

Research Article

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Attitudes of Saudi University Faculty Members and Perception of Institutional Preparedness for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

Modhawi Abdulrazaq Almedlij , Haya Alshahrani , Nouf Salem Almarzouq

Abstract

Background/purpose. This study examines Saudi university instructors' perspectives on challenges, support factors, and readiness to include students with disabilities. The aim of this study is to identify the perspectives of Saudi university faculty members on accommodating students with disabilities, as well as to highlight the main barriers that prevent effective inclusion.

Materials/methods. A quantitative descriptive cross-sectional design was adopted. Data was collected using a questionnaire administered to 52 faculty members who were selected using convenience sampling. The instrument measured four dimensions: (1) faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities, (2) differences in perception based on disability type, (3) Institutional support and faculty preparedness, (4) training needs and professional development.

Results. Most faculty members showed positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities; however, this attitude varied according to the nature of the condition. For example, 75% of teachers were confident in their students' academic abilities when they had physical limitations, but only 3.8% were confident in their students' academic abilities when they had mental health issues. Only 34.6% reported knowing about the university's disability support unit, while 40.3% were uncertain about it.

Conclusion. There needs to be a shift in legislation and a concerted effort from faculty members at Saudi universities to make sure that all students have equal access to higher education, regardless of their ability or disability. Universities must invest in structured training programs, increase awareness of support services, and strengthen institutional policies to ensure equal access and success for all students, regardless of the type of disability.

1. Introduction

The inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education is gaining increasing attention in Saudi Arabia. Faculty members play a pivotal role in fostering inclusive educational environments; however, their attitudes and preparedness can significantly impact the success of students with disabilities (Alghamdi & El-Hassan, 2020).

To better assist teachers in meeting the requirements of students with disabilities, recent studies have shown that it is crucial to recognize important elements that impact inclusive teaching techniques. According to Lombardi et al. (2019), teachers need professional development to learn how to make their lessons and tests more accessible. Also, organizations like the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Pennsylvania have materials that can help teachers make their classrooms more welcoming to all students, including those with special needs. The significance of these approaches has been further demonstrated by the fact that they improve the academic performance and adjustment of students with disabilities (Lombardi et al., 2019; University of Pennsylvania, 2020).

Faculty attitudes are crucial in deciding the success of inclusive education, according to recent research. Teachers with special education certification are more likely to be welcoming and inclusive in the classroom. One study indicated that teachers who had received training on disabilities were more likely to back inclusive pedagogy (Papadakaki et al., 2022).

Gender and years of teaching experience are two more demographic variables that have a substantial impact on these perspectives. According to Yerliyurt Günay, Elaldı, and Çifçi (2022), in inclusive settings, female teachers and those with more years of experience in the field are more likely to demonstrate empathy and adaptability. To gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing faculty opinions on inclusion, it is essential to conduct context-specific studies. These patterns, however, are not uniform everywhere. Additional investigation into these processes in different educational contexts is strongly encouraged by Papadakaki et al. (2022).

1.1. Research Questions

This study examines the attitudes of faculty members in a public university in the eastern region of Saudi Arabia toward working with students who have special needs, with a focus on how the type of disability may influence these attitudes. Using a descriptive survey approach, the research aims to foster a more inclusive academic environment by collecting insights that can guide the development of targeted training programs. Precisely, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are faculty members' attitudes towards including students with disabilities and their abilities to succeed at the university level?
2. Are there differences among faculty members' attitudes toward including students with disabilities based on the type of disability?
3. What is the level of awareness among faculty members regarding institutional support and the professional development offered at the university?

2. Literature Review

Faculty attitudes toward inclusive education have been widely studied both internationally and within the Saudi context, given their significant influence on the success of students with disabilities in higher education. Research consistently highlights that while many faculty members support the concept of inclusion, their actual practices are shaped by a complex interplay of personal beliefs, institutional support, and professional preparedness.

Local Perspectives in the Saudi Context

Several studies conducted in Saudi Arabia reflect a growing awareness of inclusive education, yet also reveal gaps in training and institutional infrastructure. Almutairi (2023) emphasized that while instructors are generally open to the idea of inclusion, many do not feel adequately prepared to teach students with intellectual disabilities due to the limited training and resources available. Similarly, Alzahrani (2021) found that a lack of familiarity with inclusive frameworks, such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), hindered faculty members' ability to adapt their teaching methods to meet diverse student needs.

Alrusaiyes (2024) confirmed that faculty members hold generally positive attitudes toward students with disabilities, but noted that these attitudes vary based on gender, academic position, and college affiliation. The study also pointed to the importance of creating more opportunities for faculty to participate in professional development programs.

Alsalem and Al-Zahrani (2019) and Alnahdi (2020) further reinforced the idea that Saudi universities often fall short in providing sufficient institutional support, leaving faculty members feeling unprepared to effectively accommodate students with disabilities. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive training programs and policy-level reforms that prioritize accessibility and inclusion.

International Perspectives and Shared Challenges

Studies from other countries reveal similar challenges, despite supportive policy environments. For instance, Gibbons and Salmon (2020) found that Australian faculty generally support inclusion but struggle with adapting instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. Likewise, Farrell and Ainscow (2019) observed that in Europe, institutional support and personal convictions jointly shape faculty behaviors, stressing the need for stronger infrastructure and clearer policy guidelines.

In the UK, Kendall (2018) and reports by HEPI in Neves & Hewitt (2020) have shown that even where formal inclusion frameworks exist, students with disabilities often face stigma and inconsistent support, especially when disabilities are not disclosed. These studies parallel findings from the current research context, in which faculty members showed a high willingness to support but varied in their awareness of institutional readiness.

Such international insights reinforce the relevance of the Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which posits that faculty members are more likely to adopt inclusive practices when they perceive strong institutional backing. This theoretical lens aligns well with the study's findings regarding uncertainty about support units and campus readiness.

Application of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) has also been instrumental in explaining faculty attitudes in inclusive education. Faculty intentions to accommodate students with disabilities are not solely influenced by their personal beliefs but are also shaped by their perception of available resources and social norms within their institutions. This helps interpret the current study's findings, which reveal a gap between positive attitudes and actual preparedness or action. As also noted by Lombardi et al. (2019), attitudes alone are not sufficient without institutional structures and a sense of control.

Professional Development as a Critical Factor

Across both local and global studies, a common recommendation is the need for ongoing, structured professional development. Papadakaki et al. (2022) emphasized that educators who receive training in inclusive education demonstrate greater readiness and confidence. This aligns with

current findings that most faculty members, especially in the Saudi context, expressed strong interest in acquiring more information, particularly about students with learning and mental disabilities.

Summary of Key Gaps in the Literature

The reviewed literature reveals a consistent pattern: while faculty members—both locally and internationally—are generally supportive of inclusive education, major gaps persist in the areas of institutional support, training, and practical readiness. In the Saudi context, studies have identified limited exposure to inclusive pedagogies, unclear policy structures, and a lack of familiarity with tools such as UDL. International research mirrors these concerns, particularly around the implementation of inclusive strategies for students with non-visible or complex disabilities.

Although theoretical frameworks such as TPB and OST offer valuable insights into faculty behaviors and motivations, the literature also points to a critical need for more context-specific empirical studies. In particular, research focusing on the actual classroom practices of faculty members, the role of institutional culture, and the long-term impact of professional development initiatives remains limited. Addressing these gaps will be essential in building a sustainable model of inclusive education in Saudi universities and beyond.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three interrelated theoretical perspectives that collectively explain faculty members' attitudes and behaviors toward inclusive education in higher education settings: the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework, and the Organizational Support Theory (OST). These frameworks guide the interpretation of the study findings and provide a structured lens through which to analyze faculty readiness, institutional factors, and inclusive practices.

1. Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) posits that behavior is shaped by three key components: attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Within the context of inclusive education, TPB helps explain how faculty members' intentions to support students with disabilities are influenced not only by personal beliefs but also by institutional expectations and their confidence in their ability to implement inclusive strategies.

Research, such as that by Lombardi et al. (2019), has shown that while positive faculty attitudes are critical, they are insufficient if not accompanied by the necessary support structures and a sense of personal capability. In the current study, this theoretical lens helps interpret the gap observed between favorable attitudes and actual readiness or practice, especially in relation to students with learning and mental disabilities.

2. Inclusive Pedagogy Framework

The Inclusive Pedagogy Framework (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011) emphasizes teaching practices that are responsive to the diversity of student needs. It encourages educators to assume responsibility for all learners by adjusting instruction to remove barriers and promote full participation. The framework advocates for inclusive strategies that are embedded in the learning environment, rather than applied only to specific cases.

In this study, the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework supports the interpretation of faculty interest in professional development and their expressed need for more knowledge about various types of disabilities. As highlighted in local research (e.g., Almutairi, 2023; Alzahrani, 2021), many instructors support the idea of inclusion but lack the training and resources to effectively implement it. This framework reinforces the call for structured training and access to adaptable teaching tools.

3. Organizational Support Theory (OST)

Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) suggests that individuals' behaviors and attitudes are influenced by the degree of support they perceive from their institution. In the realm of inclusive education, this theory posits that faculty members are more likely to engage in inclusive teaching when they feel that their university provides sufficient resources, clear policies, and administrative encouragement.

The study's findings reflect a mixed perception of institutional readiness, with many faculty members reporting limited awareness of support units and their associated policies. Consistent with OST, this perception may limit their willingness or ability to take initiative in supporting students with disabilities, regardless of their personal attitudes.

Integration of Theoretical Frameworks

Together, TPB, the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework, and OST offer a comprehensive explanation for the observed attitudes and behaviors. Faculty intentions are shaped by beliefs (TPB), strengthened by pedagogical strategies (Inclusive Pedagogy), and either supported or hindered by the organizational context (OST). For inclusive education to be effectively implemented in higher education institutions—especially in the Saudi context—all three dimensions must be addressed simultaneously:

- Empowering faculty through relevant and ongoing professional development
- Providing institutional clarity and visible support structures
- Encouraging cultural and administrative environments that value inclusion

This integrated approach allows for a more complete understanding of how faculty attitudes toward inclusion are formed and how they can be translated into effective teaching practices.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is built upon the intersection of three theoretical perspectives: the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework, and the Organizational Support Theory (OST). These frameworks collectively inform the key variables and relationships explored in the research.

At the center of this framework is the faculty member as the primary agent influencing inclusive education practices. The framework assumes that attitudes, perceptions of control, and institutional norms play a significant role in shaping how faculty respond to the needs of students with disabilities.

Key Dimensions of the Framework:

1. Personal Attitudes and Beliefs (Based on TPB):

Faculty members' beliefs about the academic abilities of students with physical, learning, and mental disabilities shape their openness to inclusion. Prior experiences, cultural perceptions, and perceived societal expectations influence these attitudes.

2. Pedagogical Readiness and Sensitivity (Based on Inclusive Pedagogy):

Faculty preparedness to adjust instructional strategies and accommodate diverse learners depends on their access to training and confidence in using inclusive teaching methods.

3. Institutional Environment and Support (Based on OST):

The presence (or absence) of disability support units, policy clarity, physical accessibility, and professional development opportunities affects how faculty perceive their ability to engage in inclusive practices.

4. Faculty Development Needs:

The study also examines the extent to which faculty members express interest in professional development and identifies gaps in their current knowledge and skills.

5. Perceived Readiness of the Institution:

This includes faculty awareness of inclusion policies, confidence in institutional resources, and perceptions of campus accessibility.

Illustrative Model (Narrative Description):

Faculty members' attitudes toward students with disabilities are shaped by their beliefs and perceptions of ability (TPB), and are supported—or hindered—by their access to inclusive teaching practices (Inclusive Pedagogy) and institutional resources (OST). The interaction of these factors determines the extent to which faculty are willing and able to implement inclusive strategies in higher education classrooms.

This conceptual framework provides the structure for the research questions, survey design, and analysis of faculty responses. It supports a holistic view that inclusion is not only a matter of attitude but also of preparedness and organizational commitment.

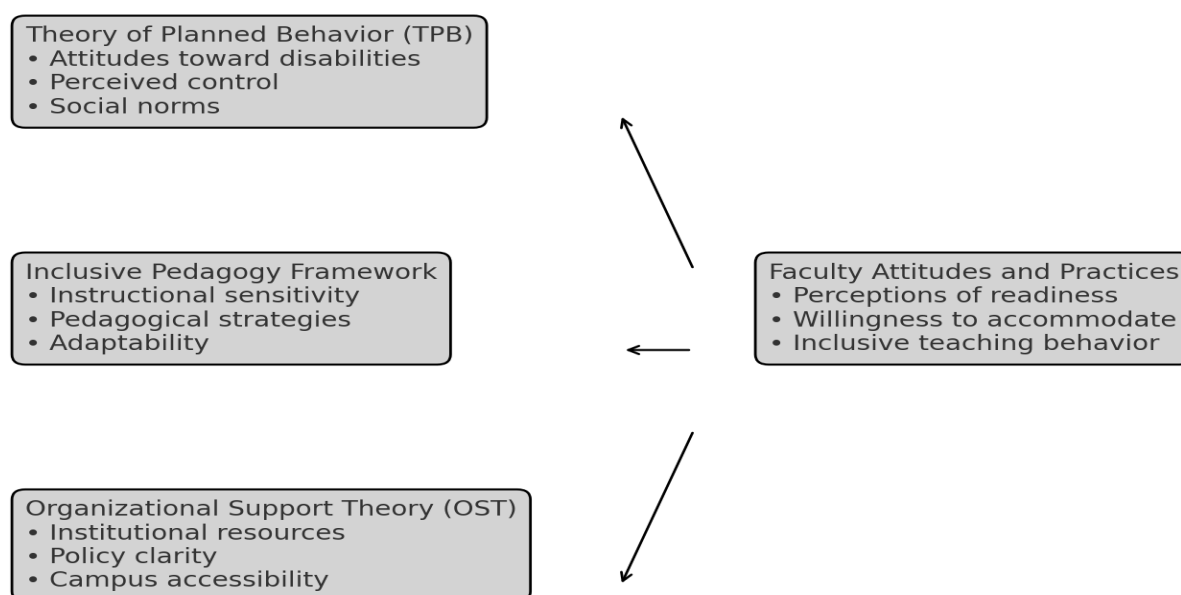


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Showing the Influences on Faculty Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education

3. Methodology

Study Design and Participants

This study employed a quantitative descriptive cross-sectional design, using an online survey to assess faculty members' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities. The target population consisted of faculty members from a public university in Eastern Saudi Arabia, representing a diverse range of academic ranks and disciplines. A total of 52 participants were selected using convenience sampling.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board. The research team also sought formal permission from the relevant Deanship of Scientific

Research. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Informed consent was embedded on the first page of the survey.

Data Collection Timeline and Instrument

Data collection occurred in October 2024 through an online questionnaire. The survey was adapted from Sniatecki et al. (2015) and modified to suit the local academic context. The survey was translated into Arabic and reviewed by experts in English, education, and Arabic to ensure accuracy and clarity. An online version was then piloted with three Arabic teachers, confirming its accessibility. A bilingual review process further enhanced reliability and minimized translation errors (Esposito, 2001)

The Questionnaire Included Two Main Sections:

1. Demographics: Gender, department, years of service, and academic rank.
2. Attitudes Toward Inclusion: Measured across five key domains:
 - Perceptions of students' academic success
 - Faculty awareness and sensitivity
 - Institutional support and accommodations
 - Faculty development needs
 - Institutional readiness

Survey Distribution Process

The questionnaire link was distributed via institutional email and shared through official faculty communication channels and social media platforms. The survey remained open for three weeks, with reminders sent midway through the data collection period to encourage participation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 22. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize responses. Ordinal data from Likert-scale items were analyzed to assess attitudes across key domains.

To evaluate the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated and yielded a high value of 0.945, indicating excellent reliability. Pearson's chi-square tests were used to examine associations between demographic characteristics and faculty attitudes. Additionally, intra-subscale correlation coefficients were used to further validate domain-level consistency.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

- Face Validity: The survey was reviewed by a panel of experts in special education and educational measurement. Modifications were made based on expert feedback to enhance clarity and relevance.
- Construct Validity: Pearson's chi-square test demonstrated statistically significant relationships among the questionnaire items and their corresponding constructs ($p < 0.000$), confirming that items appropriately represented the intended domains.

- Reported chi-square values ranged from 1.8 to 52, with all findings supporting the alignment between items and their conceptual focus.
- Reliability: The overall Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha = 0.945$) demonstrated strong internal consistency. The confidence interval for average measures (0.917–0.967) provided further evidence of high reliability. While item-level confidence intervals (0.333–0.572) indicated moderate reliability, the collective scale proved robust for assessing faculty attitudes toward disability inclusion.

4. Results

1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants:

The study included 52 faculty members from a public university in Eastern Saudi Arabia. As shown in Table 1, the majority of participants were female (73.1%), while male participants accounted for 26.9%, indicating a notable gender imbalance in the sample.

In terms of departmental affiliation, Computer Science (13.4%) and Curricula and Teaching Methods (13.5%) were the most represented, with other departments showing lower participation rates. This variation suggests a broad but uneven representation across the disciplines in the sample.

Regarding years of service, the highest proportion of respondents (38.5%) had 10–15 years of experience, reflecting a predominantly mid-career academic population. Academic rank data revealed that assistant professors made up the largest group (53.8%), followed by lecturers (34.6%), indicating a strong presence of early- to mid-career professionals.

Table 1 summarizes the formatting requirements.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristic of Saudi University Faculty Members

Statement	Response	Number N=52	Percentage %	Mean±SD
Gender	Male	14	26.9 %	1.73±0.448*
	Female	38	73.14%	
Department	Business Administration	3	5.74%	9.69±6.2*
	Architecture	1	1.9%	
	Curricula and teaching methods	7	13.5%	
	Teaching Techniques	5	9.6%	
	Educational Management	1	1.92%	
	English language	3	5.7%	
	Management Information Systems	1	1.9%	
	Business Management	2	3.8%	
	Accountant	1	1.9%	
	Computer	7	13.4%	
	Special Education	3	5.7%	
	Early Childhood	3	5.7%	
	Biology	1	1.9%	
	Arabic	1	1.9%	

Statement	Response	Number N=52	Percentage %	Mean±SD
	Social Sciences	1	1.9%	
	Breeding Assets	2	3.8%	
	Sharia	1	1.9%	
	Public Health	1	1.9%	
	Financial Sciences	4	7.69%	
	Pharmacy	1	1.9%	
	English	1	1.9%	
	Health Information Management	1	1.9%	
	Marketing	1	1.9%	
Number of years of service	0-5 years	9	17.3%	2.81±1.13*
	5-10 years	9	17.3%	
	10-15 years	20	38.5%	
	15-20 years	10	21.2%	
	More than 20 years	4	5.8%	
Academic position	Professor	1	1.9%	2.38±0.718*
	Associate Professor	4	7.69%	
	Assistant Professor	28	53.8%	
	Lecturers	18	34.6%	
	Demonstrator	3	5.7%	

*p-value ≤0.05 is considered significant

2. Faculty Perceptions of Students with Disabilities' Academic Potential

Faculty members demonstrated varying levels of confidence in the academic success and competitiveness of students with different types of disabilities, as presented in Table 2.

A strong majority (75%) agreed that students with physical disabilities can succeed at the university level, and 65% believed they can compete academically with their peers. These results reflect high levels of confidence in the abilities of students with visible physical impairments.

In contrast, perceptions toward students with mental disabilities were less optimistic. Only 3.8% of faculty members strongly agreed that students with mental health conditions could succeed academically, while 36.5% were neutral and 34.6% disagreed. Similar trends were observed regarding these students' ability to compete, with a significant proportion expressing uncertainty or doubt.

Regarding students with learning disabilities, faculty responses were generally more encouraging, though still mixed. About 38.4% strongly agreed that these students could be successful, and 30.7% agreed. However, when asked whether such students could compete academically, only 13.4% strongly agreed, while 34.6% remained neutral—indicating hesitancy about their academic competitiveness despite overall optimism about their success potential.

Interestingly, when asked about students' willingness to disclose their disabilities, 46% of faculty members (23% agree, 23% strongly agree) believed students were reluctant to reveal such information, while 36.5% were neutral.

These findings suggest that faculty members tend to have the most confidence in students with physical disabilities, show moderate support for students with learning disabilities, and hold more reservations about those with mental health challenges. This highlights the importance of targeted training to enhance faculty understanding and responsiveness across all types of disabilities.

Table 2. Teaching Staff Response to Difficulties Towards Students with Disabilities at the College Level

Statement	Response	Number N=52	Percentage	Mean±SD
5. Students with learning difficulties can be successful at the college level	Strongly agree	16	30.7%	2.12±0.98*
	Agree	20	38.4%	
	Neutral	11	21%	
	Disagree	6	11%	
	Strongly disagree	0	0%	
6. Students with physical disabilities can be successful at the college level	Strongly agree	39	75%	1.31±0.5*
	Agree	14	26.9%	
	Neutral	1	1.9%	
	Disagree	0	0%	
	Strongly disagree	0	0%	
7. Students with mental disabilities can be successful at college level	Strongly agree	2	3.8%	3.018±0.837*
	Agree	10	19.2%	
	Neutral	19	36.5%	
	Disagree	18	34.6%	
	Strongly disagree	3	5.7%	
8. Students with learning disabilities can compete academically at the college level	Strongly agree	7	13.4%	2.54±0.9*
	Agree	20	38.4%	
	Neutral	17	34.6%	
	Disagree	6	11.5%	
	Strongly disagree	2	3.8%	
9. Students with physical disabilities can compete academically at the college level	Strongly agree	34	65%	1.37±0.5*
	Agree	19	36.5%	
	Neutral	1	1.9%	
	Disagree	0	0%	
	Strongly disagree	0	0%	
10. Students with mental disabilities can compete academically at the college level	Strongly agree	3	5.7%	1.19±0.3*
	Agree	7	13.4%	
	Neutral	20	38.4%	
	Disagree	19	36.5%	
	Strongly disagree	3	5.7%	

Statement	Response	Number N=52	Percentage	Mean±SD
11. Students with disabilities are reluctant to reveal their disability to me	Strongly agree	12	23%	3.23±0.96*
	Agree	12	23%	
	Neutral	19	36.5%	
	Disagree	6	11.5%	
	Strongly disagree	3	5.7%	

*p-value ≤0.05 is considered significant

3. Faculty Awareness and Need for Training

Faculty members expressed a strong desire for additional information and training to better support students with disabilities, particularly those with mental or learning challenges, as detailed in Table 3.

A majority of participants reported high interest in learning more about the needs of students with disabilities:

- 59.6% strongly agreed and 36.5% agreed that they wanted more information about students with learning disabilities.
- 55.7% strongly agreed and 38.4% agreed regarding students with physical disabilities.
- The highest interest was noted for students with mental disabilities, with 63.4% strongly agreeing and 26.9% agreeing.

These findings indicate a consistent recognition among faculty of the need to enhance their knowledge and competencies in inclusive education, especially in areas involving cognitive or mental health challenges.

Regarding self-reported sensitivity, responses were more varied:

- For students with learning disabilities, 63.3% of participants agreed or strongly agreed they were sensitive to their needs.
- In the case of physical disabilities, 63.4% also expressed sensitivity, although 17.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- Toward students with mental disabilities, the response was more divided: 65.2% agreed or strongly agreed, while 15.3% disagreed and 17.3% remained neutral.

These results reflect a positive orientation toward professional development, yet also reveal uncertainty or inconsistency in practical sensitivity, especially concerning students with mental health issues. This reinforces the importance of offering structured training programs that not only provide theoretical knowledge but also build empathetic and responsive practices among faculty members.

Table 3. Teaching Staff Response to Get More Information About the Needs of the Student with Disabilities at the College Level

Statement	Response	Number N=52	Percentage	Mean±SD
12. I would like more information about the needs of students with learning disabilities	Strongly agree	31	59.6	1.47±0.63*
	Agree	19	36.5	
	Neutral	1	1.9	

Statement	Response	Number N=52	Percentage	Mean±SD
13. I would like more information about the needs of the student with physical disabilities	Disagree	1	1.9	1.51±0.63*
	Strongly disagree	0	0	
	Strongly agree	29	55.7	
	Agree	20	38.4	
	Neutral	1	1.9	
14. I would like more information about the needs of students with mental disabilities.	Disagree	0	0	1.51±0.775*
	Strongly disagree	2	3.8	
	Strongly agree	33	63.4	
	Agree	14	26.9	
	Neutral	3	5.7	
15. I am sensitive to the needs of a student with learning disabilities	Disagree	2	3.8	1.74±0.9*
	Strongly disagree	0	0	
	Strongly agree	17	32.6	
	Agree	16	30.7	
	Neutral	10	19.2	
16. I am sensitive to the needs of a student with physical disabilities	Disagree	8	15.3	2.23±1.16*
	Strongly disagree	1	1.9	
	Strongly agree	18	34.6	
	Agree	15	28.8	
	Neutral	9	17.3	
17. I am sensitive to the needs of a student with mental disabilities	Disagree	9	17.3	2.21±1.12*
	Strongly disagree	1	1.9	
	Strongly agree	17	32.6	
	Agree	17	32.6	
	Neutral	9	17.3	
	Disagree	8	15.3	
	Strongly disagree	1	1.9	

*p-value ≤0.05 is considered significant

4. Institutional Readiness and Support Structures

Faculty responses revealed mixed perceptions regarding the university's readiness to accommodate students with disabilities, as illustrated in Table 4.

More than half of the participants (53.8%) acknowledged that supporting students with disabilities is a shared responsibility among faculty members. However, only 17.3% believed that students with disabilities attend university at rates equal to those of their peers, while 63.4% were unsure, indicating a lack of awareness about enrollment equity.

Awareness of Institutional Support Systems was Also Limited:

- Only 34.6% reported knowing about the university's disability support unit, while 40.3% were uncertain.

- Nearly 46.1% of participants believed that accommodations for students with disabilities should include adjustments to the physical learning environment.
- Additionally, 50% expressed willingness to spend extra time meeting with students with disabilities to provide necessary support.

However, confidence in providing accommodations—particularly for undocumented or non-disclosing students—was significantly lower. Only 30.7% strongly agreed they were willing or prepared to support students who had not formally disclosed their disability status. Similarly, 34.6% believed that students with disabilities receive support only after formally disclosing their condition, highlighting procedural gaps in proactive inclusion.

Despite logistical concerns, most faculty members (90.3%) had never advised a student to change their academic major due to a disability, reflecting a commendable commitment to inclusive education.

When asked about practical challenges:

- 42.3% disagreed that time constraints prevent them from supporting students with learning difficulties, while 26.8% agreed or strongly agreed.
- Regarding their knowledge of how to support students with disabilities, only 9.6% strongly agreed they lacked adequate knowledge, while 38.4% disagreed—indicating varied levels of self-assessed preparedness.

In Terms of Professional Development:

- 48% of faculty members expressed interest in attending training programs related to disability inclusion, while 30.7% strongly disagreed—reflecting a divide in engagement.
- Perceptions of campus readiness were uncertain, with 53.8% of faculty remaining neutral and only 30.7% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the campus was prepared to support students with disabilities.

Overall, while many faculty members demonstrated a willingness to help, the responses point to institutional limitations in awareness, infrastructure, and formal policy clarity. These findings suggest a pressing need for systematic improvements, including the promotion of disability support services, policy transparency, and continuous faculty development initiatives.

Table 4. Teaching Staff Response to Get More Information About the Needs of Student with Disabilities at the University

Statement	Response	Number N=52	Percentage	Mean±SD
18. Disabled students attend university at rates commensurate with university rates for ordinary students	Yes	9	17.3%	2.46±0.779
	No	10	19.2%	
	Not sure	33	63.4%	
19. I am aware of the unity of caring for students with disabilities at the university.	Yes	18	34.6%	2.46±0.779
	No	13	25%	
	Not sure	21	40.3%	
20. As far as you know, what resources are available for	I don't know	23	44.2%	2.4±1.74
	Physical Accessibility (elevators, ramps)	13	25%	

Statement	Response	Number N=52	Percentage	Mean±SD
students with disabilities enrolled in university?	Academic Accommodations	8	15%	
	Special Units or Counseling	3	10%	
	General Accessibility/Support	3	5%	
	No Comment/Minimal Feedback	2	3.84%	
21. I am ready to spend my time meeting students with disabilities to provide them with additional assistance as needed	Strongly agree	26	50%	1.58±0.637
	Agree	21	40.3%	
	Neutral	5	9.6%	
	Disagree	0	0%	
	Strongly disagree	0	0%	
22. Make individual facilities suitable for students with disabilities enrolled in university	Strongly agree	24	46.1%	1.77±0.831
	Agree	17	32.6%	
	Neutral	10	19.2%	
	Disagree	1	1.9%	
	Strongly disagree	0	0%	
23. I make appropriate individual facilities for students who have revealed their disability to me but who have not been enrolled and documented within the sole care of the disabled in the university	Strongly agree	16	30.7%	2.13±0.991
	Agree	17	32.6%	
	Neutral	17	32.6%	
	Disagree	0	0%	
	Strongly disagree	2	3.8%	
24. Students with disabilities will not receive support until they reveal their disability.	True	18	34.6%	2.1±0.891
	Not True	11	21.1%	
	Not sure	23	44.2%	
25. Have you ever advised a student to change their specialty due to disability-related restrictions	Yes	5	9.6%	1.9±0.298
	No	47	90.3%	
26. Due to time constraints and other work requirements, it is unrealistic for me to provide support to students with learning difficulties.	Strongly agree	6	11.5%	3.19±1.085
	Agree	8	15.3%	
	Neutral	8	15.3%	
	Disagree	22	42.3%	
	Strongly disagree	8	15.3%	
27. Due to time constraints and other work requirements, it is unrealistic for me to evaluate	Strongly agree	6	11.5%	3.19±1.085
	Agree	2	3.8%	
	Neutral	8	15.3%	
	Disagree	27	51.9%	

Statement	Response	Number N=52	Percentage	Mean±SD
support for students with motor disabilities.	Strongly disagree	9	17.3%	
28. The current time does not have enough knowledge to support students with disabilities	Strongly agree	5	9.6%	3.38±1.22
	Agree	8	15.3%	
	Neutral	10	19.2%	
	Disagree	20	38.4%	
	Strongly disagree	9	17.3%	
29. I receive adequate support in my units working with students with disabilities enrolled in the university	Strongly agree	11	21.1%	3.38±1.22
	Agree	22	42.3%	
	Neutral	10	19.2%	
	Disagree	7	13.4%	
	Strongly disagree	2	3.8%	
30. The student care unit of students with disabilities in university has an accessible collection of reference materials about students with disabilities	Strongly agree	5	9.6%	2.88±1.06
	Agree	13	25%	
	Neutral	21	40.3%	
	Disagree	9	17.3%	
	Strongly disagree	4	7.6%	
31. Campus is ready and students with disabilities can be accepted and integrated	Strongly agree	5	9.6%	2.75±0.837
	Agree	11	21.1%	
	Neutral	28	53.8%	
	Disagree	7	13.4%	
	Strongly disagree	0	0%	
32. The range of vocational development programs related to the needs of students with disabilities you wish to attend	Strongly agree	0	0%	2.96±1.15
	Agree	25	48%	
	Neutral	8	15.3%	
	Disagree	3	5.7%	

*p value ≤0.05 is considered significant

5. Discussion

1. General Faculty Attitudes Toward Students with Disabilities

The study findings show that most faculty members held generally positive attitudes toward students with disabilities, particularly in relation to their academic potential and right to participate in higher education. This aligns with the work of Alrusaiyes (2024), who found that faculty members in Saudi Arabia expressed favorable views of students with disabilities and their capacity to succeed. However, the present findings also reveal that, while attitudes may be positive in principle, the actual implementation of inclusive practices may be hindered by limited training and unclear institutional expectations. These observations are consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which emphasizes the role of attitudes, perceived behavioral control, and institutional support in shaping behavior.

2. Differences in Perception Based on Disability Type

Faculty members' confidence varied significantly depending on the type of disability. They showed the highest support for students with physical disabilities, moderate support for those with learning disabilities, and significantly lower support for students with mental health conditions. These findings echo the results of Almutairi (2023), who reported that faculty were less comfortable or confident in working with students with intellectual or psychological disabilities due to limited training and experience. Similarly, Alzahrani (2021) highlighted that many faculty members lacked exposure to the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), particularly when dealing with non-visible disabilities. This pattern highlights the need for targeted professional development that addresses misconceptions and fosters faculty confidence in supporting all student populations equally.

3. Institutional Support and Faculty Preparedness

Despite a willingness to support students with disabilities, many faculty members expressed uncertainty about their institution's readiness. Over half were unaware of whether students with disabilities were enrolled at comparable rates to their peers, and only a minority were confident in the availability of institutional support structures. These concerns reflect findings by Alnahdi (2020) and Alsalem & Al-Zahrani (2019), who noted that many Saudi universities lack clear policies or sufficient training opportunities to prepare faculty for inclusive education. According to the Organizational Support Theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), such limitations in perceived support may reduce the likelihood of faculty taking initiative in inclusive practices, regardless of their personal attitudes.

4. Training Needs and Professional Development

A major theme in the results was the strong desire among faculty members for additional training and information—particularly in how to support students with learning and mental disabilities. These findings are consistent with those of Papadakaki et al. (2022), who emphasized that the lack of adequate training remains a barrier to implementing inclusive pedagogy across universities. Notably, however, a portion of the faculty expressed reluctance or a lack of interest in professional development programs. This suggests a need for flexible, tailored training models that consider faculty workload, departmental culture, and existing knowledge gaps. As highlighted in the Inclusive Pedagogy Framework (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011), meaningful change depends on both individual willingness and institutional commitment to ongoing development.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the attitudes of faculty members at a Saudi university toward the inclusion of students with disabilities, taking into account factors such as gender, academic rank, teaching experience, and training background. The findings indicate that while faculty members generally hold positive attitudes—particularly toward students with physical and learning disabilities—there remains a significant level of uncertainty and hesitation when it comes to supporting students with mental health conditions.

Although many faculty members expressed a willingness to provide assistance and invest additional time, their confidence and awareness varied depending on the type of disability and the availability of institutional resources. A notable portion of participants reported limited knowledge of existing support units and policies, and more than half were unsure about the university's overall readiness to serve students with disabilities. Notably, the results underscore a strong desire among faculty members for targeted professional development and practical tools to enhance inclusive teaching. However, the presence of some resistance to training also suggests the need for flexible and context-sensitive approaches.

To promote inclusive education in higher education settings, particularly in the Saudi context, universities must invest in structured training programs, increase awareness of support services, and strengthen institutional policies to ensure equal access and success for all students, regardless of the type of disability. Importantly, policymakers hold an essential role in strengthening faculty members' knowledge and practices regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. This can be achieved through the formulation of policies that mandate ongoing professional development, the integration of disability awareness and inclusive pedagogy into faculty training frameworks, and the provision of institutional resources that support accessibility. Furthermore, establishing policies that focus on inclusive teaching practices and create clear institutional accountability mechanisms can foster a culture of equity and inclusivity, thereby enhancing the overall learning environment for students with disabilities at the university level.

7. Suggestion and Recommendations

Based on the study findings, several recommendations are proposed to support inclusive education in Saudi universities. First, institutions should develop and implement faculty training programs that focus on understanding various types of disabilities, particularly mental and learning disabilities, and on equipping faculty with strategies to effectively accommodate students' needs in teaching and assessment. In addition, universities should increase awareness of disability support services by launching campaigns to ensure faculty members are informed about the existence and role of disability support units, referral procedures, and available accommodations.

To further strengthen inclusion, universities should establish proactive policies by revising and communicating clear guidelines that allow students with disabilities to access support without fear of stigma or mandatory disclosure, while ensuring confidentiality and flexibility. Moreover, fostering institutional readiness is essential, which requires assessing and improving both physical and instructional infrastructure to make campuses more accessible and supportive through classroom layouts, assistive technology, and inclusive course materials. Recognizing the demands placed on faculty, institutions should also provide support through time and resource allocation, such as offering teaching assistants or flexible scheduling, to enable instructors to effectively meet students' needs. Finally, since some faculty may be hesitant about training, it is important to differentiate training opportunities by offering them in multiple formats—such as online modules, workshops, and seminars—and at varying levels of depth, from introductory to advanced, to accommodate diverse preferences and experiences.

8. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights into faculty attitudes toward students with disabilities, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted at a single public university in Eastern Saudi Arabia, with a sample of 52 faculty members. As such, the findings may not be generalizable to all higher education institutions in the Kingdom. Second, participants were selected through convenience sampling, which may introduce selection bias and limit the representativeness of the sample. Also, the data relied on self-reported responses, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Faculty members might have presented more favorable attitudes than those reflected in practice.

The study focused on attitudes and self-perceptions, not direct observation of teaching behaviors. Future studies could include classroom observations or student perspectives to validate faculty responses. Finally, while the study differentiated between physical, learning, and mental disabilities, it did not explore subcategories (e.g., autism spectrum disorders, ADHD, or specific learning disorders) in detail, which may affect faculty attitudes differently.

Declarations

Author Contributions. Dr. Modhawi Almedlij: Introduction, literature review, data collection, and methodology. Dr. Haya Alshahrani: Validation, resources, data analysis, and recommendations. Dr. Nouf Almarzouq: Review, editing, discussion, and conclusion.

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