perceptions of Persons with Disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 25(4), 309 - 329.
- Caidi, N., & Allard, D. (2005). Social inclusion of newcomers to Canada: An information problem? *Library & Information Science Research*, 27(3), 302–324. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2005.04.003>.
- Ellis, P. D. (2010). *The Essential Guide to Effect Sizes: Statistical Power, Meta-Analysis, and the Interpretation of Research Results*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., & Babin, B. J. (2010). *Multivariate Data Analysis; a global perspective (ed.)*. New Jersey, Pearson Education Inc.

- Jayawardena, P., & Abeyawickrama, M. (2016). *Barriers and Opportunities in the Provision of Education for Children with Learning Disabilities in Sri Lanka*. Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka.
- Kraska, M. (2003). Postsecondary Students with Disabilities and Perceptions of Faculty Members. *The Journal for Vocational Special Needs Education*, 25(2), 11-19.
- Martín , A. R., & Arre, E. Á. (2013). Development and validation of a scale to identify attitudes towards disability in Higher Education. *Psicothema*, 370-376.
- Ministry of Social Welfare (2003). *National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka*. Ministry of Social Welfare, Government of Sri Lanka.
- Morgado, B., Cortés-Vega, M. D., López-Gavira, R., Álvarez, E., & Moriña, A. (2016). Inclusive education in higher education. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs: JORSEN*, 16, 639–642. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12323>.
- Sniatecki, J. L., Perry, H. B., & Snell, L. H. (2015). Faculty Attitudes and Knowledge Regarding College Students with Disabilities. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, 28(3), 259-275.
- UNICEF. (2021). *Disability-Inclusive Education Practices in Sri Lanka*.
- United Nations. (2022). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022*. United Nations.
- United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol*. VA 20166 USA: 22880 Quicksilver Drive Dulles.
- United Nations. (2012). *Rio+20: The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development*. United Nations.
- Valle-Flórez, R.-E., de Caso Fuertes, A., Baelo, R., & García-Martín, S. (2021). Faculty of Education Professors' Perception about the Inclusion of University Students with Disabilities. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 1-21.

Aspects of Romanian Students' Attitudes Towards Using Vlogging as a Tool in the Education Process

Victor-Alexandru Briciu *, Arabela Briciu, Dumitrița-Valentina Baci
Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania
victor.briciu@unitbv.ro*

Abstract

This paper seeks to provide insight into the concept of vlogging and its implications for the education and lives of young people. Vlogging as a phenomenon has been developed owing to technological advancements and the youth's enthusiasm for various forms of computer-mediated communication. Its emergence as a remarkable social phenomenon has been driven not only by traditional mass media but also by the dynamic landscape of social media. This paper explores the multifaceted impact of vlogging within these contexts. After presenting the theoretical aspects and perspectives of the various authors who have studied the phenomenon, the discussion will focus on vlogging as a form of education and vloggers' influence on students. The research objectives are to identify students' attitudes towards using vlogging as a tool in the education process, focusing on identifying the categories of vlog content followed by students and the frequency with which students follow content posted by vloggers. The main concepts of the research are frequency, vlogger and content categories, and the dimensions of the research are based on attitudinal measurements: cognitive, affective and behavioural components. Research findings reveal Romanian students' preferences for vlog content and their positive attitude towards integrating educational vlogs in the learning process, despite a reluctance to create their own vlogs. The conclusion of the study lies in the fact that this paper is based on already conducted research on vlogging but is oriented towards addressing the phenomenon from the perspective of education and its usefulness in this context.

Keywords: *Attitudes, Content, Education, Skills, Students, Vlogs.*

1. Introduction

In light of the social media revolution (Briciu and Briciu, 2020), a new phenomenon is emerging, vlogging, which is characterised as the prerogative of the new generation and a different way for young people to express themselves and become known on the Internet. Vlogging has its roots in blogging as an alternative to blogging, which first appeared in 2000 in the United States (Briciu and Briciu, 2021), and in less than five years has surprisingly become the most widely used method of expression for teenagers and beyond. The term vlog is quite comprehensive as it generally refers to all online videos, whether single or serial, which involve a specific characteristic mode of address: a casual one. As Wesch (2009) described, vlogs are videos in which people stand in front of a webcam and address those interested in clicking on their video, without having a concretely defined recipient. They are addressed to everyone in the community or the platform on which the video is posted, such as YouTube. In Romania, vlogging appeared in 2011, being defined as a video diary containing thoughts, opinions or experiences filmed and then published on the Internet (Băcescu-Condruz, 2017).

Vlogging has become popular among young people and not only for reasons that offer people, regardless of age, profession, political or religious orientation, the opportunity or a way out of anonymity and highlighted passions. This has brought a development of personality with it. In addition, vlogging has helped to promote deeper and more personal connections between creators and different segments of the public, with vloggers constantly creating content based on their life stories. This attracts

followers, as some find themselves in these stories, while others tend to shape their lives according to the creator's account of their experience. Luszczynska and Schwarzer (2005) argued that social cognitive theory partially accounts for users' reliance on video content, their manifestation of certain content producers, their behaviour on the video platform, and how their real-life manners are influenced by the content they watch. Unexpectedly, watchers often apply new behaviours after watching specific content creators and observing their actions. To attract a consistent number of followers, vloggers resort to editing videos (Biel and Perez, 2011); however, avoiding the overuse of editing software can be a strength, as the vlogger's choice to present themselves in a video without filters conveys the idea of honesty and sincerity (Andymooseman, 2008).

A social issue directly concerns both vlogging and vloggers is the trade-off between copyright protection and consumer privacy versus the free use and circulation of information. Vlogging offers the opportunity to document; express opinions and emotions; and freely articulate ideas in expressive video content. However, this does not mean that vloggers can freely distribute anything that may be related to private or commercial rights without permission. There are various ways in which confidential data in vlogs, for example, signatures can be protected. One such method is encryption, a technique by which data changes form; so that it becomes indecipherable. Another technique is content filtering; therefore, each vlog creator must filter video content that is not in line with users' interests. In other words, vlog creators have to take every precaution about the content of the video, so that it does not break any laws. If the author does not respect

the rules of the community to which they have distributed the video, the content may be restricted, and if the same action is repeated, the account may be closed. Finally, vloggers face the problem of not respecting copyright, risking their material being used in unwanted ways without their permission or consent. That's why sharing your personal life on the Internet is a strictly personal decision and carries many risks.

2. Research Methodology

The study aims to identify students' attitudes towards using vlogging as a tool in the education process. It focuses on identifying the categories of vlog content that students follow and the frequency with which students follow content posted by vloggers. The three objectives defined in the research are measured through a sociological survey using a questionnaire with closed, open and multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire was distributed online to a sample of students during May-June 2022, and only 218 questionnaires were validated. The main concepts are frequency, vlogger and content categories, with the following dimensions focusing on attitude measurement: cognitive, which refers to what students think about the use of vlogging in education; affective, which focuses on emotions; and behavioural dimension, which measures the intention to use or practice vlogging.

3. Objectives of the Study

This paper aims to investigate the impact that vlogging has as a tool in the education process, especially among students, with the following objectives:

Objective 1: To identify students' attitudes towards using vlogging as a tool in the education process. This objective falls under the cognitive component that the authors measured using the composite scale.

Objective 2. Identify the categories of vlog content that students follow. This objective falls under the affective component, which measures respondents' emotions about the use of vlogging in education and the impact of the phenomenon on this segment.

Objective 3. To identify the frequency with which students follow content posted by vloggers. The current objective falls under the behavioural component, which proposes measuring the intention to use or practice vlogging and the frequency with which content is watched.

4. Scope and Significance of the Study

The way people communicate, learn and socialise is different from the way all this was done in the past (Briciu, Mircea, Briciu, 2020). The criteria for competence and success today are measured by the extent to which new technology is adopted and the efficiency with which solutions to current problems are found. The new generation is surrounded by technology, and the education system is too far from online development. In contrast, it

should prepare young people to adapt and use the Internet intelligently so that they are not affected. Also, various research over time has shown that using ICT in education contributes significantly to improving student achievement.

The digitisation of education could save the education system from criticism, as young people view modern technology to be offering a wide range of applications that are the foundation of knowledge building (Rad & Egerău, 2020). The classic model of education based on memorization and standardization competence is no longer considered helpful by the new generation, which is why it is considered that a personalised way of teaching based on interaction and constant monitoring of progress is needed (Băcescu-Condruz, 2017). A new form of learning that is of interest and attracts young people is video blogging, as the younger generation reacts and is excited when they receive as much visual and audio stimuli as possible. Further, vlogging combines images, audio, video and text to communicate personal reflections, expression of feelings, documentaries and stories (Baran, 2007).

Similarly, vlogging in the educational context comes with several benefits, including meeting the need for learning by delivering information that young people cannot find in the so-called classical education system sources. The vlogging phenomenon encourages collaborative work, students can form teams, and it also helps to improve media skills. Last but not least, through vlogging, young people have the opportunity to combine the two types of learning, formal and informal. In this respect, it can be mentioned the great advantage that vlogging offers, namely the possibility

to learn a foreign language enjoyably. At the same time, video blogging also poses several threats to education, as it can encourage Internet addiction and predispose young people to cyberbullying. Further, a disadvantage could be the editing of the vlog as it requires training and not all schools/universities have the necessary training equipment. A threat to education is the strong influence of vlogs on young people's behaviour if the creator does not promote behaviour worth following.

5. Review of the Literature

Vlogging has become an increasingly popular mode of expression among young people, specifically their voice and it is useful for education and learning new things online. At the same time, vlogging is the form of communication and interaction that young people identify with as vlogging encourages interaction and is used to express ideas, feelings and creativity. In this way, young people practice communicating with the public and significantly improve their self-presentation skills.

Making vlogs also allows young people to practice their language skills and is ultimately an appropriate teaching tool for this age group. Authar and Muflihah (2020) conducted a study to investigate young people's responses to using vlogging as a learning activity. Thirty students divided into five groups were tasked with making vlogs. The research concluded that vlogging helped students to be more confident by eliminating shyness, to be more expressive and encouraged teamwork by resolving conflicts within the team. Another benefit of the study in favour of vlogging was the improvement and practice of communication skills. Thus, it was concluded

that vlogging can become a useful method for young people as it can potentially help in improving students' speaking practice.

Finally, vlogging plays an important role in developing young people's communication skills and encouraging them to learn or practice a language. For example, Rahmawati (2018) in his study mentions a technique through which vlogging was introduced into the teaching and learning system to get students to learn English better as they found the process of learning the language difficult. Therefore, the technique was adopted by the teacher to give young people the opportunity to speak English. Thus, at the end of the experiment, it was found that students became more confident after using vlogging in practicing English because a different method of learning closer to their interests was implemented. In another study, Anil (2016) came up with the finding that technology motivates and encourages young people to learn English in a positive way, and through vlogging, the anxiety of learning English is significantly reduced.

Another aspect that supports the idea that vlogging is a useful tool for improving communication could be the extension of speaking time. In other words, young people practising communication through vlogging will no longer have reservations about discussing a topic and presenting themselves. In the same perspective, El-Garawany (2017) finds that video blogging is beneficial for students as it enhances reflexivity and thinking skills at the same time. It is still useful in improving communication skills as it provides an opportunity to reflect on one's shortcomings, mistakes, and strengths.

Thus, videos allow repeated viewing allowing the creator to notice any miscommunication and correct it. It is also beneficial to watch other colleagues' vlogs which they can draw inspiration from. Another benefit of developing communication skills through vlogging is the possibility of receiving feedback. The opinions of those who view the video and the criticisms made are meant to stimulate the creator to redo the vlog or to pay more attention to certain aspects of future creations.

6. Results and Findings

Following the online application of the research instrument (questionnaire) to 218 respondents, of which 74 are male and 144 are female, the following results were drawn and presented according to each objective measured, as a part of the statistical analysis performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 23.

Thus, the first objective proposed was to identify students' attitudes towards vlogging as a tool in the education process, framed in the cognitive component and measured through the composite scale.

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the composite scale as shown in Table 1 was performed to find out the internal consistency of the items. The value obtained is 0.924, which means that it can be assumed that these items form a concept. In other words, the items measure students' attitudes towards vlogging as a tool used in the education process.

Tabel 1: The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.924	9

The objective was achieved because the results support that students have a positive attitude towards the use of vlogging in education and there are no significant differences between the opinions of female and male students, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Overall Scale Score with Attitude Index Towards Vlogging

Overall scale score with attitude index towards vlogging		
N	Valid	218
	Missing	0
Mean		3.4954
Std. Deviation		.87892

In other words, vlogging is considered by the students who participated in this research an effective process to be applied in the learning system and can cause the way of studying to be more attractive. Further, students mostly agree with the statement that this phenomenon helps to develop audio-visual learning ability as well as creativity. Finally, students confirmed that vlogging contributes to developing communication skills and is a valuable tool in language learning.

The second objective which falls under the affective component was to identify those content categories that students often watch. From their responses, it appears that they tend to follow three types of vlog content, namely humorous (21.6%), educational (19.6%) and personal (19.2%). Additionally, male students (13.7%) follow vlogs with news/news-type content more than female students (5%), while the latter are more interested in vlogs with beauty as a topic (12.7%), as presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Frequency Table of Most Watched Vlogging Categories

		Responses		Percent of Cases
		N	Percentage	
The most watched vlog types	Personal	119	19.2%	54.6%
	Educational	122	19.6%	56.0%
	Humorous	134	21.6%	61.5%
	Fashion	35	5.6%	16.1%
	Beauty	54	8.7%	24.8%
	Travel	67	10.8%	30.7%
	News	49	7.9%	22.5%
	Experimental	26	4.2%	11.9%
	Other type	15	2.4%	6.9%
Total			100.0%	

The third objective which comes under the behavioural component was to measure the frequency with which students follow content posted by

vloggers. By measuring it, it was found that most of the surveyed students follow vlogs (90.8%) and a large proportion are female (68.2%), as shown in Table 4. In other words, female students follow vlogs more compared to male students.

Table 4: Distribution of the Sample According to Gender and Criteria of Vlog Watching

		% within “You Watch vlogs?”		
		You Watch vlogs?		Total
		Yes	No	
Gender	Feminine	68.2%	45.0%	66.1%
	Masculine	31.8%	55.0%	33.9%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The Chi-Square test value was calculated to find out if there is a correlation between the two variables- gender and vlog watching. Thus, the value of $p^{\text{calculated}} = 0.03$ (Sig.1), which means there is a correlation between the two variables since the value is less than 0.05. The conclusion is that there are more females watching vlogs compared to males ($\chi^2 = 4.354$, $df=1$, $p=0.036$), as presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Chi-Square Tests

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.354 ^a	1	.037		
Continuity Correction ^b	3.381	1	.066		
Likelihood Ratio	4.112	1	.043		
Fisher's Exact Test				.048	.036
N of Valid Cases	218				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.79.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

7. Conclusions

The paper aimed to clarify the directions that the vlogging phenomenon covers in the field of education, yet, a theoretical framework for the subject was constructed by presenting the perspectives of authors who have delved into this topic.

In the research phase, the impact of vlogging as a tool in the education process was measured through quantitative research. The research achieved

the defined three objectives by tracking both students' attitudes towards vlogging if it were to be used in education and by identifying the content categories most often watched, as well as the frequency with which students watch vlogs.

From the research results, we found that students tend to follow three categories of vlog content: humorous, educational and personal. We compared the viewing of the other vlog categories and concluded that female students are more interested in vlogs with beauty as a topic than male students whereas male students are more interested in news/news-type vlog content compared to female students. Regarding the use of vlogging in education, students took a positive attitude and claimed that they would like to watch educational vlogs in lectures/seminars. However, students are not very comfortable preparing material in front of the video camera. This can also be explained by the fact that most students who participated in this research claimed that they had never created a vlog and did not intend to vlog in the future.

In conclusion, we can argue that vlogging has a positive impact on students in terms of its use in the education process as it can influence young people's perception of certain areas in a good and attractive way by helping and encouraging them to express their opinions freely. However, this phenomenon can also have a negative influence because not always are the ideas conveyed by vloggers intended to educate and not always are the posts based on ethics.

8. References

- Andymooseman. (2008). What is a vlog? [video]. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GzMZf-xS8Zs>
- Anil, B. (2016). Top-Up Students Second Language Talk Time through Vlogs. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 1(2), 129-143.
- Authar, N. & Muflihah, T. (2020). Students' vlog: speaking application. *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1516. IOP Publishing.
- Băcescu-Condruz, M. (2017). Blogging, Vlogging – from Entertainment to Education. *International Scientific Conference eLearning and Software for Education*, 369-376.
- Baran, E. (2007). The Promises of Videoblogging in Education. *The Annual Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology*, 10-18.
- Biel, J. I., & Perez D. G. (2011). VlogSense: Conversational behaviour and social attention in YouTube. *ACM Transactions on Multimedia Computing, Communications & Applications*, 7 (1), 1–20.
- Briciu, A., & Briciu V. A. (2021). Social Media and Organizational Communication. *Encyclopedia of Organizational Knowledge, Administration, and Technology*, 2609-2624. IGI Global.
- Briciu, A., & Briciu, V. A. (2020). Participatory culture and tourist experience: Promoting destinations through YouTube. *Strategic Innovative Marketing and Tourism: 8th ICSIMAT, Northern Aegean, Greece, 2019*, 425-433. Springer International Publishing.
- Briciu, V. A., Mircea, I. A., & Briciu, A. (2020). Communication and Entrepreneurship in Romania: Dissimulation of First Impression in 30 Seconds. In *Entrepreneurial Development and Innovation in Family Businesses and SMEs*, 22-38. IGI Global.
- El-Garawany, M. S. M. (2017). The Effect of Vlogging on Developing Tour Guidance Students' EFL Presentation Skills and Reflective Thinking.

Journal of Research in Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Technology, 3(1), 43-79.

Luszczynska, A., & Schwarzer, R. (2005). Social cognitive theory. *Predicting health behaviour: Research and practice with social cognition models*. Berkshire: Open University Press. 127-169.

Rad, D., & Egerau, A. (2020). Digitizare, digitalizare și transformare digitală din perspectivă sociologică, psihologică și educațională [Digitization, digitalization and digital transformation from sociological, psychological and educational perspectives]. *Vulnerabilități în asistența socială* [Vulnerabilities in social care]. Presa Universitară Clujeană.

Rahmawati, A. (2018). The Use Of Vlogging To Improve The Students' Speaking Skills. *Penerbitan Artikel Ilmiah Mahasiswa Universitas Muhammadiyah Ponorogo*, 2(1), 87-95.

Wesch, M. (2009). YouTube and You: Experiences of Self-Awareness in the Context Collapse of the Recording Webcam. *Explorations in Media Ecology*, 8(2), 19-34.



Erasmus+



*Developing Inclusive Education for Students with
Disabilities in Sri Lankan Universities*

Partner Universities



Universitatea
Transilvania
din Braşov



ISSN: 2706-0063

Organized by:
Faculty of Humanities & Social sciences
University of Ruhuna
Matara
Sri Lanka