ACCESS AND SUPPORT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWD) IN OMANI HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract*: Access and support for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in higher education constitute a critical component of inclusive education, yet challenges persist globally and within the Omani context. This study aims to examine the types of access provisions and support mechanisms available to PWDs in Omani higher education institutions, as well as to identify the challenges faced by universities in facilitating inclusion. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with two administrative staff members from the Student Affairs Department of an Omani university. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data systematically. Findings reveal that higher education institutions provide various forms of support, including administrative coordination, academic guidance, counselling, physical accessibility, technological aids, and individualized strategies tailored to students' unique needs. Despite these measures, institutional constraints such as limited policies, insufficient resources, and inadequate staff training along with academic and social barriers, including non-adapted curricula and low awareness among faculty and peers, impede the full effectiveness of inclusive practices. The study contributes to the understanding of PWD inclusion by highlighting both practical support strategies and existing gaps in policy and implementation. The findings shows a valuable insights for policymakers, educational administrators, and practitioners seeking to strengthen inclusive practices, improve access and participation, and enhance academic and social outcomes for PWDs in Omani higher education.*

Keywords*: Persons with Disabilities, Higher Education, Accessibility, Inclusive Practices, Omani Universities*

Introduction

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) are a minority group whose specific requirements are frequently disregarded, a condition that continues into higher education in Oman. Some people continue to maintain unfavorable attitudes toward people with disabilities based on myths, misunderstandings, or harmful stereotypes, contributing to social exclusion and prejudice.

Such attitudinal barriers may deter PWDs from applying to universities or limit their full involvement once enrolled, limiting not only access but retention and academic engagement. Social rejection by the general public and limited societal understanding of persons with disabilities (PWDs) often contribute to heightened stress and reduced well-being among this group. Negative societal attitudes can create barriers not just in everyday life, but also in educational settings, hurting PWDs' confidence, motivation, and participation in higher education. Addressing these attitudes through awareness, education, and inclusive practices is critical to creating an atmosphere in which PWDs can participate meaningfully in academic and social activities.

Success of persons with disabilities (PWDs) at the higher education level will have a lifelong impact on their ability to be independent. Through higher education, they have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge, develop social skills, obtain academic qualifications, and cultivate their intellectual potential (United Nations, 2006). When students with disabilities are able to access supportive and inclusive learning environments, they tend to develop stronger confidence, better communication skills, and improved problem-solving abilities attributes that contribute directly to long-term autonomy and wellbeing. Additionally, access to tertiary education supports the development of intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal capacities that contribute to greater independence in adulthood (Lopez-Gavira et.al, 2025). With appropriate academic accommodations, accessible facilities, and psychosocial support, PWDs are better positioned to complete university studies successfully and transition into the workforce with enhanced self-efficacy.

Oman's higher education institutions have made significant efforts to improve access and support for people with disabilities. The Higher Education Admission Center (2020) allows students with disabilities to choose programs that are tailored to their specific needs, while some universities, such as Dhofar University, have dedicated support units that offer assistive technologies, accessible facilities, academic guidance, and social integration programs (Al Fazari, 2023).These institutional measures are crucial for encouraging inclusion and ensuring that people with disabilities may fully engage in academic life, despite ongoing issues with social attitudes, accessibility, and comprehensive support services. This research gap emphasizes the need to look at how people with disabilities (PWDs) are assisted in Omani higher education institutions.

The present study seeks to address this gap by examining the range of access provisions and support services available to PWDs, as well as identifying the challenges that institutions face in implementing inclusive practices. By exploring both the support mechanisms and the challenges encountered, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights that can guide policy development, strengthen institutional strategies, and enhance the academic participation, success, and overall well-being of PWDs within Omani universities.

Problem statement

Examining the accessibility and support offered for people with disabilities (PWDs) in higher education is still crucial, both globally and in the Omani context, despite international pledges to inclusive education. Despite the fact that 1.3 billion people worldwide roughly 16% of the population live with a disability, PWDs are still disproportionately underrepresented in higher education due to obstacles like inadequate policy frameworks, social stigma, inaccessible infrastructure, and a lack of support services. (World Health Organization, 2023). Furthermore, many PWDs in Oman face challenges in accessing educational opportunities due to limited inclusive policies, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient academic and psychosocial support (IFC, 2024). According to Times of Oman (2023), efforts in Oman are underway to integrate persons with disabilities into both educational settings and the workforce, highlighting gradual progress in promoting inclusion and empowerment for this population. Despite these initiatives, the number of PWDs accessing higher education remains very low, reflecting persistent barriers such as limited inclusive policies, insufficient support services, and inadequate infrastructure.

Notably, existing discussions and initiatives in Oman have focused primarily on policy intentions and student outcomes, with little empirical attention paid to the perspectives and practices of higher education administrators, who play a critical role in implementing inclusive policies and support mechanisms. As a result, there is an important necessity for investigating the current accessibility provisions and support mechanisms accessible to PWDs in Omani higher education institutions. By investigating these concerns, policymakers and school administrators can create evidence-based policies to improve PWD enrollment, retention, and overall academic achievement, resulting in more social inclusion and long-term empowerment.

Research Objective

These research objectives are designed to explore the access and support provided for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Omani higher education and to investigate the challenges faced by higher education institutions in facilitating PWD inclusion. This study provides insights into the importance of inclusive practices in enhancing the academic participation and success of PWDs within the context of Omani higher education. The study aims to address the following specific objectives:

a) To examine the access and support provided for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Omani higher education.
b) To identify the challenges faced by higher education institutions in facilitating PWD inclusion.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of this study, the following research questions are formulated:

a) What types of access and support are provided to persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Omani higher education institutions?
b) What challenges do higher education institutions in Oman encounter in facilitating the inclusion of PWDs?

Literature Review

The following concepts will be discussed in this research:

Persons with Disabilities (PWD)

Persons with Disabilities (PWD) are people who have long-term impairments that limit their physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory capacities. These disabilities, when combined with societal and environmental constraints, frequently prohibit PWD from fully partaking in daily activities and communal life. Contemporary view of disability has changed from a solely medical approach to a social model, emphasizing that exclusion is caused not only by the handicap but also by societal institutions and attitudes (Shakespeare et al., 2022).

People with disabilities (PWDs) have a wide range of demands, functional abilities, and support needs. According to studies, the availability of assistive devices, contextual circumstances, and socioeconomic factors can all affect the kinds of accommodations that people with identical disabilities need (Mitra & Palmer, 2023). Additionally, some disabilities, such as cognitive or psychosocial disorders, are not always apparent, which might result in misconceptions or an underestimating of the amount of assistance needed. Therefore, rather than assuming a consistent approach for all PWD, effective disability policies must take this variety into consideration and offer flexible solutions.

Besides that, physical challenges such as inaccessible buildings, limited transportation options, and poorly designed public spaces are widespread, affecting both developed and developing nations (Kavanagh et al., 2023). Social barriers, including stigma, discrimination, and negative attitudes, compound these difficulties, restricting access to employment, education, and healthcare.

Education represents one of the most critical areas where barriers persist. Evidence shows that children and adults with disabilities often experience lower enrolment, completion, and transition rates compared to their non-disabled peers (UNESCO, 2023). To overcome these challenges, comprehensive strategies are needed, combining accessible infrastructure, inclusive policies, and awareness campaigns. Such measures ensure that PWD can participate fully and equitably within society, contributing to communities on par with non-disabled individuals.

In Oman, persons with disabilities (PWD) continue to contend with different challenges related to accessibility and inclusion and policy efforts. For instance, a recent study examining archival institutions in Oman found that although some physical accommodations such as ramps, Braille signage, and reserved parking spaces exist, there remain serious deficiencies in digital accessibility many archives lack screen-reader compatibility or adapted interfaces, effectively excluding visually or hearing-impaired persons from accessing archival content (Mkadmi, Hamad & Al-Yaarabi, 2025). Recent data from 2024-2025 show that the government is working to support and include persons with disabilities (PWD) more actively. New programs focus on jobs and social support, aiming to move beyond just care and towards full participation in society (Ministry of Social Development, 2024).

In addition, persons with disabilities (PWD) in Oman face challenges in education and employment. Although laws and policies exist to support their rights, many schools and

workplaces still lack proper accommodations, such as accessible classrooms, assistive technologies, and trained staff (AlZadjali & Badzis, 2025). These gaps limit opportunities for learning and career development, especially for young people with disabilities. Efforts are being made to improve inclusion through training programs and awareness campaigns, but continuous monitoring and stronger implementation of policies are needed to ensure that PWD can fully participate in society.

Accessibility of PWD in Higher Education

Higher education has been recognized as an important human right and a critical gateway to social inclusion, empowerment, and socioeconomic engagement for all people, including those with disabilities (UNESCO, 2023a). International frameworks and declarations emphasize that universities and colleges must provide inclusive access to all students, regardless of physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychological handicap (UNESCO, 2023b).

Accessibility in higher education demands more than ramps and lifts; it requires systemic institutional changes, policy commitment, and adequate resources to support diverse learner needs (UNESCO, 2023b). Accessible learning environments including accessible digital materials, open educational resources, and adaptive assessment significantly enhance participation of PWD in higher education globally. UNESCO stresses that inclusion is not only about access but also about fostering equity and dignity: institutions must adopt policies guaranteeing non-discrimination and equal opportunity (UNESCO, 2023c). Inclusive practices benefit both individuals and society by promoting diversity, social cohesion, and realisation of human potential (UNESCO, 2023c).

In Oman, the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities strengthens the rights of PWD across multiple domains, including education, employment, health, and social inclusion (Times of Oman, 2025). The law guarantees equal opportunities for scholarships and grants for undergraduate and postgraduate studies and mandates "reasonable accommodations" such as accessible buildings and inclusive learning support (Times of Oman, 2025). To implement this law, Oman established a dedicated sector within the Ministry of Social Development to oversee policies and services for PWD, including education and training (Muscat Daily, 2025). This represents a shift from a welfare-based model toward empowerment and full inclusion (Muscat Daily, 2025).

Despite these legal advances, educational attainment among PWD remains significantly lower than those without disabilities in Oman, with only around 20.3% attaining at least basic education compared to 81.6% for non-disabled peers (ESCWA, 2023). This gap highlights persistent structural, social, and resource-related barriers.

To enhance accessibility, higher education institutions in Oman need comprehensive strategies: accessible campus infrastructure, assistive technology, flexible teaching, individualized support services, and inclusive admission and scholarship policies (UNESCO, 2023b). Staff training and cultural change to foster acceptance of PWD are equally important. Moreover, accessibility should encompass digital learning: providing materials in Braille, large print, audio, and electronic formats, as well as ensuring online platforms comply with accessibility standards (UNESCO, 2023b). Inclusive assessment strategies, such as extended time, oral exams, and adaptive technologies, help mitigate barriers faced by PWD. Collaboration among

universities, government agencies, NGOs, and disability advocacy organisations are critical to implement effective inclusion (UNESCO, 2023c). Sharing best practices, training staff, and monitoring implementation ensures that accessibility is not only legislated but realised in practice.

Accessibility for persons with disabilities (PWD) in higher education in Oman has seen significant improvements in recent years, supported by both legal frameworks and institutional initiatives. Under the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2025), students with disabilities are legally entitled to access education at all levels, including universities and colleges, with necessary accommodations to ensure full participation (Oman Human Rights Commission, 2025). Universities have responded by establishing dedicated support services, such as specialized units for students with disabilities, which provide assistive technologies, adaptive learning materials, accessible digital platforms, and individualized academic support (Times of Oman, 2025). Additionally, measures such as priority admission pathways, scholarship opportunities, and counselling services are increasingly offered to remove barriers and facilitate equal academic opportunities. These initiatives demonstrate Oman's commitment to inclusive higher education, ensuring that students with disabilities can engage fully in academic life and achieve their educational potential.

In addition, the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was passed in Oman, which is a major step toward guaranteeing PWDs inclusive access to higher education. In addition to requiring "reasonable accommodations," such as accessible buildings, assistive technologies, sign language interpreters, Braille or electronic services, and inclusive support to remove environmental, communication, and educational barriers, the law guarantees PWD the right to education at all levels from early childhood to tertiary on an equal basis with others (Oman Human Rights Commission, 2025). Accordingly, universities have started putting support systems in place under the direction of the pertinent national authorities: During the admissions process, students with disabilities are permitted to identify the sort of handicap they have, allowing them to be assigned to study programs that may suitably provide.

To further institutionalise inclusion, a new sector under the Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) has been established to oversee services for PWD, including education, training, and social integration. This structural reform signals a shift from a welfare-based model toward empowerment and active participation, ensuring that policies are implemented, compliance is monitored, and PWD have access to scholarships, supportive learning environments, and inclusive academic opportunities. These measures reflect Oman's commitment to creating an enabling higher-education environment where PWD can pursue studies on equal footing with their peers, thereby promoting equity, dignity, and social inclusion.

In conclusion, global standards, UNESCO guidelines, and Oman's legal framework provide a foundation for inclusive higher education. However, practical implementation remains crucial. By combining legislative compliance, infrastructure development, academic accommodations, and cultural change, Oman can ensure that PWD fully participate in higher education, thus fostering equity, diversity, and social cohesion (UNESCO, 2023a).

Research on PWDs in the Omani Context

In Oman, there is still a shortage of research on individuals with disabilities (PWDs), especially in the area of higher education. The majority of current research concentrates on national regulations and student experiences, bringing insightful information about accessibility issues but little insight into how institutional administrators view and use support systems. Even though Oman has made progress toward inclusive education through regulatory measures, PWDs' full participation in higher education is nevertheless hindered by practical obstacles such inadequate infrastructure, a lack of specialized support services, and low administrative commitment. In order to identify possibilities and difficulties unique to the Omani environment and to develop evidence-based methods that can improve inclusion, academic performance, and long-term empowerment for PWDs, it is imperative that these topics be investigated.

Inclusive Education Theory

The idea that educational systems should be open and accessible to all students, regardless of their physical, sensory, intellectual, social, or economic origins, is the foundation of inclusive education theory (Al Shammari et al. 2019). According to the argument, traditional segregated models which keep kids with special needs apart from regular students maintain inequity. Through structural adaptation, legislative reform, and pedagogical change, inclusive education aims to eliminate barriers and accommodate diversity (Singh & Bhatia, 2023).

Inclusion is regarded not as charity or exception but as a fundamental right and a standard. All students should share learning spaces, curricula, and opportunities while receiving necessary support to ensure equal participation (Khasanah & Salim, 2018).

Inclusive Education Theory emphasizes that education systems must be accessible and equitable for all learners, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. The core principle of the theory is that all students, including those with physical, sensory, intellectual, or social-emotional disabilities, have the right to participate fully in mainstream education rather than being segregated into separate programs. This approach requires systemic adjustments in curricula, teaching methods, assessment, school culture, and institutional policies to accommodate diversity. The theory highlights that inclusion is not simply about physical access or placement in mainstream classrooms but also about providing adequate support, adaptive teaching strategies, and an environment that respects the dignity, potential, and individual needs of each learner (Al Shammar et.al, 2019; Singh & Bhatia, 2023).

Applying Inclusive Education Theory to higher education in Oman provides a strong conceptual and normative foundation for policy and institutional reforms. From this perspective, recent legal and institutional initiatives in Oman, including laws guaranteeing the rights of persons with disabilities and mandates for reasonable accommodation, can be viewed as steps toward realizing inclusive education as a right rather than mere compliance. Higher education institutions can enhance inclusion by transforming infrastructure, curricula, admission procedures, and support services to reflect inclusive values. Ensuring accessible campuses, providing assistive technologies, adopting flexible learning modes, and offering supportive academic services are all critical measures. This theoretical perspective also supports advocacy and evaluation of the effectiveness of inclusion in practice, determining whether students with disabilities in Oman truly receive equal opportunity, sufficient support, and full participation in higher education. These contributions collectively shaped the modern

understanding of inclusive education, integrating principles of social justice, human rights, and equity into educational theory and practice.

Conversely, the model shown in Figure 1 uses the interaction of three interconnected domains affirming, nurturing, and engaging environments to demonstrate the idea of an inclusive environment. In order to ensure that students actively participate in the educational process, an engaging environment places a strong emphasis on high-standard learning outcomes, teamwork, communication, and decision-making involvement. A supportive and compassionate learning environment is fostered by the nurturing environment, which emphasizes interdependence and the consideration of everyone's needs. Lastly, the affirming atmosphere emphasizes communication that is both expressive and receptive, acknowledges the intrinsic value of every student, and celebrates diversity. All students, including those with impairments, can flourish in a fully inclusive setting created by the junction of these three domains.
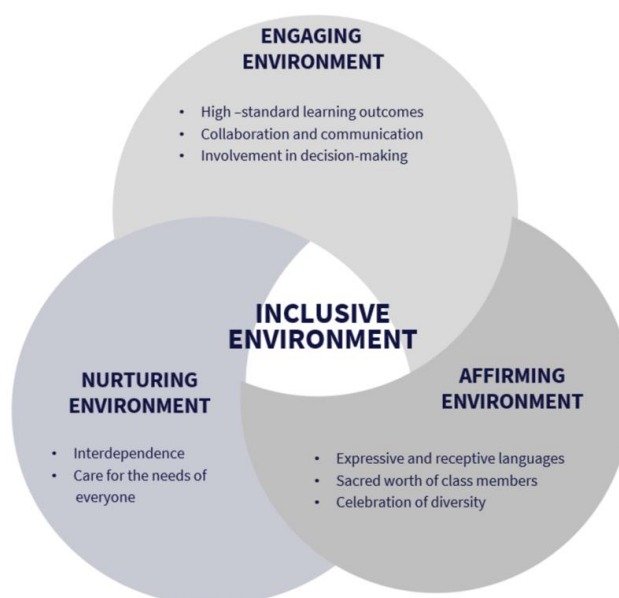
Figure 1: Model of The Emergent Theory of An Inclusive Environment
Source: Pisha (2020)

The current model supports the assumption that accessibility necessitates comprehensive support that takes into account social, emotional, and cognitive needs in addition to physical or technological adjustments within the framework of inclusive education theory. Teachers may establish learning environments that support fairness, engagement, and recognition of diversity all of which are essential components of inclusive education by incorporating engaging, caring, and affirming features (Pisha, 2020). By using this model in higher education, including in Oman, institutions are encouraged to create infrastructure, policies, and pedagogical approaches that give students with disabilities meaningful engagement in addition to access, converting legislative frameworks into useful and successful inclusive practices.
.Furthermore, this model emphasizes the importance of individualized support and collaborative approaches to ensure that students with disabilities are fully included in all aspects of the educational experience. Beyond ensuring physical access or assistive technology,

it highlights the need for tailored learning strategies, mentorship programs, and social integration initiatives that respond to each student's strengths and challenges.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach to explore the access and support provided for persons with disabilities (PWDs) in higher education, in line with the study's objectives. Specifically, it seeks to understand both the support mechanisms available and the challenges faced by institutions in facilitating PWD inclusion in Omani higher education. By focusing on in-depth insights rather than broad generalization, this design aligns with the research aim of examining the nuances of inclusive practices and administrative experiences.

The participants for this study consist of two administrative staff members from the registration and student affairs departments. Qualitative research prioritizes depth and richness of data over number, despite the small sample size (Suri, 2011).

They were selected using purposeful sampling, a non-probability technique that allows for the deliberate inclusion of individuals with relevant expertise and first-hand experience in supporting PWDs. Selection was based solely on professional involvement, regardless of age, gender, religion, or nationality, ensuring that the participants could provide rich and informed perspectives related to the research objectives. Despite concentrating on a particular school, this study offers insightful context-specific information about PWD support systems and administrative procedures in Omani higher education. Even though the results are not statistically generalizable, case-focused studies in qualitative research enable a thorough comprehension of complex phenomena within their real-life context (Yin, 2018).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed for flexible, open-ended discussions while maintaining focus on key themes related to access, support, and institutional challenges. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 50 minutes, was audio-recorded with consent, and later transcribed verbatim. The interview questions were designed to specifically address the study's objectives: (a) examining the access and support provided to PWDs in higher education, and (b) identifying challenges faced by institutions in promoting inclusion.

Instruments

For this study, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore the experiences and perspectives of administrative staff regarding access and support for persons with disabilities (PWD) in higher education institutions in Oman. The guide was specifically designed for two participants, both administrative staff members, to enable an in-depth examination of institutional practices, challenges, and strategies for inclusion. It comprises 20 main questions, adapted from the framework presented in *Accessibility of Inclusive Provisions for Students with Disabilities Transitioning into Higher Education in the UAE: An Investigative Study* (Alshehhi, 2020). The questions are carefully structured to investigate participants' understanding of PWD, the access and support provided by their institution, challenges encountered in facilitating inclusion, existing support mechanisms, external factors influencing institutional

practices, and their perspectives on potential improvements and future initiatives for PWD inclusion.

Besides that, a number of methodological issues were addressed in order to improve the study's integrity. The repetition of important themes in participant replies demonstrated data saturation, suggesting that the insights gathered were sufficiently thorough to represent the key aspects of access, support, and obstacles for PWDs in higher education. Credibility, dependability, and confirmability were the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness: confirmability was supported by firmly grounding findings in participant accounts, minimizing researcher bias; reliability was maintained by a thorough audit trail documenting gathering and analyzing data processes, and credibility was strengthened by extended engagement with participants and member checking of interpretations.

Research Analysis

Thematic Analysis was employed to analyse the interview data, following the guidelines outlined by Bacon and Kenny (2018). The process involved familiarizing with the transcripts through repeated readings, systematically coding key statements related to access, support, and inclusion of PWD, identifying patterns to develop preliminary themes, reviewing and refining these themes for consistency across participants, defining and naming each theme to capture its essence, and finally producing a coherent narrative integrating the themes. By applying these systematic steps, the study captured both the types of support available and the barriers encountered, providing a comprehensive understanding of the practical realities of PWD inclusion and offering insights into strategies for enhancing inclusive practices in higher education, based on the detailed perspectives of the two participants.

Results

The study involved two participants, both from the administrative staff of the Student Affairs Department at one higher education institution in Oman. Both participants are within the age range of 30-40 years and have over five years of experience in their roles, coordinating services and accessibility arrangements for students with diverse needs, including students with disabilities. Their administrative positions provide them with in-depth knowledge of institutional policies, practices, and challenges related to PWD inclusion. Their professional backgrounds allow for rich insights into both operational and strategic aspects of accessibility and support for students with disabilities.

Access and Support Provided for PWDs (Objective 1)

The findings indicate that the institution provides several forms of support to students with disabilities, although formal institutional policies are limited. Thematic analysis of the interview data identified four main themes. First, administrative support plays a central role. Within this theme, coordination of services refers to how administrative staff organize and manage different support services, ensuring that academic, counselling, and developmental resources are accessible and integrated. Academic guidance involves providing tailored advice to help students navigate course selections, assessments, and academic planning according to their abilities and needs. Counselling encompasses psychological and emotional support, enabling students to manage challenges, build resilience, and adapt to university life effectively. Participants emphasized that staff in the Student Affairs Department act as key

facilitators, ensuring students receive guidance and counselling suited to their individual requirements.

Second, physical accessibility emerged as a theme, with the main subtheme being accessible pathways. This relates to campus infrastructure, including ramps, elevators, and designated walkways, which support mobility for students with physical or visual impairments. While some measures are in place, participants noted that improvements are needed in certain areas to ensure full accessibility across the campus.

Third, technological support was highlighted. Subthemes include screen readers and assistive software, which are essential tools that allow students with disabilities to access learning materials and participate effectively in academic activities. Although the availability of these resources is limited, participants stressed their importance and the need for expansion to enhance student learning outcomes.

Fourth, individualized student support was identified, focusing on understanding individual needs and adapting support. Participants emphasized that recognizing each student's unique challenges and tailoring assistance accordingly is critical for promoting equitable participation in both academic and extracurricular activities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the institution shows a commitment to facilitating access and support for students with disabilities; however, limitations in resources and the absence of comprehensive institutional policies constrain the full effectiveness of these provisions. Addressing these gaps would further strengthen inclusive practices and enhance student engagement.
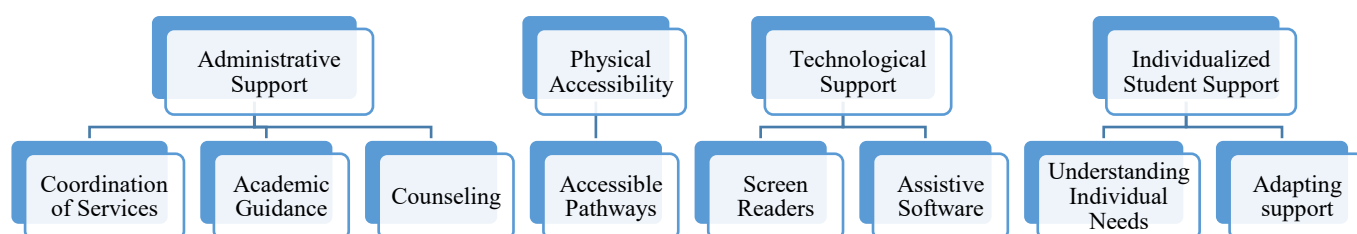

Figure 2: Theme and Subtheme of Access and Support for PWDs

Challenges in Facilitating PWD Inclusion (Objective 2)
The findings indicate that higher education institutions in Oman face several challenges in facilitating the inclusion of students with disabilities. Thematic analysis of the interview data identified two primary themes. First, institutional constraints emerged as a major challenge. Within this theme, two subthemes were identified. Limited policies and resources reflect the absence of comprehensive institutional frameworks and insufficient allocation of financial and human resources to adequately support students with disabilities. Participants highlighted that the lack of clear policies and limited facilities hinder the institution's ability to provide consistent and effective support. The second subtheme, inadequate staff training, emphasizes that few faculty members and administrative staff are sufficiently trained to address the specific needs of students with disabilities, which affects the quality of support provided.

Second, academic and social barriers were identified as a significant challenge. Two subthemes were highlighted. Curriculum and participation limitations refer to the difficulty's students face due to non-adapted curricula, limited availability of assistive learning tools, and restricted opportunities to participate fully in academic or extracurricular activities. Participants noted that these barriers often lead to feelings of isolation among students with disabilities. The second subtheme, social attitudes and engagement, reflects how societal perceptions and limited awareness among peers or faculty can restrict the active engagement of students with disabilities within the university community.

Overall, these findings suggest that addressing both institutional constraints and academic or social barriers is essential for enhancing inclusive practices, increasing participation, and ensuring equitable access for students with disabilities in higher education.
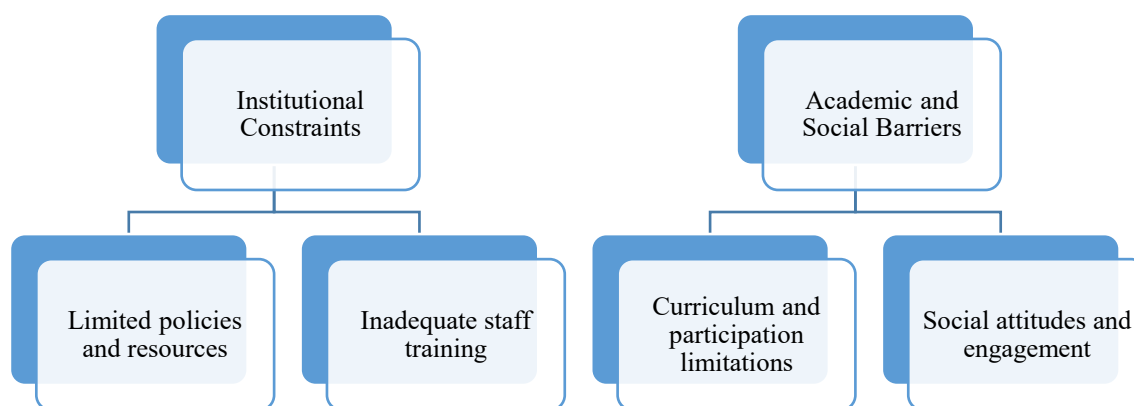
Figure 3: Challenges in Facilitating PWD Inclusion

The findings indicate that higher education institutions in Oman provide various forms of support to students with disabilities, particularly through administrative staff who coordinate services, offer academic guidance, counselling, and psychological support. Physical accessibility measures and technological aids are available to a partial extent, while individualized strategies are applied to address students' specific needs, promoting engagement in both academic and extracurricular activities. These results align with recent studies highlighting that while universities may offer some assistive technologies and infrastructure, the lack of comprehensive institutional policies and systematic support often limits the full effectiveness of inclusive practices (Alqaryouti & Alnahdi, 2023).

Challenges related to the inclusion of students with disabilities are also evident. Institutional constraints, including limited policies, insufficient resources, and inadequate staff training, were identified as major barriers. Additional academic and social obstacles, such as non-adapted curricula, restricted opportunities for participation, and limited awareness among faculty and peers, can hinder equitable inclusion and student engagement (Almusharraf & Bailey, 2022). These findings are consistent with recent research emphasizing that academic barriers and low institutional readiness significantly affect the meaningful participation of students with disabilities in higher education.

Conclusion

This research has contributed significantly to understanding the access and support for persons with disabilities (PWD) in higher education institutions in Oman by examining institutional practices, support mechanisms, and challenges to inclusion. The findings highlight the crucial role of administrative staff in coordinating services, providing academic guidance, and offering counseling and psychological support, as well as the importance of physical accessibility and technological aids. Through the analysis of thematic constructs such as administrative support, physical accessibility, technological support, individualized student support, institutional constraints, and academic and social barriers, this study provides empirical evidence of the factors that influence equitable access and meaningful engagement for students with disabilities. Consistent with prior research conducted in higher education contexts globally (Kallio et al., 2016), the study confirms the significance of comprehensive institutional frameworks, adequate resources, and targeted staff training in promoting effective inclusion of PWD.

The implications of this study hold practical relevance for higher education institutions in Oman. Policymakers and administrators are encouraged to develop and implement clear policies, expand physical and technological support, and provide professional development opportunities for staff to enhance inclusive practices. By fostering an environment that values accessibility, personalized support, and active participation, institutions can improve educational outcomes and engagement for students with disabilities. This research provides a foundation for future investigations into inclusive practices in Omani higher education and offers insights that can inform policy, intervention strategies, and the development of sustainable support systems. In conclusion, the findings highlight the importance of institutional commitment, resource allocation, and proactive strategies in ensuring equitable access and participation for students with disabilities, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and supportive higher education environment in Oman.

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