

# **Policy analysis for mapping the discourse of inclusion in higher education system in Kosovo**

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## **Abstract**

*Inclusive higher education policy has been central to global educational debates for many years. National and international higher education institutions face challenges related to providing equal access and guaranteeing active participation of all students in higher education. Although greater efforts have been dedicated to the issue of inclusion in pre-university education, issues related to inclusion in higher education remain in the margins. The main purpose of this study is to examine the broad discourses of inclusion in Kosovo's higher education policies. This is a discourse study that uses lexicometric analysis as a quantitative heuristic methodology and discourse analysis as a qualitative hermeneutic method. More than thirty national and institutional policy documents were analysed to uncover the meaning of inclusion discourse in Kosovo's higher education system as represented in policy documents.*

*Findings indicate that inclusive policies can contribute towards improved outcomes for the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. The study concludes that there is a need to develop realistic, effective, and clear inclusive higher education policy that is supported by strategic and plan-based documents that can better ensure the*

*enforcement of legally binding provisions for an inclusive higher education system.*

**Keywords:** *higher education policy, the discourse of inclusion, policy analysis, lexicometric analysis, inclusive higher education*

## **Introduction**

In the last two decades, universities around the world faced rapid development and expansion, a process which gave rise to various challenges as they worked to cope with increased demand (Powell, 2013). Issues such as strategic governance and management, funding, modernizing curricula, ensuring the quality of teaching and research, and inclusion, are considered key issues characterizing the extended demands of universities (Bunbury, 2020; Moriña, 2017). Of these, this article focuses on the modalities of ensuring an inclusive higher education policy.

There are many studies which discuss national and international policy initiatives that have contributed to the development of inclusive higher education systems (Brandt, 2011; Mutanga & Walker, 2015; Moriña, 2017; Ramaahlo et al., 2018). Brandt (2011) offers his contribution on the influence of inclusive policy in the Norwegian higher education context in supporting positive experiences for students with disabilities Mutanga and Walker (2015) argue in favour of a context-based inclusive higher education policy, suggesting that many contextual issues related to students with disabilities are institutional and national-driven. Ramaahlo et al. (2018) support the development of a tailored inclusive policy framework that can guide nation-states and higher education institutions in their quest to provide inclusive higher education for all students.

There exist several examples of policy used to promote inclusive higher education at international, regional, national, and institutional levels. At the *international level*, the provision of equal access to higher education, professional development, and lifelong learning modalities are protected by the ‘Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities’ issued by the UN in 2006. At the *regional level*, the European Union has dedicated its efforts to ensuring inclusive education as part of its broader higher education framework (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2019). In efforts to fulfil its commitments towards inclusive higher education, the European Commission developed the ‘European Strategy 2010–2020’ (European Commission, 2010). The strategy (2010) addresses the need to create mechanisms for supporting the full inclusion of students with disabilities into European Union’s higher education systems. At *national and institutional levels* (which is the focus of this study), “central” contexts such as Australia, the United States or the United Kingdom, have developed policies that aim to tackle access of students with disabilities in higher education. However, there are still many challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the development and implementation of inclusive higher education policies that reflect inclusive educational practices (Moriña, 2017).

### *The Kosovo Context*

The issue of developing inclusive higher education policy is just as relevant in the Republic of Kosovo – a ‘peripheral’ (*more isolated*) European context that has experienced disturbing historical events that have influenced its education system vastly.

Until 1980, the education system in Kosovo operated as part of the former Yugoslavia system. However, great resistance coming from Kosovar Albanians (the largest ethnic group in Kosovo) resulted in the development of a parallel education system, which created two separate parallel systems of education for

Kosovar Albanians and Serbs (Kačaniku, 2020). Following a devastating war in 1999, Kosovo separated from Serbia (with the intervention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]). After the war, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) took charge of administering Kosovo's public institutions and governance. Among other sectors, the development of a quality-oriented education system was considered one of the main goals of UNMIK's mission in Kosovo. During UNMIK's administration, Kosovo received great support from donor organizations to reform its education system. As part of this recovery package provided by the international donor community, the rebuilding of Kosovo's higher education system was guided through such mechanisms and was considered to be a strategic priority (Kačaniku, 2017, 2020).

The University of Prishtina is the first and the largest public higher education provider in the country (Kačaniku, 2017, 2020). During the first decade after the war, the University of Prishtina was the only higher education institution in Kosovo. As such, it has a longstanding institutional tradition in preparing students for the labour market (Kačaniku, 2017). The higher education system in Kosovo operates under the 'Law on higher education no.04/37' (Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, 2011). This policy document is the main legal basis for regulating higher education system in Kosovo. As such, it is imperative to take this document into account when analysing the discourse of inclusion in higher education in Kosovo. While in the early years of higher education reform, the University of Prishtina was the only higher education institution, today, Kosovo's higher education system developed vastly with 9 public and 22 private higher education institutions (Kačaniku, 2017, 2020). Within broader higher education reform in Kosovo, inclusion is considered a priority (Zabeli et al., 2021). As part of such efforts, the University of Prishtina documents are developed based on promoting the right to education for a

commitment to equal opportunities (Zabeli et al., 2020a). However, despite these steps forward, higher education reform still has a long way to go (Kačaniku, 2017).

Although Kosovo's commitment to reforming higher education is evident (Kačaniku, 2017, 2020), there is a lack of research in this area (Zabeli et al., 2020a; Zabeli et al., 2021). Undertaking research in the field of inclusive higher education came as a direct recommendation from a previous research project on the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education in Kosovo (see: Zabeli et al., 2021). In particular, the results of this paper showed a lack of understanding of inclusive higher education policies and suggested further research should be done in this area.

Hence, in this paper, we examine the current discourse of inclusion in Kosovo's higher education policies. The study focuses on national and higher education institutions (*hereafter institutions*) policies related to inclusive higher education. The University of Prishtina (*hereafter UoP*) is selected as a research site as it is a leading higher education institution, allowing for valuable insights into the discourses of inclusion within the higher education policy in the Kosovo context.

Although term "students with disabilities" is used throughout the article in reference to scholars of disability/activists of the disabled people's movement, in Kosovo context, the most common term used by scholars and education policy documents is "students with special needs".

## **Literature review**

Ensuring an inclusive education system is considered a multidimensional and complex challenge (Farell & Ainscow, 2002; Lindsay, 2003). For many years, it

has been a matter of debate whether all students should be included in education systems (Kurt et al., 2016). The so-called inclusion has been supported uncritically as a solution to the problems of its counterpart, the so-called exclusion (see: Mészáros, 2010; Rosenthal, 2019; Russell, 2002). This conceptual dichotomy, however, is usually approached without the acknowledgement that capitalist practices are anti-inclusive (Rosenthal, 2019). Referring to the selected writings by Marta Russell on “Capitalism and Disability”, “disabled persons have low graduation rates in pre-university level, and many students with disabilities do not continue their education at university level. Similarly, disabled persons have “low labour-force participation rates, higher unemployment rates, and higher part-time employment rates than non-disabled persons” (Rosenthal, 2019, p. 7).

Although this paper reflects the inclusion-exclusion dichotomy, it focuses on highlighting studies that discuss inclusive policies and practice. The debate on inclusive education has been rather concentrated in pre-university education (Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2011; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Miles & Singal, 2010; Mortier et al., 2010; Salvia et al., 2017). This is because pre-university education is compulsory in most education contexts and greater investment have been directed to this particular education level. Two noteworthy aspects should be emphasised as characteristics of inclusive pre-university education, including (1) more research published in this thematic area that has established an evidence-based decision-making practice (Boer et al., 2011) and (2) education policy documents support inclusive pre-university education as a basic human right (Bunbury, 2020; Morriña, 2017).

However, the gaps in both research and policy attention around the provision of inclusive higher education is evident (Morriña, 2017; Ramaahlo et al., 2018; Riddell & Weedon, 2011; Savvidou, 2011). International research regarding the

participation of people with disabilities in higher education is a comparatively recent emergence in the field of education studies, and remains limited in scope (Ryan & Struhs, 2004). Also, in review of academic literature, Brandt (2011), reports that research into experiences of students with disabilities in higher education is fragmented. Kioko and Makoelle (2014) note that “inclusive education in the context of higher education is informed by a complex set of understandings and does not revolve around the mere identification of barriers and associated solutions but involves a whole range of factors” (p. 106). Therefore, more research and policy attention need to be dedicated to understanding and developing inclusive higher education systems (Moriña, 2017).

This paper aims to contribute to broader understandings of how inclusive higher education policy framework can create conditions for ensuring the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education (Mutanga & Walker, 2015). We argue in favour of establishing a well-grounded and legally binding policy framework that can pave the way for implementing inclusive practices in higher education system. However, to address this issue, it is of utmost importance to define and broadly conceptualize inclusive higher education from a policy perspective.

In defining inclusive higher education policy, Schmid and Vrhovnik (2015) suggest that it a complex and multi-dimensional subject. Some authors argue that inclusive higher education policy is defined in in accord with a students’ rights lens. For instance, Braunsteiner and Lapidus (2014) define inclusive higher education policy as a fundamental right of all children and adults to fully participate in and contribute to all aspects of life and culture without restriction or threat of marginalization. Moreover, Ramaahlo et al. (2018) discuss the importance of inclusive policies in line with students’ right to have access and

belong to higher education. They argue that students have all sorts of ‘special needs’, and through inclusive higher education policy, their needs will be addressed. Savolainen et al. (2012) go further and argue that inclusive higher education policy is a fundamental way of realizing quality higher education for all. Inclusive higher education policies can influence and support inclusive thinking and practices by building equal rights into higher education for every individual, including those disabled people (Moriña, 2017). Morgado et al. (2016) argue that inclusive higher education policy can provide a framework for strategies, processes, and programmes that can lead to new practices that favour inclusion as the only approach.

In addition to academic studies that aim to define inclusive higher education policy, there are practical examples of inclusive policy initiatives at international, regional, national, and institutional levels which support arguments for the importance of inclusive approaches to higher education. At the *international level*, international organizations have taken a similar human rights-based approach to inclusive education. In 1990, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched the ‘Education for All’ movement, which adopted the ‘World Declaration on Education for All’ in the same year. Since then, several international documents on inclusive education were issued to support the implementation of inclusive policies in creating and ensuring inclusive societal development (Moriña, 2017). In 2006, the United Nations (UN) approved the ‘Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ (CRPD), which states commitments to inclusive education at all levels and access to lifelong learning (United Nations, 2006). In 2015, the UN approved its ‘2030 Agenda’ that calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030 as its fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4). The document defines inclusive education as “a process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to



reach out to all learners” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 7). UNESCO leads and coordinates the ‘Education 2030 Agenda’, which has the central message that “every learner matters equally” (UNESCO, 2017, p. 12). Although documents as such tend to holistically represent numerous problems related to inclusive education from global and multi-institutional perspective, they also directly influence education institutions and stakeholders at local levels to further develop specific and tailored policies, as well as other mechanism (Moriña, 2017). Consequently, the purpose of these documents is to present a general problems framework, which can be than analysed and utilised for concrete needs on inclusions and diversity.

At the *regional level*, the Council of the European Union recommends ensuring effective equal access to quality inclusive education for all learners based on the common values and general principles of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, and equality (Council of the European Union, 2018). Also, in the European Union’s efforts to promote inclusive education policies, the European Commission developed the ‘European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe’ in 2010. The aim of the Strategy (2010-2020) is to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities into society in general, and higher education, in particular. This Strategy serves as a planning mechanism for inclusion not only at the EU level but as a framework that supplements national and institutional policies to establish inclusive environments at the grassroots level.

At the *national level*, there exists evidence of a range of different approaches to how nations manage inclusive higher education policy. Čerešňová (2018) argues that higher education policy and legislation exercise a special role in developing the legal basis for providing inclusion to students with disabilities. Although the study favours a harmonised approach to embed inclusive higher

education at the national level, it criticizes the fragmented legal framework in the Czech Republic and Slovakia contexts. A similar situation is reported in Cyprus (Hadjikakou & Hartas, 2008). In Italy, the legislation is arguably more advanced, but reflects many differences across and between regions and universities, some of which operate autonomously, allowing them to sometimes disregard national laws around inclusion. Moreover, in a comparative study of the progress and challenges of inclusion of students with disabilities in the United Kingdom and Sweden, Riddell and Weedon (2011) report that both the UK and Sweden have made considerable efforts to increase disabled students' participation in higher education, but have done so in different ways. They argue that the "legislation and regulation documents have also been used to ensure that reasonable adjustments at institutional level take place in tackling at least three areas: the inability of legal entitlements to replace segregated with inclusive education; the contribution of the professions to this failure; and the threat to human rights posed by education system that compromised participation in family, community and employment" (p. 7). In Scotland, too, the government has prioritized the path of using strategic documents, regulatory frameworks, and other financial mechanisms to ensure the successful implementation of social inclusion policies in higher education (Kottmann et al., 2019). In many cases, inclusion in higher education is considered a government priority and is regulated through concrete policies.

Other authors define inclusive higher education at the *institutional level*. Brandt (2011) argues that higher education institutions can address inclusion dimension by reviewing student enrolment policy, as well as programmes content and implementation (). In line with diversity, equity and inclusion standards in higher education in the European Union, different institutions and universities have developed specific policy documents to promote, support, and facilitate access for students with disabilities. Under the UNIALL project "Accessibility

of Higher Education for Students with Special Needs” co-funded by the European Union in frame of the Erasmus+ program, a number of partner European higher education institutions conducted a situational analysis to identify problems related to inclusion in higher education (see: Čerešňová, 2018). This study depicts concrete measures that higher education institutions in different European countries have undertaken at the internal policy level as a step towards ensuring inclusive higher education. For example, the University of Lleida in Spain approved a policy for the promotion of educational values, including freedom, justice, equality, responsibility, solidarity, participation, and full citizenship at the institution (Claeys-Kulik., 2019). Lund University in Sweden promotes gender equality, equal opportunities, and diversity through internal inclusive policy (Haug, 2017). The University of Strathclyde in the United Kingdom established a central equality, diversity, and inclusion committee in compliance with legislation, which is guided by the UK equalities law, i.e. Equality Act 2010 (Kioko & Makoelle, 2014; Riddell & Weedon , 2011). Dublin City University in Ireland established a centre of excellence for diversity and inclusion to promote cultures of inclusion. Masaryk University in the Czech Republic established a support centre for students with disabilities to ensure that the physical and virtual environments of the university, including documents and communications, are accessible to people with disabilities (Čerešňová, 2018). Vilnius University in Lithuania employs a disability coordinator to support students with disabilities for adapting to the study process. The Free University of Berlin in Germany has a long-standing policy of enhancing equality through inclusion of students with disabilities (Bunbury, 2020; Fry et al., 2009; Holmqvist et al., 2019; Majoko, 2018; Mortier et al., 2010). The above-mentioned examples portray policy mechanisms employed by a number of higher education institutions in Europe. Nevertheless, we recognise that such examples only portray a facet of the bigger picture of internal policies in higher education institutions across the entire Europe.

The analysis of legislative and policy basis at international, regional, national, and institutional levels shows that policy opens up possibilities for the development of plans to support students with disabilities through facilitating the process of their inclusion into higher education. All these levels of policy are important in developing inclusive legislative and policy infrastructure for better understanding the complex nature of inclusion and the many factors involved in this process towards more sustainably tackling issues of inclusion in higher education. In this regard, Ainscow (2020) argues that “inclusive higher education policies should be based on clear and widely understood terms of inclusion and should draw on the experience of everybody who has an involvement in the lives of people” (p. 8). However, Majoko (2018) suggests that

students with disabilities continue to experience attitudinal, environmental, and social barriers to participation in learning in higher education, despite the paradigm shift from exclusivity to inclusivity in education coupled with the passing of supportive policies and legislation in compliance with international human rights policy and legislative infrastructure” (p. 14).

Hence, our study contributes to the literature by examining broad inclusive discourses reflected in policy documents to map the inclusive higher education system in Kosovo. The study contributes to current debates of developing inclusive higher education policy at a wider higher education context internationally.

## **Methodology**

### *Research goal*

The main purpose of this study is to examine the broad discourses of inclusion in Kosovo’s higher education policies. The study focuses on national and

institutional policies (i.e. policy documents) related to higher education, in general and inclusive higher education, in particular. UoP is selected as a research site as it is a leading higher education institution, allowing for a valuable perspective from which to map discourses of inclusion in the higher education policy in the Kosovo context.

### *Research questions*

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What is the representation of inclusion concepts in Kosovo's higher education national and institutional policy documents ?
2. How do Kosovo's higher education national and institutional policy documents reflect broader discourses of inclusion?

### *Study design, sample, and data analysis*

This research used discourse analysis to understand the broader discourses of inclusion reflected in Kosovo's higher education national and institutional policy documents in the Kosovo context.

Discourse analysis is used with the intention of determining patterns of how knowledge is re-produced and re-distributed in efforts to demonstrate how meaning is constructed (Cohen et al., 2018; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Owen, 2014). In the context of our study, discourse analysis is used to understand the meanings assigned to the text in policy documents, and to create and shape knowledge related to inclusion in higher education in Kosovo. Within the frame of discourse analysis, Andrelichik (2016) argues that meanings of text data derive and are connected to a context.

To analyse the discourse of inclusion in higher education in Kosovo, we follow Busse and Teubert (2014) recommendation that "a researcher must compile a concrete text corpus constituting the object of research which contains a

representative number of texts taken from the virtual corpus” (p. 344). As such, we have identified and reviewed 36 policy documents at the national and institutional level to examine representation of concepts related to inclusion and inclusive higher education in Kosovo, as a means to determine how the discourse of inclusion is discussed in such documents. The reviewed policy documents embody a range of texts, including strategies, laws, sub-legal acts, regulations, university statute, and administrative documents, among others. The selected policy documents are updated sources that are currently being implemented at national and institutional policy levels. All selected documents are publicly available on the official webpages of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) (see: [masht.rks-gov.net](http://masht.rks-gov.net)) and UoP (see: [uni-pr.edu](http://uni-pr.edu)).

In order to better understand the emerging discourses of inclusion in Kosovo’s higher education system, we have employed an innovative two step method in analysing the content of national and institutional policy documents by using (1) lexicometric analysis— a quantifying heuristic for social scientists in discourse studies(see: Scholz , 2019; Assunção & Araújo, 2019) to analyse the text and (2)moving deeper into analysing the discourses of inclusion in the text(having initially completed the lexicometric analysis).

*Lexicometric analysis* is a “quantitative heuristic methodology for the analysis of discourses that complements qualitative hermeneutic methods [...], which allows the discovery of discursive phenomena prior to the interpretation of meaning in texts” (Scholz, 2019, p. 123).It measures the frequency of words, concepts, and themes to determine patterns (Assunção & Araújo, 2019). Scholz (2019) argued that if words, concepts, and patterns have a high frequency, it can reflect the “typical way knowledge is structured in society or a part of it” (p. 124). In our study, we used lexicometric method to measure the frequency of concepts and themes related to inclusion that occur in higher education national

and institutional policy document texts. This involved computing the frequency of uses of specific concepts regarding inclusion, inclusive education, and addressing the needs of students with disabilities, all within the system of higher education in Kosovo. The main purpose of employing this method was to discover patterns related to issues of inclusion in higher education prior to a deeper qualitative analysis to map the discourses of inclusion as reflected in the text, as well as constructing and interpreting the meaning of the text.

The data are presented in two tables in the findings section (*Table 1* - national level and *Table 2* - institutional level). The Tables are structured as such to present the (1) policy documents (a list of the main higher education policy documents used in this study), (2) content (examples of direct quotes from these documents), (3) general issues (frequency of general higher education policy issues), (4) issues related to inclusive education (frequency of specific issues related to inclusive higher education), and (5) difference % (percentage difference between the frequency of general higher education issues and specific issues related to inclusive higher education) (see: Tables 1 and 2 for details).

After completing the lexicometric analysis and presenting the initial patterns of concepts related to inclusion in higher education in the tables (see Tables 1 and 2), we have done a deeper dive into the text for the purpose of unpacking the meanings and understandings of the broad discourses of inclusion in Kosovo's higher education as reflected in the policy documents text. Interpretations of text data are made based on contextual knowledge (Cohen et al., 2018), which also reflects the inclusive policy environment in Kosovo. Both types of analysis offered invaluable insights into the deeper meanings of the issues related to the provision of inclusive higher education policy, as well as the inclusive culture in Kosovo.

In both phases of data analysis, MaxQDA software was used for data sorting and analysis. Cohen et al. (2018) argue that using official software for organising and analysing data enhances the transparency of the research process and the reliability of data analysis.

## **Findings**

Findings were analysed based on the two research questions and structured accordingly. The *first section* presents findings from a quantitative approach to discourse analysis – lexicometric analysis on inclusive higher education policy at national and institutional levels. The data are presented in two tables showing the representation of the inclusion concepts and notions within higher education policy documents. The *second section* follows the second research question and discusses the discourse of inclusion in Kosovo's higher education policies. This sub-section presents findings from a qualitative approach to discourse analysis and discusses them within two discursive themes that have emerged from the analysed ext. Data from both phases of analysis complement each other and justify the limited representation of concepts, and confirms the isolated discourse of inclusion and meanings assigned to text data in Kosovo's higher education policies.

### *Findings from lexicometric analysis*

#### National policy level analysis

Findings from lexicometric analysis on national-level policy level show a limited representation of concepts related to inclusion in the reviewed documents. Although several educational policy documents related to inclusive education are available in MESTI electronic sources, policy documents regulating an inclusive higher education system in Kosovo are lacking. *Table 1* only presents the main policy documents at the national level, including the Law on Higher Education (Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo, 2011)



and the Kosovo Education Strategic Education Plan 2017-2021 (MESTI, 2016). Out of the main policy documents, data shows that the Law on Higher Education (2011) is the only document at the national level that superficially addresses issues related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. However, the representation of the discourse of inclusion is limited (only 5.5%). This means that out of the main document that regulates the entire higher education system in Kosovo, issues related to inclusion take up only a marginal portion. Moreover, this finding indicates that issues related to inclusion are not regulated in detail and lack the rigorous treatment that should be given to delicate/sensitive issues such as inclusion of students with disabilities into higher education system. At a superficial level, the text confirms the importance of inclusion in higher education. However, the analysed text fails to provide a thorough roadmap how inclusion in higher education system is achieved. Although the legal and policy provisions should serve as an umbrella mechanism to achieve inclusion in higher education, the analysed policy documents do not address concrete planning, promotion of tailored curricula, ameliorating access to higher education, developing learning materials, improving assessment, etc. This lack of detailed attention to inclusion within policy framework in higher education is alarming.

**Table 1:** National policy level analysis

Policy documents	Content	General issues	Issues related to inclusion	Difference %
Law on Higher Education in the Republic of Kosovo	<p><u>Article 5: Access to higher education.</u></p> <p>- In higher education that is provided by licensed providers of higher education in Kosovo shall be accessible to all persons within or outside the territory of Kosovo without any discrimination.</p> <p>- There shall be no age limitation to enrol or obtain higher education qualification in Kosovo (p.4).</p> <p><u>Article 29: Admission of students</u></p> <p>- Every candidate who passes the Matura exam has the right to continue his studies in the higher education institutions according to the legislation in force (p. 20).</p>	36	2	5.5%
Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021	At some points, the document discusses the inclusion of marginalized groups in the pre-university system. However, the section on higher education has no paragraphs or sentences that refer to inclusion (p. 2-110)	11	0	0
Other documents	In MES open sources, no documents referring to inclusive education were found.	0	0	0

## Institutional policy level analysis

*Table 2* presents the discourse of inclusion within UoP's main institutional documents. The findings show that the UoP, as the leading higher education institution in Kosovo, poorly represents issues related to inclusion in its policy documents. Dozens of regulations, decisions, and guidelines related to quality mechanisms, programmes accreditation, teaching staff advancement, curriculum development, advisory bodies, and guides for students exist within the educational documents at UoP. Nevertheless, our analysis has found that none of these documents addresses issues related to inclusive education or students with special. Moreover, the analysis of institutional internal policy documents showed that there is no concrete document currently available that addresses needs of students with disabilities within the institution or specific academic unit.

The Statute of the UK is the only document that broadly mentions one issue related to inclusion, which in quantitative terms means that university-level policy documents represent issues related to inclusion only at 0.4%, as compared to other general and broad issues of higher education.

The analysed text in this document highlights that University statute promotes education as a human right.

Nonetheless, we express our concern and argue that such declarations remain at the surface level and do not address concrete measures to achieve inclusion matters that the university needs to take into account, including: access and mobility, services and resources, background of academic staff, programmes content and didactic materials, quality of teaching and learning, socialisation and acceptance, among others. The implication of this finding in practice means

that the university poorly addresses specific issues related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the university. Our findings also might be indicative of the university’s stand on such important, yet not addressed matter, which reflects a passive undertaking and failing of institution’s actors to prioritise inclusive higher education beyond the simplistic discourse of “it is a human right”.

**Table 2:** Institutional policy level analysis

Policy documents	Content	General issues	Issues related to inclusion	Difference %
Statute of the University of Prishtina	Article 7 promotes the right to education of everyone: “The University is obliged to create equal opportunities for all without any discrimination based on gender, race, sexual orientation, marital status, language, religion, political belief or anything else, national, ethnic or social, belief of a national, wealth, property, birth status or any other status (p.15)	245	1	0.4%
University of Prishtina Strategic Plan 2020-2022	Among the seven priorities, one of the aims to promote diversity: “Learning about a world with diversity. Implementing new strategies to improve diversity; to foster a supportive and inclusive climate for all ” (p. 15)	7	1	14.2%
Other documents - Regulations and Decisions	In open sources, there is no document referring to inclusive education	0	0	0

### *Findings from discourse analysis*

Two important themes have emerged from a discourse analysis of policy documents: (1) equal access-based inclusion and (2) de jure-based inclusion. Both themes show a deeper and context-based interpretation for understanding the meanings behind concepts and legally-binding articles related to developing an inclusive higher education system.

#### Equal access-based inclusion

At the *national level*, policy documents conceptualize the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education in terms of:

Promoting equality of opportunity in access and admission to higher education (Law on higher education, 2011, p. 5).

Equal access to students with disabilities in higher education is understood as a necessity. If we evaluate this statement superficially, we might feel optimistic about the greater involvement of students with disabilities in higher education. Similarly, the following statement only suggests ensuring ‘equal access to all students without discrimination, which again can be easily translated such that students with disabilities exercise the opportunity to join scientific studies:

Equal access to scientific study and research without discrimination (Law on higher education, 2011, p. 13).

However, judging the term “equal access” more carefully in the analysed policy documents allows us to argue that access in the context of this study is interpreted only as physical access, whereby students with disabilities are allowed to enter/join higher education or scientific studies. Nonetheless, equal access in itself does not ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities in the

higher education system. There is no guarantee of any sort that students with disabilities will have the necessary services provided at their disposal, a tailored curriculum and essential learning materials, and a welcoming environment from teaching staff and their colleagues/friends. That is, access is fundamental, but it is not enough. In other words, equal access as a legally binding obligation is limited and can only serve as the first step towards achieving the bigger goal of an inclusive higher education system.

The policy documents do not discuss concrete measures and mechanisms that national/governmental level institutions have taken to comply with the requirement of providing “equal access” and “equal opportunities” to all students without discrimination. We want to highlight here the limits imposed on policies by capitalist practices, which are in themselves anti-inclusion. Hence, flexibility and autonomy are left in the hands of individual higher education institutions to address issues related to the inclusion of students with disabilities. National policies, intrinsically, show that the discourse of inclusion is only addressed in formalistic bureaucratise. There is a lack of concrete measures to be implemented by higher education institutions.

At the *institutional level*, the same jargon of “equal accesses” and “equal opportunities” to enter higher education for all students without discrimination applies.

The University shall be committed to creating equal opportunities for all without discrimination on any grounds such as sex, race, sexual orientation, marital status, ethnic background, language, religion, political or other belief, national, ethnic or social origin, affiliation with a national community, wealth, birth or another status (Statute of UoP, 2012, p. 3).

However, there are no statements or strategic commitments that discuss the planning and implementation process, including instruments and mechanisms, to guarantee that students with disabilities are included in higher education. Access does not mean inclusion. Hence, the statement is limited to broad and formalistic wording and meaning.

### De jure-based inclusion

In the second theme, we highlight that inclusion as a concept is not directly unpacked in national and institutional higher education policy documents. The only concepts that we interpret to relate to inclusion are in the jargon of “equal access”, “equal opportunities”, and a “non-discrimination” approach, which are enforced in national and institutional higher education policy documents. Nevertheless, when we go deeper into the analysis and try to find if the university has developed concrete mechanisms (i.e. action plans, etc.) that ensure the implementation of “equal access”, “equal opportunities”, and a “non-discrimination” approach within university, we find a single document – i.e. only the UoP’s strategic plan. one of the goals of UoP’s strategic plan is to:

Encourage the development of a dimension of equality and diversity (UoP strategic plan, 2020, p. 37).

When this goal and its activities in the text were reviewed, we found that UoP’s plans to address the goal of “ensuring quality and diversity “relied on developing additional legally binding documents, i.e. “drafting additional legal basis” (p. 37-38). Legal and policy frameworks are very important in supporting the inclusion of students with disabilities into higher education. Nevertheless, if achieving the goal of inclusion is reliant only on legal and policy provisions captured within such documents, uncertainties remain in terms of how this will be reflected in the implementation phase, i.e. whether these policies will be

realised in practice. Our analysis indicates the existence of a de-jure inclusion represented in the discourse of policy documents, which lacks planning and concretization for the implementation phase. Such a limited representation of inclusion within policy documents runs the risk of not being applied in higher education practice. The discourse of inclusion in policy documents, thus, remains limited and isolated to documents and legal provisions.

## **Discussion**

This study examined the discourses of inclusion in Kosovo's higher education policies. This is an important topic and needs to be addressed within the broader scope of the higher education context. Consequently, our findings are discussed in comparison to international literature in order to find ways to better understand and respond to the need of developing an inclusive higher education policy. Our study offers a modest contribution to research in the field of inclusive higher education and we urge researchers to follow-up with studies on critical higher education policy analysis.

Various studies report a large number of barriers for students with disabilities, including, barriers of a physical nature, difficulties in accessing facilities, a lack of support services, a lack of funding for additional support, difficulties and other barriers associated with a rigid curriculum, inadequate teaching methodologies, and standardised assessment methods (see: Bunbury, 2020; Haug, 2017; Moriña, 2017). In addition, *inadequate policymaking* at the national and institutional levels also pose challenges to ensuring inclusion in higher education. Our findings show that higher education policy documents in Kosovo do not substantially and critically address the issue of inclusion. While considerable inclusive policies, educational documents, administrative guidelines, methodological guidelines, and other necessary documents and



literature resources already exist in pre-university education, policy documents promoting and supporting inclusive higher education are scarce.

Moriña (2017) suggests that policies, strategies, processes, and actions together can contribute to establishing the basis for the successful inclusion of students in higher education. In line with this study, our findings demonstrate that the ‘Law on Higher Education in Kosovo’ offers a way to develop national policy and the UoP statute offers the foundation for the drafting of other documents and the creation of support mechanisms for planning the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. These national and institutional documents address very well general issues related to higher education by indicating clear mechanism and work plans to achieve the quality of studies, curriculum development, and academic development, among others. However, such documents fail to properly address the practical implementation of inclusion in higher education settings. Analysis of reports and numerous legally binding articles related to inclusion indicates that only formality-driven inclusion of students with disabilities is realised in higher education. Such documents pertain to the Law on higher education, national education strategy, and a number of sub-legal acts that provide the policy framework for higher education system in Kosovo.

Our study is comparable to previous research findings reporting that higher education systems are characterized by a lack of inclusive higher education policies to ensure a smooth transition of students with disabilities from pre-university to university level education (Ortiz-Colón et al., 2018). Kioko and Makoelle (2014) argue that the lack of inclusive higher education policy can inform disabled students decisions regarding whether or not to enter higher education. Our findings are in line with similar research suggesting that inclusive higher education policy means not only formally including students

with disabilities access into higher education, but also to advocate that institutions consider student diversity, and address their interests and needs by adapting curricula, assessment processes, and the development of tailored strategies, procedures, and systems that ensure equality and diversity (Smith, 2014; Tierney, 2014).

The development of legislation and policies that promote inclusive values and create the basis for continued institutional support will enable higher education institutions in Kosovo to recognize everyone's right to higher education and to enable all students' active participation. Drafting documents that promote inclusion would open opportunities not only to physical access but also to the creation of mechanisms within the faculties that support students with disabilities. Currently, there are no support mechanisms or services in the university or available professional staff (counsellors, psychologists or others) to support students with disabilities. The absence of support services is a major problem for universities created by the lack of regulations or guidelines, within the institutional policy framework (Bunbury, 2020; Moraña, 2017). The lack of higher education policy at the national and institutional level can serve as a barrier to the creation of support services that would provide practical inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is a need to elaborate on a realistic, effective, and clear inclusive higher education policy that is supported by strategic and plan-based documents that can better ensure the enforcement of legally binding provisions for an inclusive higher education system. This means that policy documents supporting inclusion in higher education should refrain from the vague discourse and not remain in the ivory towers of policy-makers but find application in practice within higher education institutions grassroots. This is

achieved with policy documents that reflect concrete and clear guidance to support higher education institutions in implementing inclusive practices. Such policy documents would require the detailed planning of higher education institutions in offering services, a tailored curriculum, accessible environments, teaching and learning materials, and assessment, among others, to students with disabilities. However, the national and institutional levels have yet to respond to the issue of developing inclusive higher education policy by designing practical policy documents that promote and build incisive higher education systems.

### **Recommendations**

There is an urgent need to develop context-relevant and tailored national and institutional inclusive policies in higher education. This urgent need is not limited to the Kosovo context and needs to be discussed within a global higher education policy context, including specific national and institutions policies that remain isolated from practical implementation. This requires concerted efforts to ensure that inclusive higher education derives from both national and institutional policies. Higher education systems need policies, strategies, processes, and programmes that lead to new practices in favour of inclusive higher education. To achieve this, national and institutional partners are the leading stakeholders that, through inclusive policy framework, can develop equal opportunities for including students with disabilities in higher education and guarantee their social development. A well-consolidated inclusive policy framework can facilitate students' participation and can support their learning process to ensure equality for all students in higher education. Inclusive higher education policy will not just physically include students with disabilities in higher education but will serve as a bridge for students with disabilities and their contribution to society. Hence, only then we can confirm that inclusive higher education policy impacts the lives of students with disabilities in practice.

## Limitations and future research

The limitation of this study is that it is based only on the analysis of policy documents using lexicometric and discourse analysis. This study could be followed-up by complementing findings from policy document analysis with interviews conducted with policymakers and higher education institutions staff to examine grassroots level challenges for implementing inclusive higher education policies in practice. In addition, further studies in understanding the relationship between policy documents and policy environments towards developing inclusive higher education systems are recommended.

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