# The effectiveness of existing policies and procedures in the admission of students with SEND in the UAE higher education

فعالية القوانين والإجراءات المتبعة في قبول الطلبة من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة والإعاقة في التعليم العالي في الإمارات

**by**

## NOOREYA AL OBEIDLI

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment**
**of the requirements for the degree of**
**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN EDUCATION**
**at**
**The British University in Dubai**

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# Abstract

Inclusion of students with special needs and disabilities (SEND) in the schools would prepare to gain their rights through smoother process to access the higher education. Including them in the schools raise the expectations to be included in the next education stage. The number of the students with SEND included in the schools and competing the high school is growing which will increase their demands to enter the higher education (Wolanin & Steele 2004). Higher education plays an important role in social and cultural development through responding to the changes in communities, and meets the requirements affectively (Chatterton & Goddard 2000). Completion of post-secondary education can help people with special needs and disabilities to get better job opportunities, which influences their life style positively and support their independence (Zatt, Hart, and Zimbrich, 2004).

The main aim of this study is to explore existing admission process and services to support students with special education needs and disabilities (SEND), and examine the effectiveness of the policies and procedures on their admission and enrolment in both public and private universities in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This qualitative research has used multiple methods such method as semi-structured interviews with individuals who are in positions to process students' applications and make the admission decisions for the student with SEND in higher education. Document analysis was used as a tool to support the study such as policies, and procedures. Recruitment process, admission requirements and process, criteria to make the admission decision for SEND in the higher education were also examined.

The main finding revealed an existing gap between what's written in the policies and procedures and the real practice, especially in the public universities.

This gap has direct implications for the students with SEND to get access to join the higher education. The study ends with recommendations to help the decision makers in future practices.

# الملخص

دمج الطلبة من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة والإعاقة في مدارس التعليم العام يهيئهم للحصول على حقوقهم من خلال إجراءات أكثر سهولة للالتحاق بالتعليم الجامعي. كما أن دمجهم بالمدارس يزيد من نسبة توقعات التحاقهم بالمرحلة التعليمية التالية. أعداد الطلبة من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة والإعاقة الذين ينهون الثانوية في زيادة مستمرة وبالتالي من المتوقع أن يزداد الطلب على التعليم الجامعي من قبل هذه الفئة. يلعب التعليم العالي دوراً في التطور الاجتماعي والثقافي من خلال استجابته للتغيرات المستمرة في المجتمع بفعالية. إكمال التعليم الجامعي يساعد الناس من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة والإعاقة في الحصول على فرص وظيفية أفضل مما له تأثير إيجابي على حياتهم ويدعم استقلاليتهم.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على إجراءات القبول والتسجيل وخدمات الدعم الموجودة للطلبة من ذوي الاحتياجات الخاصة والإعاقة لاختبار فعالية القوانين والإجراءات المتبعة في تأمين قبولهم في الجامعات الحكومية والخاصة في الامارات. اعتمدت الدراسة منهج البحث النوعي واستخدمت عدة وسائل منها المقابلات مع مجموعة من الأفراد الذين يتعاملون مع طلبات الالتحاق لهذه الفئة من الطلبة من خلال وظائفهم، كما استخدمت الباحثة تحليل الوثائق الموجودة، وإجراءات استقطاب الطلبة، إجراءات القبول ومتطلباته، ومعايير اتخاذ القرار بالقبول والرفض في التعليم العالي.

كشفت النتائج وجود فجوة بين ما تنص عليه القوانين وبين الممارسات المتبعة خاصة في الجامعات الحكومية مما له تأثير مباشر على التحاق هذه الفئة بالتعليم الجامعي. وشملت الدراسة على بعض التوصيات التي تساعد صناع القرار في تطوير الممارسات في المستقبل.

# DEDICATION

I want to dedicate this thesis to my late father, Mohamed Tayeb who was my role model, teacher and best friend who believed in me from a very young age. It was my father's dream to see one of his children finish their studies and work in the higher education institution. I hope he is proud of me and all my accomplishments for reaching this far, and I hope to always make him proud in all the paths I take from here on.

# AKNOWLEDGMENTS

from friends and colleagues who remembered me with their kind words and were as much excited and keen as I was to see me complete my thesis.

Last but not least, a special thanks to the woman who had my back all the time in her trust and belief in my dreams. To my mother, your prayer for me was what sustained me thus far and blessed me with the successful completion of this thesis.

Despite having their own families and busy schedules, my siblings and sister-in-law's were always present along this journey with me, with their kind and supportive words that kept me persevering to the very end.

To my beautiful children, the most people who suffered and missed me for hours on end for being long distances away from them to obtain this academic degree. My wonderful friends and daughters, Alya and Aisha, who were fully understanding and spent all summer sitting beside me reading their stories instead of having fun. My younger children Omar and Sara, who gave me hope and relief in times of hardship when I saw their innocent smiles, and who were a continuous reminder of why I followed my dreams in the first place and took on this challenge to become a strong and educated mother.

I want to express my utmost gratitude to my number one support, my husband, Dr. Ali Al Bulooshi, who was been by my side from the very beginning of this journey. Without his blind belief in my potential, I would not have made it this far. Thank you for being a great husband in believing in me, and being a great father to our children during my time spent on this thesis.

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# List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| SEND | Students with Special Needs and Disabilities |
| EU | European Union |
| MOE | Ministry of Education |
| GAO | General Accounting Office |
| MOCD | Ministry of Community Development |
| UN | United Nations |
| CRPD | Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| CRC | Convention on the Rights of the Child |
| UAEU | United Arab Emirates University |
| HCT | Higher Colleges of Technology |
| ZU | Zayed University |
| DAC | Dubai Academic City |
| NAPO | National Admission and Placement Office |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| SARA | Safety, Accessibility, Reliability and Affordability |
| KIPF | Knowledge, Inclusion, Participation, Access and Fulfilment |
| IEP | Individual Educational Plan |
| DDA | Disability Discrimination Act |
| IDEA | Individual with Disability Education Act |
| ADA | Americans with Disabilities Act |
| ADAAA | Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act |
| FERPA | Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act |
| HEFCE | Higher Education Funding Council for England |
| AHEAD | Association on Higher Education and Disability |
| NLTS | National Longitudinal Transition Study |
| DROs | Disability Resources Offices |

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background and motivation to the study

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is thriving economically due to its oil production. Its economic growth has enabled it to make many positive changes such as the establishment of universal education system (Gaad, 2011). All sectors in the UAE, including education, are based on human rights as documented in the constitution and its laws which are: the right to equality, the right to social welfare and the basic requirements and needs of life, the right to respect and not to be abused and the right to education (Bradshaw, Tennant & Lydiatt, 2004). The government has been working very hard to protect the rights of people with disabilities, education being one of those rights (Gaad, 2011).

When the implementation of including students with special needs and disabilities (SEND) in general education in the UAE began, many issues and challenges arose, such as negative attitudes of teachers towards disabled students (Gaad, 2004). Research has been conducted on these issues to determine the cause and find solutions in order to achieve successful inclusive education in the schools. Most research both internationally and locally has focused on attitudes toward the students with SEND, schools' resources and preparedness and teachers' skills and qualifications. Schmidt and Vrhovnik (2015) in their study analyzing secondary and primary teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities found that teachers who didn't get training on how to work with special needs students were less supportive in educating these students and less respectful of them when comparing to the teachers who got the training.

Another study conducted by Leatherman and Niemeyer (2005) found that factors that influence teachers' attitude toward inclusion practices were: previous experience for

those who worked in inclusive classrooms, training and administrative support. A study which evaluated the school administrators' and teachers' preparedness to work in an inclusive environment found: insufficient physical infrastructure, a lack of training, available policies were not strong enough to support students with disabilities and finally, a lack of collaboration between the teachers and the administrators (Gathumbi et al., 2015). The results demonstrated that special training should be provided to teachers and staff working with SEND students. A collaborative effort has been made to increase social awareness to enhance the educational performance for the students with SEND in mainstream schools in the UAE. In addition, research has focused on the need for different kinds of support for these students' families (Cornoldi, Terreni, Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1998; Gaad, 2001, 2004, 2013; Symeonidou, 2009).

There are continuous efforts to improve inclusion in UAE schools and make it successful. The Ministry of the Education (MOE) announced a need for special education specialists in different areas to serve and support students with SEND in the schools, such as Heads of Student and Family Services, assistant teachers, shadow teachers, special education teachers, teachers for resources rooms, inclusion coordinators, speech therapists, specialists in vision impairment and psychological counsellors. The Ministry ensures that all schools apply and follow all the rules and policies using best practices and the highest standards to provide students with SEND with the services that meet all their needs to learn and succeed (Jouny, 2017).

Several authors have addressed the need for more research in this regard to help higher education institutions apply inclusive education principles and practices for students with a wide range of SEND. For example, Gaad and Almutairi (2013) conducted a study about the issues and challenges with regard to the inclusion of students with SEND within higher education in the UAE. They recommended that to include these students,

universities and colleges needed to take many steps that should be implemented to ensure the preparedness of both the students to join higher education (basic cognitive skills to meet higher education requirements) and the higher education organizations to support them and help them meet their full potentials (services and access). In addition, there is a need for more attention from the office of Higher Education in the Ministry of the Education and decision-makers in providing policies, programs and support for the UAE to achieve successful inclusion in higher education organizations.

Low enrollment and high dropout rates are the results of the insufficient accessibility for SEND students in order to access higher education institutions, as well as a shortage of support, negative social attitudes and low financial capacity (Forman et al., 2001; Jung, 2003; Johnson, 2006; McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001; Mpofu & Wilson, 2004 cited in Sachs & Schreuer, 2011).

There is an international concern regarding the completion of higher education among the students with special needs and disabilities. Increasing higher education degree holders is one of the priorities in the European Union's agenda, it stated 40% of 30–34 year olds in the EU should have completed their higher education by 2020. To achieve this goal, all the groups in the community—including people with disabilities—should have access to and be enabled to succeed in higher education through considering some issues, such as high dropout rates in higher education.

In 2013, the European Council concluded that greater access for students with disabilities in higher education was necessary in order to achieve the European 2020 target. Providing access is not the only issue to consider; they also need to track data necessary to address the level of completion through measuring five main aspects: intake, progress, drop out, transfer and yield. Following up with students with disabilities, experts agreed that there were lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness

of the policies. In 2007, the EU emphasized the importance of students completing their studies without obstacles through providing more effective student support services, counselling and flexible ways of learning (Quinn, 2013).

Another report done by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs and Inclusive Education addressed the main problems students with disabilities faced in their transition from school to employment by focusing on reducing the high rates of education dropout, increasing access to quality education and training and providing the right qualifications to improve those capabilities of SEND students that prepare them for a working life (Transition from School to Employment, 2002). Statistics indicated that the enrolment of students with disabilities in postsecondary education in the US increased from 9.3% to 17%. This percentage is still less compared to the students without disabilities, because not all of the students with disabilities enrolled in postsecondary education complete their degree (Disability Management Services, 2011).

According to the US government's General Accounting Office (GAO) study, during the academic year 2000–2001, 57% of students with disabilities completed high school and the dropout rates among youth with disabilities decreased; but dropout rates were still higher than for students without disabilities (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). In India, Ganapathi (2014) conducted a study in which he recommended that higher education institutions, policy makers and professionals should identify the accommodations and services needed to enhance the inclusion of students with disabilities. The first step he recommended was to provide flexible admission procedures for students with disabilities. Another study conducted by Alqaryouti (2010) about the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education in Oman found that organizations needed to consider the psychological needs of handicapped students.

All of my work experience thus far has been in higher education. Through my work experiences, I witnessed some practices and procedures concerning the enrolment of students with special needs and disabilities which I always felt were unfair. I witnessed many cases of students who met the admission criteria and conditions, but were not admitted because the university could not provide the necessary accommodations and support to the student. Other cases were rejected because due to a failure to meet the admissions criteria and conditions; looking at these conditions, which were applied to students with typical development, it is not fair that they are used so strictly and in the same way for the students with special needs and disabilities.

I firmly believe that higher education in the UAE should have different procedures to handle the applications of disabled students, in addition to alternative assessments instead of the same placement tests. One admissions requirement criteria is to get a minimum of 70% in high school. Why is this percentage used to judge the student's ability to join an institute of higher education? What if a student gets 69%? There are typical development students who met the admission conditions, who then dropped out and failed to graduate.

Placement tests are another type of assessment which should alternatives for determining the abilities, knowledge and personalities of students with special needs and disabilities in order for school administrations to make the final decision of accepting them and providing them with an offer of admission. If we really want to promote inclusive education for these students, I believe we should have different criteria and procedures to handle their admissions process to allow them to achieve full access to higher education. To follow our feelings and suggest changes based on observations are not enough; it is unacceptable to judge such practices and recommend

changes. Such changes need to be made based on facts, determined through scientific research, which motivated me to conduct my research.

**1.2 People with Disabilities in the UAE**

The United Arab Emirates is committed to providing equality and social justice to the people living within its borders. In recent years, significant progress has been made to promote and ensure human rights (UAE Embassy DC, 2015).

Many efforts have been made in the field of people with special needs and disabilities. In 2008, the Ministry of Community Development (MOCD) called for inclusivity in special education through allowing students with SEND to join the government education system. This initiative, called "School for All" (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2017), was started under the School for All federal law, passed in 2006 (29/2006) for students with SEND and amended in 2009 by law N. (14/2009). It was the first law in the UAE to protect the rights of people with special needs and disabilities. Advocates called for changes to the wording of the law (29/2006) to reference 'people with disabilities' not with 'special needs'. This call was because of the term 'special needs' is general and vague. People with disabilities wanted the law to protect their rights, whereas the term 'special needs' encompassed too large a population, preventing the implementation of the law. HH Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE, responded to this call through issuing legislation to ratify the united nation convention on the rights of persons with disabilities and to change the name of the current law (29/2006) to be for people with disabilities instead of special needs (Gaad, 2011).

The educational rights of people with SEND were established. The Ministry of Education implemented the law to include students with special education needs and disabilities in the mainstream schools in the UAE. The number of students with SEND

in mainstream education has increased (Gaad, 2004; Gaad & Almotairi, 2013; Alborno, 2013).

Article 2 of the law ensures that people with special needs and disabilities should receive community services and their circumstances as special needs or disabilities should not prevent equitable access to these services. The main purpose of the law is to protect the rights of people with special needs and disabilities through providing needed services that are suitable to their abilities (Gaad, 2011). In this regard, the law states:

> A person's special needs shall not be a reason to deprive him/her of their rights and services especially in welfare as well as social, economic, health, educational, professional, cultural and leisure services. (The Official Portal of the UAE Government, 2017, P 3)

Article 12 of the law ensures their equal opportunities in education:

> The state guarantees for people with disabilities, equal opportunities for education within all educational and vocational institutions through regular or special classes if it is required, with provision of educational curriculum on sign language, braille or other methods/accommodations as required. Disability should not constitute a reason for denying application for distance learning, or admission/entrance to any educational institution whether it is a government or private institution. (Sharjah City for Humanitarian Services, 2018, p 1)

Although this law is very clear regarding providing students with needed support such as sign language translators, still none of the federal higher education institutions provide services and accommodations such as sign language for deaf students.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) joined the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2010 and acceded to various international conventions, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (optional protocol UAE signed in 2010) which states that people with disabilities should be given opportunities to be involved in decision-making processes with regard to policies and programs, especially those directly concerning them, and have access to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment, to health and education and to information and communication (UAE Embassy DC, 2015).

The Convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD) called for the movement toward inclusion for the people with disabilities by considering them full members of society with respect to their rights and removing all barriers preventing them from enjoying these rights. To achieve inclusion in the education field means creating a barrier-free academic environment and providing sufficient support to allow them to develop their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities. The United Nations (UN) is committed to protecting human rights, as included in article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ensuring that children with disabilities receive effective access to education, training, health care services, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities. In addition to everything included in article 28 regarding their rights in education stating that the child has the right to free and compulsory primary to secondary education and vocational education with preventing drop out. Based on this principle, recommendations have been made about access to lifelong learning opportunities (Promoting the Rights of Children with Disabilities, 2007).

In parallel with amending the federal law and signing the optional protocol with the United Nations, the government implemented some initiatives that led to effective and practical practices to provide people with disabilities with equal opportunities in the community. In Dubai, HH Shaikh Mansoor bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Chairman of the Higher Committee for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with SEND, launched 'my community a city for everyone' in November 2013. The mission of the initiative was 'to implement policies and best practices that empower persons with disabilities to make choices in an environment that is inclusive and ensures access to opportunities on an equal basis with others'. Inclusive education for people with SEND is one of the goals that my community initiative is putting great efforts into

achieving through an implementation plan, framework and policy (My Community Dubai, 2016). In addition, there are other initiatives such as The Dubai Disability Strategy 2020 working on achieving equal rights and services for SEND people by 2020. This strategy will involve five main fields: education, health care, employment, social protection and universal accessibility. In this regard, HH Shaikh Mansour ensured that the goal was to apply international standards for inclusive international organizations and communities, as well as local governments and institutions, to achieve full inclusion that ensures social justice, equity and protection of people with SEND (Nazzal, 2015).

In Abu Dhabi, the SEDRA foundation has been launched by HH Shaikha Aljazia Bint Saif Al Nahyan under the vision of 'making the UAE capital a global model for a barrier-free, disability-friendly, inclusive city where everyone is given an equal opportunity to participate in all spheres of community life as per one's ability' (SEDRA, 2016). With the support of Her Highness Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak, the Supreme Chairperson of the Family Development Foundation and Chairwomen of General Women's Union, in 2008, the Zayed Higher Organization for Humanitarian Care and Special Needs initiated the National Project for Inclusion of People with SEND in Abu Dhabi under 'our life is our integration'. The main purpose and goal of this project was to obtain a complete inclusion of people with disabilities in society at the social, educational, health and environmental levels and to ensure equal opportunities for them in life (Abu Dhabi e-Government Gateway, 2017).

## 1.3 People of Determination

In 2017, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Ministry of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai made an announcement requiring the populace to start calling people with disabilities 'people of determination' and people

who are providing the services to be called 'service officers for people of determination'

(The National, 2017). HH said:

> The achievements that people of determination have made in various spheres over the past years are proof that determination and strong will can do the impossible and encourage people to counter challenges and difficult circumstances while firmly achieving their goals. (The National, 2017, p.2)

Also, he launched the National Strategy for Empowering People with Disabilities, in addition to founding an advisory board for people with disabilities. This National Strategy will cover six areas: health and rehabilitation, education, vocational rehabilitation and employment, mobility, social protection and family empowerment and public life, social and sport (Khaleej Times, 2017; The National, 2017). A successful inclusive special education system requires individual and collective efforts from different parties such as policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents and others from the government and the community. Each party should know how to cooperate with the other parties and how to participate within its responsibilities and authorities to implement inclusive and special education successfully.

It is important to know how all of these parties understand the concept of inclusion in the field of inclusive and special education, in addition to believing in its values and benefits for all members of society. A successful inclusive and special education does not depend only on well-written policies and procedures, but applying the policies and procedures successfully requires administrators who understand them and have the desire to play an important role in achieving them.

**1.4 Higher Education**

That the UAE would build and operate its own university was one of the four major decisions the government made during the 1970s. This decision greatly impacted higher education development throughout the following decades (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010). Higher Education in the UAE started in 1977 with the establishment of the United Arab

Emirates University (UAEU) in Al Ain, with a mission 'to realize the aspirations of the society, deepen social ambitions, and consolidate the structural foundations' (Kirk, 2010, pp. 23). The UAEU was the first federally funded university and has students from all seven emirates.

In 1992, a new Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research was created in order to organize and regulate the higher education sector. With an increasing demand for higher education in the country, other organizations were established including two more federal institutions, the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) established in 1988 and Zayed University (ZU) in 1998 (Kirk, 2010; Bristol-Rhys, 2008). The UAEU started with 502 students in two gender-separated campuses. In 2008, this viewpoint about gender segregation in higher education started to change as new private universities—for example, New York University, Paris's Sorbonne Abu Dhabi, the American University of Sharjah and the American University in Dubai—were established. Semi-governmental universities such as the Khalifa University for Science and technology opened mixed-gender campuses and people started accepting the new system, allowing their children to join these universities (Bristol-Rhys, 2008). Many foreign universities established new branches in the Knowledge Village in Dubai, which increased branch institutions in the UAE (Wilkens, 2011). In 2006, Shaikh Mohamed bin Rashed Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, founded the Dubai Academic City (DAC). It was a government initiative to invest in the development of human resources by creating quality higher education and training opportunities. More than 25 universities moved from the Knowledge Village to the new Academic City, while allowing training institutions to continue at the Village. The main goal for the DAC was to provide undergraduate and post-graduate programs for 150,000 students in institutions which may be local, regional or global (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010).

Baburjan (2011) wrote a paper about the positive and negative impacts of the globalization of higher education in the UAE, they developed implementation of technology which led to advances in education in the United Arab Emirates' higher education system, which in turn helped create a globally competent workforce. A contrasting opinion is that the globalization of higher education provided opportunities for more universities and institutions to launch, causing a crowded marketplace which is considered a sign of declining quality.

Policy makers recognized the importance of education in developing human capital, decreasing poverty and improving incomes (El Baradei, 2010). Higher education plays an important role in social and cultural development by responding to changes in communities and meeting the requirements effectively (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000). Completion of post-secondary education can help people with disabilities to get better job opportunities, which positively influences their lives (Zatt, Hart & Zimbrich, 2004). After the UAE was formed in 1971, many public services were established very quickly. The education sector was given high priority with the Ministry of Education under the government's vision that education should achieve 'enduring development for the community'. The educational structures in the UAE are still under development (Kirk, 2010). Planning for a better future in the United Arab Emirates by providing access to higher education for Emiratis and expatriates is becoming a top priority for policy makers in the UAE. However, the relationship between public higher education institutions and the economy is different from that in other countries since the UAE's economy is dependent on oil prices (Davidson & Smith, 2008).

An independent report for the European Commission about the drop-out and completion rates in higher education stated that the rate of students dropping out before graduating has increased. Drop-out students have been classified under different

categories: disabilities were listed as a main reason for dropping out. This is an issue that should be addressed by academics and researchers, as success in higher education is very important for better job opportunities, social justice and economic growth (Quinn, 2013).

For the purposes of this dissertation, the term 'people with disabilities' will be used, based on the definition established by the United Nations: 'those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various attitudinal and environmental barriers, hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others' (UN, 2007).

## 1.5 Objectives and Questions

The higher education sector plays an important role in communities' development by handling social responsibilities to reinforce values, citizenship and civic engagement (Wilkens, 2011). Continuous and rapid changes among societies in the world increase the need for equal access to higher education; therefore, higher education institutions play a bigger social role in helping society adjust to these changes (Bjornsdottir, 2017). The inclusion of students with disabilities in these schools would prepare them to gain their rights through a smoother process to access the higher education. Including them in primary education raises the expectations that they will be included in the next education stage. The number of the students with disabilities included in schools and completing high school is growing, which will increase their demands to enter higher education (Wolanin & Steele, 2004). Inclusive education famous terminology which has been used in educational dialogues. Schools and higher education institutions invested huge resources to create new supportive policies, provide accommodations, make curriculum modifications and many universities created recruitment strategies in their enrolment plans to show their support for inclusive education (Slee, 2013).

To fulfill the existing federal law 29/2006, which ensures the educational rights of people with disabilities, more effort should be made to achieve inclusive and special education in higher education in addition to effective programs and practices planned and implemented at the administrative and policy maker levels. The purpose of this study is to examine how the federal law can be more effectively implemented.

Therefore, the main aim of this study is to explore the effectiveness of policies and procedures in handling the applications of students with disabilities by higher education organizations with the aim of providing them with complete access to higher education organizations and their educational programs.

The following questions will be addressed:

1. What are the procedures related to the recruitment of students with disabilities in higher education?

2. What are the admission requirements for students with disabilities to enroll in higher education?

3. What are the admission processes to handle applications from students with disabilities to enroll them in higher education?

4. What are the main criteria that support decision-making for admitting students with disabilities into higher education institutions?

5. What could be recommended to support the admissions services for students with disabilities?

Higher education admission policies and procedures are essential in the process of enrolling students and preparing them for their future roles in society. Effective admission policies help higher education to enhance socioeconomic development. A continuous assessment and evaluation of admission policies and models in higher education to discuss their strengths and weaknesses helps government policy writers

and decision makers to apply the best policies and procedures suitable to social conditions and allows them to achieve justice, equity and equal opportunities for all students (Hammoud, 2010).

**1.6 Rationale of the Study**

The core business of education includes preparing people for work and life, educating learners to become adults, practicing democracy and learning to work with others effectively without exploitation or violence. Over the past decade, the UAE—through its extended public and private higher education institutions—created various educational opportunities in the higher education sector which brought attention to important concerns about the need to maintain a high level of quality education along with the demands for increased educational opportunities. Unfortunately, increasing the student population in the public higher education with no additional funding, universities may reduce their enrolment to protect the quality of that education (Donn & Al Manthri, 2010).

The awareness about the importance of education is increasing among Emiratis with the number of UAE citizens with post-secondary and post-graduate degrees is increasing accordingly. The number of applicants for admission to join the federal higher education institutions in the UAE has been increasing constantly. The Advisory Committee at the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research for the Planning of Higher Education in the UAE expects the enrollment to increase by 10,000 students over the next 10 years and by 20,000 by 2020. In order to support this increase in student numbers, additional funding is needed to ensure a quality education. The acknowledgement of this funding crisis of not being able to afford educational cost ensures good quality education in the public higher education institutions should make the policy makers aware of its negative impact on the access of Emirati students and

the quality of academic programs as well as raising awareness of the importance to develop policies (Fox, 2008).

The leaders in the UAE have high expectations for public universities to strengthen, diversify and support the country's economic growth; increase successful job opportunities; advance citizenship; and protect of culture in both public and private organizations. When the funding crisis appeared, students' performance decreased below international standards. This funding problem negatively impacts the outcomes in terms of access to and quality of education for UAE students. In 2003, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research recognized this issue and launched a special national-level planning group to work on improving national educational policy in the UAE. The new committee worked under this planning group, most of whose findings and recommendations were related to higher education policy (Fox, 2008).

There were no federal policies or practices among the federal universities with regard to students with disabilities in the 1990s; each campus made its own decisions. Then, an Office of Higher Education Policy and Planning for federal institutions was started in the ministry. The Office worked hard to improve the educational policies to align them with the changing needs in the UAE, but it still faced challenges because of a lack of data and collaboration among the institutions. Responding to this need, the Office developed a strategic plan entitled 'Educating the Next Generation of Emiratis: A Master Plan for UEA Higher Education,' published it in 2007; it identified its goals: 'This plan clearly stated three main goals. First, to provide access and educational opportunities for all Emiratis; second, to provide high quality education; and third, to contribute to the UAE's economic development' (cited in Fox, 2008, p. 113).

If this funding crisis has a negative impact on the access to and quality of academic programs, the higher education system will face more challenges in providing access to

students with disabilities as they need special accommodations and equipment which are costlier than those for typical students. The first goal of the strategic plan—to provide access and educational opportunities for all Emiratis—has still not been achieved, as many of the students with disabilities still face challenges to access higher education (Fox, 2008). This was written since long time expecting this crisis. The researcher discussed these expectations with the head of the admissions unit of one of the public universities and they confirmed that some signs started to show because the admission units in the public universities were accommodating large numbers of the students and increasing enrollment by providing exceptions through conditional admission for some cases who did not meet the admission requirements.

Elementary and secondary education for students with disabilities is compulsory and all of them get access while higher education is voluntary and many students get rejected. Inclusion of students with disabilities and their completion of elementary and secondary education does not guarantee them automatic acceptance into institutions of higher education. Elementary and secondary education and higher education are two separate fields; each field has its own admissions, curriculum, governance, finance and policy (Wolanin & Steele, 2004).

Dr. Ahmed Al Omran (the first Emirati with vision impairment to complete a PhD in law), Chairman of the Advisory Council of People with Determination on the Dubai Executive Council called for the extension of academic programs for students with SEND in higher education and to avoid restricting them to specific disciplines like literature and human sciences. Holding a higher education degree is a dream for many people of determination, but many obstacles prevent them from full inclusion in the higher education community. Al Omran reported that students with visual and hearing impairment face difficulties accessing higher education in the UAE because they need

readers, writers and sign language translators especially in classes. It is even more challenging for those with hearing disabilities since UAEU colleges and universities still do not accept students with hearing disabilities, although they have had accepted blind students since the 1990s.

In addition, SEND students are given limited options in academic specialization, such as the natural sciences. Although the UAE has legislation and policies and signed the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), committing to provide students with SEND equal opportunities with other students to get the access to the higher education easily, unfortunately, most educational and academic institutions are still missing clear policies to provide students with SEND admission as others (Khalil, 2017). Even those who were admitted face many obstacles and challenges during their academic journey in the higher education, which frequently leads to students' withdrawal. All of these issues confirm the importance of endorsing a local policy that meets the needs of students with SEND to continue through all educational stages as a response to the education theme stated in the national policy to empower people of determination (Khalil, 2018). What was mentioned in the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education education report aligns with what Dr. Ahmed Al Omran stated. In theory, students with disabilities have been provided with the same educational choices as other students; but in reality, these programs are oriented toward directing SEND students to social welfare and low-paid work which they might not be interested in or which is not suited their needs (Transition from School to Employment, 2002).

The Department of Care and Rehabilitation in the Ministry of Community Development (MOCD) announced the completion of a government policy draft to protect 'people of determination'. This policy is designed to ensure there are no

violations of the rights of people of determination and to protect them from exploitation and abuse. To reduce and prevent abuse of disabled, including disability detection mechanisms and rehabilitation of victims (Khalil, 2017).

The vision of the national policy to empower people of determination is to achieve inclusion in society without obstacles to empower these people and ensure them a decent life, while the mission of this policy is to empower people of determination and their families and provide them with a quality of life at a high level. This policy aims to achieve four main objectives. The first objective is access to community inclusion; the second is to achieve active participation; the third is to promote equal opportunities; and finally, the last is to support and empower individuals and families to carry out their roles. Several gaps have been addressed in the following areas which this policy is covering: health and rehabilitation; education; vocational rehabilitation and employment; accessibility; social protection and family empowerment; and public life and culture and sport. This study focusses on the education part as it is about access for students with SEND to the higher education institutions in the UAE.

The main gaps found in the education area are the lack of awareness around accepting student with SEND in public education in the community; the curriculum and teaching methods not covering their learning needs, in addition to the lack of the mechanisms to discover the learning disability at early stages in the general education schools; limited modifications, monitoring and coordination needed to support student with SEND; lack of specialized staff in education students with SEND; limited training programs covering the inclusion principles for teachers; the need for comprehensive policies for children with SEND in the nurseries; and last, two gaps can be found in the lack of vocational educational paths for students with SEND in schools and universities and the lack of organized policies to teach students with SEND in higher education, with

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systems and procedures for admissions exams for universities and institutes such as English language … etc. (MOCD, 2017).

In Table 1.1, the education theme (objectives, initiatives and participating parties) which is part of the national policy to empower people of determination reflects the limitations of inclusion in higher education and confirms the need to provide students with SEND a clear educational track at all the learning stages.

| Theme | Objectives | Initiatives | Participating parties |
|---|---|---|---|
| Education | Develop an inclusive educational system (general, vocational, higher) | • Provide a clear educational path for all types of disabilities in all its phases.<br>• Redesign and adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of people of determination. Provide resource rooms to support the means, techniques and aids to educate people of determination.<br>• Provide therapeutic support services (speech therapy, occupational, behaviour modifications, etc.).<br>• Empower and engage communities and families in educational, recreational, sports, cultural and artistic activities. | • Ministry of Education.<br>• Ministry of Community Development.<br>• Local education authorities.<br>• Education Councils.<br>• Disabled Centers (federal & local governmental and private)<br>• Schools.<br>• Universities and higher education.<br>• Associations.<br>• Graduations of people of determination. |
| | Provide highly qualified and competent teachers in the education of people of determination in various disabilities and school grades | • Open some specialties to educate people of determination by universities and institutes (such as autism and severe disabilities education).<br>• Add a simple education in all undergraduate teachers at the pre-service stage, to include the principles of education and assessment of people of determination students as well as learning disabilities.<br>• Launch national training programs for national staff working in the field of disabilities, including teachers and professionals in education. | |

**Table 1.1: Education (National policy to empower people of determination)**
(Ministry of Community Development, 2017, p. 25)

With the increase in the inclusion level of students with disabilities in UAE general education schools, the increase in admission requests from them to enroll in higher education is expected in the United Arab Emirates. Alborno and Gaad (2012) conducted a study discussing a case study of employing adults with disabilities, which is an indication that the future of this category to access in higher education and work

placement needs to be considered in the UAE. In the meantime, access by students with disabilities to higher education in the United Arab Emirates is very limited, with few of people with disabilities enrolling in the colleges and universities. Higher education institutions are not ready to accommodate all the existing students with disabilities because they do not offer the supportive services for all kind of disabilities. For instance, deaf students can't get access to the federal higher education institutions. Those who could not gain access were getting scholarships from the office of Higher Education to study abroad. Unfortunately, scholarships for students with disabilities (specifically the deaf and blind) have been put on hold.

In August 2017, the Ministry of Community Development wrote an article that was published in the newspaper stating that students with disabilities face challenges to access higher education. Therefore, they announced an amendment to the law of the people with disability rights to bring it into alignment with the national policy for the empowerment of persons with disabilities launched by His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE, which covered all stages of education, including higher education. Also, the ministry is working to issue a policy for people with determination to help them overcome these challenges and ensure their access to all stages of education. There is now a collaboration between the Ministry of Community Development and the Ministry of Higher Education to assign employees to be in charge of the students requiring SEND services in all public and private universities in the UAE, in addition to guaranteeing a high quality of learning opportunities and an accessible educational environment to achieve successful inclusion in the higher education sector (Khalil, 2017).

Services available for people of Determination in UAE (2/1)

| Services available | | | Citizen | Non-citizen |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Health | | Health services | | |
| | | Medical (compensatory) supporting devices | | |
| | Rehabilitation | Early intervention | | |
| | | Inclusion in nursery | | |
| | | Rehabilitation centers | | |
| Education | | Inclusion in schools | | |
| | | Inclusion in Higher Education | | |
| | | Inclusion in vocational education | | |
| Vocational rehabilitation/ Employment | | Rehabilitation programs | | |
| | | Training (supported employment) | | |
| | | Vocational orientation tests | | |
| | | Recruitment | | |
| | | Post –employment Follow up . | | |
| | | Peers Training | | |
| | | Assessing working environment | | |

Legend

Available in full ⬤    Available ◗    Available in part ◐    Available but limited ◔    Not available ○

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**Figure 1.1: Services available for people of determination in UAE**

(MOCD, 2017, p. 14)

Figure 1.1 is part of the national policy to empower people of determination and shows the current states of inclusion in higher education, which is limited. The UAE government added a legal framework to address disabilities issue and support people with disabilities. The awareness about the needs and rights of disabled people is growing, but still there is a lack of a framework to start taking actions to apply the law and the policies to the educational system.

## 1.7 Overview of Chapters

This study includes five chapters. The first chapter provided the introduction, it contained background about inclusive and special education and the efforts of the UAE

government and leaders to protect the rights of people with disabilities which led to historical/significant change by calling them 'people with determination' instead of 'people with disabilities', in addition to the significance of the study. It also discussed the objective and questions of the study to support the admissions process for the students with disabilities into higher education and finally the rationale behind conducting this study.

Chapter two presents a comprehensive literature review covering the theoretical and research literature relevant to the study. The first section starts the discussion about the importance of inclusive and special education to provide people with disabilities a higher quality of life through education and career training under the principles of social justice theory. The second section explains the concepts of special inclusion and some related issues. Also, it discusses the role of educational leadership in implementing inclusive and special education successfully. The third section discusses research that has been done about disabilities resources offices in higher education as part of the collected data in the study and the role of employees working in such offices during the admissions process as well as the services they provide to students with disabilities after they are enrolled. The fourth section discusses students with disabilities studying abroad. As part of the data collection piece, this section includes interviews with people working in the department in the Ministry of Higher Education overseeing students studying abroad and students with disabilities who got the opportunity to study abroad. Finally, the fifth section discusses educational policies in terms of the stages of the policy cycle, which will be helpful for analyzing the existing policies as a part of this study.

Chapter three describes the research methodology applied in this study. This study followed the qualitative approach in using three different methods to collect the relevant

data: participant observation, semi-structured interviews and documents collection and analysis. The chapter consists of a selection of the sites the participated in the study; sampling and subject selection using purposive sampling, wherein the researcher used interpretive analysis to analyze the collected data; and concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness, challenges, limitations and ethical considerations.

Chapter four presents the results, analysis and discussion. It contains four sections. The first analyzes the documents related to the admission of students with disabilities in government organizations and institutions of higher education, which includes the national policy to empower people of determination; the UAE cabinet decision number 43 in 2018 about supporting people with disabilities (of determination) in their work; the Abu Dhabi 2017 disability classification manual; and policies related to the universities 'A' and 'B'. The second section presents results collected through interviews with the National Admission and Placement Office (NAPO) and the scholarships department in the Higher Education Office, the heads of admission in public and private universities, the heads of the disability services offices in the universities, students with disabilities in institutions of higher education in the UAE and abroad to answer the research questions. The results were organized long the following themes: the history of the inclusive and special education in the higher education; the recruitment of students with disabilities into higher education; the admissions process, which includes admissions requirements, the process to handle applications and criteria to make the decision; services for students with disabilities; the current situation of inclusive and special education in higher education; the increase in the enrolment of students with disabilities; scholarships for students with disabilities to study abroad; and experiences of students with disabilities in higher education. The

third section will present the participant observation. The fourth section will present the summary.

Chapter five is the conclusion, it includes summary of the study, key findings, implications, recommendations, limitations and challenges, scope for future research and conclusion.

# CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explores policies and procedures for admission processes of disabled students' applications to join higher education. The admission process is the first door to be knocked on in order to gain access to higher education. In order to understand the important factors involved in this process and their role in increasing the enrolment of students with disabilities in higher education, the literature review will have sections on topics important to this study, including social justice for disabilities, inclusive and special education, inclusive and special education in higher education, transition from grade school to higher education for students with disabilities, disabilities services in higher education, study abroad for students with disabilities, educational policy and policy cycle and decision-making.

Social justice work is required to accomplish inclusive and special education in universities, who should be considering policy-making processes to support the practices. Social justice became part of the policy aims for decision makers who are involved in the strategic plans of higher education. Social justice is part of a vocabulary used by people who are calling for fairer and more democratically-empowered communities. The political system in higher education combines social justice considerations and inclusion strategies to build a framework which assures economic growth and human capital development through fair access and high aspirations (Singh 2011).

## 2.1 Theoretical Framework

This section identifies the theoretical framework designed for this study, which allows for the examination of policies and procedures in handling disabled students' applications to join higher education. In order to include the factors involved and identify which are appropriate for the study, three aspects of the theoretical framework

are included: social justice theory, inclusive education theory for higher education and policy theory. The three aspects are represented in figure 2.1.

Social Justice

Inclusive special education theory ➕ Policy cycle theory ➡ Inclusive and Special Education in the higher Education
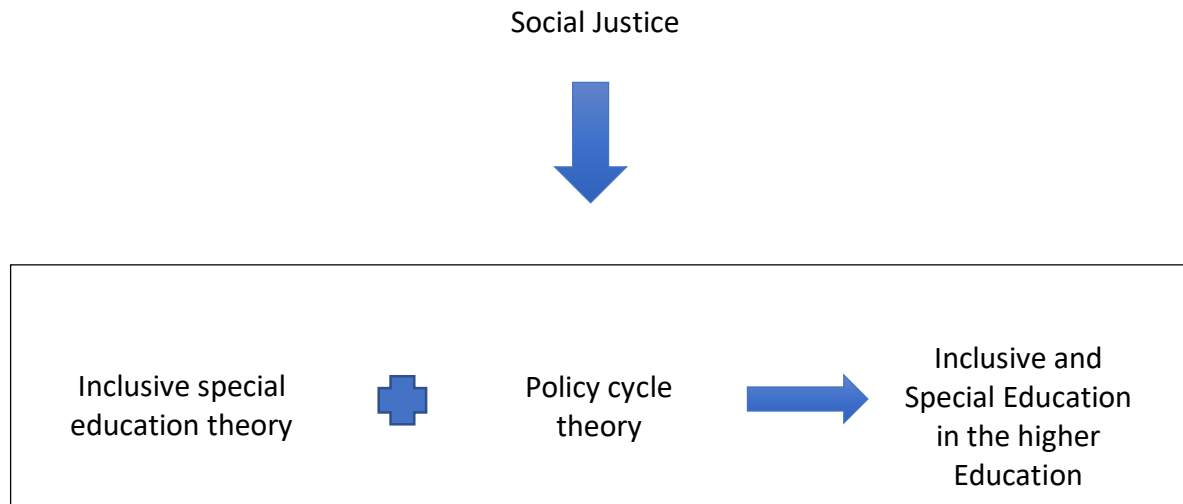
**Figure 2.1: Study frame work**

Under the concept of the social justice, I will be discussing the rights of people with disabilities to access higher education. According to Miller (1999, p. 1), social justice provides a rationale for 'how the good and bad things in life should be distributed among the members of a human society'. Social justice is the fair and just relation between the individual and society and it's measured through the distribution of wealth, opportunities for personal activity and social privileges. The social model of disability focuses on the physical conditions and the policy makers' actions and decisions to pay attention to the difficulties people with disabilities face in living, working, studying, and so on (Diker & Turkun 2013). Many researchers wrote about the impact of the social justice theory on the disabled. Robina and Riddell (2005) published a paper "Social justice and disabled people: principles and challenges". This paper considered the concept of social justice and its applicability to disability. This theory will help in justifying the importance of and the need for applying inclusive and special education in higher education.

Hornby's (2015) theory of inclusive special education was selected because it includes both special and inclusive education and is a model based on qualitative research. It is a combination of the philosophy and values of inclusive education with the practices and procedures of special education. It provides a practical framework for policies, procedures and teaching strategies to achieve effective and successful inclusive and special education for students with disabilities. Hornby has written extensively on major aspects of this theory including definitions, rights, labeling, peers, an etiology, intervention models, goals, curricula, reality, finance, means and ends and research evidence that should be addressed within inclusive and special education.

The third theory to be used is policy cycle theory. Lasswell was the first one to introduce the idea of the policy process in 1956. The model he introduced involved seven stages: intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination and appraisal. This field improved during the 1960s and 1970s; therefore these stages went through changes. The stages today are: agenda-setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation and evaluation and termination. This theory will help in following the inclusive special education policy cycle in order to analyze it and improve its implementation to be more effective. The first stage is agenda-setting, which includes problem recognition and issue selection, which in this study is the low enrollment of students with disabilities in higher education. The second stage is policy formulation. In this research, I will review all the policies that have been formulated regarding the inclusive special education in the higher education system in the UAE. The third stage is decision-making implementation. Making decisions follows formulating the policies. I will follow the implications of the current policies in admission services for the students with disabilities. The fourth stage is evaluation and termination. In this stage, I will investigate how these policies contributed to solve the

problem of low enrolment of students with disabilities in higher education (Jann & Wegrich 2007).

**2.2 Social Justice for Disabilities**

Under the concept of the social justice, I will discuss the rights of people with disabilities to access higher education. According to Miller (1999, p. 1, cited in Goodlad and Riddell 2005), in general, social justice provides a rationale for 'how the good and bad things in life should be distributed among the members of a human society'. Social justice is the fair and just relation between the individual and society and it's measured through the distribution of wealth, opportunities for personal activity and social privileges. A human rights approach toward people with disabilities moved away from focusing on the person's limitations, because to access social services in a community develops their capabilities to the maximum; to enjoy their rights is the core idea of the social model of disability. Ensuring the social model of disability does not mean to reject medical services. The social model concept along with support from medical services all work together to empower people with disabilities and enhance their independence. Removing the barriers could be done through their positive contribution and participation, in addition to the government's role and civil society both working together to overcome challenges faced by people with disabilities to activate their participation in the communities where they live by learning and working (The United Nations Children's Fund 2007).

The social model of disability, drawing on this foundation, focusses on the physical conditions and the policy makers' actions and decisions to pay attention to the difficulties people with disabilities face in living, working, studying, etc. (Diker & Turkun 2013). 'Education, it is argued, enables people to live with dignity, develop their full capacities, participate fully in development and improve the quality of their

lives' (Miles & Singal 2010, p. 3). Based on the social model of disability, all students should participate and learn, because higher education experiences provide opportunities for empowerment through enhancing their knowledge and social skills (Oliver 1990).

There is a long history regarding social justice research conducted by authors such as Rawls (1971), Miller (1999), Reeves (2005), Fainstein (2009), Marcuse (2009) and Harvey (2009), that examined many issues like segregation, exclusion and discrimination through focusing on economics, ethnicity and gender, but very few studies were conducted on the unequal opportunities available to disabled people (Diker & Turkun 2013). Goodlad and Riddell (2005) considered the concept of social justice and its applicability to disability, arguing that social justice theory can help in justifying the importance of and the need for applying inclusivity to special education in higher education.

A study was conducted about inclusive education in higher education at the University of Seville using a qualitative methodological approach and asking whether the university is an institution that opens or closes its doors to students with disabilities. One of the barriers mentioned was that the students had problems accessing the University, as well as issues related to their registration, requesting scholarships and getting the help that they needed (Morgado et al. 2016).

This report reviewed publications between 1992–1999 with regard to ensuring people with disabilities had access to educational opportunities that develop their abilities and skills to live independently in Europe. The report presented a summary of these publications highlighting the main problems in two areas. The first area was education and training, which addressed problems such as a high percentage of dropouts, a low level of access to education and training, a lack of or limited qualifications, and an

underestimation of abilities and vocational training that was not always related to job practices. The second area was employment, which addressed problems such as a high rate of unemployment, a low level of access to employment, difficulties in facing changing working conditions, the negative attitude of employers and limited or missing contact with education. Data showed that people with disabilities face challenges in joining the labor market not because of their disability but because of a low level of access to education and training (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education 2002).

Some concerns have been raised about the economic wellbeing of people with disabilities, including being able to acquire the equipment and devices they need to help them handle their daily routine tasks, which can cost them a significant proportion of their income, which makes it difficult to experience "good living" (Sen 2009).

Based on Mille's point of view regarding the principles of social justice:

> poverty is commonly understood as an economic condition that does not allow one (or a family) to maintain basic human needs (food, clothing, healthcare, housing) …. Meeting needs in service to social justice then would require that all persons/ families have access to all goods necessary to human existence. A minimalist would argue that this revolves around basic service, health, education, and physiological needs. A minimalist would extend this to include quality of life issues. (Capeheart & Milovanovic 2007, p. 88)

The social model of disability points out that people with disabilities are excluded from society. Moore and Yeo (2003) explained this exclusion through the diagram in Figure 2.1 showing the relationship between poverty and disability, and the relationship between exclusion and poverty. They found that limited access to education and employment was a reason for poverty and exclusion among people with disabilities. It is important for those who are working toward developing the disability sector to consider how it is related to reducing poverty (cited in Yeo 2005). The Department of International Development (2000) noted a strong relationship between levels of

education and economic growth: education helps poor people to develop their skills and enhance their productivity for a better economic status.
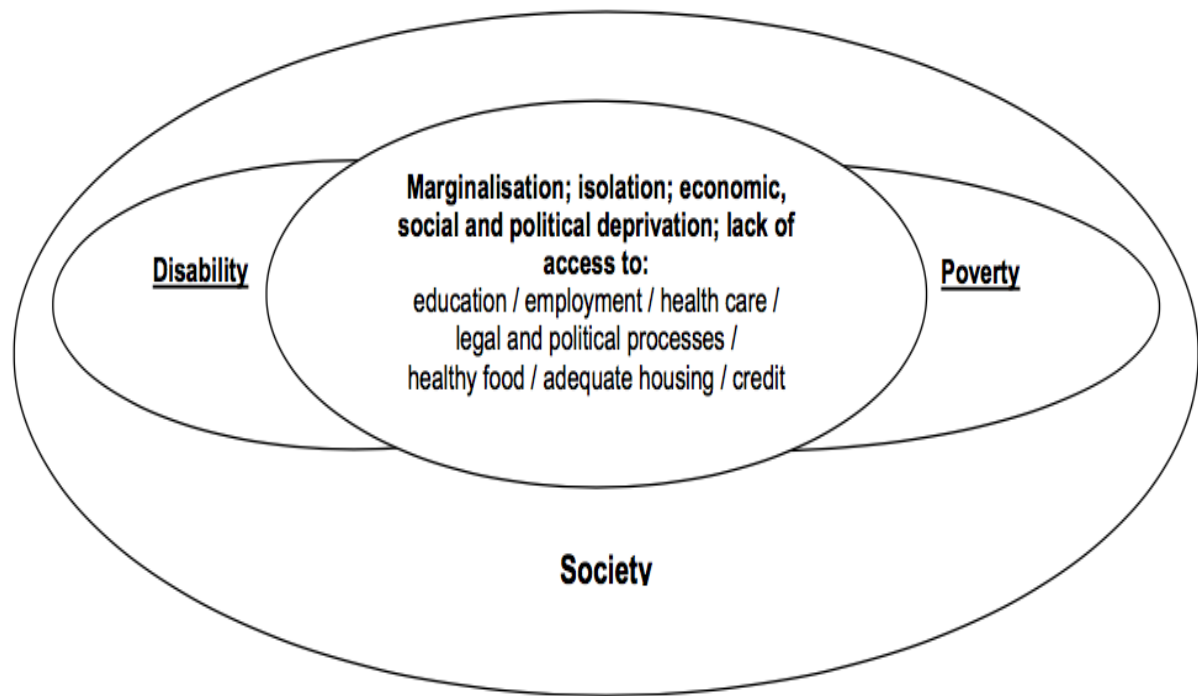


**Figure 2.2: The relationship between the characteristics of poverty and disability**

(Adopted from Yeo 2005, p. 21)

Venter and his colleagues (2002) conducted a needs analysis in five countries (India, Malawi, Mexico, Mozambique and South Africa) using focus groups and interviews regarding the mobility and access issues people with disabilities face in their daily lives. They classified the barriers to access and mobility for students with disabilities into three main areas as shown in Figure 2.2. The findings showed that raising awareness among community members was very helpful in reducing the levels of these barriers; people became more welcoming of people with disabilities and understanding of their needs in various situations. Building a proper inclusive and special education system

that provides students with disabilities access to education could lead to higher levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. Providing training opportunities for some staff in each service area in society, teaching them how to communicate with students with disabilities is another important need, especially for those with hearing impairments. Students with disabilities need devices and equipment in order to be able to access higher education and complete or resume their studies. These devices include items such as wheelchairs, crutches and hearing aids, the purchase of which increases costs for disabled students over those that other students are paying. Initiating a system to provide disabled students with such devices through sponsors or a borrowing system would help to overcome such difficulties.
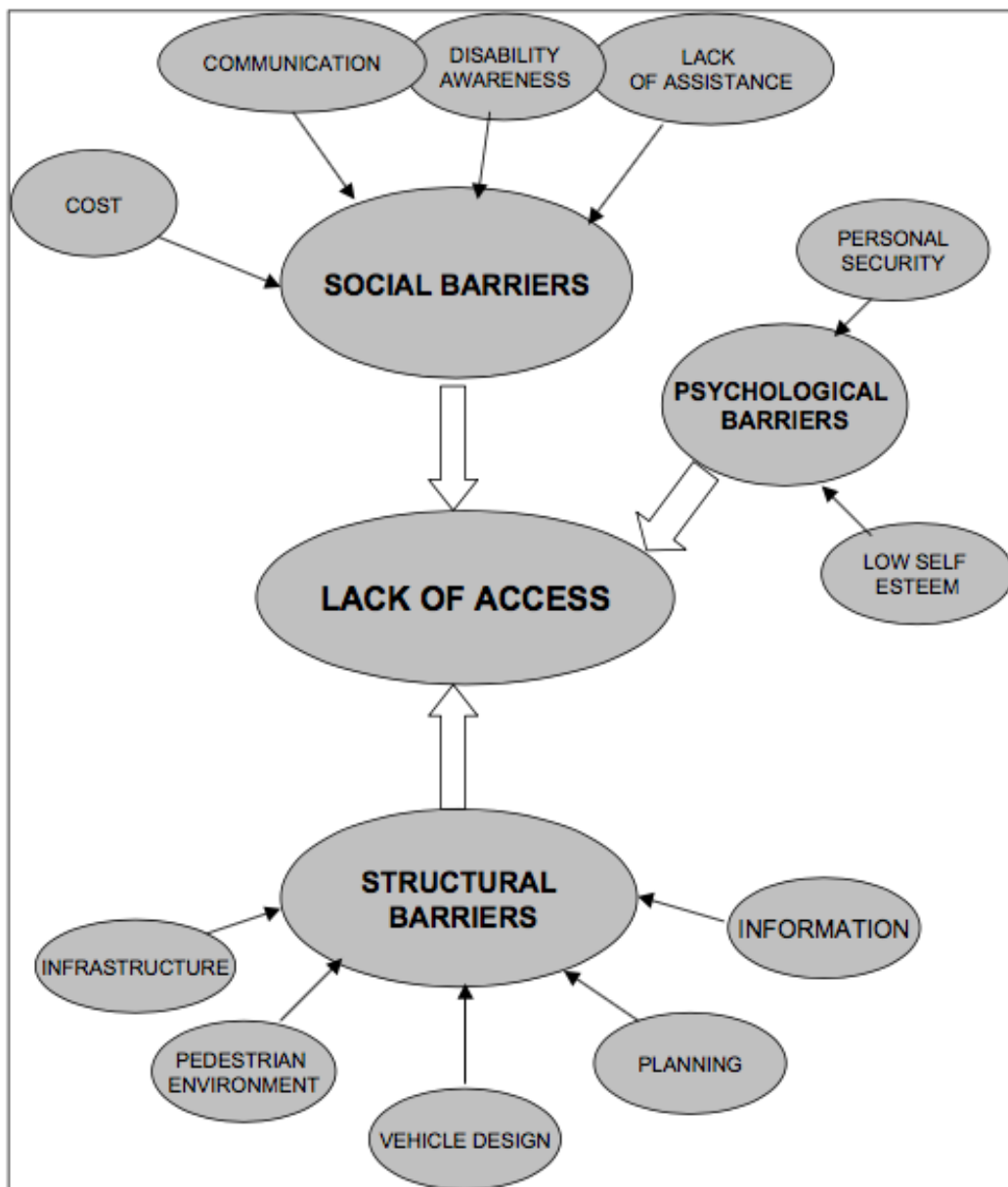
**Figure 2.3: Barriers to accessibility identified by needs analysis**

(Venter et al. 2002, p. 8).

The study results of Venter et al. (2002) in Africa and India highlighted the relationship between disability, poverty and the lack of access to important services in developing countries. In India, 50% of people with disabilities did not go to school and their employment rate is very low. The bad financial and economic circumstances among people with disabilities is because of the lack of access to education and employment

opportunities, which in turn leads to economic hardship. Enhancing access to education, employment, health care and social services is very important to ensure a good income and a better financial status for disabled people and increases the overall human development in their communities. Policy makers should consider such issues to be high on priority lists for government strategy and national agenda planning (Venter et al. 2002).
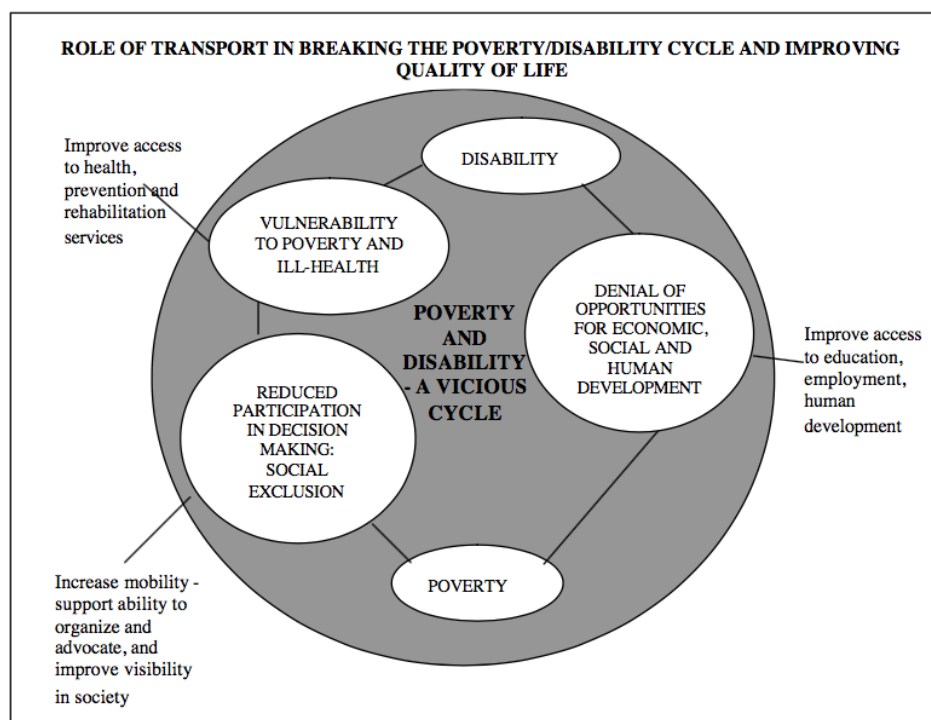


**Figure 2.4: The disability poverty cycle and the role of transport**

(cited in Venter et al. 2002, p. 5)

In Australia, after the second World War, people started to recognize education would improve their life regardless of their social background (Gale & Tranter 2011). Social justice is strongly related to need, desert, and equality. Social justice with respect to needs means that necessary needs such as food, medical resources and housing be provided based on the various resources for each need. The expression 'economic desert' is an issue for social justice; it is about the way people are rewarded for their

performance in their work. Equality is another part of social justice dealing with allowing people to enjoy their different rights in the community (legal, political and social rights) in a fair and equal manner.

To achieve social justice in the community and make it a reality through higher education, a community requires three good high-level circumstances: sustainable development, economic development and equity. Sustainable development is the ability to continuously provide requirements to meet the developmental needs of the future generations as well as the current generations. Education for sustainable development is providing students with high-quality education from early childhood to higher education as an ongoing process over their lifetime (Waghid 2014). A study conducted in this regard discussed three fields: social sustainability, social justice and educational sciences to explore the relationship between the social sustainability and education. The study found interdependencies and overlaps between sustainability and education. Unequal access to education leads to social injustice; education is considered an important factor in achieving economic capital and economic issues cause living changes (Ketschau 2005).

Education plays an important role in promoting freedom and social justice (UNESCO 1996). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) established three main goals for educationally-sustainable development which promotes and improves the quality of education: reorienting the curricula, raising public awareness of the concept of sustainable development and training the work force (Gough 2006). To build a successful special inclusion system into education for students with disabilities, these goals should be considered. Students with disabilities have the right to learn properly and get the required academic skills that enable them to succeed and join higher education.

Modification is another important issue to make the curriculum suitable to the cases of disabled students. The preparedness and readiness for work improves their lives and achieves the second circumstance of social justice, which is economic development. Economic development should be reflected in improvements in living standards and quality of life. Economic development is related to economic wellbeing and strong wellbeing comes from governments providing their citizens with better opportunities for economic development in fields such as health and education, as well as political and cultural areas (Kabuya 2011). Zdeck (in Ngowi 2009) mentioned that two aspects of economic development are creating jobs and providing access to quality education. Higher education degrees are vitally important to getting employed and maintaining economic development; meanwhile, the jobs available for high school graduates are obviously decreasing (Pedraja 2013).

Maunder et al. (2004) have examined different solutions to overcoming these barriers in each country. Figure 2.3 shows a sound access practice that has four fundamental factors: safety, accessibility, reliability and affordability (SARA). Safe conditions to avoid accidents and injuries, to ensure the safety of people with disabilities. Accessibility demands consideration of different types of disabilities during the designing of the services. Reliability of the service should be beneficial and is important for people with disabilities. The cost of accessing the service should be reasonable and affordable (Maunder et al. 2004).
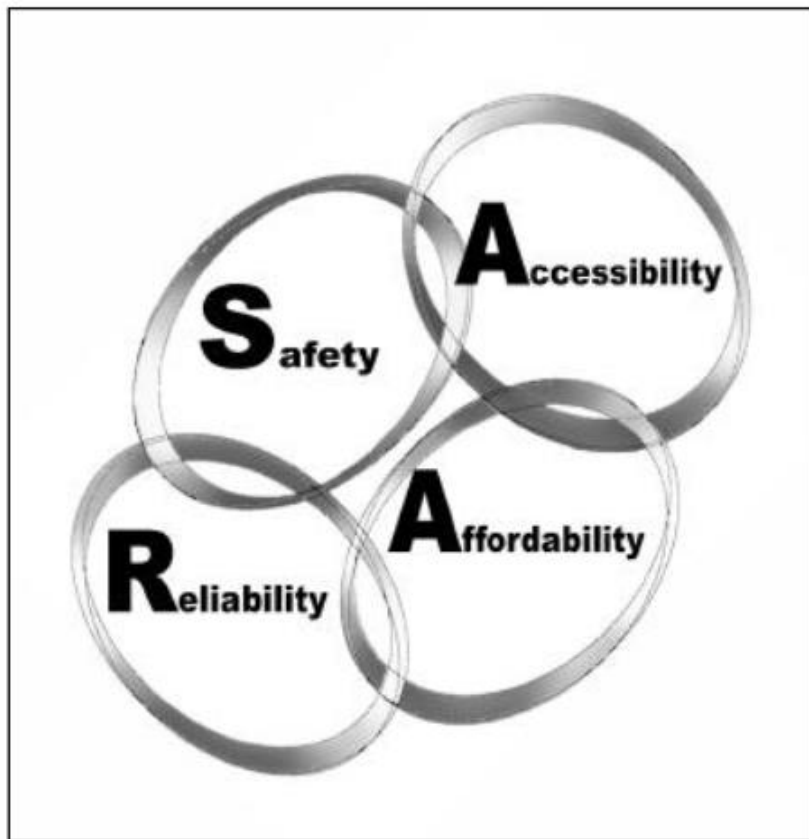
**Figure 2.5: Basic principles of good access**

**SARA. The top four issues** (cited in Maunder et al. 2004, p. 3).
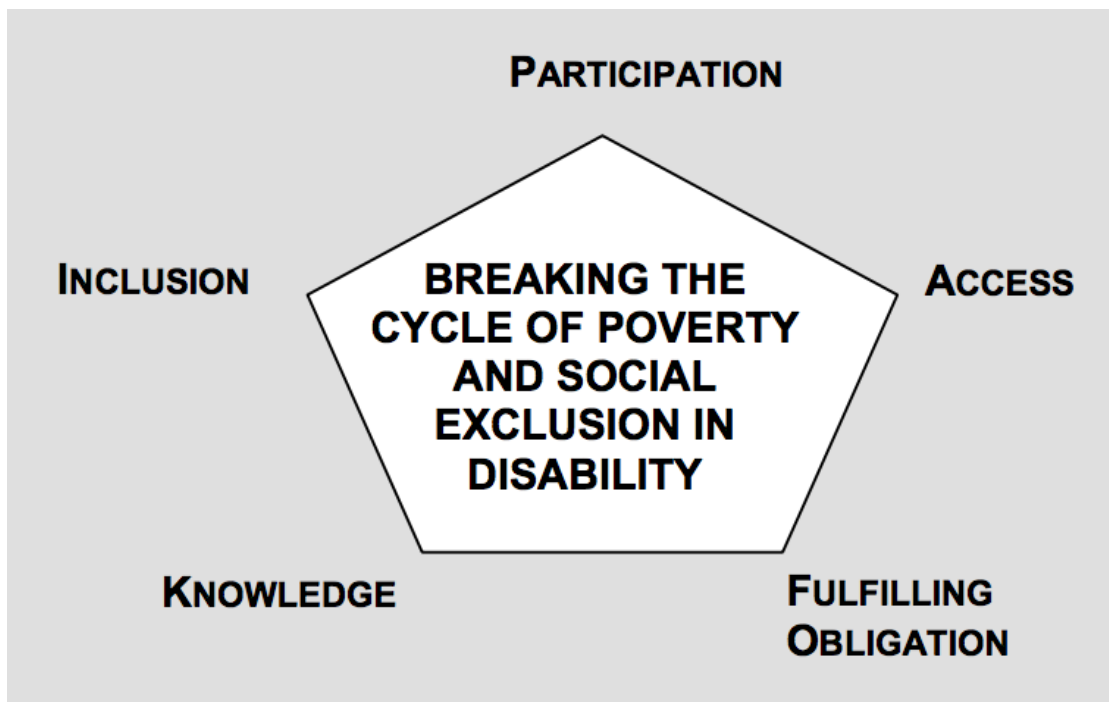
**Figure 2.6: KIPAF Framework**

(Department for International Development 2004, p. 7).

KIPAF (Knowledge, Inclusion, Participation, Access and Fulfilment of obligation in disability rights) is a framework reflecting the agenda of the Department of International Development in the UK. It was built based on the social model of disability to overcome the obstacles to including people with disabilities in the community and to control the barriers to entry by paying attention to the issues of inclusion, access, participation, knowledge and fulfilling human rights obligations. Spreading knowledge and information based on research regarding disability issues helps people with disabilities to secure a higher quality of life. Increasing the level of inclusion in all of society by providing people with disabilities more opportunities to be involved in social and economic activities in order help them get access to education and employment is worthwhile. People with disabilities should be given the chance to use their voices in decision-making processes during their representative role in

organizations; this is a democratic practice that should be implemented to meet the UAE's commitments to the Human Rights Convention.

The accessibility of the social environment, getting access to social services such as education, health or social protection are part of this. The ability of the disabled to buy property and earn an income by themselves in order to be more independent is also important. Ensuring that the policies and legislation designed to protect and promote the achievement of rights and empowerment of people with disabilities are fulfilled by government and other organizations is a concern of all responsible entities in society (Department for International Development 2004).

The population of the UAE has economic wellbeing, which is reflected in people's high salaries and quality of life, but still people with disabilities are not sharing the benefits of this aspect of society because of the obstacles and challenges they face trying to participate in higher education. Equity is the third circumstance, as there are UAE laws and legislations which ensure equity for people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) in all the different fields, but unfortunately, they are not applied effectively in the higher education sector yet. Therefore, the UAE government should work hard to build a practical system and prepare the higher education institutions that allow students with SEND to access higher education. Their success in gaining a higher education degree will grant them better job opportunities and higher incomes, which will allow them to lead a better life. Social justice is very important and should be the main principle and concept to cover creating inclusive schools and universities in the educational system.

## 2.3 Inclusive Education

An inclusive education means including all of the learners in the same class and, as a movement, it's growing internationally (Gaad 2011). But social justice for inclusive

and special education won't succeed unless we build an academic environment where all students with disabilities are included equally and respected. Education is not just getting information and practicing activities, it's about developing intellectual skills, becoming critical learners and experiencing success (Shields & Mohan 2008). Ryan (2006), argued that social justice is a very important element to applying fully successful inclusion. Inclusive and special education is a practice that guarantees all students the right to learn despite their abilities as well as respect for their difference. Social justice is about fairness in distributing resources and public services, which includes education and the right to learn.

Learners without disabilities also see benefits: increased appreciation, acceptance of individual differences and respect for all people. The benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities: improved social relationships and networks, peer role models, increased achievement, higher expectations, increased collaboration among school staff and improved integration of families into the community (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education 2002).

Hornby's (2015) theory of inclusive special education was selected because it includes both special and inclusive education and because it is a model based on qualitative research. It is a combination of the philosophy and values of inclusive education with the practices and procedures of special education. It provides a practical framework for policies, procedures and teaching strategies to achieve effective and successful inclusive and special education for students with disabilities. Hornby has written extensively on many major aspects of this theory including definitions, rights, labelling, peers, etiology, intervention models, goals, curricula, reality, finance, means and ends and research.

There is confusion regarding the definition of "inclusion" because it's used in many ways and for different purposes, such as an "inclusive society" and "inclusive schools". In this study, inclusion of students with SEND means accepting students with SEND into higher education institutes to study in the regular classes side by side with other students. This is accomplished by arranging a process—which includes the whole institute—to develop an inclusive academic and learning environment where the SEND students' needs can be met effectively. It is a human right of students with SEND to get access and learn beside their peers. Rejecting their applications because of their special needs or disabilities should be considered on par with denying their human rights. To avoid confusion, we should be aware of the difference between human rights and moral right. What could be considered as a human right might not be the best option for the students to do in a moral sense. In addition to getting a suitable education that meets their needs, there is a concern that using some practices such as individual education plans (IEPs) could result in labelling, which often leads to stigmatizing students with SEND. Avoiding such important practices could cause harm because the disabled and their specific needs will not be identified, therefore the students won't get the support required to get the appropriate education that meets their needs.

Norwich (2013) called this confusion the 'dilemma of difference'. He found in his study that students with SEND can be stigmatized even without labelling or identification because of their poor academic performance. Therefore, identification through preparing good IEPs and transition plans support the student to succeed in their academic journey, to be continued even after they leave school.

While inclusive education is also known as educating students with SEND alongside their peers in mainstream classrooms, students with SEND feel more comfortable and get a stronger sense of belonging by learning with colleagues who share similar

interests, abilities, disabilities and difficulties. Educational placement should be considered to include students with SEND in the learning community. There were different point of views regarding the etiology of special educational needs and disabilities. First, many assumed SEND happens because the children are born with physiological or psychological difficulties. The second point of view suggested that SEND is totally socially constructed. Inclusive and special education admits the role of different factors in the etiology of SEND. These factors are physiological, psychological, environmental and social, in addition to the psychosocial model which includes an ecological view of the etiology of SEND and of interventions required to understand it within inclusive and special education.

Special education interventions have been impacted by a wide range of disciplines such as medical, psychological and other different treatment models which disagree with the point of view that the best path forward focuses on the students' needs and strengths. Inclusive and special education enhances considering both points of view by focusing on a student's strengths, needs and other models (medical, psychological, etc.) that influenced by. The focus on academic achievement as a main goal of education has been increased lately with less attention given to the development of life skills, social skills, communication skills and independent living skills. In contrast, the goals of education within inclusive and special education are the development of life skills, vocational skills and social skills, in addition to academic skills (Hornby 2015).

> The major goal of education for children with SEND, as with all children, is to produce happy and productive citizens who are included in their communities as much as possible and have the skills needed to meet the demands of adult life. (Hornby 2015, p.243)

Inclusion is a dynamic process which contains continuous reflection, rethinking, analyzing and learning leading to the child's physical, emotional, social and cognitive development (Centre for Studies on Inclusion Education 1997).

The national curriculum designed for students in mainstream schools emphasizes academic performance more than personal, social or vocational education, which does not help students with SEND to succeed. Unsuitable curricula create more emotional and behavioral difficulties which lead to failure. Inclusive and special education calls to provide students with SEND access to appropriately balanced curricula that consider both academic curricula and functional curricula to meet their educational needs. The concept of inclusion was introduced as a way to show its applicability to educate all students with SEND in mainstream schools effectively. Currently, this is not the reality because of obstacles such as a lack of relevant attitudes, knowledge, skills and training that teachers need to take over inclusion tasks in their classes with SEND students. To apply the policy of full inclusion successfully, inclusive and special education requires teachers to receive continuous professional development training to support their practices and increase their competence to teach students with SEND (Hornby 2015). Many resistant teaching professionals raised the concern of the difficulties in being able to afford inclusive and special education, but the fact is a segregated system is much more expensive and costs the government a significant portion of their education budgets for these resources (Centre for Studies on Inclusion Education 1997).

The funding of inclusion systems to educate students with SEND in mainstream schools is an issue that causes educators concern and confusion. Inclusive and special education focuses on having sufficient funds for the inclusion system to provide SEND students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that support their independence and success in the life after school. Inclusion is not just about helping SEND students to get their education in the mainstream schools, it's about being included in their community in their daily activities, which will be beneficial after leaving school (Hornby 2015).

Inclusive and special education takes into consideration that these elements would combine to be the most effective system to fight against discrimination attitudes, create welcoming communities, build an inclusive society and achieve education for all (Centre for Studies on Inclusion Education 1997).

Strong collaboration between governmental organizations is needed to agree on the main standards of successful inclusion and achieve changes in policy, legislation and practices. The UNESCO Salamanca Statement and UN standards rules confirmed the importance of including people with disabilities in all the educational process stages and asking them about what kinds of policies and solutions they wished to see (Centre for Studies on Inclusion Education 1997; World Conference on Special Needs Education Access and Quality 1994).

Successful implementation of inclusive education requires an effective and well-planned collaboration between the ministries responsible for students with disabilities to ensure smooth transition of services and resources (Gaad 2011). They include the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Community Development, the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Health.

Despite the existing level of research, the proponents of inclusion believe that there is still an inadequate research base for inclusive education (Lindsay 2007). Many other researchers (Farell 2010; Kauffman et al 2011) supported her point of view. Inclusive and special education confirms the need for more intensive research regarding the effectiveness of policy and practice focusing on evaluating interventions, programs and educational placements. In addition, there is a need for more research on the post-school stage for students with SEND (Hornby 2015). The Centre for Studies on Inclusion Education (1997) encourages academic researchers to conduct more studies on inclusive and special education that leads to more solutions.

**2.4 Social justice and leadership**

Research by Chapman et al. (2011) focused on the important role of the leadership to enhance the success of students with disabilities and suggested that inclusion of a diverse student population can, under the right organizational conditions, activate collaborative initiatives and encourage innovative ways of teaching.

During the last decade, the interest of university administrators in social justice issues has increased as a result of the increasing number of students at risk (Grogan in Karpinski & Lugg 2006). Social justice and leadership have been viewed and discussed widely at both national and international levels. Ensuring social justice is part of a school administrator's responsibilities in their leadership role (Turhan 2010).

Because this study is analyzing the admission process for students with disabilities into higher education in the UAE, interviewees were all holding leadership positions such as the head of admissions and the head of Special Needs Services. Therefore, it is important to discuss issues and elements related to the educational leadership since they are responsible for implementing legal requirements and policies in making learning environments and educational institutes socially just. Education is a connected process requiring collaboration among several parties in an educational system including grade schools, higher education institutions and professional staff where they work together to achieve social justice in their work environments (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy 2005).

Many scholars conduct research on the relationship between leadership and social justice. A study was conducted in Pakistan about promoting social justice and equity through university education by exploring the perceptions of teachers on social justice and inequity in the universities of Pakistan using qualitative data analysis techniques. The study resulted in recommendations to emphasize the role of educators and policy

makers in implementing practical ways to promote social justice and equity (Abdulla & Chaudhry 2018). In Oman, researchers conducted a study about how school leaders affect attitudes toward inclusive education. The results showed that school leaders play an important role in school performance to implement and manage inclusive practices (Al-Mahdy & Emam 2018).

Ryan (2006), for example, explored this relationship in schools. A number of scholars have demonstrated that educational leadership needs to be more aware of moral aims for social justice because they should put their efforts into making the community equitable for everyone. Some have argued that practical practices of social justice and equity include self-reflection and critical thinking (Freire 1998; Lather 1986; Lum 1993 cited in Jean-Marie 2008). They argued that critical inquiry and self-reflection are important because they make leaders more aware of moral and ethical outcomes during daily practice. According to Brown (2004), self-reflection allows a leader to test personal assumptions, values and beliefs. Critical reflection combines both characteristics to include examination of personal beliefs and consideration of how ethical consequences impact practices. Reflection is a process by which we explain and assess our work experience critically.

Professional development plans and programs are another topic in this literature, since they are seen as important in preparing leaders to implement social justice effectively because the implementation might require a shift in values, attitudes and behaviors in their work environment (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy 2005). Karpinski and Lugg (2006) conducted an historical study aimed at exploring issues related to social justice and equity in educational administration. They provided an example of a leader, J. Rupert, who fought strongly to achieve social justice. Theoharis (2007) conducted a qualitative study about social justice educational leaders and resistance by interviewing

seven principals. These principals worked toward applying equity and justice through raising student achievement, improving school structures, re-entering and enhancing staff capacity and strengthening school culture and community. The principals' efforts led to an improvement in the educational environments in their schools, but during their work they faced resistance from their schools, their immediate communities, their districts and beyond which had negative effects on the principals and took a great personal toll on each of them, subjecting them to constant discouragement. In the end, the principals developed proactive coping strategies to maintain social justice in their schools. These examples show that changing values and practices is not easy and needs a huge effort and significant resources to be applied.

Another study conducted in the US explored the educational research on leadership preparation in terms of social justice. Many training programs have been arranged for people in leadership positions to prepare future leaders in the education sector to advocate for all the students, but still less is known about the impact of this training. These preparation programs should promote opportunities for inclusion, democratic schooling and social justice (Jean-Marie, Normore & Brooks 2009).

Bates (2005) found that in educational administration and social justice, the need for a suitable model of educational administration is required to overcome issues related to justice and fairness. Social justice is vital to achieving high-quality education, so educational administrations should consider it. It requires two elements: the first is distributive justice to ensure equity in the educational institute, meaning that each student gets their rights in all learning processes. The second is a recognition of justice, which results in understanding and respecting the cultural differences. Considering the fact that cultures are in a state of continuous change, education plays an important role in exploring the differences that arise. Educational administrations have significant

responsibilities and they can't ignore social justice issues anymore; these issues must be given priority to avoid injustice and to celebrate differences.

Jean-Marie (2008) explored the leadership practices of four female secondary school principals in the United States in their work to overcome the difficulties of social injustice and inequity they faced. These principals were practicing self-reflection and critical thinking together, which helped them to strengthen their staff and led to positive changes in the social justice and equitable learning atmosphere in their schools.

Educators for social justice should prioritize student learning and achievement as the main aim of their work. Building more inclusive schools requires responsible leaders who are aware of social justice principles and able to spread this awareness to create collaborative teams working toward building inclusive educational communities (Capper & Young 2014). Creating inclusive and special education in higher education institutes is not easy because proponents face challenges from upper management and other levels. Leaders should believe in the values and principles of social justice and bring that awareness to their teams. Without support from leaders, inclusive and special education will not find a place in reality.

## 2.5 Inclusive Education in the Higher Education Sector

A number of studies have demonstrated that students with disabilities either have not been able to continue their post-secondary schooling because of their special needs, since some higher education institutions rejected their applications, or they faced barriers and obstacles during their studies. Education is the most important field advocating for students with disabilities in their fight for equal access and equal treatment in both public school and higher education (Paul 2000).

Mock and Love (2012) conducted a study in the US to improve access to an inclusive postsecondary education, where professionals participated in qualitative data collection

to explore policies, practices and beliefs about access to higher education for students with intellectual disabilities. The existence of barriers and tension led to more restrictions and less inclusion. Another study conducted in Kenya about the role of higher education in promoting inclusive education found that less than 1% of people with special needs can access higher education because of several obstacles (Kochung 2011).

Many western countries like the US, Canada, Australia and Ireland offer postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities in colleges with different levels of inclusion. On some campuses, they separate special education courses and put students with disabilities into special classes without able students, while others apply full inclusive and special education in academic and social activities where students with disabilities and other students all learn together. It's different from country to country in the west, although many western countries are more advanced than many other parts in the world (Grigal, Hart & Weir 2012; Hart et al. 2006; Uditsky & Hughson 2012).

The Australian Government specified students with disabilities as one of the underrepresented groups in higher education. Support services and programs were promoted through government policy and funding for students with disabilities, but still the students' enrolment was not increasing. While 20% of Australia's population has disabilities, only 4% are enrolled in universities. The country passed the Australian Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in 1992 and introduced the Disability Standards for Education in 2005. Negative attitudes toward students with disabilities by universities lecturers have been addressed. Australia still needs to consider encouraging policies and legislation regarding disability in the universities, and the universities should create institutional policies to promote access and participation for students with disabilities (Ryan 2011).

Brandt (2011) conducted a study to explore the experiences of students with disabilities in Norway to address obstacles in the higher education system there. The study found that reform in Norway's higher education programs helped to enhance the academic skills and learning capabilities of students with disabilities in higher education. Also, the study found that the students who experienced difficult times during their studies got the modifications they needed. This study explored the experiences of students with disabilities while the country was implementing the Quality Reform of higher education institutions. The main goals of the Quality Reform in Norway were to help all students to succeed, to provide equal rights to education for all and to improve completion and dropout rates. The study showed that the reform led to positive changes and consequences. These positive changes improved the experiences of students with disabilities in Norwegian higher education institutions. However, some students also experienced challenges and difficulties in succeeding because they were not provided with the adjustments they needed.

Another study investigated the experience of students with disabilities in higher education in Scotland. The study resulted in the country addressing five areas that students with disabilities face obstacles during their studying: physical environment, access to information, entrance to higher education, assumptions of "normality" and levels of awareness. At the same time, while some cases were getting help to get over these obstacles, other initiatives were made to improve access for students with disabilities. These positive initiatives were the result of hiring disability coordinators, which reflected not only the importance of the disability service offices in the higher education institutions but also the qualifications of the staff member providing such services. Reviewing the institutions provisions and creating disability statements were

both important and helped to raise awareness of disability issues among administrators and faculty members (Tinklin & Hall 1999).

Fuller et al. (2004) conducted a study investigating the experience of students with disabilities in light of barriers they faced in the learning environment in a higher education institute. They specifically looked at those barriers related to teaching and assessments. The study highlighted the need for variety and flexibility to be considered in all of the teaching and learning processes the teachers and administrators go through, to ensure quality and access to information.

Bjornsdottir (2017) conducted a study describing a vocational diploma program designed for students with intellectual disabilities at University of Iceland's College of Education, exploring their sense of belonging to the college community. The program started in 2007, training the students to work in pre-primary schools, after-school programs or in the field of disability as self-advocates. Students who were not meeting admission conditions could apply to join this program. The main goals of this program were preparing students for particular jobs in the education field and providing them with both a proper college education and practical knowledge as well as skills within an inclusive education system designed to enhance their participation in the community. In the United States, students with disabilities are more vulnerable to dropping out and suspending their studies than able students (Ryan, Katsiyannis, Peterson & Chmelar 2007). The existence of the law called Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted to ensure the 'free appropriate public education' for students with disabilities, and to prevent discrimination against disabled students in the education field, including within institutions of higher education. The inclusive education was built based on the philosophy of equity in education to provide an education for students with disabilities (Gaad & Almotairi 2013).

The inclusion of students with disabilities in elementary and secondary education is different than including them in higher education, since the former are obligatory, while higher education is voluntary. So, students with disabilities may be rejected by colleges and universities or be discharged from their institution of higher education for not achieving required levels of academic performance (Wolanin & Steele 2004).

Although the attendance of students with disabilities is increasing in higher education, there are still barriers preventing their full participation. Riddell (1998) discussed the experience of students with disabilities in higher education where efforts have been made to remove barriers that students with disabilities face during their study. While there are initiatives to widen access, unfortunately, the funding of students in higher education has decreased significantly. In addition, other problems can be attributed to dealing with disability concepts within the medical model rather than the social model (Riddell 1998).

**2.5.1 Transition from high school to higher education for students with disabilities**

One of the important elements for the successful inclusion of disabled students in higher education is a transition plan designed from the student's early period in school rather than at the end of compulsory education in order to move from one educational stage to the next, and then from education to employment (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education 2002). In order to provide a successful transition to college, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in the US requested a transition plan be included in each student's IEP. The purpose of the transition plan was to prepare students with disabilities for the college, work and independence (Wolanin & Steele 2004).

Students with disabilities who are able to finish high school successfully and move directly to higher education represent the ideal case, where there is a shift—known as

"transition planning"—that has been well-thought-out. Transition to higher education for students with disabilities in the US includes shifting from a legal framework that mandates protection under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to a legal framework focused on equal access as specified by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), as amended by the Americans With Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) (Evans et al. 2017).

The main purpose of the transition plan is to systematically prepare students with disabilities for college, employment and independent living. The IEP is a written document which is prepared in consultation with the parents of the student, the student, a regular teacher, a special education teacher and other appropriate specialists. Preparing the IEP should start upon an agreement between the school, students and parent. When the student reaches age 14, the IEP should include a "statement of the transition service needs" and when the student reaches age 16, it should include a "statement of needed transition service". Transition services are activities designed to encourage and prepare the student to experience a smooth and successful move from grade school to higher education or vocational education, and on to employment, independent living and community participation (Wolanin & Steele 2004).

Students face three major challenges during this transition phase. The first is the requirement to be active, independent and responsible in order to get any needed accommodations. The second is the lessening involvement of the parents in this process. The third is that students will not get the same type and level of services; therefore, they need to build their time management and study planning skills and develop self-advocacy skills. Although transition planning is imperative, the practitioners service should be aware that not all the students with disabilities have the

same access to transition support. The students' access to supportive resources and accommodations in high school impact their transition experience (Evans et al. 2017). Although there are large organizations to support students' disabilities rights in education, many studies show that very few students with disabilities experience active transition planning during high school. Eckes and Ochoa (2005) conducted a study about the challenges students with disabilities face in college and, based on their work, it appears that low-quality transition services for students with disabilities from high school to higher education was one of the reasons behind these challenges. A number of authors have emphasized that having a proper IEP during the transition process is a very important element of preparing students with disabilities for higher education. An IEP document must include a statement about the current educational performance of the student, explaining how the student's disability impacts his/her learning process, annual goals or short-term objectives, supportive services and accommodations provided to the students or modifications to the curriculum, assistive technologies the student uses, as well as evaluation criteria, procedures and transition services for older students (Bartlett, Weisenstein & Etscheidt 2002).

A study conducted by Cawthon and Cole (2010) found that 91% of the students did not remember having an IEP or accommodations; of the few who experienced an IEP, a large percentage of them did not get any information about transition topics which should have been covered in their final IEP meetings. Information about supportive services and available accommodations are examples of knowledge that should be brought to students' attention in this process through a collaboration between the school counselors and the disability service offices in the universities.

Morina (2017) conducted a study in Spain that included three parts: the first describing the current situation of students with disabilities in higher education; the second part

presenting some related literature about students with disabilities and the faculty members in higher education; and the third exploring policies, strategies, processes and actions that played roles in supporting the students' success. The results demonstrated that a range of transformations at different levels should be considered in higher education in order to have more inclusive universities. First, university buildings should be fully accessible. Second, the first year is considered a sensitive transformative time for students with disabilities, the university should have a proactive role through to ensure smooth transition and avoid early dropout. Third, persistent professional development programs should be available for the faculty members to train them and enable them to address needs and issues of students with disabilities.

Parental involvement is required in the IEP, but they have no role in academic programs or non-academic activities in higher education. The culture in higher education is different and does not accept parents' involvement because they consider the students to be adults, responsible for managing their own lives. The students should sign a consent form or permission letter in order to allow the sharing of any information about their academic progress and non-academic activities with their parents (Wolanin & Steele 2004).

A number of studies have looked at how parents continue to involve themselves when their disabled child has entered an institute of higher education, which concerns employees at the resources office about how the relationship with the parents should be, and at which level they can share the educational records of the students with disabilities with their parents, especially given the need to follow the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) which limits what practitioners can share with the parents. Evans et al. (2017) argued that we cannot ignore parents' important role, especially because in most of the cases where students sought the disability

resources offices before the start of the academic year, it was because of the active role of their parents guiding them.

Students with disabilities should be able to disclose their case and identify accommodations they need. Studies showed that often, they are not prepared to disclose their status because they do not know how to apply for or access services available on campus to be used for their benefit. In some cases, they decide to not disclose their case because they want to study as other students without disabilities do and avoid the label of 'disabled'; others only disclose their case when they experience academic challenges. Students and their parents should be aware of the differences in the rights and responsibilities in schools and universities. In grade school, all the required assessments for the IEP in order to design the programs and activities for the students with disabilities are provided at public expense. In higher education, the students and their families have to pay the costs. The financial aid programs, a social service program such as vocational rehabilitation, or the college could help with some cases. In higher education, students are responsible for arranging payment for any tests needed and should be aware that they won't get such services routinely paid for or reimbursed.

Students have the right to get appropriate "modifications" while in grade school or attending an institute of higher education. But the situation is different in that higher education students with disabilities can only get modifications or accommodations to help them meet the demands and requirements of the curriculum or to meet the college's academic requirements. Colleges won't make fundamental changes to their program, but the curriculum can be substantially changed in secondary school to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Students and their parents should be aware that policies and regulations regarding inclusive and special education in the schools is different than what exists in higher education. In elementary and secondary school, teachers and

administrators have some responsibility in addition the students' responsibilities for the students' educational success. Therefore, it's very important to help the students to develop self-sufficient skills during the transition process to help them learn how to advocate for themselves. Also, students with disabilities should be assigned a leadership role in designing their own future in these processes as a crucial preparation step for higher education (Wolanin & Steele 2004).

In the UK, the government allocates budget resources not only for students with disabilities but also for universities who are providing access to students with disabilities to join their institutions and complete their degree successfully, which encourages the universities to enroll and support students with disabilities by providing them with the services and accommodations needed to retain them until they complete their studies. As an example, in 2003–2005, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) launched a special funding program called 'improving provision for disabled students' (Healey, Pretorius & Bell 2011).

Students with disabilities face huge challenges in higher education after the high school stage. A solid preparation plan by the high school transition team is very important to ensure the success of students with disabilities in their pursuit of a postsecondary education. In addition, preparation should provide the necessary services to cover the needs of students with disabilities to support them in a successful learning and academic performance (Cawthon & Cole 2010).

Achieving a successful and smooth transition period should be a collaboration between the school, admissions and the disability resources office in an institute of higher learning.

A number of authors have argued that admissions is the first gate the student knocks on to enter the postsecondary institution. For example, Evans et al. (2017) explained that

employees working in recruitment and admissions should be careful to avoid any discrimination in the admissions process. The admissions process should include delivering the institution's resources and accommodations for students with disabilities in addition to putting them in contact with practitioners in the Disability Resources office. In the US, it is illegal to use admission criteria to reject the applications of students with disabilities and not allow them to access higher education, as clearly stated in section 104.42 of the implementing regulations preventing discrimination because of student disability in admissions and recruitment. This prohibition applies in cases when students with disabilities meet the standards required but the regulations do not prevent schools from rejecting a student application in cases of not meeting these standards (Kaplin & Lee 2013).

Experts have suggested that per agency work on indicators and the MIPIE report (2011), at the higher education level, factors that impact the quality of a schools' admission strategies include: non-discriminatory rules and policies; policies and strategies developed to support students with disabilities; the existence of a clear policy statement against bullying; implementation of existing codes of practice on inclusive and special education; staff training sessions on admission issues and on creating a welcoming school climate; and working respectfully and collaboratively with students (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education 2002).

Sachs and Schreuer (2011) conducted a study about the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. The study results addressed issues to be considered such as the significant effort students with disabilities should make to meet the academic demands to succeed. Students with disabilities face difficulties in meeting higher education requirements in western culture. This study's authors recommended flexible admission procedures for students with disabilities. In addition, they

recommended that adjustments and accommodations should consider more creative solutions to overcome the obstacles that students face.

Subpart E of the Section 504 of the US Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is about students with disabilities in higher education. The regulation only provides that students with disabilities, called "handicapped persons", may not be subject to "discrimination" in admissions, academic programs or other programs, services and activities at higher education institutions. Per this law, the admission standards and requirements that students with disabilities should meet in spite of their disabilities would seem difficult to achieve and indicates unwelcoming signs warning these students away from joining higher education. There are two different points of view in this regard: the first recommending initiatives against discrimination includes academic adjustments to be applied on the admission requirements for the students with disabilities to ensure that such requirements do not prevent them from securing their rights in the higher education sector and reasonable accommodations to be provided by the institutions. While the other point of view is that since higher education attendance is voluntary, students with disabilities who want to join higher education must meet specified academic and other standards, even though in many selective institutions they cannot get admitted even if they meet the standards. In general, attention must be focused on providing higher education opportunities for students with disabilities who can meet the academic standards and admissions requirements, achieve good academic performance, complete their education to graduation, and who are "college qualified" (Wolanin & Steele 2004).

Special needs support services are important in most countries. They became available in the UAE Universities after the growing attention paid to rights in education by the government toward people with disabilities. The special needs support services look

after students with disabilities and students with special needs. The special needs support services at each university have different tasks and responsibility based on the number of the special needs and disabled students and their requirements. Support services in higher education started in the US in response to the Rehabilitation Act's call for equal access to the program for students with disabilities. Since disability resources started, they have developed through four stages. The first was in 1975, when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act legislated free and convenient K–12 education, which led indirectly to more students intending to access higher education. The second was in 1977, after forming the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), which was the first professional organization for the people responsible for developing policies and in charge of quality services for students with disabilities in higher education. The third was in 1985, when the US Department of Education began to collect data and more information about students with disabilities and sponsored the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) for the purpose of creating data-based policy and practice decisions. The fourth was in 1990, when the Americans With Disabilities Act was passed (Evans et al. 2017).

**2.5.2 Disabilities Services**

Disability Resources Offices (DROs) provide many activities based on students' needs. The following table shows the core activities of the service offices and their components.

| Category | Components |
|---|---|
| **Service provision** | Communicating the accommodations process |
| | Assessing and maintaining documentation |
| | Facilitating accommodations |
| **Administration** | Advocacy |
| | Assessment |
| | Budgeting |
| | Grievance process |
| | Hiring and supervision |
| | Language and branding |
| **Outreach** | Campus climate and accessibility audits |
| | Collaborative programs |
| | Educational events |
| | Transition assistance |
| | DRO website and campus technology access |
| | Student engagement and development |

**Table 2.1: Core activities of a disability resource office**

(Evans et al. 2017, p. 364)

Students with disabilities should be able to disclose their case and identify accommodations they need. Studies have shown that often students are not prepared to disclose their status because they do not know how to apply for and access available services on campus effectively. In some cases, they decide to avoid disclosing their case because they want to study as other students without disabilities and not carry the label of "disabled"; others disclose their case when they experience academic challenges (Healey, Pretorius & Bell 2011).

Just making such services available is not enough, as shown by Cowthon and Cole (2010) in their work exploring the perspectives of students with learning disabilities about the accommodations available and obstacles they encountered to get access to the services. Participants were four-year university students. The study collected information about accommodations use, opportunities as well as barriers they faced during transition, knowledge students had regarding their disability and available services, and self-advocacy strategies. The study revealed the need to raise students'

awareness about available resources provided by the university. The results also showed that the students were using the same resources used to in the school.

Under the first category of service provision ensure Communicating the accommodations process. Students with disabilities need special accommodations and the process to request these accommodations should be summarized for students and other partners such as faculty members through different sections on the institution's website. Any changes to the process should be announced broadly. Assessing and maintaining documentation includes the documentation process for all the collected information through assessment steps which should include an interview and a review of external documentations that guide the practitioners to a holistic understanding of student needs and required accommodations. Facilitating accommodations from a social justice point of view removes barriers and obstacles in order to provide the student with disabilities equal access to higher education. Disability service practitioners should have deep understanding of the accommodations types. The authors should provide a framework with examples of accommodations built based on the work of other researchers. As shown in Table 2.2, these accommodations are categorized in to four main areas: instructional, academic policy, testing and environmental. Selecting specific accommodations for each student depends on institution type, geographic region and student population. The service practitioners' role doesn't exist inside the institution only; they also play important roles in facilitating accommodations for study abroad internships and practicum experiences (Evans et al. 2017).

| Instructional | Academic Policy | Testing | Environmental/ Physical |
|---|---|---|---|
| Advanced receipt of syllabus/handouts | Course substitution for required courses (e.g. math or world language) | Allow student to mark responses on the test rather than a Scantron form | Accessible campus transportation (e.g. bus or shuttle service) |
| Course materials in alterative format | Flexible attendance with professor approval | Breaks during testing | Accessible websites and learning management systems (e.g. Blackboard) |
| FM listening device | Priority or early registration | Dictate exam answers to scribe or tape | Accessible parking |
| Grammar/spell checker | Reduced course load | Document conversion (e.g. audio or braille) | Pre-plated meals (for people with food allergies) |
| Kruzweil Reader or e-reader | | Extended exam time (e.g. 1.5 times) | Captioning for lectures and videos |
| Livescribe pen use | | Increased size of text and response bubbles | Computer-assisted transcription or Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) |
| Note taker | | Oral exam format | Ensuring proper and timely snow removal |
| Outline or notes from professor | | Reader to verbalize directions and questions on the exam | Ensuring proper curb cuts and audio pedestrian crossing |
| Priority or preferential seating | | Room with minimal distractions | Laboratory assistance |
| Record lecture | | Separate room for testing | Physical access (e.g. doorways and bathrooms) |
| Screen text enlarger (e.g. zoom text) | | Use of word processor for written responses | Residence hall bed shakers and emergency lights |
| Screen-reader-accessible technology (e.g. JAWS) | | | Sign language interpretation (including at campus events) |
| Textbooks and instructional material in braille | | | Residence hall single rooms |
| Textbooks in alternative text or format | | | |
| Use of laptop computer or calculator | | | |

**Table 2.2: Examples of accommodations for students with disabilities** (Evans et al. 2017, p. 368)

The second category is administration. Service practitioners play an advocate role with other parties to facilitate the accommodations needed and ensure equal access such as encouraging faculty members to promote inclusive practices in their classes and making sure administrators consider the physical accessibility of buildings and assign specific budget amounts for accommodations. Also, they should offer the students programs that enhance self-advocacy skills, in addition to their role outside the institutes to increase the awareness about inclusive and special education in higher education as well as arrange for more collaboration with the community to benefit the students with disabilities.

Assessment is a very important tool to evaluate achieving service aims through providing the decision-makers with data. Data collected through the assessment process could be used as evidence to evaluate student satisfaction and to identify areas for improvement in the service. Disability resources offices will not able to provide the appropriate accommodations without enough budget to cover the expenses. The amount of the budget depends on the student population, as institutions with a large population need larger budgets while smaller institutions need smaller budgets. In addition to the types of accommodations provided, offices providing modern technology, equipment and devices need more budgetary resources than other offices. Institutions should have a written grievance policy and appeals process which is clearly explained, published, and easily accessible to students. Hiring qualified employees for the disability resources offices starts with a clear job description and follows a process that ensures equal opportunity. The number of staff working in the service office depends on student use, institutional resources, and other services. Providing professional development opportunities to the service office employees is very important to strengthen their skills and knowledge, which will lead to a better practices and more quality services.

Language and branding include the language used to describe the office's purposes and services in addition to the office title (Evans et al. 2017).

Kasnitz (2011) found that it is very important to select words that are acceptable culturally for the office's title. Such supportive service offices have different names in each country. In the United States, research showed that the most commonly used term is "Disability Services" (31%), next was the title "Office for Students with Disabilities" (11.5%), then "Disabled Support Services" (10.4%) and finally "Disability Resource Centre" (8.7%) (Kasnitz 2011). All these titles clearly indicate disabilities. In the UAE, most of the service offices titles in the universities include the term "special needs" as in "The Office of Special Needs Services" where they provide services for both students with special needs and disabilities; in addition, Zayed University uses the title "Accessibility Centre".

The third category is the outreach. Hedrick et al. (2010) conducted a study which resulted in students with disabilities experiencing campus environment as unwelcoming and less supportive than their colleagues without disabilities. Accessibility auditors are professional people from specialized organization who assess and evaluate campus accessibility based on barrier-free designs. Employees at the disability resources offices should collaborate with different organizations and agencies, such as vocational rehabilitation, disability-specific organizations and high school counsellors in the community to support and increase their accessibility. In addition to preferable collaboration with other departments and services inside the institute including the admissions office which is the basic search area in this study. Disability resources practitioners offer training sessions for other institute community members to educate them about disabilities, offices services and available accommodations. Students with disabilities experience transition twice during their academic journey in higher

education: first, in their transition from the high school to post-secondary and second, in their transition out of the institute and into work opportunities or other options. There is not enough research done in this area. Both transition periods are important and require efforts from the service practitioners to take action and provide the necessary support. Disability resource office website content and design should be inclusive and welcoming. Service office employees should be involved in processes related to services that can be done online, such as registration and course management, to make sure they are accessible. Disability resources staff should always be active and offer student engagement and development opportunities through initiating socially-just events and programs (Evans et al. 2017).

Hwaley, Pretorius and Bell (2011) presented the Virginia Commonwealth University's (VCU) model supporting the education of students with disabilities, which works on ensuring individual success by using the university and the community services. Their model framework includes three steps as shown in the Table 2.3.

| Direct coaching | Consultation | Monitoring |
|---|---|---|
| Develop self-advocacy skills. Expose to technology and how to incorporate it in to learning. Identify informational interviews/jobs shadowing experiences. Provide information on legislation and develop a plan to disclose status to employer. Assist students to transfer accommodations and strategies to long-term work setting. | Utilize campus and community resources. Incorporate learning strategies and accommodations into learning. Use technology and assistive devices. Use self-advocacy skills. | Students notify program on an "as needed" basis. Fully use accommodations and strategies. Progressive with studies. |

**Table 2.3: The Virginia Commonwealth University support model**

In general, disability service offices help students to develop their self-determination and self-management skills to access and use the available accommodations. They draw students' attention to the importance of disclosing their status to use these accommodations. Self-management skills are important for more effective time management, goal-setting skills and study skills. Lack of these skills can impact their academic independence. Disability service offices help students to explore assistive technology devices that can help them in their cases and support their success. Even if the assistive technology is expensive and not all the students can afford it, many universities provide such services through their disability service office to be used on campus or borrowed by students. Also, the disability service office should help students to get internship opportunities that enhance their career experiences and prepare them for work life (Healey, Pretorius & Bell 2011).

Starting from transition planning until the student receive their admissions offer, different people in different positions in higher education should collaborate to achieve successful inclusion in the community for students with disabilities. Also, in order to arrange for a successful and productive collaboration, these people should go through a training program to prepare each one of them to perform the required duties and achieve expected goals.

> The implementation of inclusive education should be seen as a collective task, with different stakeholders each having roles and responsibilities to fulfil. The support that classroom teachers need to fulfil their roles includes access to structures that facilitate communication and team working with a range of different professionals (including those working in higher education institutions, as well as on going professional development opportunities). (European Agency 2012b, p. 23)

### 2.5.3 Study abroad for students with disabilities

The UAE government supports and encourages the international educational experience and offers full scholarships for students to study broad. Different

organizations provide such offers and opportunities, including graduate and post-graduate programs. In this study, I would like to mention scholarships for students with disabilities granted through the office of higher education as they offer scholarships to students with disabilities to continue their postsecondary education, especially deaf students, because public universities do not provide accommodations for deaf students in their disability resource offices. It is important to focus on study abroad opportunities even for those accessed the universities in the UAE as it became very common and part of the academic programs to offer training or studying more courses related to their major to strengthen their knowledge by studying abroad at other universities.

Nowadays public and private universities collaborate with universities abroad and sign agreements for exchange programs where the students from each university have the opportunity to travel and study in the collaborating university and have an international academic experience. Lately, the office of higher education has put the scholarships to study abroad on hold for certain kinds of disabilities (mainly deaf and blind students) because of some issues which I will explain in more detail in chapter four. This action has made students with hearing impairments frustrated, as they have ended up with no access to the public universities within the UAE and could not get scholarships to study abroad as their colleagues in previous years. The only option left to those students was getting a scholarship to study at one of the private universities; but joining this type of university raised another issue, which I will also explain and analyse in chapter four. Supporting students with disabilities and offering them opportunities to study abroad become global directions where many. The reports published by the Institute of International Education mentioned that the number of students with disabilities who were studying abroad increased from 2.6% in the academic year 2006–2007 to 5.7% in the academic year 2013–2014. This percentage is lower than the participation of non-

disabled students. Also, the report stated that half of the students with disabilities who studied abroad were students with learning disabilities, while the percentage of students with physical disabilities who were studying abroad decreased from 8.0% in the academic year 2006–2007 to 4.7% in the academic year 2013–2014 (cited in Evans et al. 2017). Students with disabilities may need help getting through the process of choosing the university and the program that is accessible and will provide them with the accommodations they need.

According to a number of studies, employees in the disabilities service offices should be proactive in providing students with sufficient information in with regard to foreign universities to be able make his decision. Practitioners should work to bring in opportunities and assure equal access for students with disabilities to study abroad. The staff should be aware of whether there are legal compliance issues in the countries where the students will study in addition to the accommodations to be provided to the students with disabilities under the social justice concept. They should encourage students with disabilities to accept any opportunities to study abroad. Table 2.3 includes some good strategies to encourage students with disabilities to study abroad. Also, to avoid discrimination while reviewing the applications in order to make the decision, information should be disclosed and documents collected after the student get accepted into the program. The practitioners in the disability service offices should work toward developing relationships with the students, the staff working in the service office in the university that the student will join and their colleagues in the overseas program (Evans et al. 2017).

| Strategy | Rationale |
|---|---|
| Clearly communicate the accommodations process for study abroad. | Students can adapt to changes with advance notice and when they are not set up to expect more than a site or institution can provide. Students should also know who to work with to arrange appropriate accommodations. |
| Include students with visible disabilities in marketing and promotional material and market the stories of individuals with a wide range of disabilities. | Students may self-select out of the study abroad experience based on misconceptions that they will not be able to successfully travel abroad. Images and testimonials from fellow students with disabilities help individuals imagine themselves studying abroad and can increase interest and enrolment in these programs. |
| Hold educational sessions about study abroad as a collaboration between the study abroad office and the DRO. | Students may not be sure whether to seek resources for travel abroad with accommodations from disability resource office (DRO) or from the study abroad office. Information sessions can demonstrate the collaboration between these offices, as well as help students see study abroad as an option that is encouraged for them in their education career. |
| Develop a mentoring program that pairs students with disabilities who have returned from study abroad with students preparing for departure. | This may help students to prepare for their study abroad experience and set realistic expectations of systems or supports that may be different while abroad. It will also help students learn of other students with disabilities who have successfully managed their disabilities (and others' perceptions of their disability) while abroad. |
| Indicate which programs are in countries with legislation similar to the ADA (e.g. the United Kingdom). | This will allow students who require substantial accommodation in some environments or who are nervous about travel abroad to pick a program in a country with greater protections or similar supports to those available in the United States. |
| Indicate programs where specific medications (e.g. Adderall) are illegal to use or process. | This will allow students time to work with their providers to discuss alternatives or to identify programs in which their medication needs and educational interests can both be met. |
| Start the planning process early. | Early preparation for a new program sponsored by the institution allows for planning for anticipated accommodation needs or to review in-country resources necessary to distribute to students with physical, psychiatric, or learning needs abroad. This will be especially important for students who may need additional time to arrange the necessary accommodations or require alternatives for their typical supports while abroad (e.g. paperwork for service animals to travel abroad may take several months or even years or may not be possible in some locations). |
| Provide resources on cultural perceptions of disability in host countries. | Not all countries have perceptions of people with disabilities that are similar to those in the United States. Early preparation for students will help them to understand cultural norms that they may experience or need to navigate as they relate to their disability. |

**Table 2.4: Strategies to encourage study abroad for students with disabilities**

(Evans et al. 2017, pp. 429–430).

## 2.6 Educational Policy

Qualitative and quantitative data which reflect on evaluating the current policies and procedures are important for policy makers in assessing the quality of education of students with disabilities. There are a number of policy requirements to include in order to collect data when considering the need for evidence on inclusive education at the national level: the need for national-level data collection should be based on and aligned with international and European-level agreements, the need to understand the impact of differences in countries' education systems, the need to analyze the effectiveness of inclusive education, the need for data collection to provide evidence relating to quality assurance issues, the need to track students with disabilities performance and achievement in the long term.

A national education policy starts with the main objectives to be achieved in the field of education, such as access and quality. Inclusion concepts became an area of interest for those writing international policies starting in the 1990s (Arnesen, Mietola & Lahelma 2007).

Policy is a core concept for implementing special and inclusive education. A study that investigated the experience of students with disabilities in one of the universities in the United Kingdom used semi-structured interviews in order to make recommendations related to policy and practices. The study revealed the need for a central policy to support the concept and idea of accessible learning environment for students with disabilities, focused collaboration to apply the policy in practical and beneficial ways, continuous supervision and evaluation procedures which consider the participation of students with disabilities, staff training and advocacy. Regardless of the inclusiveness practices during the admission process, the students experienced marginalization and disempowerment, which ensured the need to address policy and practice at both the

administrative and departmental levels. The need for a central policy, vocal collaboration and ongoing monitoring and supervision for the practices of inclusive and special education in higher education require raising the awareness of understanding of disability. Policy changes should be achieved by high-level administrators, to work on the problem from the top down. In spite of the efforts the university spent to create equal opportunities for all the students, applied practices were still unspecified. The institute viewed disability as problem, which impacted the students negatively; this needed to be fixed at both the policy and practice levels. The collaboration required to implement a better policy in practical ways requires a committee to achieve this purpose (Holloway 2001).

After the federal law (29/2006) for people with disabilities passed in the UAE, organizations such as the Ministry of Community Development, the Ministry of Education, and various higher education institutions amended existed policies and released new policies as an effective step to activate implementing the law, protect the education rights of students with disabilities and facilitate special inclusion. Regardless of the recognition of international policies and laws in the region and abroad, they are not taken seriously by the stakeholders and people in the necessary positions of authority to implement them, especially in mainstream schools and higher education institutes, or they are not clear enough to support the inclusion of special education and smooth transitions for learners with disabilities from grade school into mainstream colleges and universities. Government legislation, policy provisions and agendas all indicate that nations and leaders are aware of the rights of the students with disabilities. Also, they show dedication and commitment toward supporting these rights. But how these initiatives are developed is quite a different matter (Gaad 2011).

> There is a gap between policy and implementation which must be acknowledged and addressed. How it is that there can be so much philosophical agreement on

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rights and yet so much divergence in practice is not well understood. (Tilstone, Florian & Rose 1998, p.14)

**2.6.1 Policy Cycle and Decision Making in the West**

Policies and practices of special inclusive education are always affected by theories of inclusion and inclusive education (Artiles, Kozleski & Waitoller 2011; Singal & Muthukrishna 2014). Changes in systems and practices require new policies to support these changes in the community. Analyzing policies to test their effectiveness should consider the process and stages in the policy cycle.

Lasswell was the first one to introduce the idea of the policy process in 1956. The model he introduced involves of seven stages: intelligence, promotion, prescription, invocation, application, termination and appraisal. However, the field of policy studies was growing constantly. Therefore, these stages went through changes and new versions of the stages developed during 1960s and 1970s in the US by Anderson in 1975, Jenkins in 1978, May and Wildavsky also in 1978, and Brewer and deLeon in 1983. The stages today are: agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation and termination. These stages of policy-making take place sequentially: first, defining the problem and adopting the agenda, then specifying goals and processes to implement programs and finally the assessment to test the policy's efficiency and make changes and adjustment after evaluation (Jann & Wegrich 2007). This theory will help in following the development of inclusive and special education policy cycles in order to analyze them and improve their implementation in more effective ways.

An agenda is 'a collection of problems, understanding of causes, symbols, solutions, and other elements, of public problems that come to the attention of numbers of public and their governmental officials' (Birkland 2007, p.63). The first step of policy-making requires realizing and recognizing the social problem which the policy will address.

Defining the problem is another important requirement to prepare the agenda. Recognition and definition of the problem are usually done by interested and affected community members. The agenda is a list of activities, tasks and responsibilities assigned to people in specific positions (stakeholders) inside and outside the government to pay attention to the problem. The involvement of these specific participants who will take roles during the policy process is important. Not all types of problems get the same level of government attention. Issues and problems that impact the nation and the strategic development of governments tend to be the government's top priority (Jann & Wegrich 2007).

Cobb and Elder (1983) described the process as including the Agenda Universe, Systematic Agenda, Institutional Agenda and Decision Agenda. The agenda universe includes all ideas that could be discussed in the upper level system and accepted within the social and cultural norms. The second level is the systematic agenda, which contains issues that deserve attention and become realized by the political community within the legitimate jurisdiction of the government authority. The boundary between the systematic agenda and the agenda universe is the limits of 'legitimate jurisdiction of existing governmental authority' (Cobb & Elder 1983, cited in Birkland 2007, p.65). If the problem gains the attention of and is successfully accepted from the systematic agenda, it moves to the institutional agenda, which is the third level. The institutional agenda consists of the elements that should be considered seriously by the authorized decision-makers. The fourth and final level is the decision agenda, which involves items that could be applied/applicable through government.

The problem addressed in this study is the low enrolment rate of students with special educational needs and disabilities in higher education because of the challenges they face getting access. The UAE governments pays a high level of attention to the rights

of people with SEND and it has been one of the important topics on their agenda, which has resulted in their initiating and drafting new policies in this regard.

The policy formulation stage contains the list of aims to be achieved by the policy; alternative plans should be considered in this stage. Policy formulation was impacted by efforts to enhance practices through techniques and tools that lead to the best decision-making. Clarifying goals, determining the desired production within the assigned budget and the application of a cost benefit analysis are considered as important tools in the policy formulation stage. Some new studies combine formulation and the decision-making as one stage of the policy cycle (Jann & Wegrich 2007), while the traditional model considered policy formulation as a pre-decision step of policy-making. This stage involves fewer participants and more of work to be done compared to the agenda-setting process. The literature in the policy field describes this stage as a back-room function (Sidney 2007).

In the 1970s and early 1980s, research primarily in the US and to some extent in Canada and the UK focused on the implementation of policy into applicable programs. Applying policy in this stage through the assigned participants from the first stage (agenda-sitting), the participants responsible might be institutions and organizations or people in specific positions related to the policy subject. The policy implementation stage includes important elements such as program details, application of the policy to a program, methods to explain the program, dividing the resources and the budgets and criteria of decision-making. The failure in achieving these goals is not always because of bad implementation, but rather could be the result of bad policy design. The strong relationship between the tools selected and the policy implementation is one of the important outcomes of implementation research (Jann & Wegrich 2007).

The implication research is divided into three generations. The first generation of the studies was pessimistic and introduced examples of implementation failure. These studies helped to raise awareness and build a body of literature useful for the second generation, which started to build a theoretical framework and represented the debates between top-down and bottom-up approaches. The top-down approach is hierarchical execution, while the bottom-up approach asserted that implementation happens in every day problem-solving strategies. The third generation of implementation research tried to connect both approaches top-down and bottom-up together by filling the gap. The third generation is more scientific than the previous two generations (Pulzl & Treib 2007).

The main purpose of creating new policies is to solve existing problems or at least reduce their disadvantages. During the evaluation stage, the focus is on the outcomes of the new policy in the community which ends with terminating the policy or redesigning it. The evaluation process should be done based on the drafted objectives in the formulation stage. Considering participants who are going to evaluate the outcomes of the policy is very important issue to avoid bias. Evaluation through insider participants or self-evaluating was strongly criticized due to conflict of interest (Jann & Wegrich 2007).

## 2.7 Summary

This literature review helped demonstrate that providing people with disabilities access to higher education in order to ensure them as high-quality a life as others without disabilities who get higher education degrees in the community is a significant aspect of the social justice movement.

Shifting from the medical to the social model of disability is another direction mentioned by a lot of the literature; the UAE has recently begun following recommendations on this topic, which is reflected in the country's policies and laws.

The literature supports the importance of higher education in providing people with disabilities a high-quality life. The literature shows that education helps people to get a better jobs and earn a better income, both of which guarantee them a better quality life; the lack of an education was often listed as the main reason for poverty and the inability to overcome various impediments such as social, psychological and structural barriers.

Inclusion does not mean simply providing students with disabilities with a chair in the school system, allowing them to sit beside other students. It's a call to give them a proper education that enhances their skills; it's a call to believe in their abilities; it's a call to support them in taking an active role in society through strong leadership that believes in inclusion and really supports the educational initiatives and plans for students with disabilities.

The literature shows the importance of providing scholarships for students with disabilities and supports the idea of encouraging them to travel abroad to study, which aligns with what was mentioned in this study in terms of continuing to offer them scholarships to study abroad, the practice in the UAE since the 1990s.

Another important area the literature focused on is the transition from the high school to higher education. Inclusion for students with disabilities in higher education is frequently discussed in the context of how challenging it can be to handle the transition smoothly; the current study supports these results and will present that information in chapter four. The individual educational plan (IEP) is one of the most important requirements for getting admitted successfully to higher education; preparing a proper IEP requires a huge effort by the teacher and/or counsellor to assess and identify the

needs of the student with disabilities in addition to the accommodations that have been used in the school to help the student. The literature shows that it's an area that is facing challenges.

Per the literature, not all policies and laws the UAE has been implementing are successful; the gap between the policies and the laws and the reality of inclusion continues to exist, and not just in the UAE, but also in other countries.

As the literature reviews indicated, the concerns regarding higher education for students with disabilities have been raised and discussed from a variety of different points of view. In the current study, the issue has been discussed using the perspective of different aspects of the admissions process for students with disabilities.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

Reviewing researches was done in the field of inclusive and special education and especially regarding students with disability, different approaches as quantitative and qualitative were applied and used between exploring and investigating for issues and solutions. This chapter explains the procedures that will be followed to collect the data, identifying the research participants, the instructions, and kind of data will be obtained (Johnson & Christensen 2014). The purpose of this study is to explore the effectiveness of policies and procedures in the admission services for the students with disabilities in the higher education through identifying four main dimensions: recruitment procedures, admission requirements, process to handle the students with disabilities applications, and the criteria to make the decision. The investigation will cover these areas in order to find the main reasons behind the low enrollment of the students with disabilities in universities in the UAE. The final step will be providing the field with the recommendation list to support the admission services and achieve a higher enrollment for students with disabilities in higher education in the UAE and abroad.

## 3.1 Research Approach

The research design or approach presents the plan or strategy used to investigate the research questions (Johnson & Christensen 2014). The qualitative approach has been selected in order to achieve the purpose of this research study which is to explore the effectiveness of policies and procedures in admission services for the students with disabilities in the higher education through identifying four main dimensions: recruitment procedures, admission requirements, process to handle the students' applications, the criteria to make the decision, and finally recommendation to support the admission services.

This is a basic qualitative study using one to one interview with individuals who are in positions to process and make decisions regarding the admission of students with disabilities. To achieve inclusive and special education in higher education a serious action should be planned from the administration level, and the policy makers. The main rationale of using an investigative qualitative approach is to explore the current conditions and practices to be described and analyzed to support and improve increase the enrollment of the students with disabilities in the higher education. This research will collect data regarding the recruitment procedures, admission requirements, and process to handle the students' applications, and the criteria to make the decision. In addition to gathering all the written documents that includes the policies, procedures, and practices about the inclusive and special education in the higher education. Different theories will be used as collecting and analyzing the data: the social model of disability, the theory of inclusive and special education, and policy cycle theory. The interpretive approach will be followed to understand and describe the current admission practices for the students with disabilities in the higher education.

The qualitative approach became popular because of the work and efforts done by the anthropologists and sociologists to understand the cultural and the social aspects of people's lifestyle. In addition to that some other work done by the researches working in the fields: education, law, and counseling to understand a specific phenomenon (Merriam 2009).

Recently the inclusive of people with disabilities in the general education system has been considered as international phenomenon which is related to social justice and equity in many countries. Inclusive and special education should be considered in the policy texts to ensure that students with disabilities have rights in education (Liasidou 2015). To apply the inclusive and special education system successfully it needs to be

understood and prioritized from the policy and decision makers to be transferred through practical procedures in the higher education institutes. The qualitative approach in this study will provide the stakeholders with a deep description and interpretation to support the process of this educational change.

Qualitative researchers collect qualitative data such as words and pictures in order to describe what is really appear to them to end up with new theories. Researchers use qualitative approach when they want to discover and learn more about specific subject or phenomenon (Johnson & Christensen 2014).

> Participants in a qualitative study report their different points of view and experiences through their own language and words, which influence their understanding and interaction to the things around them (phenomenon) (Johnson & Christensen 2014). Through the description, the participants get the philosophical meaning of their experience, which is the core idea of the phenomenology (Merriam 2009): Qualitative researcher focuses on the exploration, description. Qualitative researchers (Educational researchers who like to explore educational issues using qualitative data, such as open ended interviews that provides data based on the participants' perspectives and their actual words. Qualitative researchers emphasize movement directly from observations and data to descriptions and patterns. (Johnson & Christensen 2014, p. 18)

Qualitative researchers do not use standardized instruments; instead they select open ended questions and do not presume any particular kind of answer. They collect qualitative data in order to make interpretations (Johnson & Christensen 2014):

> Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world in to a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms     of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, p. 3).

**3.2 Scope of the study**

This study focus on services students with special needs and disabilities needs to access higher education. It critical stage as its searching for the procedures of handling their

applications through the admission process. While there are efforts to ensure the physical accessibility of the buildings and curriculum modifications opening the front door which is the enrolment still not guaranteed. It's a very crucial step to make sure the fairness and equal chances to get the opportunity to complete their higher education as other students. This research will be presenting and analyzing some documents such as policies and procedures regarding students with SEND rights and services in the higher education sector, in addition to providing information which conducted through semi structure interviews about the efforts to recruit students with SEND in higher education institutions, admission process which will include admission requirements, process t handle their applications, and criteria to make the decision, available services for students with SEND in universities participated in the study, scholarships to study abroad for students with SEND, and finally experiences of students with disabilities in the higher education.

## 3.3 Methodology

### 3.3.1 Site selection

In order to select the relevant data, the researcher sent requests to three public universities and five private universities that are all located in the UAE. The three public universities were selected are the oldest and only federal universities in the UAE, they are well stablished universities and serving students with special needs and disabilities. The five private universities are well known universities where most of the students are interested and apply to join, these universities were selected based on their repetition and student enrollment. Two of the public universities and three of the private universities approved the request to participate in the research and the other universities did not respond. Also, the researcher involved two departments from the office of the higher education in the Ministry of the Education, these departments are The National

Admissions and Placement office (NAPO) and the scholarship department. The office of the NAPO was selected because all the admission applications for the public universities goes through it, and the scholarship department was selected because to explore the scholarship opportunities for the students with disabilities.

Seven sites were chosen categorized into three types as shown in Table 3.1, a government higher education office, public universities and private universities in order to collect data to answer the research questions, and investigate the current practices in the field of the admission process for students with disabilities in the higher education. The research context will not be related to the selected sites physically. The study will focus on the operational work on the admission and enrollment process to handle the students with disabilities applications.

| Category | Departments / Institutions |
|---|---|
| The office of the higher education | • The National Admission and Placement Office (NAPO).<br>• The scholarship department. |
| The public universities | • University A<br>• University B |
| The private universities | • University C<br>• University D<br>• University E |

**Table 3.1: Categories of the selected sites**

The first category is the office of the higher education which is part of the Ministry of Education, this category includes two sites. The first is the National Admission and Placement Office (NAPO). The NAPO is responsible for processing applications of Emirati and mother national students who successfully passed secondary school for admission in the public universities in the UAE (Ministry of Education 2016). The all Emirati and mother national students from all over the UAE application to join the federal universities go through the NAPO first, then the NAPO distributes it to the

selected institutions. The second site is the scholarship department where students apply for scholarships to study abroad. The scholarship department was selected to explore the process of handling these applications to study abroad especially the students with hearing impairment as the national universities does not provide services and accommodations for deaf students yet.

The second category is public universities in the UAE. This category involves two universities approved to participate in the study. The first public university called "A", offers bachelors, masters and PhD degrees in several fields and has over 13,000 students across its campuses. It has a services office for students with disabilities, which is supposed to ensure equal educational opportunities for students with disabilities. The second public university called "B", offers bachelors and Master's degrees in several fields and has around 8,000 students across its campuses. It has a large resources office for students with disabilities which was launched few years ago to provide these students with the support and accommodations they need. Employees in disability resources offices in both "A" and "B" universities have a role during reviewing students with disabilities applications in order to make the final decision to accept or reject the student application.

The third category is the private universities in the UAE. This category involves three universities approved to participate in the study. The first private university called "C" offers graduate and post graduate programs in different fields and has around 1200 students. They do not have a service office in their campus in the UAE, but the assistant dean of student is responsible to facilitate any help they need. First, they put the student with disability in touch with the disability resource office in the main campus in the west through emails, the specialist there collect the required documents to assess the student needs and then send their recommendations for needed accommodations. The

second private university called "D" offers bachelor and master's degrees in different fields and has around 3000 students. Both universities "C" and "D" are multi-cultural and multi-nationality campuses. The third private university called "E" offers bachelor and master's degrees in different fields and has around 1500 students across its campuses.

### 3.3.2 Subject Selection

The researcher started with using purposive sampling that occurs in cases when the researcher has a previous knowledge or information about the population. The participants have been selected specifically to achieve the purpose of the research (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun 2015). Based on purposive sampling the participants were selected from administrative positions that would help to collect the needed data. The participants include two employees from the office of the higher education: the head of the National Admissions and Placement Office (NAPO) and the head of the scholarship department. The head of admission units in the five universities agreed to participate in the study. The employees in charge of the disability services in the five universities agreed to participate in the study.

Also, the participants included three students with disabilities who were able to get the access to the higher education in the UAE and abroad. The first student called "F" was able to get scholarship and study abroad the bachelor degree, then joined private higher education institute in the UAE and successfully get a Master's degree, and currently studying a PhD in a private higher education institute in the UAE. The second student called "G" was able to get access to a public higher education institute in the UAE. The third participant called "H" was able to get a scholarship and studied abroad and currently working as a network engineer.

The snowball sampling was considered and used as second type of sampling when some participants recommended more employees that have roles through the admission process to participate in the study. The head of the NAPO in the office of the higher education recommended to arrange for another interview with the head of the scholarship department to answer the questions related to the scholarships for the students with disabilities. Head of the admission in university "B" recommended other two employees in the admission department and were added to the participant pool as they agreed to participate in the study. Also, the employee in charge of the disability resources office in university "B" recommended to include one of the senior staff member who was added to the participants pool as the staff member agreed to participate in the study. which increased the participants in the study. Those three participants were considered under the snowball sampling as "In snowball sampling researchers identify a small number of individuals who have the characteristics in which they are interested. These people are then used as informants to identify, or put the researchers in touch with others who qualify for inclusion and these, in turn, identify yet others" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011, p.158). The total number of the participants in the study are 18 participants as explained in the follow table.

| Site | Number of participants |
|---|---|
| Office of the higher education | 1 participant from the NAPO<br>1 participant from the scholarship department |
| University "A" | 1 participant from the admission unit<br>1 participant from the disability resources office |
| University "B" | 3 participants from the admission unit<br>2 participants from the disability resources office |
| University "C" | 2 participant from the admission unit<br>1 participant from the disability resources office |
| University "D" | 1 participant from the admission unit<br>1 participant from the disability resources office |
| University "E" | 1 participant from the admission unit<br>1 participant from the disability resources office |
| Students | 3 students |
| Total number of participants | 19 participants |

**Table 3.2: Number of Participants from each Site**

The following is a table including the summary of the participants and type of data obtained:

| Participants | The kind of data |
|---|---|
| The head of the NAPO in the office of the higher education | • Their perspective and point of view about enrolling special needs students in the higher education based on their daily experiences. |
| Employees from the admission units in the participated universities | • Detailed explanation regarding the marketing and recruitment, admission requirement, admission process to handle the applications, and the criteria to make the decision. |
| Employee in charge of the disability resources offices in the participated universities | • Their role in order to assess and evaluate the special needs students' applications. |
| The employee in charge of the special needs services in the selected universities | |
| The head of the scholarship department in the office of the higher education | • Detailed explanation regarding the scholarships for the students with disabilities. |
| Students with disability who got access to the higher education in the UAE | • Describe the process of applying for the higher education.<br>• Describe their experience in getting the admission to the higher education. |
| Students with disability who got scholarship to study abroad | • Describe the process of applying for the higher education.<br>• Describe the process they followed in order to get scholarship to study abroad.<br>• Describe their experience in studying abroad (challenges and strengthens) |

**Table 3.3: Summary of the participants and type of the collected data**

**3.3.3 Data collection methods and study conduct**

The researcher prepared the required approval documents for each site for data collection. For the office of the higher education the researcher submitted the ethical clearance and to whom it may concern letter from the university she studies in and that was enough to get the approval to participate in the study. There were extra documents required for the universities such as: to whom it may concern document as evidence

that the she is a PhD student, research ethics form for each university (filled and submitted to the research office to be reviewed by their committee to get the approval for participation), ethical clearance from the BUID (where the researcher studies), a completion report of CITI human subjects research, the consent form, a copy of the data collection instruments which were the interview guides and the scripts that would be used to recruit the subjects.

After getting the approval from the research office to collect the data, the researcher sent emails to the employees in the selected positions (admission units and disability resources offices) to arrange for the interview. The email was attached with the institution approval, interview guide and the consent form to be signed and sent back to the researcher. This study including reflection on the researcher observations through her work experiences, semi structured interviews and collecting written documents that includes the admission applications, policies and procedures related to the admission services for the students with disabilities in the participated universities, governmental documents and newspapers. The three methods applied to collect the data are discussed and explained in the following subtitles.

**3.3.3.1 Reflection on observation of services offered**

Observation is important method to collect data in qualitative research as it applies where the subject under study is acting naturally. It is a primary source of data that can lead to the need of more data by using another different data collection methods (Merriam 2009). Using observation helps the researcher to recognize the behaviors and reactions as it happens in order to be explained and interpreted (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011).

The researcher experienced dealing with students with disabilities for two years through her position as student counselor in one of the public higher education institutes in the

UAE. That was before the institute create disability resource office to handle their cases and facilitate their needs and accommodations. The study will include reflections on some cases which the researcher dealt with through her work experiences. Those cases of students with disabilities were recognized after getting the admission offers, which the counselor was involved in meetings to discuss their cases if they would be allowed to continue or not and facilitating the accommodations and support services. Also, the researcher was a committee member to create special needs policy and list of accommodations could be provided for students in another public university, in addition to be part of several discussions to fight for and advocate in behave of the students with special needs to provide them with needed accommodations. Also the researcher involved in many meetings to discuss their desire to study science which was not acceptable in between the academic people and they had many concerns in this regards, will be discussed in details in Chapter 4. All these experiences highlighted the challenges the students with disabilities face in the higher education and motivated the researcher to conduct this study.

### 3.3.3.2 Semi structured interviews

The study explored and investigated the procedures of admission process for students with disabilities to join the higher education and the effectiveness of the policies through these processes. A semi structured interview was used to collect data because it considered as one of the main approaches in qualitative research. Data is gained from different approaches, which the research participants speak about events, their experiences, views of practices, and these approaches consist of interviews. The interview characterized by three features: it looks for rich and detailed information, the questions are open ended, and questions and their order are not fixed but can be adapted to the flow of the interview conversation (Flick 2014). The in-depth interviews will

include descriptive, structural, contrast, evaluative, circular, comparative, prompts, and probes questions (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009) based on research questions and the required data we are seeking.

The interview is a flexible tool for data collection as it's a powerful instrument for researchers. The interview allows the participants to describe and present their point of views about their daily living experiences. It has a specific purpose, it is questioned based, interviewer asks the questions, and the interviewee responses must be clear and often as detailed as possible. The interview is previously prepared and usually a specifically planned event rather than naturally or randomly occurring situation. The data will be collected through one-on-one interviews with the participants. In depth interview will be used to collect the data in this study. The exact wording and sequence of questions will be prepared in advance. All interviewees will be asked the same basic questions in the same order. Questions will be worded in a completely open ended format (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011).

Six different interview guides were designed based on the positions of the participants, their roles and experiences during the admission processes. The first type of interview was designed for the employees in the office of the higher education in the Ministry of the Education. This interview guide includes five sections. The first section includes questions about the history of the inclusive and special education in the public higher education, the current situation of the inclusive and special education and its limitation and about the relevant policies and procedures. The second section included questions about recruitment events for students with disabilities, admission requirements for students with disabilities, the process the students with disabilities follow to join the higher education, the process the NAPO follow to handle their applications, criteria to make the decision and the process between the NAPO and the admission units in the

public universities to handle the students' applications. The third section include questions about statistics data regarding the number of the students with disabilities apply to join the higher education and how many of them get the admission, number of the students in the higher education currently, type of their disabilities, colleges they study at, and how many of them graduated. The fourth section include questions about the rate of the drop out, reasons of the drop out, suggestion to increase enrolment of the students with disabilities in the higher education and evaluation the inclusive and special education in the higher education from the participant point of view. The fifth section include questions about conditions to get scholarship, cost of studying abroad for the student with disability, total number of the students with disabilities who are studying abroad currently. (see Appendix 5)

The second interview was designed for the head of admission in the selected public universities. This interview guide includes four sections. The first section includes questions about the history of the inclusive and special education in the university, the current situation of the inclusive and special education and its limitation and about the relevant policies and procedures. The second section included questions about recruitment events for students with disabilities, admission requirements for students with disabilities, the process the students with disabilities follow to join the university, the process the NAPO follow to handle their applications, criteria to make the decision and the process between the NAPO and the admission units in the university to handle the students' applications. The third section include questions about statistics data regarding the number of the students with disabilities apply to join the university and how many of them get the admission, number of the students in the higher education currently, type of their disabilities, colleges they study at, and how many of them graduated. The fourth section include questions about the rate of the drop out, reasons

of the drop out, suggestion to increase enrolment of the students with disabilities in the university and evaluation the inclusive and special education in the university from the participant point of view. (see Appendix 2)

The third interview guide was designed for the head of admission in the selected private universities. It's similar to the interview guide for the head of admission in the public universities in addition to one more question in the second section about the study fees for the students with disabilities. (see Appendix 3)

The fourth interview guide was designed for the employees in charge of the disability resources offices in the selected public and private universities. This interview guide includes thirteen questions about the current situation of the inclusive and special inclusion in the university, limitations, role of the office during the admission process, number of the students with disabilities in the university, type of their disabilities and colleges they study in, data about how many of them graduated, role of the office in the university, budget, training programs for the students, faculty and staff, policies, efforts to increase the enrolment of the students with disabilities in the university, main obstacles for the low enrollment of the students with disabilities and evaluate inclusive and special education in the higher education from the participant point of view. (see Appendix 4)

The fifth was designed for the students with disabilities who were able to join the higher education in the UAE. this interview guide includes twelve questions about their decision to join the higher education, the admission process they experienced, needed help to apply, difficulties they are facing, get needed support, their experience in the higher education in general, awareness about the laws in the UAE, disability service office and its services, building accessibility and the cost. (see Appendix 5)

The sixth interview guide was designed for the students with disabilities who got scholarships through the office of the higher education to study abroad. This interview guide includes thirteen questions about the reason behind making the decision to study abroad, process to apply for the scholarship, needed help during applying process, difficulties they are facing, get needed support, their experience studying abroad, awareness about the laws in the country they study regarding students with disabilities rights in the education, disability service office, building accessibility and if they get chance to study in the UAE, are they going to shift and come back?. (see Appendix 5) Recording the interviews, writing notes and creating a journal and transcription were used to document the collected verbal data during the interviews.

One of the famous methods for collecting qualitative data in the qualitative research is the interview. The interview allows the qualitative researcher conducting conversations to get deep and detailed information about participant's thoughts, believes, and knowledge.

Also it allows getting in to the internal world of the participants to understand their perspectives and inner words, which leads to accurate interpretive for the collected data (Johnson & Christensen 2014). Semi structured interviews were arranged in order to obtain the needed information in this study. Semi structured interviews contain verbal questionnaires including a group of questions to get specific answers from the participants (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun 2015).

### 3.3.3.3 Document Analysis

Several documents from government and the universities were collected for analysis. Type of collected documents UAE governmental documents, available policies in the participated universities regarding the students with disabilities' rights and services,

applications students use to apply for joining the universities which are all on line (universities' websites), local newspapers.

Government documents will include the National Policy to empower People of Determination, The UAE cabinet decision number (43) in 2018 about supporting people with disabilities (people of determination) in the labor market, The Abu Dhabi 2017 disability classification manual. Documents belong to the universities will include university "A" policy: Special needs support services, University "B" policies.

The researcher gathered all the documents related to the research topic to investigate its effectiveness supporting the students with disabilities during the admission process. Also, the researcher aimed to explore if these applications easy to be filled? Applications and information is accessible on line in the website?

Websites were another source of information since many documents are available online. In order to examine how easy it is to access the application and complete the process the researcher created accounts in the websites of the office of the higher education (where the students apply to join public universities "A" and "B" and the websites of the private universities "C", "D" and "E".

On the website of the Ministry of Education, the registration link found under the services link, under the registration link there were another link 'application of admission for student with special needs' there were more details about the service, conditions, required documents and service time. The first step to apply for any of the public higher education institutes was to create account, basic personal information required to create the account in addition to the type of the account which the researcher used higher education student, and agreement on terms of services which was about to agree that the communication will be electronically through email or the created account on the website. The account was created successfully, the researcher received

a message on her mobile directly informing her that the account has been created successfully with the username and password, and asking to check the email for more details. the email was received but did not include any details except greeting from the Ministry of the Education and the account user name, there were a link titled by Ministry of Education when the researcher pressed it took her to the account on the website to start the service of applying. The following options for more specification in service selection were available:

➢ Level
o Any
o Higher education
o General education

➢ Key words
o Any
o Equivalency
o Scholarships
o Attestation
o Schools
o Certification
o Accreditation
o Registration

The Ministry provided these detailed options because of providing variety services to different categories of students at different academic stages. The researcher selected option higher education from the level list, and option registration from the key words list for the purpose of this study which regarding the admission process for students with disabilities in the higher education and started application started with the list of the public universities and apply for scholarship to study abroad, under this list there were two options:

> Yes: the student already registered or interested to pursue higher education in one of the above-mentioned institutions. When the researcher pressed yes, the service continued only in Arabic with a message includes congratulates the student for passing the high school successfully, informing the students that registration at this stage doesn't guarantee getting admission (may be because it is late), request to submit missing documents and continue follow up with the selected university regarding the applicant admission status, or follow up with the scholarship department in case of the desire to study abroad.

No: not interested to pursue higher education in one of the above-mentioned institutions. When the researcher pressed no, again the service continued in Arabic and took her to another page requesting the following information: nationality, name in Arabic and English, student Emirate ID, mobile phone, email, school type, school zone, school, type the reason for not continue their higher education and finally request to check on statement that the student is full responsible of the decision to not continue the higher education, then submit the form.

University "C" requested creating account by filling some basic personal information to get access to the applications, then the applications has more detailed requirements to be filled and upload documents to be submitted. University "D" requested to submit a request by filling some basic personal information to get access to the applications, after the researcher submitted the request received an email with the link to sign in the application to fill it and upload the required documents. University "E" also requested to submit a request by filling some basic personal information, after the researcher submitted the request a message appeared on the screen that the admission team will contact her within 48 hours, the researcher get received a call from the university within 5 minutes explaining more details regarding the selected program and campus to study in, in addition to the required documents. The process is the applicant should go personally and handle to documents, fill a hard copy of the application manually.

During the interviews the researcher requested for the available documents regarding the students with disabilities in each university, all they mentioned that their documents are on their websites, except university "E" provided her with a hardcopy of their admission application and student handbook.

The NAPO and the scholarship department provided me with a copy of the Law articles from UAE constitution and cabinet that they follow and apply regarding the scholarships for students with disabilities, and more details from the website.

Through the newspapers, the researcher knew that the Ministry of the Community Development initiated new policy (national policy to empower people of determination

and contacted the director of people of determination care and rehabilitation center through the email, they send the researcher English and Arabic versions of the policy. Another detailed document about people with determination' rights, this document issued from executive committee at the executive council in Abu Dhabi and distributed on all the governments institutions. As the researcher working in a higher education sector, she received a copy of this document through email.

## 3.4 Analysis of Data

After collecting the data from the interviews, the next stage involves analyzing them. The qualitative collected data will be analyzed interpretively, the data analysis is more of a reflective, reactive interaction between the researcher and the data got from the participants in order to do the required interpretations of the interviews. Analyzing qualitative data will use could happen in several stages several stages: creating natural units of meaning, classifying categorizing and ordering these units of meaning, structuring narratives to describe the interview contents, and finally interpreting the interview data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011). Analyzing other information collected previously while the researcher collecting the data is very important step, this study including analyzes of the documents such as the policies, forms, applications and written procedures.

In the first stage the researcher will review the collected data from the observations and documents. The revision of the interview guides will be done at this stage because it helps strengthen the data gathered through interviews, as it provides the researcher with a background that leads to deeper discussions and gain more detailed information which helped to understand and describe the current situation.

Transcripts of each interview will be made and categorized by the researcher was creating a transcript of each interview on a world file, all the files were organized and

categorized based on the university names and the interviewees possessions. Hard copies of the interview transcripts, documents (policies, forms, …) and all original papers will be saved in locked drawers at home to which only the researcher has access. The audio recorded interviews will be saved in the researcher's personal laptop with password, and a backup will be created to safe guard against any technical issues might cause losing the data on an external hard disk and kept in the same drawers with other documents.

After collecting the data and reviewing it for analysis, gaps will be identified which may require a follow up interview with some participants analyzing, the researcher found some gaps which needed to get back to some of the interviewees for collecting more details. The fourth step will be reading. qualitative researchers read their data several times in order to do the analysis each time. Every time the researcher reads the data, a deeper understanding about the information was developed.

Considered different approaches to analyze qualitative data is important as the researcher should be selective in his process. Interpretive research depends on the researcher personal assessment to describe the situation or themes. The interpretation one researcher makes might differ from the interpretation that other researchers make. Which means that researchers bring their own point of view to their interpretation (Creswell 2012).

The Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) will be used to analyze the collected data from the interviewees in this study. Reading and re-reading the transcript is very important to pay attention to the participants' words in their responses to the questions. The initial noting is another level of analysis that includes the original transcript and exploratory comments. This step happens in parallel with the transcript reading, while the researcher is reading exploratory notes and comments are added.

These notes and comments are comprehensive and detailed reflection about the collected data. Describe issues has been discussed in the interviews and present the meaning from the participant's point of view. The process of the reading and the exploratory comments will lead to more interpretive which helps to understand the participants' perspectives. The rich and detailed exploratory comments will help to develop emergent themes. These themes should be categorized based on the kind of connections between them. These steps will prepare the date for deeper levels of interpretation (Smith, Flowers & Larkin 2009).

The participants were from typical samples that are working in positions related to the research topic, administrators from the admission departments in the three higher education institutions, specialized people who are responsible of caring about the students with special needs and disabilities, and authorized people in the Ministry of Education.

The following is a table including the summary of the research questions, tools collections, and the analysis methods:

| Question | Tool collection | Data analysis |
|---|---|---|
| 1. What are the procedures related to the recruitment of students with disabilities in the higher education? | • In depth interviews includes descriptive, structural, contrast, evaluative, circular, comparative, prompts, and probes questions.<br>• Documents include: policies and procedures, applications. | • Interpretative analysis for the data collected from the interviews.<br>• Content analysis for the documents. |
| 2. What are the admission requirements for the students with disabilities to join the higher education? | | |
| 3. What are the admission processes to handle the students with disabilities applications to join the higher education? | | |
| 4. What are the main criteria that support decision making for admitting students with disabilities in the higher education? | | |
| 5. What could be recommended to support the admission services for students with disabilities? | | |

**Table 3.4: Summary of research questions, tools collection, and analyzing methods**

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical has been defined in Webster's new World Dictionary behaviors as "conforming to the standards of conduct of a given profession or group", what researchers consider to be ethical is a matter of agreement among them (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun 2015). Considering the code of ethics in research is very important for researchers for moral principles. Required Several ethical forms were filled to ensure that the data will be collected will be used for scientific research purposes only, and will not be misused. Following approval of the study proposal the researcher filled and submitted the British University in Dubai (BUID) research ethics form (medium/ high risk research) in order to get the ethical clearance. In addition to the ethical forms for the participating public

universities. Also, the researcher passed successfully the CITI Human Subjects Research (HSR) and got the certification in the field of Social Behavioral Educational (SBE) to ensure her awareness and background regarding the research ethics. The HSR provides important requisite historical background, ethical issues and instructions and guidance for researchers conducting studies that involve human subjects.

Documents like the interview guides and the consent form sent to the participants were bilingual Arabic and English versions as the majority of the participants were Arabs and the Arabic was their mother language. Although the consent form includes information and details about the nature of the study and the consequences of participation, and stated that the participation is voluntary and the participants can withdraw at any time by contacting the researcher through email or phone as the researcher contact information were provided, the researcher explained it verbally through the phone and face to face prior to the interview. The researcher will not be able to include the ethical forms and the approval letter from the participated universities to maintain their confidentiality as agreed. Anonymity of the interviewees and universities were ensured through the use of considered, the researcher used pseudonyms for the participated universities and students.

## 3.6 Trustworthiness

The researcher applied several techniques to ensure trustworthiness of the study. Triangulation was used to establish trustworthiness of the data. It is a verification approach based on obtained information from multiple methods and sources (Johnson & Christensen 2014). Also based on Merriam (1998, p. 204) "triangulation is the use of multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings". First the researcher used triangulation by applying three different methods to collect the data: interviews, relevant documents were collected and

reviewed (written policies and procedures) and reflection on observation of services. Also, the data was collected through different sources (e.g., employees from different organizations, students, websites). The second strategy was using member checking by sending back the transcripts of the interviews to the participants for verification. The third strategy was peer review by receiving external comments and feedback on the research process and procedures.

## 3.7 Role of the researcher

Listening as an outsider and neutral not allowing my experience to interfere with what I am hearing, got all the information and details without judge it. Practicing my role as a researcher as Glense (2011, p. 60) mentioned that the researcher as "a curious student who comes to learn from and with research participants". I explained the purpose of the study and made sure the participants understood my role as a learner and who is asking to gain knowledge not for accusation and interrogation. Also, explained the importance of sharing their experience and knowledge which will help to improve the field by overcome challenges they face during their daily routine tasks and implement better practices. I was listening carefully and recording all the details with writing the notes not to miss any information to get the true conception about the practices through the admission process for the students with SEND in reality. Some participants were very cooperating and open to sharing all that they have, they showed interest and requested to share my study when its finish. Some were conservative and carefully responded shortly to the answers which were making me repeating some questions in the different way to get more details.

# Chapter Four: Results, Analysis and Discussion

This study aimed to investigate and explore the effectiveness of policies and procedures in the admissions services for students with disabilities in higher education through identifying four main dimensions: recruitment procedures, admission requirements, processes for handling the applications of students with disabilities and the criteria to make the decision regarding acceptance or rejection. The final step will be providing the field with a list of recommendations for admissions services departments across the UAE to make their access to higher education (either in the UAE or abroad) for students with disabilities easier, with fewer obstacles and barriers.

In this chapter, the researcher will present and discuss the results collected via the three different methods. This chapter will consist of four sections: the first section will present the results collected from documents; the second section will present the results collected from the interviews, organized across seven themes, some of which will also answer the research questions; the third section will present the researcher's reflections on her observations throughout her career in supporting students with disabilities; and the fourth section will be a summary of the results.

## 4.1 Document Analysis

The researcher made every effort to get copies of the relevant policies related to the research topic. This section will include an analysis of the policies the researcher was able to secure from the participating universities and the Ministry of Community Development.

### 4.1.1 National Policy to Empower People of Determination

This new policy was drafted and approved through the Ministry of Community Development in 2018. The whole document is 30 pages long. The main contents include the current states, experiences of other countries and the policy.

The current states include detailed statistics about the numbers and percentages of people with disabilities (people with determination) in the UAE based on:

- National and non-national registered in each emirate.

- The disability cases which were categorized into six types: visual, multiple, intellectual, hearing, physical and autism.

- Their ages into three categories: under 18 years, between 19–59 years and above 60 years.

- The number of students with disabilities in the schools, students holding cards in the rehabilitation centres and students not holding cards in the rehabilitation centres.

- Employed people with determination.

It includes detailed statistics about the number of the rehabilitation centres for people of determination, which was 87 centres in total in 2015–2016 (categorized as 7 federal governmental centres, 23 local governmental centres and 57 private sector centres) and their distribution across the UAE. In addition, there were also counts for the number of students in each category of the centres and more details about the number of students in rehabilitation centres as well as the number of the technical and administrative employees in the centres in each emirate. These rehabilitation centres provide educational and therapeutic services such as early intervention, education, rehabilitation, psychological support, social services, supporting therapeutic services, vocational and employment services.

The following services were available for people with determination (both citizens and non-citizens): health, rehabilitation, education, vocational rehabilitation/employment, accessibility and social protection. The figure shows five categories of the availability: available in full, available, available in part, available but limited and not available. The

inclusion in higher education was available but limited. The only services available in full: the Nol card in Dubai (for using the metro system), the Mawaqif exemption in Abu Dhabi (free parking) and the Salik exemption in Dubai (road toll fees). Also, the document provides a map of the main entities responsible for services for people of determination through federal and local governmental and private sectors. Then the document explains in detail the existing gaps in the areas of: health and rehabilitation, education, vocational rehabilitation and employment, accessibility, social protection and family empowerment and public life, culture and sport. The same areas were included as policy themes as well.

The country's new direction regarding people with disabilities focuses more on the social aspects to empower them in the community, which came about as a result of shifting from the medical model to the social model. The policy also handled the new shifts in important concepts relevant to the move from the medical to the social model. The experience of other countries included: Jourdan, Australia and Sweden. It compared the legislative status of the rights of the people with disabilities in these countries to those in the UAE. All three countries signed the international convention and are participating. Each country has its own policy that applies nationally and supports the rights of people with disabilities. Both Jordan and the UAE applied one policy, titled 'the people with disabilities rights policy'. In Australia, they applied three policies in this regard: The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), the Disability Services Act and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). In Sweden, they applied the Swedish Policy to protect vulnerable groups.

In each country, there are different entities authorized to implement the policy. In the UAE, special committees were established for the areas of work, education, healthcare, culture and recreation. In Jordan, the responsible entity is the Higher Council for the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Department of the Social Services is responsible for implementing the policy in Australia. In Sweden, it's the Ministry of the Human Rights. None of these countries have the mechanisms to apply and follow through on the implementation of these policies either a national plan for people with disabilities. Also, this part presented examples of the most important frameworks and policies in Jordan, Australia and Sweden.

In Jordan, they initiated the national strategy for people with disabilities over two time periods. The first period was from 2007 to 2009 and the second period was from 2010 to 2015. As a result of the first period, law number 31 for people with disabilities was passed in 2007. Based on the assessment of the outcomes from the first period, the second period consisted of twelve elements: legislation; health and disability; rehabilitation and support services; inclusive education; higher education and scientific research; economic empowerment; family empowerment and social protection; accessibility, sport, entertainment, culture and public life; media and awareness; violence/abuse and exploitation of people with disabilities; and collaboration with the social sector.

In Australia, they initiated the national strategy for people with disabilities, which was scheduled to be implemented from 2010 to 2020. This strategy resulted in two important programs to support people with disabilities. The first program was the establishment of the Australian government's Department of Social Services, which supports policies related to people with disabilities and services providers. It focuses on early intervention, community initiatives and employing people with disabilities. The second program is the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which aims to empower Australian people with disabilities whose ages are less than 65 years old to benefit from support systems to help them get jobs in order to become independent and

active participants in society. This strategy included six elements: inclusive and accessible communities; protection of rights; justice and legislation; economic security; personal and community support; learning and skills; and health and wellness.

In Sweden, they initiated the government's disability policy for the period from 2011 to 2016. This initiative focused on three priorities: the justice system, transportation and an information technology strategy. The policy provided three programs: adjustments to homes, car compensation and funding for job creation. The outcomes included making Stockholm more accessible for people with disabilities through modifications they put added to the pedestrian crossing areas and traffic lights to make the movement of people with different disabilities easier and their journeys more accessible; sports facilities became more accessible; and public transportation boarding is now provided by cranes to make it easier for the disabled to board and disembark from public transport.

The policy included vision, mission and objectives. The policy covered the following themes: health and rehabilitation; education; vocational rehabilitation and employment; accessibility; social protection; family empowerment; public life, culture and sports. Under each theme, there were detailed objectives, initiatives and participating parties.

The UAE laws and regulations were drafted very well and documented in the governmental sources in the UAE, but they were still not implemented effectively in reality. There are no penalties for failure to comply or fines against organizations who are preventing students with disabilities from exercising their rights. Even people with disabilities themselves are passive; most did not try to use the law to get their rights in their communities.

**4.1.2 The UAE cabinet decision number (43) in 2018 about supporting people with disabilities (people of determination) in the labour sector**

This decision was made based on federal laws and cabinet decisions to protect the rights of people with disabilities. The researcher was able to get a hard copy of this decision, which was drafted in ten pages and includes fourteen articles. The article explained some words such as the country (UAE), the ministry (Ministry of the Community Development) and the stakeholders. Also, it included some definitions for words and phrases such as: people with disabilities (people of determination), discrimination, reasonable accommodations and people of determination card. Article two is about protecting the rights of people with disabilities in the work sector. Article three listed the stakeholders who are committed to protecting the rights of people with disabilities (people with determination) under their authority. Article four is about avoiding discrimination during the recruitment and employment process for available job vacancies.

Article five is about preparing the work environment and providing reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities (employees of determination) to ensure their safety during their duty hours. Article six is about organizing work tasks in flexible ways make employees with disabilities feel comfortable and allow them to use their skills and experiences at work. Article seven is about assessment and performance management. Performance assessment for people with disabilities (people of determination) should focus on the results that have been achieved and not on how they were achieved. Article eight is about career development and learning opportunities. This means providing people with disabilities (people of determination) suitable career paths to achieve their ambitions. Article nine is about conferences, meetings and institutional events. The organizations should include employees with disabilities

(employees of determination) in their activities and events. Article ten is about the rights of employees with disabilities to keep their possessions and return to work when their health status allows them, following human resources policies and regulations.

Article eleven is about the role of the Ministry of Community Development, the Ministry of Human Resources, Emiratisations and the Federal Authority for Government Human Resources to work together to put in new systems identifying reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities (people of determination) needed in the work environment. Article twelve is about how the Ministry of Community Development is required to collaborate with the other stakeholders to implement this decision. Article thirteen is about the Minister of the Community Development or whoever is authorized to make the organizational changes needed to implement this decision. Article fourteen is to publish this decision in the newspapers and activate it starting the day after the date of publication.

**4.1.3 The Abu Dhabi 2017 Disability Classification Manual**

In 2017, the Executive Committee of the Executive Council in Abu Dhabi distributed an approved classification schema for the categories of people with disabilities, to ensure that they could get all of their rights after the implementing of the federal legislation was passed and approved. This manual was written in collaboration by five entities: the Zayed Higher Organization for Humanitarian Care & Special Needs, the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), that Abu Dhabi Health Authority (HAAD), the Abu Dhabi Statistics Centre (SCAD) and the Ministry of Community Development. It's a huge, detailed document consisting of an introduction; objectives; important considerations for determining the categories and severity of disability; disability category classifications and service paths; terms and definitions; and teamwork.

The main objectives were to provide a reliable reference to the designation of categories of persons with disabilities, their definitions, types and path of services, along with determining the responsibilities and tasks of relevant authorities providing services to such categories. Further, it was designed to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to their rights under international and local conventions and laws Also, it was to optimize the investment in the capabilities and resources available in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Finally, it was there to provide a reliable reference framework for designing the strategic planning of services and the preparing of various studies and statistical surveys.

Consider the manual as a reference to the category classification of persons with disabilities and in determining their different needs for services. The important considerations for determining the categories and severity of disability were: to record deficits in one or more of the three adaptive functional domains which are cognitive knowledge, practical domain and the social domain; diagnose the case by specialists by using standards applied to the UAE environment; and provide a report as evidence describing the case by a competent authority. Disability should have an impact of not less than six months on the social, psychological, emotional, educational and other abilities of the individual. Each disability case should be reported as a delay/deficit/decline in functional or structural performance based on the human natural growth curve or standard deviations (Zayed Higher Organization for Humanitarian Care and Special Needs 2017).

This classification manual was written based on the classifications in the US law IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). In addition to adding behavioural and emotional disorders, the Abu Dhabi disability classification included thirteen categories for persons with disabilities: autism spectrum disorder; complex sensory disability;

hearing impairment; visual impairment; intellectual disability; orthopaedic impairment; multiple disability "very severe disability"; communication disorders "language and speech"; acquired traumatic brain injury; behavioural & emotional disorders "personal"; learning difficulties; health impairments; and attention deficit & hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The classification system included detailed information about each category for practitioners and service providers to follow and use.

### 4.1.4 University "A" policy: Special needs support services

University "A" has their own policy organizing the services for students with special needs and disabilities. The policy consists of an overview of the support service for students with special needs; scope implements to all students with special needs; objectives to ensure the access to the university for students with special needs who completed secondary school successfully; a policy drafted in eight points ensuring the student's right to learn and succeed; and detailed procedures of the policy under eight main areas covers the rights and the responsibilities of both the students and the faculty member and the office of the service responsibilities. The policy offers guidance on preparing the Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP) and facilitating the accommodations with the student and the faculty. Also included is recommendations for communication between the service office, the student and the faculty as well as guidance on recording the data and handling the documents. The policy ensures the confidentiality of the students' information, noting that the student should give their consent to disclose their case to another party inside or outside the university.

When comparing what the participants stated during the interviews about how university "A" was accepting students with disabilities since it started with the dates mentioned on the universities policies, it took them decades to create policies for

students with disabilities and special needs. Their policy activated in 2014 and, per the policy's instructions, was supposed to be reviewed in 2016. The policy language is very general and used the term "special needs" only and did not include the term "disabilities". The policy does not contain any definitions of the term "special needs". Nothing was mentioned about reviewing the policy in 2016 or whether there was an update the policy, which gave the researcher the impression that the revision did not take place, which is against the recommendations of Morina (2017), that policies and practices must be revised continuously to achieve quality inclusive and special education for students with disabilities to fully participate. The policy language needs to be reviewed in order to include the term "students with special needs and disabilities" and to add definitions to make it more specific and detailed.

### 4.1.5 University "B" policies

University "B" had an old policy that was approved in 2013, and a new policy was approved in 2017. The researcher will be presenting both.

The old policy at University "B" 'students with special needs' was initiated in 2003. It was quite general and broad, consisting only of a policy draft about trying to support students with special needs whenever the resources were available.

The activation in 2003 came years after the university opened and the old policy language did not include the term "students with disabilities", nor does it have any sign of being committed to serving the students. It took them more than a decade to realize that the policy was not effective and to make the new policy, which was activated in 2017. This came a long time after the passing of the federal law for people with special needs and disabilities (passed in 2006 and was amended in 2009). This slow response to the government's directions impacted the implementation of the laws and the policies, and the quality of the services provided.

When the university created a new department to take on the responsibility of serving students with special needs and disabilities, this resulted in large well-equipped centres to support the students with special needs and disabilities in the university. In 2017, the new department created a new, more detailed policy that covered all the areas that serve the student needs in order for them to get a fair and appropriate education. The new policy includes more details and contains a purpose, guidance on application, definitions (accommodations, disability and impairment) and the policy draft.

## 4.2 Interviews

In this section, the researcher will present the collected results from the interviews, which will be organized under the following themes/topics:

- The history of inclusive and special education in higher education.

- The recruitment of students with disabilities in higher education.

- The admissions process, which includes admission requirements, any processes to handle the applications and criteria to make the decision.

- Services for the students with disabilities.

- The current situation of inclusive and special education in higher education.

- Increase the enrolment of the students with disabilities

The above themes will be divided into public and private universities, in addition, the role of the NAPO with the public universities. Also, this section will be presenting the following two themes:

- Scholarships for students with disabilities to study abroad.

- Experiences of students with disabilities in higher education.

## 4.2.1 The history of inclusive and special education

The inclusive and special education started at the same time that the higher education sector was initiated in the public universities. The participant from university "A"

mentioned that the university has accepted students with disabilities since it started. They used to have blind students and some of them graduated with distinction. They also accepted students with mobility-based disabilities.

At university "B", the participant joined the admissions team in 2013 and found that the inclusive and special education was part of the establishment of the university; they were accepting students with special needs from their founding.

The private universities had a different situation. At university "C", the participant from the admissions stated that they do not have any data regarding the admission of students with disabilities as their application does not contain questions on this subject.

> The university founded in 2010; we began receiving applications in 2009. Whenever an applicant with disabilities met the admission criteria, they were accepted and provided with needed support.

The participant from the office of students said that in the first four years, they did not have any students with disabilities. Their first students with disabilities enrolled in the fifth year and this number increased in the sixth and seventh years. At university "D", they started offering accommodations for students with disabilities in 2009. Similar to university "C", they never rejected an applicant who met the admissions requirements because of their disability. University "E" is a special situation as it's the only university in the UAE that accepts deaf students. Already the university had strategic plans that included offering inclusive and special education in the future. The real action happened in 2015, when a group of deaf students applied and upper management welcomed the idea of their enrolment.

At that time, there was a person responsible for this group started communication with the university. The university first looked into their needs of these students and then approved the students' applications after they found out the university was ready and prepared to accept them. Also, they offer a 50% discount off tuition for students with

disabilities. They needed teachers who were qualified to teach them and cooperate with them. The university already has teachers with special education background welling to teach them, the group of deaf students enrolled in the special education program. Those students were already working and had jobs; they wanted to continue their studies to improve their income levels and their quality of life levels. Their situation as working adults encouraged the university to accept them, as their employment reflected their high motivation and sense of responsibility.

**4.2.2 Recruitment of students with disabilities in higher education**

Usually, universities arrange for visits to the secondary schools to meet the students in their final year to introduce the university academic programs and encourage them to apply. Also, universities arrange for open house days to allow the students and their parents to visit the university and this step is considered part of the recruitment process. In order to answer the first research question—What are the procedures related to the recruitment of students with disabilities in higher education? —the researcher asked for more details about the school visits and open house opportunities.

The researcher asked this question to understand if the universities arrange for visits to special education schools and centres where most students with disabilities are studying to target them or do they only visit the regular mainstream schools where very few students with special needs and disabilities study? The researcher also wanted to know if these special schools and centres get invitations to attend the universities' open house events.

**Public universities**

University "A" mentioned that it is part of the process used for other students (through school visits, brochures, the website, exhibitions, orientation and more) except that they encourage those students who have any kind of special needs or disabilities to state their

case and indicate whether they have special needs or disabilities in the application form, including providing all required reports from specialized hospitals or doctors that support their case.

In university "B", they approach normal schools and do not have a special process to approach the schools and centres for students with disabilities. If the students with disabilities are in the mainstream school they usually visit, otherwise they do not arrange visits to the special centres and schools where the majority of the students with disabilities study. However, they no longer have access to mainstream schools, they can only approach the students through the career fairs and NAPO visits where NAPO invites the schools, which reduced their overall communications with potential students. Not all of potential students come to these trips, even if they come not every student come to ask questions to know more. It depends on the student whether they ask or not; approaching every student is no longer guaranteed. As an alternative option, they do organise an open house day on the campus and invite the schools; there, they provide a booth for each college and one for the disability services office. Parents and students can both stop by any booth to ask and get the information and details they are seeking.

Another participant from the same university confirmed what the first one mentioned by saying:

> No process to approach them for recruitment. The only thing we do if the students visit us in our offices or contact us, we take care of their cases and do our best to help. We do a tour, provide some suggestions that assist the student in making the decision, explain the facilities we can offer.

**Private universities**

University "C" does not approach special needs schools. The admission process is very selective. They do recruitment targeting only the strong schools with high standards. Sometimes these schools have special needs students who do apply to join the

university. The university arranges visits for schools from inside the UAE and from all over the world. The criteria they use to choose the schools they visit is based on the school's reputation and the applications they receive from that school every year. For example, last year they received ten outstanding applications from a school in Jordan, so they decided to visit this school this year. In addition to the recommendations they get from the university representatives in some countries, those representatives know more about the schools in their areas. Based on their recommendations, the university arranges visits to some schools even if they did not receive any applications from them previously.

The university arranges an event called "weekend candidate" where they invite all the students whose applications passed the admission process and got selected. This event usually takes place over two full days (Friday and Saturday); for those who are from abroad, the university buys them tickets so they arrive on Thursday (a day before the event) and depart on Sunday (a day after the event). This event includes a sample class for each academic program in the university to provide the student with a chance to join a class for the program they selected to join (science, art, etc.). It is usually a basic lecture about the program in addition to lectures from the deans of the all different programs in the university. Also, they take them to the grand mosque and on a safari trip with dinner to get a little experience of UAE culture.

The main purpose of this event is to give the student a chance to experience life at the university and in the UAE, to explore their feelings toward the university and whether they fit in. Students already enrolled at the university can get involved in this event to help. The admissions team arranges for a meeting with current students a couple of weeks in advance to prepare them for their roles and students can participate in this event as "peer ambassadors". Also, the university arranges open-day events three times

per semester. The open day is three hours long and includes a lecture about the university, an overview of the application process and a campus tour which is led by the peer ambassadors.

University "D" is a well-known accredited university. They do not arrange school visits but they do organize other events and programs to attract students and recruit them, in addition to offering information on their website. The admissions team organizes annual workshops for guidance counsellors; the theme for the 2018 workshop was "counselling and guiding special education needs students" and 56 counsellors from the top schools in the UAE, Cairo, Bahrain, Oman, KSA and Jordan attended the event. The workshop included two sessions. The first session was an interactive panel discussion focused on providing career education for those with special needs and counselling techniques for those who work with these students, including tips on how to help them navigate a route to career success. The second session included talks from three of university students with mental and physical health challenges. The main purpose of this workshop was to bring the counsellors' attention to the services the university provides to students with disabilities and make them aware of the importance of their role in preparing their students with disabilities by encouraging them to enrol in higher education and work actively toward their continuing education. Participation emphasised the important role the schools play in psychologically preparing students with disabilities for academic life at the universities. One participant stated that:

> If the schools take this initiative, they will facilitate the students' life, if the student is used to these processes at school, he will feel more relaxed when he comes to the university, this will avoid the student feeling like he is different, we need to look at his psychological status.

The university organises events related to students with disabilities sometimes as mentioned above. They also have an exchange program with Harvard University and

last year, they worked together on a program about students with special needs and disabilities that included seven days of activities and lectures related to special needs.

The university organises a big open-day event once a year for parents and students to inform them about the programs offered at the university, the admissions requirements, to meet the faculty members and to accept the submission of the admissions applications for those who are ready. Also, the university schedules a campus tour during the open day which led by the university students. In addition to weekly open-day events, each of which runs for an hour and a half and which include an informative and interactive presentation, potential students meet the admissions team to learn more about admissions requirements and the application process and to go on a campus tour. They organize a special program which includes a series of workshops for students at grades 11, 12 and 13; these workshops provide the students with background about the academic programs to help them choose the program that is suited to their skills and personalities. These workshops are categorized under two main sections. The first section includes workshops about TOFEL and SAT preparation, math tutorials and study skills required to succeed in the university. The second section includes workshops about what it would be like studying in the programs they selected, with a chance to interact with the professors.

At university "E", they do not arrange any visits to the schools, they just do intensive marketing through different media. It is generalised marketing without any specific details about students with special needs and disabilities.

Based on the data provided in the national policy to empower people of determination in 2015–2016, there were 87 rehabilitation centres in the UAE between federal, governmental and private entities where a big number of students with disabilities who study and learn. None of the five universities interviewed arranged to visit these centres

to recruit students who are able to finish their high school successfully and meet the admission criteria to join their institutions; even the NAPO was not inviting them to attend the events they arranged for the students' schools to introduce them to the public universities available that they can join. Some of these centres are affiliated with the Ministry of Community Development, which also failed to take the initiative in any efforts to cooperate with the NAPO and the higher education institutions to introduce their students to such options and raise their awareness regarding the necessary requirements to prepare themselves, or services available to encourage them to think seriously about their post-secondary education.

Serious action should be taken from the Ministry of Community Development, Ministry of Education and higher education departments to facilitate the proper recruitment of those students in the rehabilitation centres as well as students who are already in mainstream education. The contact point to communicate with for recruitment purposes in the schools and rehabilitation centres should be the counsellors who handle the students' issues to help them play an active roles in preparing those students for the next stage of life and encouraging them to think seriously about enrolling in higher education as mentioned by participants in university "B" and university "D". University "D", as mentioned, communicated with the counsellors in the schools to bring their attention to their important role in this regard. This supports what Garrison-Wade and Lehmann (2009, p. 429) stated about the counsellors' role as they had 'minimal expectations for students with disabilities in term of continuing on to college'.

In addition to reorganising their admissions process, the Ministry of Education should take proactive steps through communicating with the NAPO in the higher education department at the early stages of every academic year to provide them with sufficient data about the number of students with disabilities studying as high school students and

expected to apply for enrolment in higher education. Also, it is important to provide higher education with more details about each case and the student's needs through a proper individual educational plan (IEP) which will allow service offices to arrange for any accommodations needed and to prepare the academic environment to meet the student's learning needs.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education should implement proper transition plans through arranged meetings between the potential students with disabilities, admissions units and service offices to guide the students through the admissions process, introduce available services, answer their questions and discuss any concerns they have with regard to enrolling in higher education. This will, in turn, encourage them to apply and receive their educational rights in the community. Research conducted by Morina (2017) about the challenges and opportunities that inclusive and special education students face in the higher education sector confirmed that a proactive transition plan helps decrease the dropout rates and enhance the academic success of students with disabilities.

### 4.2.3 Admissions process

Under the admissions process, the researcher will present three types of results related to this area: the admissions requirements that the student with disabilities should meet to get access to the university, the process for handling the applications of students with disabilities and the criteria to make the final decision of approving or rejecting applications from students with disabilities.

Each university has its own application that the student should complete within special process the university follows. All applications should be filled and submitted online through each university's website, in addition to the academic requirements the student should meet in order to get admission offers. Here will answer the second research

question: What are the admission requirements for students with disabilities to join higher education?

As explained in chapter 3, the researcher created accounts at each university to explore the application process and see how easy it is to access and complete for students with disabilities. The researcher will discuss more details about the online application process at the end of this section.

**Public universities**

For university "A", admissions for students with disabilities is the same as for other students—a minimum high school grade of 75% (a current high school certificate or a certificate not older than three years) and an English requirement (EMSAT minimum of 700)—in addition to the medical reports that state the type of disability the student has and help expected from the University.

For university "B", admissions for students with disabilities is similar to that of other students, 70% in the high school grade and 500 or more on the EMSAT English. Blind students are exempt from the EMSAT exam. The academic bridge department makes an internal assessment to determine their English skills and levels.

Another participant ensured the exceptions they offer students with special needs and disabilities, she noted:

> Just sometimes we make some reasonable exceptions, for example, we exempted a student from EMSAT because of severe epilepsy, after reviewing her medical reports. We had another exam done by writing on paper instead of doing the EMSAT on the computer.

**Private universities**

University "C" the students should complete the application online and submit one of the following: SAT scores (essay test not required), ACT scores (writing test not required), three SAT subject test scores, three AP exam scores, International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma, three IB higher-level exam scores if the student is not an

IB Diploma candidate, and a nationally accredited exam that shows the student completed their secondary education. An English language testing score is required non-native English speaking students; they might be asked to submit results from one of the following English language proficiency examinations: 100 and above on the TOFEL (Test of English as a Foreign Language Internet-Based Test), 7.5 and above on the IELTS Academic (International English Language Testing System), 70 and above on the PTE Academic (Pearson Test of English Academic) and 191 and above on the C1 Advanced or C2 Proficiency (Cambridge English: Advanced or Proficiency).

Often, students who are applying to the university campus in the UAE are not required to submit English language proficiency tests; instead the admissions office assesses their written and verbal skills during the candidate weekend. The applicant is required to submit two essays: the first is a personal statement and the second is a specific essay about the student's interest in the university and is required for entry into this university. Submitting a portfolio is optional for students who would like to highlight their talent in the arts (visual art, music, theatre, film and new media).

For university "D", potential students should complete the application online and submit the following: official school records for grade 10, 11 and 12 and an original copy of their high school diploma for verification. High school diplomas and grade 12 transcripts obtained in the UAE should be attested by the Ministry of Education-Higher Education Affairs (MOE-HEA). High school diplomas and grade 12 transcripts obtained abroad must be attested by: the Ministry of Education (or equivalent) of the home country, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (or equivalent) of home country or the embassy of the country study in the UAE, UAE embassy in home country or UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For British students, the qualification grade of C or above applies to IGCSE/GCE, a minimum grade of D is required for AS level and A level,

seven subjects from (O/AS/A) or four subjects from (AS/A) are required and these subjects should be four chosen from the following areas: math, languages, sciences, humanities/social sciences, arts and design. Students who got their high school certificates from schools following MOE and ADEC (Abu Dhabi Educational Council) curricula are required to submit/undertake the following:

- Students from the general track should have a minimum average of 90% for grade 12 and a minimum average of 90% in the math and scientific courses (physics, chemistry and biology); they must pass the preparatory course in physics at the university and pass the national exams with the required score.

- Students from advanced tracks should achieve the minimum score required or accepted in addition to passing national exams with the required score.

- Students from the ADEC track should have passed the advanced math (level 3) and the advanced physics courses (level 3), and then achieved the minimum score required or accepted to pass the national exams with the required score.

- TOEFL Internet-based (79–80) and writing skills range (24–30), paper-based (550) and essay (4).

- Academic IELTS overall 6.5 and writing 6.5.

- EMSAT sum (1550–1650), writing (CI).

- SAT math (minimum 560).

All students who want to join the engineering programs must pass the university's computer proficiency exam and the ACCUPLACER math exam. All the students who want to join the architecture program must submit a portfolio that includes three pieces of art that the student made, along with a short paragraph about each work. They must also select three photos of buildings from around the world and include a short paragraph explaining why the student choose them.

University "E" has the same requirements for students with disabilities they do for as other students: a high school certificate with a grade average of no less than 60% (if the students do not meet this requirement and the grade is less than 60%, the student should go through a foundation year) and a valid English language proficiency score of at least 500 in TOFEL ITP or a Band 5 in academic IELTS. Students who want to join college of law, Arabic language, or Islamic studies teacher education are exempted from the English language proficiency certificates.

In this part, the researcher will answer the third research question: What is the admission processes to handle the applications of students with disabilities looking to enrol in higher education?

**Public universities**

All students who want to join the public universities should apply through the NAPO website. Previously, there was place in the application to mention whether the applicant had special needs, and the applicant needed to attach the medical reports and documents, then the NAPO sent the application to the university to be reviewed and make the decision. The participant from one university mentioned in their interview that there is a plan to create a special and developed application for students with special needs. Later, when the researcher went to create an account on the NAPO website, a more advanced application was created and there were special applications for students with disabilities titled 'application of admission for students with special needs' as explained in the methodology chapter.

Similar to the other students, students with special needs apply through NAPO website. The NAPO open enrolment period for applications is late October to early November. All high school students start applying and uploading their documents during this time period and once the final scores of their high school career are published, NAPO

connects the score and pulls the data into the system, so the applications of the students who meet the universities' criteria get transferred to the admissions units for approval. In university "A", the admission unit sends the applications of students with disabilities who meet their requirements to the office of disability services, who arrange meetings with the students to get more details about their cases, the services they need, and any kind of accommodations they need to be provided in the schools, in addition to collecting the necessary documentation. The employees in this office get back to the admissions unit to inform them if they will be able to accommodate the student, then the admissions unit completes the admissions process by sending the student the offer. If the office cannot accommodate the student, the application gets rejected. In cases of admissions approval, the admission unit goes further and communicates with other departments, e.g. the residences, to make the arrangements for the students with disabilities so that they will be accommodated upon their arrival at the university. The participant added:

> The admissions process for this category of students is the same as other regular students except that they are treated in a different way, meaning the university tries to provide them with resources and assistance relative to their type of disability and needs.

At university "B", the participants from the admissions unit explained their process for handling applications, saying that for students with disabilities who meet the academic requirements, first the admissions unit arranges for a meeting with the individual and sometimes the parents join too. The purpose of this meeting is to explain the university's policies and procedures regarding all areas the student might need. Then they arrange for a meeting with a specialist in the office of disability services, where both the admissions unit and the office of the disability services collect information and documents about the student's case. Next, the office of disability services reviews the application; if the office of the disability services can provide the necessary services

and accommodations, they send their recommendation to the admission unit to approve the application. Also, they communicate with other institutes of higher education about national students because they have people there who follow up regarding this category of student. They work to provide any specific arrangements the students need for IELTS and EMSAT testing. Students who need a special arrangement for ILETS should submit the request three months in advance to get the approval. If there is not enough time— for example, the academic year starts in a month—they do an internal assessment test and provide a conditional admission for the student until they take the ILETS. Also, admissions cooperate with higher education office arrange for the EMSAT admissions exams for students with disabilities. Examples of accommodations that students with disabilities might need: providing someone to read the exam to the student or printing the exam with in an extra-large font.

The participants from the office of the disability services explained their role through these processes, saying that it's mostly a verbal consultation when admissions refer a student to their office, but it's not a proper system, policy or procedure to be followed, it's all about individual efforts. Currently, they are working on documenting these processes and procedures to be a guideline. Students who are coming in and have disclosed their case through the application process or those whose appearance indicates their disability are easy to handle from their first day. But there are many others who have special needs and hidden disabilities but do not identify their cases.

The participant said:

> If we consider what we read in the works of literature, 10 to 20% of any population should have some form of disabilities, whether it's physical or learning needs, or issues with mental health, so if we say we 10% of our population should have learning needs or physical disabilities, which is around 900 students, but we do not (what we have is 10% of that number, only around 100 students). We are not catching everyone.

**Private universities**

At university "C", the process is the same for students with disabilities as it is for other students. All students submit their applications online. The admission committee reviews the applications to make decisions based on meeting the university requirements and conditions. I would like to mention that there are no minimum test scores required and the admission committee reviews each application holistically; they look at the personal qualities, extracurricular activities, academic test and works of each student. They receive thousands of applications every year and take the best after considering all of criteria mentioned above in fair and objective ways. Some students mentioned in their application that they have disabilities and this did not impact their application process at all if they met the university's requirements, got the admissions offer and the university can accommodate their needs and support them. Some students don't disclose such information through the application process until candidate weekend, when they send requests to accommodate their needs during this event and the university complies. Candidate weekend gives the admissions team and student services the opportunity to get to know more about the student's case. Later, if the student accepts the admissions offer, the admissions unit refers the student to the office of student who they put the student in touch with the centre located at their campus via the director of campus life initiatives and assistant dean of students, who is in charge of disability services on campus in the UAE. The student submits all of their documentation to the centre where there are specialists in different fields to assess and evaluate the student's case and recommend accommodations to be provided. The university provides the students with the recommended accommodations through the employee in charge of services for these students.

At university "D", all applicants must submit health history, which should be filled out and stamped by a physician; this form should be submitted along with their online application. This form includes one question related to a mental health and the two questions related to physical health. If the doctor mentions that the student has a specific medical condition (special needs or disability), and the applicant meets the admissions requirements, the admissions committee direct the student to the university health centre. The director of the health centre meets with the student first and requests a report about their condition from the doctor along with any and all special accommodations requested. Some admissions depend on the case. For example, if the problem is mental health-related, such as ADHD, the centre requests that the student go for testing and evaluation. Then, based on the evaluation results, the university facilitates any requested accommodations like extra time, or taking exams in a different area where it is quieter. Some students can't perform in front of others, i.e. public speaking or presentations.

For physical disabilities, the centre requests the medical reports and facilitates any kind of accommodations needed. The university tries very hard to help the student by providing them with alternatives to succeed academically and at the same time offering whatever help they need from the university. The admissions unit has never rejected any applicant who meets the university's requirements because of their disability. The university is committed to providing reasonable accommodations, which is consistent with the academic standards of the university. The participant mentioned the following example:

> I will give you example of a student who applied for fall semester. He has had complete vision impairment since he was 2 years old, graduated from school. Usually for admissions requirements, we request all the syllabi and marks from the school; in this case, he passed all the steps but couldn't provide us with any details about his performance related to the school. When the student applies for admission, if they [admissions] see any physical disabilities or the student discloses any details about being special needs, they refer the student to the director of the health centre to be sent

for evaluation. With this student, he didn't have the appropriate school record. He asked to join the college of business. We called a faculty member from the college to review his case. We figured out that there are some classes he can't attend and complete because of his disability. We spoke to the student and he changed to media. I contacted the dean, but we also figured out there are some classes he can't attend as it requires watching videos and movies which he can't do. Finally, he decided to go for journalism, where he can write and can do all the classes in journalism in the Arabic language. The requirements to join the university meant he needed to sit for TOFEL and SAT. working to have the TOFEL with our help, he waited to book for the exam for more than a month; he could not book it, we don't know why. We were waiting for him, calling him, telling him 'We are still waiting for you, your place is here, are you done with your TOFEL?', but no response. We prepared his classes, syllabi, made a special math syllabus. The father came several times and was impressed with our facilities, but we do not know what happened with him, maybe he could not get the TOFEL. We had a case of a student with vision impairment who graduated last year.

The role of the health centre is to do the assessment and fill out any special accommodation forms. Once the admission committee receives this form, including the recommendations, the admission unit continues the proceed accordingly. Some examples of the kinds of accommodations admissions arranges for the student include: more time on placement tests, placing the student in a separate room to take an exam, register the student for a lighter academic load, etc.

At University "E", they have two deaf students and students with other kinds of disabilities. The participant from the admission unit explained the process regarding the other kinds of disabilities: after the student fills out the application and submits the documents required, for those who meet the criteria, admissions sends their applications along to the colleges for a final decision, in part determined based on whether they can accommodate them based on the student's need. There is a committee in the colleges to look into these cases and review their applications if the college can provide the accommodations needed; if they accept the student, admissions send the student an offer of admission. For the deaf students, the university teaches them in special classes, if the student meets the requirement and received an offer of acceptance from admissions.

The participant, who is in charge of the deaf students' group and the head of the humanities and social sciences department, explained that in the case of the deaf students, all the students who met the requirements received an offer from admissions and the department does not interfere with admissions decisions, because there are special programs and services already for these students. He said:

> We do not have any role during the admission process to make the decision of whether to accept or reject their applications. But I think there are some deals between the university and higher education office that they follow it. For example, students with disabilities get a special discount on their fees to encourage them to join the university.

The university "E" encourages students with disabilities to apply and accepts them as long as they meet the admissions criteria, but they do not have a specialized office or dedicated staff members to handle their cases and facilitate the services they need. All students with disability issues are handled by the dean of the students, who takes it to the deans' council to be discussed and approved or rejected. The members of the deans' council have no background in understanding the learning needs of students with disabilities, and their decisions are usually made based on the minimum available resources. In this way, they can show their support to these students in the community while benefiting financially from the fees they pay without actually delivering helpful services and accommodations. All of the people who deal with students with disabilities have their own duties and responsibilities which are not directly related to the services and accommodations that students with disabilities need; the task of handling the students' needs is an extra responsibility.

Also, the researcher noticed during her visit to the university that the managerial practices that the university follows are very simple with no modern management styles. People barely responded to their emails; the researcher had to call them in order to get them to reply. The researcher communicated with the switchboard operators for days until she was able to reach the people authorized to approve her request to collect

data, then to get in touch with people in positions to participate and be interviewed. This makes a lot sense when reflecting on what the head of the scholarship department mentioned, i.e. that deaf students and their families are not satisfied with this design as the educational outcomes from the department are not at the same level as other universities. Outcomes are much lower than what students used to achieve abroad. In addition, a lack of variety with regard to choices in majors is extreme as special education is the only option and it does not match with the desires of all students with disabilities.

In this Part, the researcher will answer the fourth research question: What are the main criteria that support decision-making for admitting students with disabilities in higher education?

**Public universities**

Since the applications first go to the NAPO and the NAPO distributes them to the universities, based on the applicants' selections, the researcher started asking this question of the NAPO. The NAPO's response was that they do not set any criteria for admissions to the public universities, they just follow the admissions criteria that each university sets based on their individual policies and regulations. The NAPO screens the applications, then sends along the applications of those who meet the admissions requirements and criteria to the admissions unit at each university. The NAPO does not set or interfere with these requirements and criteria.

At university "A", after passing the admissions requirements, the main criteria for a student's acceptance is whether their disability would allow them to study and move with no significant difficulties. Another criterion is whether the resources they need to study are available and can be provided by the offices of the disabilities centre.

At university "B", there are two main criteria related to the admission, which are a minimum of 70% for high school grades and a passing grade on the EMSAT test (or an internal assessment as an alternative). Another criterion is related to the availability of the services and accommodations needed. For example, a student who meets the admissions criteria, but to whom the accessibility centre cannot provide the required service and accommodation, the university cannot accept them. Similarly, a student who does not meet the admissions criteria, but for whom there are services available for their case, the university cannot accept them either.

The participant said:

> The office of disability services has a role in the process to make the decision of accepting or rejecting the applications of students with disabilities. We involve them. If they have the services and accommodations for the case, we do accept; if not we reject, based on the feedback we got from them.

The participant mentioned the following example saying:

> The office of the disability services takes part in the admissions process for students with disabilities. We previously had a case of around 30 deaf students who all applied to join the university. We worked with the disability office to see if we could accept them or not, but they did not have accommodations for them. They will be in different classes, they will each need a translator in each class, the university does not have the resources.

Also, the participants explained the efforts made with regard to a case where admissions were trying to help the students to get accepted:

> This topic was raised to the VP, lots of investigation was done to see if we can accept them or not but the decision was to reject their application because we cannot offer accommodations for them. We do not have people to support them academically. This case required translators who are good in English in addition to the course topic, which was the biggest challenge for us, in this case. Broke my heart and the students were asking, 'Where we should go to study then?'

Many of the students disclosed their case in their applications and they submitted their documents and medical reports because they needed to get accommodations for the placement exams. Some students do not mention anything about their cases in their applications; they feel embarrassed about announcing it or talking about it and this is a problem. Because students who do not disclose their cases and have their applications

processed as the other students, their applications are approved only based on the admissions requirements and criteria; admissions doesn't find out about their disabilities until the same day as the placement exam, which causes a delay in processing their admissions applications. One participant said:

> Sometimes we get surprised to see them in the EMSAT exam in a wheelchair without knowing that a disabled student or low vision student will be in the exam. Low vision students need to do the exam on A3 paper with extra time, but because they did not mention their case in their applications, we aren't prepared. In these cases, we contact the NAPO and reschedule their exams in order to do preparation needed for them.

For those who identified their cases through their applications, the admissions unit puts them in touch with the offices of the disability services from day one to start working with them. In some cases, the parents are proactive. They frequently play an important role by visiting the university before the student applies in order to explore the environment and ask questions about any facilities and accommodations the university has for students with disabilities and whether their particular case will be accepted or not. In such cases, admissions contacts the director of the disability services office to respond to their concerns and confirm whether their case could be accepted or not, whether they have the resources and accommodation for the case or not. It's a coordinated effort between three parties: the NAPO, the admissions unit and the office of the disability service, and cases are evaluated case by case or group by group.

Sometimes the admissions unit knows about certain disabled cases from the NAPO or EMSAT office. Also, sometimes the NAPO approaches the offices of disability services directly to see if they can offer the services needed to a specific case before transferring the application to admissions. The student applies online through the NAPO system, the NAPO checks on their qualifications, determines whether they meet the university criteria, and then they move them to the university approval pool. Next, the head of the admission reviews the high school grades and EMSAT score; if they meet the university's criteria, the head of admissions approves and submits their

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acceptance. Once it's submitted, the student will be in the NAPO system and they know that these students have already been accepted at University "B", then admissions download their data. The participant added:

> Lots of communication between us and the NAPO happens in each case; sometimes one special needs case requires the efforts and time we spend with three normal[1] students. They need attention to their case, meetings and lots of conversations and dialogues. Sometimes we need to educate ourselves and learn more about their conditions.

**Private universities**

At university "C", the criteria for students with disabilities are the same as for other students. Students submit their applications online through the common application system and attaching the following documents: school transcript, type of testing (SAT, IB, A-levels), essays, recommendation letters from the teachers and a list of the activities they were involved with in grade school. The admission committee reviews the applications and the related documents and make their decision based on academic criteria only.

> We do not correspond based on their disability or special needs; we correspond based on their academic qualifications.

At university "D", it is the same for students with disabilities, in terms of academic criteria and meeting the admission requirements as the same as any other student. The university does its best to accommodate all type of disabilities and never rejects any applicant with a disability who meets the academic requirements.

At university "E", after passing the admissions requirements, the main criteria for acceptance are the availability of the accommodations and services the student needs. Research into the admissions requirements and the process for handling the applications of students with disabilities resulted in data similar to other students at most of the

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[1] Please note this is direct translation from the participant and not necessarily in line with the researcher's own terminology.

universities. It is unfair to compare their special cases and needs to other students. However, creating special processes and providing some exceptions does not mean reducing the academic standards of the universities, At the same time, thinking of ways to provide more flexible systems with alternative options, especially for the required placement exams, should be considered as existing with some cases at university "B". This is aligned with the point of view presented by Evans, Broido, Brown and Wilke (2017) that by reviewing the student application holistically and assessing their ability to enrol in higher education in different ways and methods in order to accept the student application to access the institution, such as reviewing external documentation (individual educational plan, parents input and feedback, medical documentation, etc.) in addition to arranging for detailed and structured interviews with the student, which allows the specialists in the disabilities service offices to understand the students' needs from their point of view, and not only based on what is written in the documents.

The practice of arranging for interviews with students with disabilities is a common one at universities "A", "B" and "D", but unfortunately at universities "A" and "B", it might also lead to excluding the student application because of a lack of available services and accommodations instead of the university stepping up to provide better services. The existing practices at universities "C" and "D" of processing the applications of students with disabilities and providing them with admissions offers based on academic performance that meet the university's requirements and without taking into consideration their disabilities at the beginning, gives the impression they are supportive of students with disabilities who meet the admissions requirements. The university tries hard to accommodate the needs of these students, encouraging them to enrol and trying to avoid losing them because of their disabilities. But the fact is, they provide accommodations because they follow the Americans with Disabilities Act,

which makes offering admission to this category of students mandatory and rejecting their applications because of their disabilities illegal. In such cases, the student can make take a case to court.

Also, if we think more deeply about this, it is not always fair, because their standards are so high and difficult for students to meet, which means the majority of candidates with disabilities got rejected or even did not even try to apply because they could not meet the requirements. This process does not encourage students with disabilities to apply and does not support their enrolment in higher education. Those universities do not put much emphasis on community to make access by students with disabilities to higher education easier and more likely. Students with disabilities who were able to get admission and access to these universities made it because of their own efforts to meet these high standards with help from their families or teachers if they were in good school.

In the public universities "A" and "B", the office of disability services plays an important role in the final decision to accept or reject the applications of students with disabilities based on the availability of the needed services and accommodations, which is against UAE laws. The admissions unit cannot accept any application and offer students with disabilities admission, even if they meet the necessary conditions, unless the service office confirms that they can accommodate the students' needs. This resulted in these universities rejecting a significant number of applications who meet the admissions requirements because of the unavailability of the services and accommodations needed. This practice is illegal and contravenes the provisions of the federal laws as well as government policies and regulations. Only university "B" offers exceptions to the placement tests for some cases of students with disabilities, substituting an internal assessment and providing accommodations during these

placement tests. Unfortunately, these processes are individual efforts from some of the staff in the admissions unit and not the result of a formal process or procedures. Also, this practice is not documented, which means if these staff members were not available for any reason, the students can't request or won't get these accommodations because they are dependent on the staff's values and beliefs in an inclusive special education. There are some individuals who do not believe in an inclusive special education; they see it as wasting resources which results in their not putting any efforts toward support their admissions process for students with disabilities. This reflects the importance of the role of leadership in such processes, to achieve an inclusive and special education. In turn, this raises awareness among people holding leadership positions and educates them about the importance of inclusion.

Applying to most of the universities should be done online through the websites, which are all inaccessible and many students with disabilities would need help to complete such applications successfully. Only at university "B" is the website designed and supported to be accessible to blind students, as they can hear all the information available on the website. The rest of the websites of the participating universities are not accessible. For example, in order for blind students to be able to use the website to fill out the application online, the websites should have their own assistive technology and not require intensive training to be able to fill out the application by themselves without help. Blind students who finished high school via the mainstream education system even if provided with the assistive technology usually did not get any training on how to use it, which resulted in them needing help to fill out the online applications required to enrol in higher education.

**4.2.4 Services for students with disabilities**

**Public universities**

At university "A", the centre for disability services is part of the student affairs department. The centre includes assistive adaptive technology devices for students with disabilities to borrow and use, in addition to a computer lab. The main purpose of the centre is to provide students with disabilities access to the educational opportunities that is equal to that of their colleagues. Students who are facing academic difficulties also are encouraged to request a consultation session with the director of the centre. The specialists there explore the student's needs through a proper evaluation. The centre provides friendly and confidential support to students with disabilities registered at the university via the faculty member and the staff who deal with those students. The centre provides a wide range of support services. They review written documents describing the student's case and educational recommendations and help prepare an IEP that includes the accommodations.

The centre staff also help students with disabilities to be aware of all the services and resources they might need to access the university; provide help with the courses, classrooms, exam modifications and any other recommended adjustments; provide exam proctoring for the students who need to use special equipment or need to take their exams separately in different rooms. They communicate with the faculty, staff and other departments to introduce the potential adjustment solutions and adaptive technology available that could be used to help the students. They help the students to improve their learning and studying habits to enhance their independence. They provide training sessions for using the adaptive technology devices available in the centre. They provide course materials in alternative reading formats, e.g. braille, audio texts, etc. as

well as the assistive technology lab hardware and software which support students with disabilities to be independent in reading and writing.

Learning to use the adaptive technology helps to improve the students' work and academic performance, which reflects positively on their self-esteem. The disability support services assistive technology lab includes PC computers with software and equipment such as: text to speech software; screen reader software; screen enlargement software; closed circuit television (CCTV); portable text magnification systems; printer access for note-takers; flat screen monitors; braille printers; braille sensors; adaptive microphones and keyboards; and adjustable tables. They provide workshops to improve the students' skills (on the computer); in addition, they provide support classes (tutor) for English and math. They support students with disabilities in their academic life and in their residence at the university.

The office arranges a yearly meeting with every college, to present information about how to communicate with students with SEND as well as the process to request the service. Also, they provide the dean of each college with a list of the students with SEND in his college. Every semester, they communicate with teachers who have students with SEND in their classes to make them aware of the student and their needs. At university "B", the office of disability services serves 130 students, including students with learning difficulties and physical disabilities. It is an independent department situated directly under the provost in the university structure. The office has its own budget, which they prepare based on their needs and cases. In addition to the external fund, they go through sponsors. The office has a huge centre on each university campus with equipment and devices students with disabilities need to use it in order to support their learning. These centres are called "Assistive Technology Resources Centres" and they are sponsored by two different sponsors. The centre includes a

variety of different software, hardware and tools to support students with disabilities through their learning process. Examples of the devices available in the centres: screen readers; document readers; learning systems; document converters; note takers; document and book players; braille displays; tactile learning systems; braille output devices; magnifiers; Perkins Braillers; talking dictionaries; talking scientific calculators; talking meters and other tools.

The office provides different services, which faculty members and students can request online through the website. Faculty members can request exam accommodation and course materials accommodation for their students with disabilities. Students can submit their registration form to identify their case as a student with disabilities. The centre offers training and workshops for faculty and administrative staff; training and workshops for students with disabilities and volunteers; and volunteer registration. The office of disability services follows up on the academic performance of students with disabilities and provides guidance and coaching. The office has a lending program which allows the students with disabilities to borrow the tools available in the centre. The students have access to the centre's libraries, which support their academic, personal and professional development. The office provides on-campus employment opportunities for students with disabilities. They also prepare orientation programs for new students, faculty and staff to introduce the centre's facilities and services. In addition to all the above services, one of the sponsors allows the university to use the resources of other educational institutional organizations with which they are partners. They organize professional workshops and training sessions for the faculty and staff about disabilities and special needs learning. And they organize awareness events for the university community and offer membership cards for anyone interested in accessing the centre.

The participant explained their efforts with regard to marketing their services to the students and raising awareness about the centre:

> Part of our job to sell the service, we do go to the classes and talk to students and teachers and hand out leaflets to make them aware of the kinds of disabilities we cater to. We visit around 80 classes.

In addition to providing services to the students identified with disabilities, they put efforts into finding cases who are not identified and need help:

> We are not only providing the support, but we are also making efforts to discover the cases. We figure out many cases who were born with hearing problems, but no one identified it until they come to the university (the students usually think it's a minor hearing issue but it was major 40% of the time), which makes our role difficult, important and challenging.

Also, the participant was aware of the situation in other places and compared them, saying:

> In Europe, most of those cases were identified at an early stage and went through the right channels in their education. Discovering something at a late stage makes it more difficult to accept and adjust to. We have to start all over from the beginning to train them.

The university specifies certain days when there are no students on campus to run its departmental meetings and training sessions for the faculty and staff. The office takes advantage of these days by offering sessions for the faculty members, to get them to realize that students with disabilities and special needs are normal and that disabilities are a huge percentage of the population, they are not rare. Faculty begin to accept these ideas and cooperate to serve and accommodate the needs of their students with disabilities.

**Private universities**

University "C" has a big specialized centre on their campus in the west. On their campus in the UAE, the assistant dean of students—who is also the director of campus life initiatives—is responsible for handling and facilitating the services and accommodations for students with disabilities. The student submits all of their

documentation to the centre in the west; there are specialists in different fields to assess and evaluate the student's case and send their recommendations and accommodations to the people in charge in the student office at the relevant UAE campus to be executed. The student office is currently serving 18 students with special needs and disabilities. Three students with the physical disability: one with visual impairment (blind), one with a mobility disability and one with cerebral palsy. There are 12 students with learning disabilities. Three students who need housing accommodations, using the options for a single room without a roommate. They all are studying different majors in science and humanities. They do not arrange any training in this regard, but at the beginning of each semester, an automated email goes to the instructors of these student to make them aware of their student case or cases. Sometimes the instructors approach the employees in charge in the student office if they need any help or have any questions about the accommodations required.

At University "D", the health centre is responsible for looking after students with disabilities, in cooperation with the counsellors. The centre arranges the accommodations and communicates with the faculty. In total, until fall 2017–2018, they had 96 students: 43 students with mental health issues, 53 with physical disabilities (but only 13 using special accommodations). The remaining students with physical disabilities want to work by themselves and don't want special accommodations. Examples of special accommodations in use at this time: a note-taker in class; some need an oral interpreter; test reading device; and a special test location (quiet, alone). The participant added:

> We provide them with maximum support so that they can succeed. We allow them to use their own devices, break down the exam to smallest parts (quizzes), we request for them to sit in the front row, accessibility (especially for wheelchairs), alternative class materials, format provided by instructor (PDF), handouts to be sent to blind students on their devices, we request additional time for work in the class and outside the class, some need halftime extra, some need full time extra, they feel relaxed and happy. We reduce the credits to 4 or 3 courses instead of 5 courses. Follow up with the counsellors

and academic advisors. They will be working with a group of people to handle them and help them to get their degree and achieve.

Also, the participant mentioned more cases who have already graduated:

> We had two cases, one was five years ago and another was a long time, maybe ten years ago. Both graduated, our special needs students graduating. We had a student with autism; he graduated and he is back and doing his master's. The deaf students were depending on lip reading; they sit in the front of the class, have a special meeting with the instructor after the class, all materials and explanation were provided in writing. They were able to speak little, their talking was not very clear, but we were able to understand some of their talking. One was female, the other one was male.

The university does not specify any budget for services for students with disabilities, but staff members can attend conferences related to helping students with disabilities in higher education to benefit and bring back the best practices. The special needs students are arriving with their own devices, so they do not cost the university too much.

This participant explained:

> We have an autistic case, he has a shadow teacher, he brought the shadow teacher at his own expense, she attends classes with him, but she does not interfere (they had a meeting with her) unless there are needs in social situations, if he feels uncomfortable.

There is a special accommodation request form on the website. The director of the health centre helps the student to fill it out. The form includes the student's name, ID, semester, the year and the accommodation needed. No more details about the diagnosis or the student's problem are revealed because of confidentiality. They maintain privacy and confidentiality based on the US Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERBA), which the university follows. There is a description of the special accommodations that could help the student on the website. The form has the signature of the student, their counsellor, and the director of the health centre. Then the director of the health centre scans it and sends it to the instructor, requesting that the instructor support the student with special accommodations. Also, they ask the instructor to meet with the students privately to discuss the accommodations with the student. They advise the student, if the instructor does not call you within two days, the student should

approach the instructor during office hours. They assure the student that their information should not be disclosed in front of anybody, meetings should be conducted privately with the student. Every semester, they go back to their list, they contact the student asking if they want to utilize the accommodation again and, if the answer is yes, they sign a new copy of the form, whey is then forwarded to the instructor.

At university "E", there is a discount on the fees, the classroom buildings are easy to access, and the registration office helps students with disabilities to register for their courses. The deaf students following the years' system, the university asks them about the courses they want to study each semester, and the students communicate through a sign language translator.

There is no special office or centre at this university to look after the needs of students with disabilities. There is a committee as I explained above. If a student with a disability needs any exceptions, extra support or accommodations, there are clear instructions in this regard. The student submits their request to the dean of student and the dean takes it to the deans' council for approval. Regarding the budget, the participant said:

> No, there is no special budget within our budget for that student, even for the devices and machines, the student should bring it themselves. We need an office in the university for the volunteers who like to help students with disabilities. Sometimes they need someone to help them with writing or reading during the exams, which should be within the professional procedures. We suggested having an office with a database of students who love to volunteer and help. Also, we should consider some issues as the reader or writer should not be from the same department as the student with disabilities.

The university does not offer any training or workshops about students with disabilities and how to communicate with them. There are some instructions in this regard; for example, the university provides the faculty with instructions regarding the exam-taking procedures for students with disabilities because not all of the teachers are aware of these procedures, especially the adjuncts who are coming from outside the university to teach the deaf students (elective courses). The teachers from inside the university know the needs of these students and they have special needs backgrounds, in addition

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to the modifications the teachers need to make in their curriculum accessible to those students.

One of the newspapers stated that the ministry of community development is planning to collaborate with the universities to create special offices with specialized employees to look after students with disabilities in the public and private universities. These offices already exist in the public universities and in some of the private universities, but it seems there is no collaboration between them, and none of them know about each other's intentions and efforts. Still, there is a place for the Ministry of Community Development to collaborate with the universities in this regard, through reviewing the qualification of the employees working at these offices and serving students with disabilities and improving the services these offices provide.

As the researcher noticed during the collection of the data, the qualifications of employees working at these offices should be reconsidered because most of them are not trained in special education, many of them have no academic background in special education or how to facilitate inclusion to be a reality; they are often from different backgrounds who get training in the field, which is not enough to provide proper and professional services. However, these offices are not providing services and accommodations for all kind of disabilities and there are cases of students who met the admissions criteria and requirements but had their applications rejected because these offices could not accommodate them. This issue could ensure what is stated in the national policy to empower people of determination by bringing attention to the lack of staff who specialize in inclusive and special education, the lack of services and accommodations and the lack of systems and procedures with regard to the admissions process for students with disabilities.

Reviewing the history of inclusive and special education in higher education, it's clear that universities have accepted students with disabilities for a long time, some universities—especially the federal universities—since they started. However, there is a huge gap between entities serving and caring about this category of students in higher education, even more than what has been stated in the newspapers and other media sources. If all these efforts were gathered and unified, the community will notice a huge difference and a dramatic improvement of services for students with disabilities in higher education.

It is very important that the websites of the universities be accessible and able to be used by students with disabilities, especially those with hearing and vision impairment. The websites of the NAPO, university "A" and university "B" have details and information about students with special needs and disabilities. The websites of the private universities "C" and "E" included detailed information about the financial aid available while containing nothing about services and accommodations for students with disabilities. The website of university "D" provided good data about how they support students with disabilities during the interview process, in addition to their efforts to raise awareness in the schools and introduce their services for students with disabilities to encourage them to apply and join the university. This university website has very rich and detailed information about the university, all the published documents about the services and information the students need to know are available as PDF files so that students can download them and read them more easily (e.g. leaflets, handbooks, catalogues). Unfortunately, this information was largely in regard of all the services except those for special needs and disabilities. Their website did not contain this information and nothing was mentioned directly about students with disabilities. Also, the university offers student workshops, but there is no information about how students

with disabilities could join and benefit from these workshops, or the possibility of providing students with disabilities with the accommodations needed for such events and activities.

## 4.2.5 The current situation of the inclusive and special education

In the public higher education sector, the NAPO confirmed that the government is putting great effort into the field of inclusive and special education, and the NAPO is doing its best to help students with disabilities apply to get the admitted and enrolled in higher education institutes; if an application is rejected from one institute, the NAPO sends it to another one which might accept. With this new direction of the government and leadership caring about people with disabilities and assuring them a high level of education, universities are trying to accommodate more cases based on the services they have.

University "A" applies full inclusion for many different special needs and disabilities, except the deaf students. The participant said:

> In my opinion, it's not limited anymore as we have students with different types of special needs and disabilities, and they are getting great opportunities, except for the deaf students. We never rejected any student who met the admissions criteria because of a lack of the service, even with the new cases we make an effort to know more about their cases and provide them with services they need.

One of the obstacles the universities face in dealing with students with disabilities is that some of them succeeded in the school, not because of their efforts and the grades they earned, but because the school teachers and administrators sympathized with them. This participant added:

> We can't do the same in the university; they should put in effort and succeed because of their own work instead of getting grades by sympathy.

In university "B", they have full inclusion because they do not separate typically developed students from students with disabilities. This university was the only one that responded to some of the questions related to statistical data, e.g. the average

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number of the students with special needs and disabilities they admit every year ranges from 35 to 45 applicants as Table 4.1 indicates, with data for the last five years:

| | |
|---|---|
| 2017 | 43 |
| 2016 | 33 |
| 2015 | 36 |
| 2014 | 30 |
| 2013 | 35 |

**Table 4.1: the number of the students with special needs and disabilities applies annually from 2013 to 2017**

Also, they provided me with the data in Table 4.2 about the types of special needs and disabilities and their numbers as the following table showing:

| Type of disability/special need | Number |
|---|---|
| Anxiety and low abilities | 1 |
| Autoimmune | 2 |
| Common/intractable health conditions | 58 |
| Hard hearing | 3 |
| Health condition | 16 |
| Hearing and speaking | 1 |
| Hearing impairment | 2 |
| Hearing problem | 6 |
| Learning difficulties | 1 |
| Movement | 14 |
| Neurodevelopment | 12 |
| Physical | 10 |
| Selective Mutism | 1 |
| Severe Osteoporosis | 1 |
| Stuttering | 1 |
| Totally blind | 2 |
| Vision problem | 50 |
| Visual impairment | 5 |

**Table 4.2: the number of each type of disabilities**

The participant did not have any idea about the dropout rate among the students with disabilities, but she expected a very low dropout rate because all of the students with

disabilities she has encountered are very determined students, committed to finishing their degrees. Also, she previously worked with students at risk of dismissal; none of them were students with special needs or disability.

The participant in the admission unit added some comments based on her experience (she is adjunct faculty in addition to her duty in the admission department), saying:

> I personally had special needs students in my class, two cases I had experience teaching. One was handicapped and had with disabilities in his hands and legs, the second was a student with very low vision. In both cases, I worked with the office of disabilities to help me accommodate their needs.

Regarding the limitation of inclusive and special education in the university, the participant noted that from the admission unit's point of view, is it's not limited as they deal with students with disabilities as if they are just another student, and they find that students with disabilities are even more committed than other students. Also, she stated:

> My experience with the two students I taught was so positive. They performed very well and showed high levels of interest and commitment, attended all classes and submitted their assignments on time, both were doing great. Especially impressive because one of them was married, had a family and worked a full-time job.

The participant from the office of disability confirmed that their students with disabilities are fully included in the classes by offering them the support and accommodations they needed. They facilitate those accommodations by contacting the teachers of the students with disabilities to inform them about the cases and give them ideas and tips on how to deal with the students according to their cases and needs. The ABP (academic bridge program) faculty members offered extra support; they are the more proactive when it comes to providing support for the needs of student with special needs and disabilities. Because they are the first department the student joins when starting their academic journey after grade school, the office of disability has established a good relationship and collaborates with them to support these students. They work together, side by side. The participant dialogue was positive and included signs of cooperation, which she described saying:

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> Without us, it would be difficult for them to provide the student with the support needed. Also, without them, we wouldn't be able to identify some cases or deliver the service and support.

In the beginning, students are new to university life and came from a school which had a totally different academic style. Most interactions between the university and the students happen in the classes, where more needs could be explored. One of the challenges the office faces dealing with students with disabilities is that they were not getting the right accommodations in their grade schools, or they are not getting enough attention for their cases at their school. Sometimes they received too attention, but in a negative way, with teachers and administrators being so sympathetic to their disabilities that they gave them higher marks and grades which does not reflect their real performance and also led them to have unrealistic expectations.

The office face many difficulties in changing student attitudes in both cases; the first case by being more aware of their cases and accommodations they need to accept themselves and their needs in a positive way without impacting their self-esteem and the second case through encouraging them to work hard and be more independent and responsible. The office works closely and collaborates with the ABP department to achieve this. In addition to students with disabilities with whom they deal starting from the admission process, there are lots of cases with special needs who are being identified by teachers at the ABP. The participant mentioned the following example:

> For example, in some cases they never had hearing aids. We figure out they need a hearing aid, we contact the home to explain the situation and start following up with a doctor. It's not easy for some students who have never used one. Also, sometimes the parents refuses to admit to the hearing problems because of stigma, so they are in the denial stage and we end up having students in classes who are not doing very well, not progressing and they do not know the reason. When their instructors send them to us, we insist they get their ears checked. We also help by recommending good companies because sometimes they don't go to the right one.

Also, the participant added the following regarding handling these cases, saying:

> It's not a case we give them special treatment, we give them the same advantage as other students, the perception is wrong, when we talk to the teacher, they say we do not want to give them special help, it's actually the same type of help or the same amount of help as other students have.

Because of cultural and educational aspects, the schools are not encouraging and facilitating these students as much as they could to help the students to move to the next step, which is higher education. For example, if I asked the students, "Which university do you want to join?" That means I expect you to go to the university. But if those questions are not built into the culture of the school, the students may not think about it. Teachers should be talking to members of the household (parents and family) to be proactive and plans for the next step, which is after the school. The schools are not preparing students with disabilities for university.

Regarding the limitations of inclusive and special education in the university, the participants at the office of the disability services mentioned that they try as much as they can to accept as many of the cases who are applying to join the university as possible. They are also trying to include them in activities and campus life events, and recently the student affairs informed the office that they want to have students with disabilities as members of the student council. The only challenge for them is that they have to study and put in extra effort with more time than other students because they need extra training; therefore, they usually do not have enough time to participate in activities. This is the only disadvantage because they are really trying to be able to do all that required from them.

One participant described the situation, saying:

> I think we are very good at inclusive and special education. We deal with them totally as other students. If you walk around the campus, you will see them having their normal academic life on campus as others do. You can see blind students who are using their sticks, they are totally independent and do not need any help from anybody, they go to the accessibility office to request help if they need it. The faculty are totally supportive

and very much involved in helping the special needs students. I can say they are 100% inclusive.

Another participant also added:

Up to now, the levels we achieved… it's so successful and positive. Also, it's a significant sign of human and civil development.

In the private higher education sector, the participant from the admissions unit in university "C" mentioned that the university applies full inclusion to students with disabilities such that they get the same treatment/handling as other students, in addition to providing them with the accommodations they need. The university follows the US American with Disabilities Act (ADA), which ensures the rights of students with disabilities in education. Regarding the limitations, the participant's point of view that inclusive and special education is not limited at all as they accept all students with disabilities who meet the admissions criteria and they are doing their best to provide them with the accommodations and services they need within the limits of reason. They stated that the university has never rejected any applicants because of a student's disability. The other participant from the office of the students ensures that the university follows both the US and the Emirati directions regarding the students with disabilities. The Emirati direction is mostly about empowering people with disabilities and having a positive attitude toward them to make them feel welcomed in the community. The US direction is to follow the ADA law as it's more systematic and includes more details. Regarding the limitations, this participant had a different point of view: they felt that that it's limited because they do not have a wide variety of students with disabilities cases. It's a learning experience for both sides, students and the administration. The services are limited, but with each case they learn more and do their best to overcome these limitations. However, the number of students with disabilities are increasing, and as the number of students increases, the number of limitations are dropping.

Participants from university "D" mentioned that since 2009, when they started to accommodate students with disabilities, they have improved this service gradually little by little, and now they have created something very professional. They have their own policy and students approach them requesting help for different disabilities and special needs cases. Regarding the limitations of the inclusive and special education, the participant explained that it depends on the cases, and whether the disability is physical or mental. The students with mental disabilities follow up with the director of the health centre and the counsellors; the counsellors see them regularly and the health centre informs the instructors about the special accommodations they need. In cases with physical disabilities, the student might need to use a specific device which the university can't offer them. In those situations, the student should bring their own devices and the director of the health centre will contact the instructors to make them aware of the devices the students will be using in classes and facilities where the student needs to learn in order to thrive academically. This all sounds like it's not limited for students with mental disabilities, but it is limited for students with physical disabilities. The participant explained more saying:

> We try to follow the maximum policies that we have, but we also have to follow the KHDA. Previously, the students were using braille, but today every student comes with his own different devices. We had three with vision impairment until now, but two of them graduated, and another one who is little different, the student is not 100% disabled but wanted to be treated as special needs.

Also, the participant mentioned the differences among the students in requesting the accommodations and support:

> Some students request to be treated as special needs and some no, they want to keep it confidential (everything is confidential in the clinic and no one has any access to any document) and they do not want to disclose it and continue equally as other students without special needs. We respect them and just keep it for our records.

University "E" is the only UAE university that has classes for deaf students. University "E" has students with different types of physical disabilities (blind and mobility

disability) studying in different colleges, in addition to the group of the deaf students who are all together studying for their bachelor's of education in special education under the college of education, humanities and social sciences.

The participant explained that students with disabilities are in a very good situation as the university accepts different types of disabilities (impaired mobility, impaired vision and chronic disease), in addition to deaf students as they have 31 deaf students (all of whom are in one section) in the college of education (they study in the special needs department) and more students with disabilities are studying in various programs in the university. For the deaf students, they are not fully included as they study in special classrooms together only because they need a translator (the translator is one of the students who is studying in the special education department and knows sign language). There is a call to include these students with other students in the general classrooms and allow the translator to attend the classes, but there are some obstacles such as the other students do not feel comfortable being with the deaf students in the same class because the level of information in their curriculum is different. The curriculum for the deaf students is modified because of their disability. The participant said:

> We cannot teach them with the same intensity and concentration requirements. The deaf students' abilities are limited and one of the difficulties they face is studying the terms and definitions in English, how to translate this into American Sign Language (ASL), which only some of the translators and students know. We are trying to introduce them to the ASL for some parts and definitions, but still in my opinion they cannot study at the same intensity level of information. We are trying to make it full inclusion for the deaf students, but still it needs more preparation.

The students with other disabilities (vision and mobility impairments) are fully included with the other students. All students with disabilities get a 50% discount on the fees and most of them are sponsored by different entities in the government. The university has a special committee for people with determination (students with special needs) in the university, including three deans, the head of the psychology department and a member

from student affairs. The committee studies and discusses all the details regarding their needs and what they require to be successfully included in the university community.

Also, the participant added his own experience, saying:

> It depends on the kind of the disability, most of the universities have students with special needs and disabilities and those students experience academic life and do their academic duties as other students. I taught students with vision and mobility impairment, I never felt they were different and they were doing the same requirements as other students. Students with vision and mobility impairment do not face big difficulties, they can study the same curriculum, just they might need someone to help them in writing and taking notes. Students with hearing impairment who face difficulties may need a modified and simplified curriculum.

In contrast, there are some obstacles to their current situation. The participant described it by saying:

> In my opinion, the main obstacle is the input services week during the foundation stages at the school (for those who are not well-prepared academically), which does not help them succeed and join higher education. First, those students should get and master the basic learning skills reading and writing. Passing them because of sympathy does not work and won't help the community and the students themselves. Passing them with sympathy in the grade schools is very common and that's why most of them can't continue their education and the tasks become more difficult. In our university, we do accept deaf students, but we want to be honest and tell you that their academic skills are weak, even their teachers mentioned their low learning level. We want inclusion to provide the community with the qualified outcome of these students, but inclusion does not mean graduating unqualified students.

The participant expressed his awareness of the importance of inclusion and his belief in its values and benefits for the community and the students:

> It's not just about inclusion but providing them with a good education to make them able to serve the community in the best way. In addition, to help them have a high level of self-confidence by being able to do what others do. For those who got a strong education and were able to continue their education and get graduate degrees and got high academic positions in the universities. When there is no inclusion in the schools, universities will not have a large number of these students applying to join higher education.

The issue that different participants from both the public and private universities mentioned to me in the course of doing this research was the unethical common practice happening in the schools during the process of assessing the learning outcomes of students with disabilities. The results of the evaluation process do not reflect their real academic skills and capabilities because of the illegal help they are used to getting in

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the schools through administrators and teachers providing them with the right answers and, in some cases, writing for them. Such practices exist for two reasons: the first is because the teachers and the staff sympathize with these students and the second reason is because the success of those students reflects positively on the school. If the school is seen as supportive of inclusive and special education, it will help the school to get a high ranking. Unfortunately, supporting students with disabilities in this way is unethical. It's done just because the schools or organizations want to get awards and accreditations for both prestige and marketing purposes.

There is a special department for special needs in the Ministry of Education with specialized employees to follow up with the schools regarding the learning processes and accommodations needed for students with disabilities who were included in the mainstream education. They should have strict procedures to train the teachers in the schools with regard to teaching and evaluating students with disabilities and their educational outcomes. Providing illegal help deprives the students with disabilities of their right to learn and to be independent. They are prohibited from learning and doing things they can do. These are things they need to do to develop their capabilities, self-esteem and self-confidence, allowing them to prepare for work and life beyond school. These students should get proper help. They should be provided with the assistive technology and intensive training necessary to help them to learn and respond to the assessment tools or strengthen their skills through focusing on their own abilities. To create a successful person in a specific field is better than creating fake facts presented as real results showing that the student is average in everything while they are not.

From the beginning, the education of students with disabilities should be realistic, with their personal information and the details in their academic performance detailed in reports and individual educational plans. They should be helped through modified the

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curricula and accommodations. This would increase the likelihood that a student will succeed and be prepared for better learning options to be continued in higher education and, eventually, through to working opportunities in the future.

Each stage of life has its own needs and requirements that must be fulfilled and satisfied to move to the next stage successfully. Failure to obtain these needs and requirements at any stage would lead to students being cognitively stuck at that stage and unable to move on to the next stage, which impacts all aspects of their personal lives. Showing their strengths in their reports encourages the universities to accept the students and employers to provide them jobs.

Teaching and training this category of student costs a lot. Some schools and organizations deal with it as a business, which ends up a losing proposition from their point of view because they will not benefit from any financial profits or direct earnings, even though the student will benefit personally in many different ways and eventually, the community will benefit as well. Supporting students with disabilities in education requires a purely humanitarian desire to help them have a better life without needing any personal benefits or credits in return.

Students with disabilities in schools are at the stage where they need an education to learn in order to improve their cognitive skills, experience fairness and be considered equitable compared to their colleagues. The next stage is the need to get a job and work in order to secure a steady income and be independent financially. But without a good high-quality education, they won't be able to achieve their goals in the life stages that follow. If we consider that the last decision that was made and approved in the UAE cabinet was about supporting people with disabilities opportunities to get jobs and work, the basic requirements is to provide a high-quality education for people with disabilities that considers ways their capabilities can be strengthened. Access to higher

education is an important prerequisite to securing a good job and building a career path that guarantees a good income and a quality life.

### 4.2.6 Increase the enrolment of the students with disabilities

In this part of the chapter, the researcher will present the participant ideas and suggestions to support the admissions process for students with disabilities in order to increase their enrolment in higher education. Here, the researcher will answer the fifth and final research question: What can be recommended to support admissions services for students with disabilities?

**Public universities**

At university "A", one participant suggested the following:

- To get sufficient data about this category of student from the Ministry of Education in order to plan their enrolment according to the university's policies and procedures.

- To develop new policies and procedures for this category that facilitate their admissions, studies and student life.

- To have specialized recruitment plans for them.

- To provide all of the requirements and resources required for as many different disability types as possible and to accept all applications that might be received from these students.

Another participant said:

> In my opinion, it's easier to accept disabled students and serve them from day one than other kinds of hidden special needs. Obvious special needs and disabilities are easier to handle and serve.

At University "B", the participant from the admissions unit said:

> By increasing the resources and services for them and adding more accommodations.

Another participant added:

> We need to learn more about disabled people. Hire the right people who are trained in special needs and disabilities. Raise awareness between the families and parents. Usually, cases who have educated parents with a good awareness do better in their education in the university.

The participant from the office of the disability services said:

> We have to work closely with the schools. I am sure there are lots more cases that did not get identified because of social and cultural stigma. I visited around 12 of the top universities in the UK to explore the best practices in this field. I figured out they are providing the same services but with a different system because they have more detailed lows and their services started at an early stage in the schools.

## Private universities

The participant in the admissions unit at university "C" said:

> To make the students aware that the university treats them fairly and their situation as special needs or disabled students won't impact their applications, we do look at their academic qualifications and skills.

At university "D", the participant's point of view was:

> Go educate the family more. Education should come from the family, should start in the family at home. I remember a five-year-old autistic boy who studied with my daughter, he continued with her to high school and moved to attend higher education in Canada. He is still in touch with my daughter. Studying together teaches other students to accept them and makes the special needs student feel he is accepted in society. We need to help these students, we need to educate and bring awareness to schools for educators and to homes for families. Provide the families with support.

The participant from admissions at university "E" said:

> More marketing and announcing about providing admission for these students. Our doors are open and as mentioned, we will start accepting them on the other campus.

While the other participant's thought was:

> Most of the universities today are working to get international accreditations. One of these accreditations criteria is supporting the special needs students and the level of inclusion existing in the university. Supporting the special needs students and having an accessible building for them are important criteria to get a high rank in these accreditations. In my opinion, supporting the special needs and disabled students and providing their services is manageable. Therefore, we should expand our services to accept them. Through my work experience, I had a blind master's student, I was assigning her the same tasks as other students. Special needs and disabled students might not be able to do some tasks, but that does not mean they can't learn.

Also, he added:

> …students struggling to catch up and do all the requirements. To increase their numbers in the universities, we should provide them with a proper and strong education in the schools especially at the primary stage (basic skills).

There is a contradiction in the what some participants stated as the researcher was collecting the data. While most of them stated that inclusive and special education is not limited at their institutes, most also stated and confirmed the two main practices indicating limitations with regard to the inclusiveness of special education: (a) not accepting some kinds of disabilities—for example, deaf students—and (b) not providing admission for some cases because of the lack of the accommodations and support services the student needed.

This issue of the limitations in the current situation of inclusive and special education was admitted indirectly through the suggestions provided by the participant at university "A" about developing special policies and procedures with regard to their admissions instead of applying the same processes as for other students. Those suggestions were, first, to prepare a special recruitment plan targeting students with disabilities to encourage and support them in enrolling at the university. The second suggestion was to extend and increase services and accommodations for more disability types to provide opportunities for more students with disabilities to access higher education.

### 4.2.7 Scholarships for students with disabilities to study abroad

For a long time, the UAE government has offered scholarships to students with disabilities to study abroad for their higher education degrees. This is particularly directed at deaf students due to the UAE's lack of services they need in schools and higher education institutes. These scholarships are provided through the Office of Higher Education. The government used to provide deaf students with scholarships to

study both high school and higher education abroad. Lately, this has been put on hold.

Meeting with the head of the Scholarship Department at the Office of Higher Education, he explained that previously the Office of Higher Education (which was the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research) offered scholarships for grade school and university students to study abroad. Then it became restricted to university students only and currently, even the scholarships for the university students have been put on hold.

The participant explained the situation with the schools:

> This decision has been made because of the poor cooperation from the schools' side after experiencing negative situations. The schools that we were dealing with started to exploit the education system and were not helping our students to succeed. In order to get more profit, they were taking advantage of the governmental support those students were getting. It ended up being a commercial project instead of learning and opportunities.

With regard to the universities, the participants added two main challenges:

> The situation at the universities was better, but at the same time the students were facing a challenge by spending a long time at the stage of studying the English language and doing foundation-level work because of their weak language and academic skills. The other challenge we were facing was getting admissions for the students who did not have an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) file which became a barrier to getting admissions approval from the universities abroad. The IEP is an important admissions requirement for students with hearing impairment at these universities.

The IEP is a proper documentation of the students' current skills and performance levels, along with the kinds of accommodations and services they used to get that were helpful. The IEP helps the university to understand students' learning needs holistically in order to continue providing them with the educational services they need. The IEP is a very helpful resource which saves the student time, saves the university effort and saves the scholarship provider resources.

The students who got scholarships and travelled abroad to study faced challenges related to the cultural differences. They moved from a conservative culture in the UAE to more open cultures in the west without any preparation for this cultural transition.

The application for scholarship from a student with disability gets assessed medically and academically. The Scholarship Department considers the student's physical state and ability to travel abroad. They got the same benefits and allowances as other students, in addition to any additional costs for devices and equipment they need to support their special case. Usually, the student with a disability scholarship costs the government four times as much as the other students. Unfortunately, the participant did not answer the question six in the interview guide, which was 'How do you evaluate inclusive and special education in higher education in the UAE?' The participant said that he does not have enough information or background on inclusive and special education in the higher education sector of the UAE to answer the question.

Another issue that has been raised regarding students with disabilities studying abroad is that it broadens their educational options and life experiences. While the UAE started this service of providing students with disabilities with scholarships to study abroad since the early 1990s for different types of disabilities, it was especially helpful for cases where the higher education institutions in the UAE could not provide services and accommodations, such as for deaf students. For deaf students, even the high school students, the UAE was offering them scholarships to study abroad because there were no schools for them in the UAE. This aligns with the international approach as discussed by McLean, Heagney and Gardner (2003).

Lately, these scholarships for deaf and blind students have been put on hold instead of improving the service and developing it. Some reasons for this action have been presented earlier in this chapter. The researcher was not persuaded by the reasons disclosed by the participant who claimed that the government was suspending the scholarships for the deaf students because the schools in the US were not helping the students to succeed and failing them on purpose to get more money. There might be a

grain of truth there, but not to the point of giving up and suspending the scholarships without making any effort to solve such issues, e.g. through arranging meetings and communicating with these schools, or at least finding alternative options which would allow the students to continue learning through a proper specialized educational system for deaf students which is not available in the UAE.

Suspending the scholarships for deaf and blind students at the higher education stage because of their weak language skills did not lead to any actions to improve the English curriculum in the UAE schools where they study. One of the student participants in the study mentioned that they suffered in a UAE school due to not having one unified sign language to communicate with each other and use to study as well as a failure to have a qualified sign language interpreter. Also, one participant at university "B" mentioned rejecting the applications of a group deaf students because of not being able provide the most important services, i.e. specialized interpreters who master sign languages in different scientific fields.

Another reason mentioned was the failure to provide a proper IEP file, which becomes a vital admissions requirement at the universities abroad; its lack becomes a barrier to getting admissions offers for those students. Currently, the UAE has a significant number of higher education institutions which offer education degrees. Most of the educational programs in these universities include the special education path, which reflects having a population of specialized, highly-educated staff to train the schools and rehabilitation centres on preparing a proper IEP files for each case in order to help them move to the next academic stage more easily, with fewer obstacles. This is directly connected to what the participant in university "B" mentioned about not starting the service at an early enough stage in the schools, which leads to more challenges as the

student progresses through grade school and ultimately attempts to enrol in higher education.

Another participant mentioned the cultural challenges that students with disabilities face when they travel to study abroad, which corresponds with assurances by Soneson and Cordano (2009) that cultural experience is an important area where students need to be apprised of and prepared for the dramatic differences they will face before their departure. Usually new students go through intensive orientation programs introducing them to the new system they will be joining; the researcher expected the scholarship department in higher education to arrange similar preparation for such a sensitive category of students before their departure, in addition to intensive follow-up within the first year with students to be provided with any guidance and counselling regarding issues and challenges they face.

From the researcher's point of view, multiple issues led to the suspension of scholarship for students with disabilities (specifically, the deaf and blind) in the universities. Reasons include: a lack of transition plan services to prepare them for such a step and a lack of proactive services to prevent them from facing some of these issues. However, when the issues took place, the stakeholders did not provide any solutions or recovery plans. The act of suspending scholarships is passive and until now, there were no efforts in the higher education sector to resolve it and get it start back to providing scholarships again. This is another example of the importance of the leadership role in supporting inclusive and special education.

### 4.2.8 Student with disabilities experiences in higher education

### 4.2.8.1 Student "F"

The first student participant was a female with a mobility disability. She got her high school diploma from a government school. She has had different experiences in higher

education abroad and in the UAE. She completed her bachelor's degree in the US at Gorge Washington University. She started in 1991 and finished in 2000; it took her almost 10 years to get her degree. This delay was because of two reasons: first, she went through some health issues which made her suspend her studies for a period of time; second, she changed her major. She started studying to become biomedical engineer, which was her parents' choice, because it was not available in the UAE; this makes it easier to get the scholarship. When she got deeper into studying the m ore advanced courses, she realized that she did not like it and shifted to biology, with dual minors in English and sociology. After she finished her bachelor's, she applied for another scholarship to study for her master's in healthcare administration and received the scholarship, but her parents advice was to go back and continue pursuing her master's at one of the private universities in the UAE. She is currently conducting her PhD at a private university in the UAE. First, she talked about her experience abroad, then she talked about her experience in the UAE.

Her parents decided to send her abroad to study, selected the major and applied for the scholarship. She knew nothing about the application process and whether it was easy or if she would have needed help to get through it. She did not face any difficulties with the Office of Higher Education as she was dealing with the Cultural Division because they were responsible for the students there. They were very supportive and responsive to her needs, even more than she expected and hoped. In the beginning, she faced a problem with commuting as a student with a disability and without a car, as it was difficult to use the metro with her manual wheelchair. She raised this issue with the cultural division of the UAE embassy and they paid for her to get an electric wheelchair; they even paid for the chair's maintenance and went above and beyond the norm.

Regarding her experience studying abroad, she said:

> It was an interesting experience, the first time away from the family, being on my own in a new environment, new culture, the studying was different because the system was different than ours. I got my high school degree from the government it was totally different. Learning English itself was an experience. Some classes like calculus I had to learn the same material in Arabic in the school. It was an adjustment with a new language, but other than that, getting used to the system, being on my own, taking care of myself, taking care of the house, paying bills, being fully responsible for myself was like learning a new life.

She arrived a little late, after the start of semester and missed the new student orientation sessions and programs, therefore she was not aware of any laws regarding the rights and regulations of students with disabilities. There was a special office responsible for students with disabilities at her university, but it did not provide any equipment or devices. They did accommodate her with some special services, as she mentioned in the following example:

> For example, whenever I had classes in the old building, which was not accessible, they moved my classes to the new building, which was accessible. The university is old and only the new buildings are accessible. If I had the manual wheelchair, I would not have been able to manage, but because the embassy paid for an electrical one, it made my life a lot easier. These services were free as the office was part of the university and it was their job to help students with SEND.

The researcher asked if there were an opportunity to study at one of the UAE universities, was she willing to shift? The participant's respond was:

> It was my parents' decision, I had no choice to shift. There were some problems I faced there when I changed my major and the times I got sick. My parents were always saying, you need to finish and come back. There was no option to shift or give up. Honestly, I never thought about it; it was more about continuing where I was and coming back with my degree.

At a private university in the UAE, she completed her master's; she then made the decision and applied for acceptance to get her PhD. The application was simple and she did not face any difficulties in applying to the university. There are no special staff or an office responsible for students with disabilities. They are not providing her with any services or equipment. The building was accessible, and whenever she needed anything, she had to talk to her professor or the administration for help.

The situation of the student "F" has two sides. The first side is the positive side, which is an example of educated parents of a person with a mobility disability using a wheelchair and reflects the important role parents play in encouraging their kids to continue their postsecondary education and be independent through experiencing different life without their family. The second side is more negative, where parents took the decision out of the hands of their daughter and did not include her in any aspect of the process of studying abroad, starting from deciding to send her abroad to study, then applying for the scholarship without allowing her to experience the application process with all of the documents required and the information needed, which sometimes opens the student's eyes to areas they were not aware of and encourages them to to be more prepared. This negative side ends with the student's parents choosing her major, which had a major impact on the student because, after about two years, the student shifted to another major because the major her parents selected didn't suit her. This led to long delay that, in addition to her health circumstances, resulted in her spending 10 years getting her bachelor's degree.

The extended period of time this student spent getting her bachelor's degree was also due to her being insufficiently prepared to move into this stage of life, which usually leads to more difficulties academically in the student's first year in university and a longer time to complete the degree, as confirmed by Evans, Broido, Brown and Wilke (2017). Later, when she wanted to stay longer to continue her post-graduate studies, her parents refused and requested her to 'come home'. This reaction indicates several things; they might have regretted sending her abroad at the beginning or wanted it to be just a one-time experience in her life, to allow her to get some experience of a different way of life. When they decided to send her in the first time, they made the decision, and when she wanted to continue, they refused, which seems to be considering only

what fits their thoughts and feelings, not what their daughter desired. Sometimes, families push their kids toward some option that is inappropriate, which sets them up for failure. Just because they want to please themselves, perhaps trying to pretend that their kids are normal and can do what their peers are doing. They act this way to fulfil a psychological need in themselves more than support their child's needs.

### 4.2.8.2 Student "G"

The second student participant was a male who is currently studying human resources at one of the public universities, which he joined in 2012. Before joining this university, he studied in two different places. First, at an Abu Dhabi centre for special needs; then he continued at one of the mainstream public schools until he finished high school. Regarding his decision to enrol in higher education, he mentioned two factors: the first was his family:

> I got great support from my parents and family members, especially from my brother. Their continuous encouragement pushed me to continue my studies and enrol in higher education.

And the second factor was some pre-enrolment communication he had with the university and the role he played at an event at the university:

> Also, there was cooperation between me and the university. Before I enrolled in the university, I was invited to the university as a guest for inspirational talk. This cooperation made me feel the university is different from the school and really would add more to my personality.

He followed the same admissions process as other students to apply for the university and did not face many difficulties with the application process. His brother and the Abu Dhabi centre for special needs helped him to go through the process and apply. He was welcomed, and the university told him that they were waiting for him to join. He thinks that currently, the process is much easier, because lots of positive changes have happened since 2012.

Also, he mentioned that he is not facing any difficulties; the disability services office is providing him with all kinds of services and support he needs. Some examples of the support he receives: he gets 50% extra time on quizzes and exams because of his slow handwriting and he was provided with an iPad and a laptop to use for writing instead of having to rely on writing by hand. He described his university saying: 'It's the university of opportunities'.

In describing his experience moving from the centre to the mainstream school, he explained:

> When I moved from the centre to the school, I was afraid of dealing with this new environment. I was in the centre for 9 years, in closed environment which has only students with SEND. Mentally, my personality was not ready to move to a bigger, open community.

And regarding his experience enrolling in higher education, he described:

> When I joined the university, I faced the same feeling. I had some concerns that I wouldn't be able to socialize with my colleagues. I faced some challenges socially. The university nominated me as the President of the Happiness Council of Youth. Which encouraged me to socialize more with my colleagues and gradually a big shift happened in 2015, when I overcome these challenges by participating in and volunteering for more different kinds of activities. The university changed my life for the better, for the best.

He is aware of the laws and regulations governing the rights of people with disabilities, especially the laws about their rights in education. With regard to the disability services office, he mentioned that it's very supportive. He joined the university in 2012, before this office was founded, and at that time, he faced a lot of obstacles. He was feeling detached from the university environment. The office helped him to connect with different people and groups in the university and to be more engaged. This office provides different kinds of services and equipment for different special needs and disabilities. Also, they help students with disabilities to search for jobs after graduation. The office has a significant role in motivating the students and encouraging positive

aspirations, which helps them to do their best and succeed. The university building is accessible and all the services are free. In general, the university empowered him.

At the end of our interview, he mentioned that one of the major challenges his colleagues with special needs and disabilities faced in the university and could not overcome, was getting the required score on the IELTS exam. The IELTS is an obstacle stopping them from continuing their studies at the university. Even he could not start the university's academic programs until he got the score he needed on the ILETS. He said:

> Even I do not know if I passed or they helped me by giving me an exception because of my commitment and hard work during the foundation stage (studying English levels), as I got extra time in the ILETS and they repeated the recording for me twice.

### 4.2.8.3 Student "H"

The third student participant was a male with a hearing impairment. The researcher communicated with him through emails and he responding by typing up his answers. He was able to study in the UAE from kindergarten to grade 9. He completed grade 9 in 1994 but could not continue on to high school because at that time, the UAE educational system was not providing a high school for deaf students. He was encouraged by his family to apply for a scholarship to study at a high school in the US. He secured a scholarship and successfully studied abroad for both his high school diploma and a bachelor's degree; currently, he is working as a network support engineer.

In 1995–1996, his family helped him to apply for a scholarship and he went abroad from 1996 to 1999 for high school in a US school for deaf students. Then, from 1999 to 2002 he studied in the US for an associate degree in science (college). Then he applied for another scholarship and the Zayed Higher Organization (ZHO) supported his case and helped him get the scholarship. He went abroad again to study for his

bachelor's degree from 2009 to 2012 and split his time between two universities. He started with Gallaudet University for his first two years, studying information technology, then transferred to the North-Western Connecticut Community College, where he continued for another three years studying computer systems technology.

He wrote about his experience with the higher education institutions in the UAE. In 1999, he joined the Al Ain Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT Al Ain), they were friendly and patient with him, but they did not provide an interpreter and he was asked to find an interpreter to help himself. He described the situation there, saying:

> They didn't have any knowledge about serving deaf people when I went to HCT in Al Ain. Unfortunately, the UAE didn't have enough interpreters.

They only provided him with the closed caption function on his IBM computer, which translates the spoken part of his classes to text so he can read it on his laptop screen, but he changed his mind and went back to the US to study there more.

> I believe that I got more benefit of a good education from the USA more than at HCT and felt that Deaf UAE people were facing difficulties with the office of Higher Education in the UAE.

Regarding his experience with the educational system in the UAE, he added that he hoped that there was more support for providing a greater number of qualified interpreters for deaf people in both the grade schools and in higher education institutes. The educational experience he got on his journey from kindergarten to grade 9 at the service centre was very weak; for example, the teachers were using their own sign language and many students could not even learn reading and writing skills there. He benefitted from the educational system for deaf students in the US and got the right education because they use one common sign language related to education: ASL. Also, he suggested that there needs to be one place under the government for entities which includes both deaf people and other people together; the community at large should have experience of and knowledge about the culture of deaf people.

The participant said that he got all the support he needed while he was studying abroad, even more than he expected.

The participant wrote about his experiences in the US. He mentioned that the US educational system has many universities and colleges providing different programs for deaf students. There are three well-known universities in the US for deaf students:

1. Gallaudet University (GU), Washington, D.C.

2. National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), Rochester, New York.

3. The Southwest Collegiate Institute for the Deaf (SWCID), Big Spring, Texas.

They have many different majors, and deaf people can choose whatever they like. These three universities are for deaf students who are learning directly through the sign language. The teachers are either deaf or hearing, but all of them use sign language only without interpreters. Other higher education institutes also have many programs for deaf students, but they require an interpreter if a deaf student attends these universities, take into consideration that interpreter should be qualified and have strong sign language skills.

He added that he received a strong education in the US, and the education he got in the UAE was not good. He described it, saying: 'I had troubling learning from the UAE'. And he recommended that deaf student should go to the US to study if they wanted to continue their education. Studying abroad is optional; some choose to continue in the UAE. He was aware of the experiences of his colleagues who studied in the UAE and he described their experiences, saying:

> I checked with them by asking them some words testing their knowledge. They didn't know most words. I asked them how they passed the test. They said that they cheated through interpreters who were not high quality. Interpreters answered for deaf people!

He recommended that if the UAE educational system could not provide a highly-qualified interpreter with strong sign language skills, then it's better to not start

educating deaf students in the higher education institutes. Deaf students enrolling in the higher education system require a common sign language, highly qualified interpreters and teachers with a strong background in the education of deaf students and their learning needs. Without these requirements, they will be wasting students' time and giving them a poor education with confusing sign language, as currently, each teacher uses a different sign language. He strongly recommended that the UAE government continue to provide deaf students with scholarships to study in the US for a good education.

The participant aware of the laws and regulations for students with disabilities and students with hearing impairment and mentioned the following links:

https://www.ada.gov/

Which is about the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The second link was:

http://www.dhhig.org/laws-regulation-executive-orders

This link is about the federal laws and regulation and executive orders for Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in the US government.

Services that he needed and was provided with include: interpreters, sign languages teachers at the three major universities mentioned above, videophone service, etc.

In the US, the buildings at the universities he studied in were accessible for students with disabilities.

Deaf students in the US get services and equipment they need for free. An example of these services is the videophone service for free as pictured in Figure 4.1, which was provided by the participant and shows and the link for a more detailed explanation.
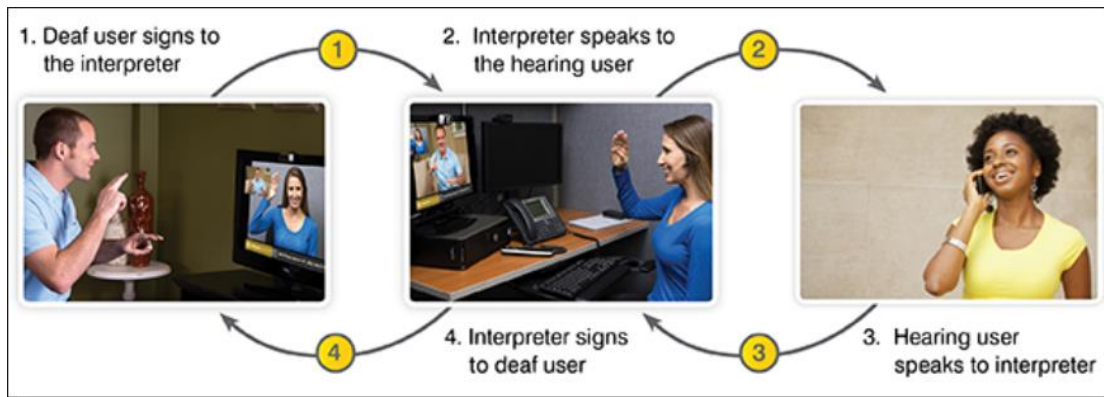
**Figure 4.1: communication process through videophone for deaf people**

The last question that the researcher asked the participant was: If there was an opportunity to study at one of the UAE universities, would you be willing to shift? Please explain why.

Unfortunately, the participant response was 'No', because of the lack of services (mainly qualified interpreters) that deaf students need in order to learn properly as previously explained with regard to his experience at the HCT and the teachers' lack of the background in teaching deaf students and their culture. He said: 'If I had studied in the UAE, I would have a poor education'.

The government of the UAE is not responding to the needs of certain kinds of the disabilities, such hearing impairment, as until now public universities were not able to provide the accommodations for deaf students that they need to get a proper education. To be fair, some of the higher education institutions have tried to accommodate the needs of deaf students but as participant "H" disclosed with regard to his experience, they were not too helpful. Maybe because he compared the quality of the services he got in the US and kind of services he got in the HCT, the lack of providing qualified interpreters was a glaring omission.

The availability of the capable interpreters gives the students opportunities for interaction through active discussion and dialogues using sign language. Providing qualified interpreters is one of the main challenges the educational system faces with regard to educating deaf students in both grade schools and higher education. One of the private universities, university "D", started accepting deaf students several years ago and one student graduated successfully. This student was trained to read the lips, also he had his own devices, with the faculty members' cooperation, he was provided with written copies of all the lectures and class materials. He was able to succeed. University "E" is the first higher education institution to provide a post-graduate education for deaf students. It's not an ideal option or proper education for several reasons: first, it's not full inclusive; the deaf students study together in special classes and are not educated alongside other students. Second, they do not allow the students to select the academic program they want as the university only accept them into one academic program, special education. Third, the study language is Arabic; the academic program does not provide options to improve their English, which is very important and necessary in the labour market nowadays. Fourth, they teach students a simplified curriculum that's not similar to the level other students study in the same academic department, because of their weak academic skills and background.

After putting scholarships to study abroad for deaf students on hold, the Office of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education was providing the students scholarship to study at university "E", but because of the above-mentioned reasons, the students and parents were not satisfied with quality of that education and their learning outcomes, which lead to the government stopping these scholarships too. Also, such a poor education was not guaranteeing them a proper career in the future; of the students who graduated, some are working in the same university as interpreters and the rest

could not find jobs in the area in which they received their degree, which we could call an education without future. The quality of the education university "E" was arranging for the deaf students does not help them to achieve important goals such as getting a proper job and starting down the career path.

Teaching deaf students at university "E" together in segregated classes as a separate group is considered an illegal practice and against social justice practices based on Hlalele and Alexander (2012). In their article, they examined university access by discussing the practices of some universities attempts to achieve inclusion; unfortunately, this led to labelling and stigmatization, which results in exclusion. Also, this is a very obvious example for what Slee (2013) mentioned about some institutions creating new strategies and mechanisms to contribute to inclusion that leads directly to more exclusion.

The situation of the deaf students in the university "E" is problematic because educating students with disabilities is considered a commercial business. They provide these students with a low-quality education and using bad practices. They started accepting students with disabilities in general and students with hearing impairments in particular without any sort of basic infrastructure for accommodation services. The university does not have a special office or department with trained staff to serve the students by arranging for the accommodations they need or by providing the assistive technologies they require. The information that the participant from this university mentioned about the international accreditation and standards confirms this problematic situation and indicates that the main purpose for accepting students with disabilities is to tick the box on the forms and show that they are applying high standards to get the accreditation. The only qualified staff they have are the faculty members in the special education department who have a background in serving and teaching students with disabilities.

But those faculty members have their own academic duties; they might volunteer sometimes to help with some cases, but they are not available to assist with every single case's needs and accommodations. They are accepting students with hearing impairments, students that other universities do not accept, in order to achieve their annual enrolment targets and obtain the desired income for the university.

## 4.3 Reflection on Observation

The researcher worked in higher education for 10 years as a student counsellor. For the first four years of her career experience, she handled the cases of students with special needs and disabilities before the university created a special office and hired people with a special education background to serve this category of students. In this section, the researcher will present and reflect on some cases of students with disabilities that she worked with through her work experience.

The first case did not disclose any information about her case in the application. Her disability was severely poor vision. She did not request any accommodations during the CIBA English test (placement test), which resulted in poor performance and she was placed in the foundation program to study English levels. The instructor discovered her case by noticing that her verbal English skills were good, but she couldn't perform well on written tasks. That's when he started by asking the researcher's office for help on her behalf to arrange for the accommodations she needed. The researcher met with the student, but could not help much at the beginning as the student had a lot of resistance and refused to respond to questions. The researcher communicated with the student's father (as his contact was registered in the system) to learn more about the history of the case and request the medical report needed to arrange for the right accommodations. The father provided the researcher with the relevant history and sent along her medical report, explaining the student's vision disability. The researcher

arranged for more meetings with the student, explaining the support the university would be offering to her in order to get her to feel comfortable and reduce her stress and anxiety. The student had no reaction in these meetings, just listening and if there was a need for a response, just shaking her head to say yes or no.

The researcher prepared multiple versions of the course materials on A3 paper with font sizes, then introduced the sample to the student to choose the one she felt more comfortable with and could read, to be used in preparing all materials she needed. The department adopted the one she selected it. The researcher encouraged the student to communicate with the researcher if she faced any challenges or needed any more support, but the student continued to offer very high resistance and was very independent. The researcher respected her choice, but kept an eye on her from a distance and did not want to bother her by arranging more meetings.

The instructor also stayed in touch with the student's instructors every semester, arranging accommodations as needed. When the student finished the general academic courses and wanted to select her major, she approached the researcher asking for her help because wanted to choose a science major. Unfortunately, her request was rejected by the department because of their opinion that she would not be able to do the lab tasks or deal with chemical materials and equipment. Around that time, the office for students with disabilities was created in the university and the researcher could not continue handling the student's case and referred it to the office to help her. The researcher attended the student's first two meetings with the office and the academic department, trying to support her case, but could not do any more as the office requested that the researcher stop attending these meetings. They stated that, if there was a need in the future, they would invite the researcher back into the conversation. The researcher knew

that the student was not allowed to join the science major, but graduated successfully from the university with another major.

In this case, the student was the first child in the family. She was born with health issues, which resulted in her disability. The parents were young and soon got busy with more kids and life in general. The grandmother was taking care of the disabled child, was highly protective of her and kept isolating her. The student did not get a chance to build a strong relationship with her siblings or her parents; her grandmother was her whole life.

Even after she finished the high school, the parents did not register her for the university directly; they waited one year, until her younger sister finished high school, to enrol them in the university together because they were worried about the student being alone and wanted the younger sister to take care of her. But since there was no rapport between the sisters, this plan did not work; the younger sister did not care about her older sister at all, and even had a bad attitude. Sometimes, the parents asked the younger sister to communicate with the student affairs office regarding some issues. For example, once the parents asked the younger sister to collect the receipt for the fees for the summer courses for her sister; she came to the researcher's office very angry and grumbling that she was busy and did not have time to follow up on her sister's issues. Also, it was very obvious that she did not show any reaction toward her sister; if you saw her passing by her, it was like they were strangers and they did not talk to each other.

The second case the researcher experienced was a student born with a physical disability which kept her from walking and she grew up handicapped. She went through several surgeries and intensive physical therapy, which helped her to walk by using crutches. Unfortunately, this meant she was not able to carry her books and her laptop.

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She did not disclose any information about her case and the accommodations she needed in her admission application, so when she got the offer and came to the university to discuss her case and needs with the admissions office, they referred her case to the researcher. She needed to bring a helper onto campus to be with her and carry her stuff, which was not allowed based on the university's rules and regulations. It was a straightforward case that did not need much with regard to documents or evidence. The researcher requested a general medical report that explained the student's situation and discussed the case with the dean of students. The dean approved the student's request to allow the helper access to the campus and to be with her to carry her laptop and books.

The helper went with her everywhere; during class time, she used to put the student's stuff on her desk and wait outside the class; when the class finish, she entered the class to help her again. The student had direct entry to the university programs and did not need to go through the foundation program. The student was very mature and highly motivated, but she was older than the other students at her level and was not socializing with them much. The student performed very well academically and never asked for any further accommodations or academic support. She did seek the researcher's help as a counsellor about how to handle issues she faced with her family sometimes. She had a strong personality and was able to defend her ideas and thoughts and protect herself from anything keeping her from what she wanted. Other than needing someone to carry her stuff, she was quite independent and confident.

The researcher witnessed a third case during her work in higher education. A student applied to join the university where the researcher worked. The student's application was handled normally through the admission process, his application got approved and the offer was sent. After the student received the offer, he communicated with the

university explaining that he was dwarf and needed some simple accommodations to be able to access the facilities, specifically the lab desk and lab materials, because he was accepted to study a scientific major. The university rejected his request and withdrew the admissions offer. He was an acceptable student who met all the admissions criteria. Withdrawing the admission offer because of the student's physical status was not fair; the student sent some emails expressing how upset he was but he could not do anything more to protect his rights and get the access he needed as he was an international student living abroad.

The action of withdrawing the admissions offer of a student who met all of the requirements and fit into the program academically just because of his physical situation is against the law; but the only thing he was able to do was send an email expressing how disappointed and upset he felt. This was an international student from a developing country outside the UAE. The situation might have been different if this student was from one of the developed countries.

The title of the disability services office includes another issue that I noticed. The disability services office or the department responsible for serving this category of students in four of the five participated universities does not have any signs that indicate the services it provides as its title does not directly include words such "special needs" or "disabilities". It doesn't even refer to the category of students they serve or to the kind of services they provide, which can and has caused confusion among students and their parents. This does not align with the common practices, as data shows that the different titles used in the US are "disability services" (31%), "office for students with disabilities" (11.5%), "disabled support services" (10.4%) and "disability resources centre" (8.7%) all of which include some form of the word "disability", which clearly

indicates the category of students the office serves (Evans, Broido, Brown and Wilke 2017).

# Chapter Five: Conclusion

This chapter will include a summary of the study, key findings of the study, implications of the current study, recommendations based on the study, challenges and limitations of the study, the suggested scope of future research and a conclusion.

## 5.1 Summary of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the admissions process for students with disabilities in the higher education institutes and the effectiveness of education policies related to students with disabilities in the UAE in order to provide recommendations from both participants and the researcher to support admissions services and increase the enrolment of students with disabilities in higher education. This study followed a qualitative methodology, using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The majority of the participants who were interviewed were people who hold positions in the admission units and disability service offices in two public universities and three private universities; in addition, the researcher interviewed employees from the Office of Higher Education in the Ministry of Education and two students with disabilities. The interviews focused on: recruitment of students with special needs and disabilities into higher education, admission requirements, processes for handling the applications of students with disabilities and the criteria used to make the admissions decision.

## 5.2 Key finding of the study

The results reveal that none of the public or private universities arranged visits to the rehabilitation centres that educate many students with disabilities to recruit any of the students there. Even the National Admissions & Placement Office (NAPO) does not invite these centres to attend the events they arrange to introduce students to the options available to them at higher education institutes. University "D" carries out visits to mainstream schools and arranges meetings with the counsellors there to explain the

services and accommodations they offer students with disabilities to encourage the students with disabilities at these schools to apply.

The requirements for acceptance to higher education institutes for students with disabilities at all of the universities that participated in this study are the same as those for other students with no exceptions. However, only university "B" provides an alternative to the placement test through an internal assessment for some cases who can't manage the EMSAT test. Universities "A", "B", "C" and "D" all have applications to be filled out and submitted online. Only at university "E" is there no digital option; their application is available as hard copy and the students must physically go to the university to get a copy, fill it out and submit it. For the public universities, the NAPO recently created a special application for students with special needs and disabilities, but at the private universities, it's the same application that all of the students use.

At the public universities "A" and "B", they process the applications for students with disabilities through two steps: first, if the student meets the academic requirements, they move to the second step where they send the application to the office of disability services. Then, if the office responds that they can accommodate the case and provide the services needed, then the admissions unit approves the application and sends an offer of admission to the student.

At the private universities, university "C" processes the applications of students with disabilities in a way that is similar to that of other students, i.e. through an admissions committee, where they review the applications and candidate weekend. At university "D", all the students must submit a health history form; if the form contains any information about a disability, the director of the health centre collects more documents

from the student and explores any accommodation that might need to be prepared and provided; at the same time, the admissions unit continues their admission process.

At university "E", the applications of deaf students who meet the admissions requirements go through the same process as other students. But if there are any other kinds of disabilities present, admissions checks their documents first; if they meet the academic requirements, they send the application to the college to determine whether they can accommodate the case; admissions continues the admissions process, but decides whether or not to send the offer based on the feedback from the college. This process impacts the criteria used to make the admissions decision, which—at universities "A", "B" and "E"—is based on the student meeting the academic requirements and the university having the accommodations and support services needed.

At universities "C" and "D", admission is just based on meeting the academic requirements; having a disability was never an obstacle for any student to get admission to and enrol in the university. To increase the enrolment of students with disabilities, several participants suggested that the initiative should start with the Ministry of Education and the schools, through providing the students with disabilities with a strong education that allows them to be able to access higher education. They also suggested raising the awareness of the families and collaborating with the universities in order to facilitate the access of students with disabilities to higher education. In addition to providing more services and accommodations, participants suggested that higher education institutes hire specialized employees to serve students with disabilities, make more efforts in recruiting those students and do more marketing about the services available for students with disabilities.

**5.3 Implications of the study**

This section includes practical implications of the current study for the Ministry of Education and the higher education institutes. In it, the researcher discusses how they should improve the education of students with special needs and disabilities in the grade schools to prepare them for the post-secondary education stage and increase their chances to get admitted to and enrolled in higher education.

The results of this study may raise awareness of the need to pay attention to the education of deaf students. Improve education of deaf students strengthening the English curriculum and by teaching them American Sign Language (ASL); both recommendations will enhance their English language skills and prepare them for higher education as university studies are based on English and therefore, students need strong English skills. Relatedly, it's the time to provide services and accommodations for deaf students in UAE public universities. Since such services are expensive and would cost a lot, this researcher suggests it would be good to put the available budget, resources and efforts to create a proper education for deaf students into least in one public university. To that end, the researcher urges educators to consider the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) since it accepts students from all over the UAE and has student residences in Al Ain, where the university is located.

This study also provides some thought-provoking opinions from students with disabilities who experienced both studying in the UAE and also studying abroad that should be considered in future educational plan for students with SEND either in the UAE or as part of the program to send them abroad. Involve those students and listen to their experiences; let them participate in making decisions and plans. They deserve to have their opinions considered.

This study may inspire higher education institutions to recognize the importance of approaching students with SEND in both the centres and mainstream schools during the recruitment process. Also, the results of this study may encourage higher education offices and admissions units in the universities to start creating a special admissions process and specific procedures for students with SEND. Higher education institutes should consider their potential students in more fair ways with regard to the admissions requirements and the placement tests necessary to access higher education.

## 5.4 Recommendations

Participants agreed that proactive action should start with the Ministry of Education regarding students with disabilities who are already included in the mainstream schools. Identifying their needs, arranging for their accommodations and providing the assistive technologies some cases need to use along with the training on how to utilize it all results in a prepared student, able to join higher education and succeed in their studies and their lives. Many cases don't start identifying accommodations and using assistive technologies until they are in university, which is too late and is not as effective as if they'd started younger. Another issue that should be solved and handled urgently is to make sure that all the teachers dealing with students with disabilities in the schools and the rehabilitation centres are following best practices and capable of preparing a professional IEP file for the students to present when they apply for higher education; this will support their applications and make their acceptance to the universities easier. I believe that organizational efforts should be made with regard to two main areas to support the access of students with disabilities to higher education. The first is to create proper processes and procedures to implement the laws and legislation that the government initiated to protect the rights of students with disabilities in higher

education. The second is to expand services to cover all kind of disabilities to be accommodated and served at institutes of higher education.

After providing them with a good education, the next step the Ministry of Education should take is to facilitate communication with the NAPO and other higher education institutions to include students with disabilities in their recruitment plans and encourage them to apply. And this doesn't just apply to mainstream schools. The NAPO and the higher education institutions should include students with disabilities who are studying in the rehabilitation centres in their recruitment plans and events. They should also hire the right specialized and trained people with special education academic backgrounds to manage the higher education service offices.

The application and admissions processes for students with disabilities should be reconsidered. Higher education institutes should offer alternative options for the placement tests and IELTS evaluations as university "B" does with some cases, where they instead use an internal assessment done through the English department. If that's found problematic, or doesn't work for all universities, consider other options suited to university standards and student ability. Disability service offices in public universities should not have any role in the admissions process; students who meet the academic requirements should be provided with an admission offer directly. The role of the service office should be to identify services and accommodations that the student needs to have arranged. Upper-level management at the university and in the government should support these offices in serving the students by providing them with the budget and resources they need.

In the end, successful inclusive and special education in large academic organizations like universities requires the cooperation of several entities supporting each other and depending on each other. The disabilities service offices can't provide student with the

services and accommodations they need without a strong budget, which needs to be approved by upper management in the university. Upper management needs support from the government in order to be able to afford all the costs of such services.

There are other important needs which should be considered, such as modifications to the curricula as well as assessment methods and tools which also need approval from employee in positions of responsibility, such as the dean of student or the provost. Universities should empower and authorise some parties, like the specialist in the service office and the faculty members teaching students with disabilities in order to proceed with arranging the accommodations smoothly and within acceptable period of time, or to create a practical workflow process to get the approvals for such accommodations without wasting the students' time. Therefore, the location of the disability service office in the administrative structure of the university is very important to making such a process short and easy. Kasnitz (2011, cited in Evans, Broido, Brown and Wilke 2017) provided some data in this regard which shows that 58% of disability service offices are located under student affairs services which aligns with the practices in university "A", while Evans, Broido, Brown and Wilke (2017) recommended that it should be within the president's or provost's purview and management, which is the current practice in university "B", where the disability service office is an independent department that reports directly to the provost.

The researcher also recommends raising awareness about educating students with disabilities in higher education among the staff and faculty members of all universities in the UAE, as well as in communities and families. Because, as mentioned by one of the participants who attended university "B", educated parents play a huge role by being proactive and communicating with universities in advance to explore the admissions requirements and the services available to prepare their children for this stage. And this

is in line with work done by Lightner, Kipps-Vaughan, Schulte and Trice (2012) on the importance of the parents' role during the transition from high school to university for students with disabilities. Employees in leadership positions at higher education institutions should believe in inclusive and special education to ensure their support of these students in order the students to succeed and become part of the education reality in the community.

The government should have a special committee consisting of people with backgrounds in different fields and representing different entities who all care for and serve people with disabilities in the community. This committee should be authorized to audit implementations of all UAE laws and regulations on the subject of protecting the educational rights of students with disabilities in the community to support their enrolment in higher education.

When the UAE Cabinet and the National Council make any decisions with regard to the rights of students with disabilities, they should request the stakeholders to attend such sessions and meetings, prepare their strategic plans to apply these decisions and update the government about the initiatives and actions designed to achieve their plans. Such direct communication between the government and the higher education institutions would help to overcome many of the obstacles and challenges to educating people with disabilities by developing solutions for any unexpected issues and problems arising during the implementation process by getting extra help directly from the government.

In the Higher Education Office, the Scholarship Department—in addition to checking their medical and academic reports—should arrange an individual meeting or interview with each student with disabilities to make sure the student is aware of the process and the major they applied to study is their selection and desire. This will allow them to

identify students who are not motivated enough or who are not prepared to travel and study abroad, as well as those whose parents are pushing/forcing them into a particular university or field of study. It's better for these students to not get the scholarship until they feel they are fully prepared and responsible enough to take such action.

Educating deaf students is one of the most important areas that needs improvement, preferably through choosing one sign language for all students and teachers in the UAE; the researcher this language should be ASL and it should be taught, learned and used in the schools. This would help deaf students to gain the language needed to study in the higher education institutions. Universities should be providing qualified interpreters using the same sign language as the students use in classes and then they should assess the process. This should be planned and rolled out by following the best practices of the US. Experts should work with the special deaf schools to train the teachers in ASL and the professional skills and practices of effective interpretation. Issues related to deaf students studying abroad should be solved effectively and scholarships allowing them to study abroad must be resumed until the government arranges a proper education system for them in the UAE.

It's time to create a transition plan to invest the money we were using to educate them abroad into building a strong educational system through improving issues related to their education such as choosing a single, unified sign language and hiring qualified interpreters in the schools and universities to provide them with a good quality education in the schools. A good grade school education prepares them to join higher education with fewer obstacles and barriers, in addition to providing the services and accommodations needed at the universities.

## 3.5 Challenges and Limitations

As Ioannidis (2007) explained, each research project has its limitations. The researcher faced some challenges while conducting this study which limited the outcomes. Since the enrolment of students with disabilities into higher education is very limited, the results of this research are also limited by the few universities willing to participate in this study. The results do not represent all institutions and cannot be generalized to other higher education systems, as only two public universities participated in the study and there are other six universities that would not.

Significant differences exist among the institutions, which could limit these recommendations. These recommendations might not be applicable to some institutions based on their academic specialists and different environments. There are scientific and technical institutes in the UAE where they offer only science and engineering majors. Some of them may admit more students with disabilities; some of them might be even more limited in the number of student with disabilities they admit. Some might admit none at all. Some participants were very conservative and refused to answer certain questions or did not provide data the researcher requested, which resulted in them not answering some of the interview questions. Also, the number of students was limited to those the researcher located through personal and professional connections. While the universities provided the researcher access to their students with disabilities to collect the necessary data from them, the researcher was only able to conduct interviews with three students with disabilities who had access to higher education.

## 5.6 Scope for Future research

The rehabilitation centres are very rich areas for longitudinal and case studies on a variety of different issues and topics. For example, issues preventing students from

being included in mainstream education need to be identified and solved in order to better plan for their moving to higher education in the future.

Another important area that needs more research is the transition from the high school to the university, in order to link the efforts of the secondary schools with the universities' to ensure a smooth transition experience for students with disabilities.

More studies should be conducted about educating deaf students in the schools and universities, in order to address the challenges this category of students face in getting a proper education.

More statistical studies are needed to track the number of students with disabilities who are enrolling in higher education institutions, the number of graduate students pursuing post-graduate studies and the rates of students with disabilities dropping out to uncover and address the reasons for these issues in order to solve them. Addressing the challenges that both the institutions and the students with disabilities face? Even the interview guides for this study included some questions in this regard but the participants at most of the universities refused to share such data, considering this information to be confidential. These types of statistics belong to the university and are not allowed to be shared with other parties.

Some students enter into their postsecondary education directly after high school, while others they go for military service before they enrol in higher education. This has been the situation in many countries and recently became the situation in the UAE in 2014, when military service became mandatory for Emirati males aged 18 to 30. This law was endorsed by His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Students in the UAE will not be allowed to join higher education until they finish their military service. There is a lot of research in other countries that has been conducted on students with special needs and disabilities who enrolled in higher education after their military service.

So far in the UAE, there are no studies or data about such cases except what was published through the media about cases of injury and death. Burnett and Segoria (2009) found that it's very important for higher education institutes to consider the situation of students who are resuming their education directly after their return from the military service. Those who are back with disabilities have a totally different perspective on their circumstances as people with disability. A collaboration between different organizations may be required to address their educational needs.

## 5.7 Conclusion

The UAE has done a lot of work to protect the rights of people with disabilities in different fields. Also, there have been tremendous efforts to make their lives easier by providing them with different services they need and making the cities barrier-free and accessible so that they can live more easily and with fewer obstacles.

Protecting the educational rights of people with disabilities, especially in higher education, could be considered one of the most challenging areas not only in the UAE but all over the world. Despite the strong policies and laws the UAE has in this regard, they have not been implemented effectively in reality. I believe more effort should be made to implement these laws and policies with serious strategic plans to change the current reality and ensure a high-quality education for all people with disabilities.

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Appendix 1: Research Ethical Form

**Research Ethics Form (Medium / High Risk Research)**

To be completed by the researcher and submitted to Research Ethics Committee

**i.    Applicants/Researcher's information:**

| Name of Researcher /student | Nooreya Al Obeidli |
|---|---|
| Contact telephone No. | 0507817656 |
| Email address | 2014121044@student.buid.ac.ae |
| Date | 14th January 2017 |

**ii.    Summary of Proposed Research:**

Background and rationale for study (This should be sufficient to justify the proposed research). Aims and objectives of the research (or the research question/s) and Potential benefits of proposed research: Limit to 500 words

The main aim of this study is to explore the effectiveness of policies and procedures in handling the applications of the students with disabilities in order to be provided with complete access in higher education organizations. This will be explored through the admin people who are in positions of making the admission decision for the student with disability: Head of the National Admission and Placement Office (NAPO) and the employee in charge of the special needs office in the Ministry of the Education – office of the higher education. Head of admission, and head of the special needs center in three public universities, and three private universities in the UAE. In addition to students with disability who got admission to join the higher education in each university, and students with disability who got scholarship from to study abroad to hear about their experience regarding the admission process.

The following questions will be addressed:

1. What are the procedures related to the recruitment of students with disabilities in the higher education?
2. What are the admission requirements for the students with disabilities to join the higher education?
3. What are the admission processes to handle the students with disabilities applications to join the higher education?
4. What are the main criteria that support decision making for admitting students with disabilities in

the higher education?

5. What could be recommended to support the admission services for students with disabilities?

The investigation will cover these areas in order to find the main reasons behind the low enrollment of the students with disabilities in universities in the UAE. The final step will be providing the field with the recommendation list to support the admission services and achieve a higher enrollment for the students with disabilities in the higher education in the UAE.

With the increase in the inclusion level of students with disabilities in UAE general education schools, the increase in admission requests from them to join the higher education is expected in the United Arab Emirates. Applications and admission process is the first step for the students to join the higher education. Analyzing the current situation to be improved is important for the future preparedness.

**Methods of data collection:**
Please outline in detail how data will be collected and **attach a copy of any questionnaires, interview schedules or observation guidelines** to be used. Limit = 400 words.

This is a basic qualitative research will be based on one to one interview with individuals who are in positions to process and make the admission decisions for the student with disability: Head of the NAPO and employee in charge of special needs office in the Ministry of Education – office of higher education. Head of admission units, and head of the special needs centers in three public universities, and three private universities. In addition to students with disability who got admission to join the higher education in these universities, and students with disability who got scholarship to study abroad to hear about their experience regarding the admission process. The researcher will conduct semi structure interviews using open-ended questions in order to collect the data related to the research questions. The interview could be conducted either in English or Arabic according to the choice of the interviewees. The collected data will be regarding the recruitment procedures, admission requirements, and process to handle the students' applications, the criteria to make the decision. In addition to gathering all the written documents that includes the policies, procedures, and practices about the inclusive special education in the higher education.

The following is a table including the summary of the participants and type of data obtained:

| Participants | The kind of data |
|---|---|
| The head of the NAPO | • Their perspective and point of view about enrolling special needs students in the higher education based on their daily experiences. |
| Head of admission in the sel[ected] universities | |
| Employee in charge of the special needs office in NAPO | • Detailed explanation regarding the marketing and recruitment, admission requirement, admission process to handle the applications, and the criteria to make the decision. |
| The employee in charge of the special needs services in the selected universities | • Their role in order to assess and evaluate the special needs students' applications. |
| Students with disability who got access to the higher education in the UAE | • Describe the process of applying for the higher education. |
| | • Describe their experience in getting the admission to the higher education. |
| Students with disability who are studying abroad | • Describe the process of applying for the higher education. |
| | • Describe the process they followed in order to get scholarship to study abroad. |
| | • Describe their experience in studying abroad (challenges and strengthens) |

The questions are very similar with very minor differences, the following questions are attached (English and Arabic copies):

1. Questions for NAPO employees.
2. Questions for the head of admission at the public universities.
3. Questions for the head of admission at the private universities.
4. Questions for the head of special needs services.
5. Questions for the students with disabilities who joined the higher education in the UAE.
6. Questions for the students with disabilities who joined the higher education abroad.

**Recruitment of participants:**
Please outline the number and type (it may be considered vulnerable) of participants involved; give

details of how potential participants will be identified and invited to take part in the study; and how informed consent will be obtained. Limit = 300 words

Based on the purposive sampling the participants will be selected from administrative positions that will help to collect the needed data. The participants will include employees in positions related to the research topic, and students with disability. The employees are: head of the NAPO, head of admission and head of the special needs center in three public universities, and three private universities. In addition to students with disability who got admission to join the higher education in each university, and student with disability who study abroad to hear about their experience regarding the admission process. The total number of participants is 21 candidates (14 employees, and 7 students). The interview with each employee will take around 45 to 60 minutes, while the interview with the students will take around 30 to 45 minutes.

Upon the approval of the ethical clearance the researcher will email the employees to arrange for the interview. The email will include the consent form (English and Arabic copies), ethical approval certificate, and the interview questions (English and Arabic copies). The interview could be conducted either in English or Arabic according to the choice of the interviewees. The researcher will request the head of the accessibility center to recommend student with disability to be interviewed.

Please attach a copy of your information sheet(s), draft materials such as interview questions etc. and consent form as well as indication of planned time of issue/use. If you are not using a consent form, please explain why.

☒ Attached

Potential adverse effects on participants and steps to deal with them:
Please outline any potential harm or negative consequences including psychological stress, anxiety or upset, which may be induced by the study and the steps to be taken to address them.

There is no risk on the participants. The researcher will use semi structure interviews with open-ended questions about participants work experience related to the research topic. The researcher will not interfere with their personal life.

**Steps to be taken to ensure confidentiality of data:**
Please outline steps to ensure confidentiality, privacy and anonymity of data during collection, storage and publication. Please specifically identify any confidential or personal information, and /or any other party's protected intellectual property which you need to use and safeguard.

The consent form includes a statement, which confirm that participating confidentiality will be maintained. Identity of the interviewees will not be disclosed; participants' names and university name will not be mentioned.

**Steps to be taken to ensure financial and commercial propriety.** Please specifically identify any external funding or significant third-party financial involvement with the research.

There are no financial and commercial demands or requirements for this research.

iii.    **Declaration by the Researcher:**

Having read the University's Research Policy I declare that the information contained herein, is to the best of my knowledge and belief, accurate.

I am satisfied that I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research that may arise in conducting this research and acknowledge my obligations as researcher and the rights of participants. I am satisfied that all researchers (including myself) working on the project have the appropriate qualifications, experience and facilities to conduct the research set out in the attached document and that I, as the lead researcher take full responsibility for the ethical conduct of the research in accordance with subject-specific and University Ethical Guidelines (9.3 Policies and Procedures Manual), as well as any other condition laid down by the BUiD Ethics Committee. I am fully aware of the timelines and content for participant's information and consent.

Print name: Nooreya Al Obeidli

Signature: _____                Date: 2nd May 2017

iv. Reviewed by Faculty Member of Research Ethics Committee and passed to Research Ethics Officer for

Electronic Circulation ☑                Committee Meeting ☐

v. Endorsement by the Faculty's Research Ethics Committee member (after electronic referral to all Ethics Committee members)

Yes ☐                No ☐

vi. Authorisation by the Vice Chancellor or his nominee on behalf of Research Ethics Committee following virtual (medium risk) or actual (high risk) meeting, signing as Chairman of the Research Ethics Committee of the Research Committee.

Yes ☐                No ☐

The Committee has confirmed that this project fits within the University's Policies for Research and I authorize the proposal on behalf of BUiD's Research Ethics Committee.

Print name: _Professor Ashly H. Pinnington_

Signature: _____                Date: _10th May 2017_
(Chair of the Research Ethics Committee)

Appendix 2

## <u>Interview Guide for Heads of the Admission Units in Public Universities</u>

**Date:**

Duration:

Location:

<u>Interviewee background information</u>

Qualifications:

Years of experience:

Years in current job:

Gender:                          Age:

<u>Questions:</u>

**Section A**

1.  Could you please describe the history of the admission for students with disabilities in the university? When did it start and how?

2.  Explain the current situation of special and inclusive education in the university?

3.  Do you consider inclusive and education limited in the university?
    Explain your point of view.

4.  Are the policies and procedures regarding inclusive and special education archived in the university's written documents?, If yes;
    Are these available for students?
    Do all faculty know them? And other administrative staff?

**Section B**

5.  Could you explain the processes the admission unit follows to approach students with disabilities in schools to provide them with needed information and encourage them to apply for the higher education?

6.  What are the admission requirements for students with disabilities to join the university?

7.  What are the processes that the students with disabilities follow to join the university?

8. What are the processes the admission unit follows to handle applications from students with disabilities?

9. What are the main criteria to make decisions about accepting or rejecting applications from students with disabilities?

10. Is the process of applying to the university for students with disabilities different from (or similar to) the process for other students? Explain.

11. Are students with disabilities applications different from (or the same as) applications for other students? Explain.

12. Can you explain the process of work between the NAPO and the admission unit in your university to handle the applications from students with disabilities?

**Section C**

13. Could you please brief me about the approximate number of the students with disabilities who usually apply to join the university yearly? How many of them usually gain admission?

14. What is the total number of students with disabilities in the university currently? What are their disabilities? At which colleges do they study?

15. Do you have annual statistical data about how many of them have been able to graduate?

**Section D**

16. What is the dropout rate for students with disabilities?

17. What are the main reasons for dropout? Have there been any studies carried out in relation to dropout?

18. What could be done to increase the enrollment of the students with disabilities in your university?

19. How do you evaluate current situation of involving inclusive and special education in the university?

Appendix 3

## Interview Guide for Heads of the Admission Units in Private Universities

Date:

Duration:

Location:

Interviewee background information

Qualifications:

Years of experience:

Years in current job:

Gender:                           Age:

Questions:

**Section A**

1. Could you please describe the history of the admission for students with disabilities in the university? When did it start and how?

2. Explain the current situation of inclusive and special education in the university?

3. Do you consider inclusive and education limited in the university?
   Explain your point of view.

4. Are the policies and procedures regarding inclusive and special education archived in the university's written documents?, If yes;
   Are these available for students?
   Do all faculty know them? And other administrative staff?

**Section B**

5. Could you explain the processes the admission unit follows to approach students with disabilities in schools to provide them with needed information and encourage them to apply for the higher education?

6. What are the admission requirements for students with disabilities to join the university?

7. What are the processes that students with disabilities follow to join the university?

8. What are the processes the admission unit follows to handle applications from students with disabilities?

9. What are the main criteria to make decisions about accepting or rejecting applications from students with disabilities?

10. Is the process of applying to the university for students with disabilities different or similar to the process for other students?

    (In both cases yes, or no and why?), (Explain your point of view)

11. Are students with disabilities applications different or the same as applications for other students?

    (In both cases yes, or no) why?, (Explain your point of view)

12. Could you please brief me about the fees for students with disabilities? Do they pay more for extra services?

13. Is there any cooperation between the NAPO and the admission unit in the university to handle applications from students with disabilities? If yes, please explain.

**Section C**

14. Could you please brief me about the approximate number of students with disabilities who apply to join the university yearly? How many of them are successfully admitted?

15. What is the total number of students with disabilities in the university currently? What are their disabilities? At which colleges they study?

16. Do you have annual statistical data about how many of them have been able to graduate?

**Section D**

17. What is the dropout rate for students with special needs?

18. What are the main reasons for dropout? Have there been any studies carried out in relation to dropout?

19. What could be done to increase the enrollment of students with disabilities in your university?

20. How do you evaluate / assess the inclusive and special education in your university?

Appendix 4

## **Interview Guide for the Head of Special Needs Services**

Date:

Duration:

Location:

<u>Interviewee background information</u>

Qualifications:

Years of experience:

Years in current job:

Gender:                              Age:

## **Questions:**

1. Explain the current situation of special and inclusive education in the university?

2. Do you consider special and inclusive education limited in the university? Explain your point of view.

3. Do you have any role in the admission process for students with disabilities?, If so, please explain your role.

4. What is the total number of student with disabilities in the university currently? What are their disabilities? At which colleges do they study?

5. Do you have annual statistical data about how many of them have been able to graduate?

6. What are the available services for students with disabilities in the university?

7. Explain the role of the center in the university?

8. Is there special budget for the special needs services?

9. Is there training programs for the faculty and staff who deal with special needs students?

10. Do you have special policies in this regard?

11. What could be done to increase the enrollment of the students with disabilities in your institution?

12. What are the main obstacles behind the low enrollment of students with disabilities?

13. How do you evaluate inclusive and special education in the higher education?

Appendix 5

## **<u>Interview Guide for Employees in the National Admissions and Placement Office (NAPO)</u>**

Date:

Duration:

Location:

<u>Interviewee background information</u>

Qualifications:

Years of experience:

Years in current job:

Gender:                              Age:

<u>Questions:</u>

**Section A**

1. Could you please talk about the history of admission for students with disabilities in higher education in the UAE? When did it start and how?

2. Explain the current situation of special and inclusive education in the higher education system in the UAE?

3. Is special and inclusive education is limited in the higher education in the UAE? (In both cases yes, or no) why?, Explain your point of view.

4. Are the policies and procedures regarding inclusive and special education in the higher education archived in written documents?, If yes:

   Is it available for students? Can I get a copy of these documents?

**Section B**

5. Could you explain the processes NAPO follow to approach students with disabilities in schools to provide them with the needed information and encourage them to apply for the higher education?

6. What are the admission requirements for students with disabilities to join higher education?

7. What are the processes that students with disabilities follow to join higher education?

8. What are the processes that NAPO follow to handle applications from students' with disabilities?

9. What are the main criteria to make the decision to accept or reject applications from students with disability?

10. Is the process of applying to higher education for students with disabilities different or similar to the process for other students?

    (In both cases yes, or no) why?, (Explain)

11. Are the applications for students with disabilities different or same to the applications for other students?

    (In both cases yes, or no) why?, (Explain)

12. Is there any communication or follow up between NAPO and those students with disabilities after gaining the admission to join higher education?

13. Explain the process of work between NAPO and the admission units in universities to handle the applications from students with disabilities?

**Section C**

14. Could you please brief me about the approximate number of the students with disabilities who apply to join higher education yearly? How many of them gain admission?

15. What is the total number of students with disabilities in higher education in the UAE currently? What are their disabilities? At which colleges do they study?

16. Do you have annual statistical data about how many students with disabilities have been able to graduate?

**Section D**

17. What is the dropout rate of students with disabilities?

18. What are the main reasons for dropout? Have there been any studies in this regard?

19. What could be done to increase the enrollment of students with disabilities in higher education?

**Section E**

20. What are the conditions for the students with disabilities to get the scholarship?

21. Do students with disabilities have special or more benefits/stipends than other students or is it the same for all students? (Differentiate).

22. How much does it cost the ministry to provide scholarships for students with disabilities?

23. What is the total number of students with disabilities who have gain scholarships to study abroad? What are their disabilities? At which colleges do they study?

24. What is your evaluation for the current situation of the scholarship programs for students with disabilities?

25. How do you evaluate inclusive and special education in higher education in the UAE?

Appendix 6

# Interview Guide for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education in the UAE

Date: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .     Duration: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Location: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

<u>Interviewee background information</u>

University name: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Year of study: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .     Major: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

. . . .

Type of disability: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Name of the high school: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Gender: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .     Age: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

## Questions:

1. How did you make the decision to join higher education?

2. Can you please explain your admission process to join higher education?

3. Did you need help applying to higher education?

4. Are you currently facing any difficulties either with the office of the higher education or in your university?

5. Are you getting the support you need?

6. What are the things that you hoped to receive more support on?

7. Can you explain your experience in higher education?

8. Do you have information about the laws in the UAE regarding disabilities and educational access?

9. Is there special office or staff member responsible for students with disabilities in your university?

10. What range of service and equipment do they offer?

11. Do the buildings in your university have a good access for students with disabilities (wheelchairs, braille on lifts, etc..)?

12. Are services and equipment free?

Appendix 7

## **Interview Guide for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education**

## **abroad**

Date: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .     Duration: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Location: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

<u>Interviewee background information</u>

University name: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .     Country of study: . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Year of study: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .     Major: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Type of disability: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Name of the high school: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Gender: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .     Age: . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

## **Questions:**

1. Why did you select to study abroad rather than studying in one of the UAE universities?

2. Can you please explain the process you went through to apply for a scholarship?

3. Did you need help applying for the scholarship?

4. Are you currently facing any difficulties either with the office of the higher education in the UAE or in your university?

5. Are you getting the support you need?

6. What are the things that you hoped to receive more support on?

7. Can you please explain your experience studying abroad?

8. Do you have information about the laws in the country you study in regarding disabilities and educational access?

9. Is there special office or staff member responsible for students with disabilities in your university?

10. What range of service and equipment do they offer?

11. Do the buildings in your university have a good access for students with disabilities (wheelchairs, braille on lifts, etc..)?

12. Are services and equipment free?

13. If there is an opportunity to study in one for the UAE universities, are you willing to shift? Please explain why.

Appendix 8



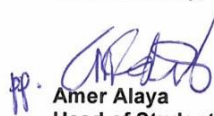www.buid.ac.ae

21 October 2016

## To Whom It May Concern

This is to certify that **Ms Nooreya MohamedTayeb Alobeidli – Student ID No. 2014121044** is a registered student on the **Doctor of Education** programme in **The British University in Dubai**, from **September 2014**.

Ms Alobeidli is currently working on her research and the title is "Analysis of the Admission Process for the Students with Disabilities in the Higher Education in the UAE: Investigative Study". She is required to gather data by conducting some interviews and analysing documents. Any support provided to her in this regard will be highly appreciated.

This letter is issued on Ms Alobeidli's request.

Yours sincerely,

**Amer Alaya**
**Head of Student Administration**

Appendix 9

This is to certify that:

**Nooreya Alobaidli**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**Faculty, Post-Doc, and Student Investigator/Social & Behavior Research** (Curriculum Group)
**Faculty, Post-Doc, and Student Investigator/Social & Behavior Research** (Course Learner Group)
**1 - Basic Course** (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Masdar Institute of Science and Technology**

Completion Date 02-Mar-2017
Expiration Date 02-Mar-2018
Record ID 22331592

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w8a4f2ba4-d6e6-45f5-8b0c-299434782cc2-22331592

Appendix 10
# **Informed consent form**

Dear Participant

The purpose of this research is to explore the effectiveness of policies and procedures in admission services for students with disabilities in higher education through identifying four main dimensions: recruitment procedures, admission requirements, the process used to handle students applications, and the criteria to make the decision. Your participation involves verbally responding to specific questions during an interview that takes approximately 45 - 60 minutes.

Your participation will help in understanding/evaluating the current practices in admission for students with disabilities in order to develop more effective recommendations to support admission services for students with disabilities in higher education.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and after the interview you will receive the transcription to be checked before I move on to the next steps of this research.

If you have any questions concerning the study please contact the researcher at:
2014121044@student.buid.ac.ae or 0501113427

The return of a completed consent form will be proof that you have agreed and consented to participate in this study.

Thank you for your valuable participation and contribution to this important study.

Nooreya Al Obaidli
The British University in Dubai
2014121044@student.buid.ac.ae
0501113427

# Consent Form

**Title of project:** Analysis of the admission process for students with disabilities in higher education in the UAE: an investigative study

Name of the researcher: Nooreya Al Obaidli

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated ……………. for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and will receive the interview transcription to be checked.
3. I understand that my data will be kept confidential and if published, the data will not be identifiable as mine.
4. I agree to take part in the above study.

| Name of participant | Date | Email |
|---|---|---|
| | | Signature |

| Name of researcher | Date | Email |
|---|---|---|
| | | Signature |

Appendix 11

# Sample of interview transcript

**Date:** 19th October 2017

Duration: 37 min

Location: interviewee office

Interviewee background information

Qualifications: PhD Education

Years of experience: 20 years

Years in current job: 4 years

Gender:  Female                Age:

Questions:

**Section A**

1. Could you please describe the history of the admission for students with disabilities in the university? When did it start and how?

   I do not know when did start because I joined the admission in 2013, but I think since the establishment of the University they are accepting special needs student. May be the department of the special needs have a better idea about the history.

2. Explain the current situation of special inclusive education in the university?

   We have full inclusion because we do not separate between normal student and special needs students, I personally had special need students in my class, two cases I had experience teaching them, one was handicapped had with disabilities in his hands and legs, the second was a student with very low vision … in both cases i was working with accessibility office to accommodate their needs.

3. Do you consider inclusive education limited in the university?

   Explain your point of view.

   No I think it's not limited as we deal with them as other normal student, they are even more committed than other students. My experience with the two students I taught was so positive, they were performing very well and showing high interest and commitment, attending all classes and submitting their

assignments on time, both they were doing great. Specially one of them was married and has family with full time job.

4. Are the policies and procedures regarding inclusive special education archived in the university's written documents?, If yes;

   Are these available for students?

   Do all faculty know them? And other administrative staff?

   I do not know if there is a written policy or not, we have process in place but it's not documented or written, it's individual efforts.


**Section B**

5. Could you explain the processes the admission unit follows to approach students with disabilities in schools to provide them with needed information and encourage them to apply for the higher education?

   We approach normal school, we do not have special process to approach students with disabilities school. If they are in the school we usually visit, otherwise we do not .., the problem now is we do not have access to schools any more, we only approach the students through the career fairs and NAPO visits where NAPO invites the schools which reduced our communication with the students, not all of them come to this trip, even if they come not every student come to ask us to know more. It depends on the student whether they come to ask or not, approaching every student is not guaranteed any more. We do organize an open day in the campus and invite the schools, where we have a booth for each college in addition to the accessibility office. Parents and students, they stop by any booth to ask and get the information and details they are liking for.

6. What are the admission requirements for students with disabilities to join the university?

   Similar to normal student, 70% in the high school grade and 500 or more at EMSAT English. For blind student, we exempt them from EMSAT exam. The ABP department make internal assessment for them to assess their English skills and levels.

7. Why the blind students are exempted from EMSAT exam?

I had a blind student who insisted to take the exam, she took it twice and did not got the required score at both attempts.

8. What are the processes that the students with disabilities follow to join the university?

   Similar to normal students they apply through NAPO website, NAPO open site for application late October early November. All high school students start applying and uploading their documents, once the final result of high school published, NAPO already are connected with the score and they pull the data and enter in to the system, so the student who are meeting our criteria got transferred to us (admission unit) for approval, we approve and admit them.

9. What are the processes the admission unit follows to handle applications from students with disabilities?

   The problem is not all the student identify them self as special needs so in this case we just process it as other normal student because when I approve their application there are no indication whether this student is special need, but when they come to the university and got identified they contact the office of accessibility to start follow up with them. In cases that we identify them we put them in touch with accessibility office, some parents are proactive they come before they apply to the university to ask about facilities and accommodations do we have for students with disabilities and whether this particular case accepted or not, we contact the director of the accessibility center to answer their concerns and confirm whether this case could be accepted or not, if we have resources and accommodation for the case or not. It's a coordination between three parties NAPO, admission unit, and accessibility center. Case by case or group by group. Sometimes we are surprised to see them in EMSAT exam on the wheelchair without knowing that a disabled student or low vision student will be in the exam, low vision students need to do the exam on A3 paper with extra time, because they did not mention their case in their applications, in these cases we contact NAPO and reschedule the exam in order to do needed preparation for them.

10. Is there students who mention in their application about their case and identify themselves as disabled students?

Many of them they do because they need to provide us with their documents and medical reports, to get the accommodation they need for the exam. Some do not, they feel embarrassed to announce it or talk about it.

11. What are the main criteria to make decisions about accepting or rejecting applications from students with disabilities?

Meeting our criteria, 70% at high school and passing EMSAT or the internal assessment.

12. What about the service, do you get back to the accessibility center?

Yes, we do. We had a case previously around 30 deaf students applied to join the university. We worked with the accessibility office to see if we can accept them or not but they did not had accommodations for them, they will be in different classes, they will need translator in each class, the university does not have the resources, this topic was raised to the VP, lots of investigative was done to see if we can accept them or not but the decision was to reject their application because we cannot offer accommodations for them we do not have people to support them academically, this case required translators who are good in English in addition to the course topic. Which was a biggest challenge for us this case broke my heart and the students were asking where we should go to study then?.

13. I need to understand if the accessibility center has any role in this process to participate in the decision of accepting or rejecting their applications?

Yes, if we are informed about the case we involve them, if they have the services and accommodations for the case we do accept if not we reject, based on the feedback we got from them.

14. Is the process of applying to the university for students with disabilities different from (or similar to) the process for other students? Explain.

Exactly it's the same.

15. Are students with disabilities applications different from (or the same as) applications for other students? Explain.

Same application, there is a question in the application: do you have special needs? They need to answer, if they have disabilities they need to mention it under the question and upload their documents.

16. Can you explain the process of work between the NAPO and the admission unit in your university to handle the applications from students with disabilities?

Sometimes we know about the disabled cases from the NAPO or EMSAT office, sometimes the NAPO approach the accessibility office directly to see if they can offer the needed service to the case before transferring the application to us.

Student apply online (NAPO system), NAPO check on their qualifications, if they are meeting our criteria they move them to our approval pool. Then I revise the high school grade and EMSAT score, if they meeting our criteria I approve and press submit, once I submit they will be on NAPO system and they know that these students already accepted at Zayed University, then we download their data in banner.

17. Is there any meetings with NAPO to discuss all these process and details about cases?

Every semester before the big admission we meet with NAPO and other higher education institutions admission units just to discuss the process and agree everything together.

**Section C**

18. Could you please brief me about the approximate number of the students with disabilities who usually apply to join the university yearly? How many of them usually gain admission?

Most of them if they are meeting our criteria they are admitted, there is no limit for them, we do not put certain seats (quota) for them, the number we admit every year from 35 to 45 applicants. This is the average number we take every year.

| 2017 | 43 |
| 2016 | 33 |
| 2015 | 36 |
| 2014 | 30 |
| 2013 | 35 |

19. What is the total number of students with disabilities in the university currently? What are their disabilities? At which colleges do they study?

205 students, but I can not specify their colleges, the report I requested does not mentioned colleges, kind of disabilities and the numbers. But there are no restrictions for them, they can join any college. We do not identify certain major for them, it depends on what they want to study.

| Anxiety and low abilities | 1 |
|---|---|
| Autoimmune | 2 |
| Common/intractable health conditions | 58 |
| Hard hearing | 3 |
| Health condition | 16 |
| Hearing and speaking | 1 |
| Hearing impairment | 2 |
| Hearing problem | 6 |
| Learning difficulties | 1 |
| Movement | 14 |
| Neurodevelopment | 12 |
| Physical | 10 |
| Selective Mutism | 1 |
| Severe Osteoporosis | 1 |
| Stuttering | 1 |
| Totally blind | 2 |
| Vision problem | 50 |
| Visual impairment | 5 |

20. Do you have annual statistical data about how many of them have been able to graduate?

No, maybe the accessibility office has this data. Tw students I was teaching they graduated.

**Section D**

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21. What is the dropout rate for students with disabilities?

    I do not have any idea, but I would expect very low dropout rate because all of them are very determined and committed students to finish their degree.

22. What are the main reasons for dropout? Have there been any studies carried out in relation to dropout?

    I do not have any information about this, I was working previously with students at risk of dismissal none of them was special need student.

23. What could be done to increase the enrollment of the students with disabilities in your university?

    By increasing the resources and services for them, and add more accommodations.

24. How do you evaluate current situation of involving inclusive special education in the university?

    I think we are very good in inclusive special education, we deal with them totally as other students, if you walk around the campus you will see them having their normal academic life on campus as other. You can see blind students who are using their sticks, they are totally independent and do not need any help form anybody, they go to the accessibility office to request for help if they need, the faculty are totally supportive and very much involving in helping the special needs students. I can say they are 100% inclusive