

“Co-Constructing Accommodation Processes for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: Toward a Systemic and Institutionalized Approach”

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within institutional governance, pedagogical practices, and organizational structures.

Keywords: Inclusive higher education; Students with disabilities; Accommodation processes; Co-construction; Institutional inclusion; Equity.

ملخص البحث

حظيت قضية الدمج في التعليم العالي باهتمام متزايد على الصعيد الدولي؛ غير أن ممارسات التكيف المُقدّمة للطلبة ذوي الإعاقة لا تزال تقتصر إلى التنسيق والاتساق، وتعتمد في أغلب الأحيان على المبادرات الفردية بدلاً من أطر مؤسسية مننظمة. تتناول هذه الدراسة عملية البناء المشترك لمسارات التكيف في مؤسسة تعليم عالٍ، من خلال دراسة حالة نوعية أُجريت في جامعة القديس يوسف في بيروت (USJ) في لبنان.

تتعلق الدراسة من إطار نظري تكاملي يستند إلى نظرية العدالة الاجتماعية (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 1999)، والنموذج الاجتماعي للإعاقة (Oliver, 2006)، والتصميم الشامل للتعليم (CAST, 1990; Shakespeare, 2018)، ونظرية المأسسة (Scott, 2014). وقد جُمعت البيانات عبر 29 مقابلة شبه موجهة مع طلبة وأعضاء هيئة تدريسية وقيادات أكاديمية وموظفين إداريين.

كشفت النتائج عن ثلاثة محاور رئيسية: عوائق هيكلية متجذرة (غياب إجراءات موحدة، وشح الموارد، وضعف الاعتراف بالإعاقات غير المرئية)، وممارسات تكيف مجردة وغير رسمية، وبروز آلية البناء المشترك بوصفها محوراً مركزياً يُتيح دمجاً فعلياً ومستداماً. واستناداً إلى هذه النتائج، تقترح الدراسة نموذجاً للتكيف يتألف من ستة مراحل متكاملة.

سُهم هذه الدراسة في الأدبيات المتعلقة بالدمج في التعليم العالي من خلال تقديم مفهوم منهجي للتكيف وإطار عملي قابل للتطبيق في سياقات مؤسسية

Abstract:

Inclusion in higher education has gained increasing global attention; however, accommodation practices for students with disabilities (SWD) remain fragmented, inconsistent, and largely dependent on individual initiatives rather than structured institutional frameworks. This study examines the co-construction of accommodation processes within higher education through a qualitative case study conducted at Saint Joseph University of Beirut (USJ), Lebanon.

Grounded in an integrative theoretical framework drawing on social justice theory (Rawls, 1971; Sen, 1999), the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2006), Universal Design for Learning (CAST, 2018), and institutional theory (Scott, 2014), the study explores how accommodation can be reframed as a structured, participatory, and institutionalized process. Data were collected through 29 semi-structured interviews with students, faculty members, academic leaders, and administrative staff.

Findings reveal three major dynamics: persistent structural barriers (lack of standardized procedures, limited resources, and under-recognition of invisible disabilities), fragmented and informal accommodation practices, and the emergence of co-construction as a central mechanism enabling context-sensitive and sustainable inclusion. Building on these findings, the study proposes a six-stage accommodation model integrating identification, contextual assessment, co-constructed individualized planning, implementation, monitoring, and institutional evaluation.

The study contributes to inclusive higher education literature by advancing a systemic conceptualization of accommodation and offering a transferable operational framework. It demonstrates that achieving equity requires not merely access to accommodations, but their integration

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم العالي الشامل؛ الطلبة ذوو الإعاقة؛ مسارات التكيف؛ البناء المشترك؛ الدمج المؤسسي؛ العدالة.

متنوعة، مؤكدة أن تحقيق العدالة يستوجب دمج التكيف ضمن آليات الحوكمة المؤسسية والممارسات البيداغوجية والهياكل التنظيمية.

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1. Introduction

The internationalization of inclusive education policies has positioned higher education institutions (HEIs) as key actors in promoting equity, access, and meaningful participation for all students. International frameworks, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006) and the UNESCO Education 2030 Agenda, have reinforced these commitments, obliging institutions to ensure that students with disabilities (SWD) receive appropriate and timely accommodations.

Despite this momentum, the operationalization of accommodation practices within HEIs remains inconsistent and frequently under-institutionalized (Fichten et al., 2022; Moraña, 2020). Existing research has largely focused on student experiences with specific accommodations or access-related barriers, while comparatively limited attention has been directed toward the organizational, processual, and governance dimensions of accommodation, particularly in non-Western or under-resourced contexts.

This gap limits understanding of how inclusion can be operationalized at a systemic institutional level, transitioning from informal, ad hoc responses to coherent and sustainable frameworks. Recent scholarship increasingly underscores the need to move beyond individualized accommodations toward institution-wide, structured approaches that embed inclusion within governance, pedagogy, and organizational culture (Morña, 2020; Fichten et al., 2022).

This study responds to this call by examining accommodation processes within Saint Joseph University of Beirut (USJ), Lebanon, a private higher education institution with a stated commitment to inclusive education. It is guided by the following central research question:

How can accommodation processes for students with disabilities be co-constructed and embedded within institutional structures in higher education?

The study adopts a qualitative case study design grounded in an integrative theoretical framework and offers both empirical insights and an operational accommodation model applicable across comparable institutional contexts.

2. Problem Statement

Accommodation for SWD in higher education is frequently treated as a peripheral or reactive function—addressed on a case-by-case basis rather than through systematic institutional mechanisms. At USJ, as in many comparable institutions, preliminary observations and administrative documentation reveal that accommodation

processes lack standardization, that responsibilities are diffused across actors without formal coordination structures, and that students' experiences of inclusion vary considerably across faculties.

This study identifies the following core problem: In the absence of formalized and institutionalized accommodation frameworks, inclusion in higher education remains dependent on individual willingness and situational factors, generating structural inequities in access to support and undermining the sustainability of inclusive practices.

3. Research Objectives

This study pursues four interrelated objectives:

- To explore the perspectives and lived experiences of key stakeholders at USJ regarding the implementation of inclusion policies for SWD.
- To identify the effective and potential challenges that constrain the inclusion of SWD within the institution.
- To document existing good practices that have supported inclusive accommodation at USJ.
- To develop an operational accommodation framework that can systematically facilitate the inclusion of SWD.

4. Significance of the Study

This study holds significance at multiple interconnected levels—scientific, social, and institutional. Each dimension reflects a distinct but complementary rationale for the urgency of this research in the current landscape of inclusive higher education.

4.1 Scientific Relevance

From a scientific standpoint, this study addresses a substantive gap in the international literature on inclusive higher education. While a growing body of scholarship has examined accommodation from the perspective of individual student outcomes or access barriers (Fichten et al., 2022; Moriña, 2020), comparatively little attention has been directed toward the processual, organizational, and governance dimensions of accommodation—that is, how accommodation systems are constructed, coordinated, and institutionalized within higher education settings.

This study advances the field by reconceptualizing accommodation as a systemic, relational, and multi-actor process rather than an isolated administrative response. By integrating social justice theory, the social model of disability, Universal Design for Learning, and institutional theory into a unified analytical framework, it develops a multi-level conceptual lens that connects individual experience, pedagogical practice, and organizational governance. This theoretical synthesis constitutes a meaningful contribution to inclusive education theory, particularly in its articulation of co-construction as a central mechanism linking equity principles with institutional transformation.

Furthermore, the study addresses a critical geographical gap in the literature. The majority of empirical research on inclusive higher education has been conducted in Western, English-speaking contexts (Moriña, 2020; Fichten et al., 2022). By generating in-depth, contextualized evidence from a non-Western, Arabic-speaking institution—Saint Joseph University of Beirut—this study diversifies the empirical landscape and strengthens the analytical and cross-cultural transferability of findings.

4.2 Social Relevance

At the social level, the significance of this study stems from the enduring structural inequities that affect SWD in higher education and, by extension, in society. Disability is not merely a medical category but a social condition shaped by institutional barriers, cultural assumptions, and the absence or inadequacy of systemic support structures (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2006). When accommodation practices are fragmented, informal, and contingent on individual goodwill, they reproduce and reinforce these inequities rather than redressing them.

This study responds to a fundamental social justice imperative: the right of SWD to full, equitable, and dignified participation in higher education—a right enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006) and reaffirmed in the UNESCO Education 2030 Agenda. By documenting structural barriers, identifying co-constructed good practices, and proposing an operational accommodation model, the study contributes to the reduction of institutional exclusion and to the promotion of more equitable educational environments.

The social relevance of the study extends beyond the individual institution. In Lebanon and the broader MENA region, disability inclusion in higher education remains an underexplored and underdeveloped domain, with significant disparities between legislative commitments and institutional realities. This study offers an evidence-based foundation for advocacy, policy reform, and systemic change in contexts where inclusive education structures are still being constructed.

4.3 Practical and Institutional Relevance

At the practical level, the study's significance lies in its direct applicability to institutional actors. The proposed six-stage accommodation model provides HEI administrators, disability services coordinators, academic leaders, and faculty developers with a concrete, actionable, and modular framework for transitioning from fragmented, informal practices to structured, equitable, and sustainable accommodation processes. By bridging theory and practice, the model serves as a practical tool for institutional transformation—not only at USJ, but across comparable institutions facing similar challenges.

5. Conceptual Definitions

The following definitions establish the conceptual and terminological framework of this study. Each term is grounded in established theoretical and empirical scholarship and is operationalized in a manner consistent with the study's analytical orientation.

Students with Disabilities (SWD)

In this study, the term Students with Disabilities (SWD) refers to any student whose participation in academic life is affected by a physical, sensory, cognitive, psychological, neurological, or invisible impairment. This definition deliberately extends beyond formal medical certification and aligns with the social model of disability (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2006), which locates disability not within the individual but within the interaction between a person's characteristics and the structural barriers produced by inaccessible institutional environments. This operational definition is further consistent with the framework advanced by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006, Art. 1), which recognizes disability as resulting from "the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." In the higher education

context, this encompasses students with mobility impairments, visual or hearing impairments, chronic health conditions, learning disabilities (such as dyslexia or ADHD), and mental health conditions.

Accommodation

Accommodation refers to institutional adjustments to teaching methods, assessment practices, physical environments, technological resources, and/or support services designed to reduce structural barriers and enable equitable participation for SWD in academic life. This conceptualization draws on the work of Fichten et al. (2022), who define accommodation as a spectrum of individualized and institutional responses aimed at mitigating the impact of disabling barriers on student learning and participation. Accommodation is distinguished from mere access provision: as Ainscow (2020) underscores, genuine inclusion requires not only physical access but the meaningful adaptation of pedagogical and institutional systems. In the context of this study, accommodation is understood as both a process and an outcome—encompassing the procedures through which support is identified and negotiated, as well as the specific adjustments ultimately implemented.

Co-Construction

Co-construction refers to a collaborative, dialogic, and negotiated process through which accommodation plans are developed jointly by students, faculty members, and institutional services, reflecting shared responsibility and active stakeholder participation rather than unilateral institutional prescription. This concept is grounded in socio-constructivist epistemology (Vygotsky, 1978), which positions knowledge and practice as inherently relational and produced through social interaction. In the context of inclusion, co-construction is increasingly recognized as a condition for sustainable and equitable accommodation: when students are active participants rather than passive recipients of support, accommodations are more contextually appropriate, more likely to be implemented effectively, and more responsive to evolving needs (Wehmeyer & Shogren, 2016; Bergson-Shilcock & Witte, 2015). Co-construction, in this sense, is both a methodological principle and an ethical commitment—one that recognizes SWD as the primary experts on their own needs and learning conditions.

Institutionalization

Drawing on Scott's (2014) three-pillar framework, institutionalization denotes the process by which practices become formalized, legitimized, and embedded within an organization's regulative structures (rules, policies, formal procedures), normative frameworks (professional values, shared expectations, and role definitions), and cultural-cognitive systems (taken-for-granted assumptions and shared meanings). Applied to accommodation, institutionalization implies a transition from practices that are informal, contingent, and dependent on individual goodwill toward practices that are formally organized, systematically governed, and organizationally embedded. This distinction is central to this study's argument: without institutionalization, inclusive practices remain fragile and episodic, reproducing rather than addressing structural inequities. This conceptualization is consistent with Riddell et al.'s (2005) analysis of disability policy in higher education, which demonstrates that durable inclusion requires embedding accommodation within formal governance structures rather than relying on the discretion of individual actors.

Inclusive Higher Education

Inclusive higher education refers to a systemic, institution-wide orientation toward ensuring that all students—regardless of disability, background, or identity—have equitable access to, participation in, and benefit from higher education (UNESCO, 2020). This concept extends beyond legal compliance or disability-specific accommodation to encompass a transformative reconceptualization of educational environments as inherently

diverse and designed to respond to learner variability (CAST, 2018; Moraña, 2020). Inclusive higher education is understood in this study as both a normative goal and an institutional process—one requiring alignment between policies, pedagogical practices, physical environments, and cultural attitudes.

6. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrative theoretical framework that brings together four complementary analytical perspectives: social justice and the capabilities approach, the social model of disability, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and institutional theory. Rather than operating in isolation, these perspectives are deliberately articulated in a sequential and cumulative logic: each framework addresses a specific dimension of the accommodation problem, and together they construct a comprehensive, multi-level understanding of inclusion in higher education.

The overarching analytical contribution of this framework lies in its capacity to reconceptualize accommodation as simultaneously normative (establishing why equitable accommodation is a moral and political imperative), diagnostic (identifying where structural barriers arise and why), pedagogical (addressing how learning environments can proactively respond to diversity), and organizational (specifying how practices can be formalized, embedded, and sustained). This multi-dimensional articulation supports a shift from individual adjustments toward systemic transformation, and from reactive, compensatory interventions toward proactive, coordinated, and institutionally embedded strategies.

6.1 Social Justice and the Capabilities Approach

The theoretical framework begins with social justice as its normative foundation, establishing why accommodation in higher education is not merely an administrative obligation but a fundamental requirement of equitable and just institutions. Drawing on Rawls' (1971) theory of justice as fairness, this study frames accommodation as a mechanism of corrective equity: formal equality of treatment is insufficient when underlying structural conditions prevent students from accessing academic life on genuinely equal terms. From a Rawlsian perspective, differentiated institutional responses are not exceptions to the principle of fairness but expressions of it.

This foundation is extended and deepened by Sen's (1999) capabilities approach, which shifts analytical attention from resource provision to the real opportunities individuals have to achieve valued functionings and ways of being. In the context of higher education, this implies that SWD require tailored accommodations not as special privileges, but as institutional conditions enabling the conversion of formal access into substantive participation. Accommodation, in this sense, is a vehicle for expanding capabilities—ensuring that disability does not structurally constrain students' academic trajectories.

Taken together, social justice theory and the capabilities approach provide the normative justification for the accommodation framework developed in this study, and ground its commitment to equity as an outcome rather than merely a procedural principle. This normative foundation, however, does not specify where barriers arise—a diagnostic task addressed by the following theoretical perspective.

6.2 The Social Model of Disability

If social justice establishes why accommodation is required, the social model of disability provides the diagnostic lens for understanding where barriers originate and how they function. Initially developed by Oliver

(1990) and further elaborated by Shakespeare (2006), the social model constitutes a paradigm shift in the conceptualization of disability: rather than locating disability within the individual as a medical or personal deficit, it attributes disabling experiences to the interaction between individuals and inaccessible social, environmental, and institutional structures.

In higher education, this perspective reframes institutional responsibility fundamentally. Difficulties experienced by SWD are not solely the product of individual impairments; they arise from the failure of institutions to adapt their structures, teaching practices, evaluation methods, and physical environments to the full range of human diversity. Accommodation is therefore not a concession or an act of charity, but a necessary and normatively justified institutional response to barriers that institutions themselves—however unintentionally—produce.

Applied to this study, the social model directs analytical attention toward the organizational conditions that generate inequality: the absence of standardized procedures, the variability of faculty responses, the under-recognition of invisible disabilities, and the fragmentation of accommodation processes. These are not natural or inevitable features of higher education; they are remediable institutional failings. This diagnostic insight, in turn, points toward the need for pedagogical frameworks capable of proactively reducing barriers—a dimension addressed by the next perspective.

6.3 Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Having identified the normative imperative (social justice) and the diagnostic framework (social model), the question becomes: how can institutions proactively design learning environments that reduce the need for reactive, individual accommodations? Universal Design for Learning (UDL), developed by CAST (2018), provides the pedagogical response to this question.

Grounded in the principle that learner variability is the norm rather than the exception, UDL promotes the design of flexible, inclusive learning environments from the outset, rather than retrofitting accessibility for specific individuals. It achieves this through three interconnected principles: providing multiple means of representation (addressing diverse ways of perceiving and understanding information), multiple means of engagement (supporting varied motivational and affective orientations to learning), and multiple means of action and expression (enabling students to demonstrate their learning through diverse modalities) (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014).

UDL's contribution to the theoretical framework is both practical and conceptual: it operationalizes the normative commitment to equity (from social justice theory) and the institutional obligation to remove barriers (from the social model) at the level of daily pedagogical practice. By anticipating diversity and designing flexible environments, UDL shifts inclusion from a reactive to a proactive institutional orientation. Nevertheless, UDL does not eliminate the need for individual accommodation; some students will require targeted support beyond what universal design can provide. The two approaches therefore function along a continuum, with UDL reducing the frequency and intensity of required individual interventions. This complementarity points toward the need for an organizational framework capable of sustaining both universal and individualized approaches—a task addressed by institutional theory.

6.4 Institutional Theory

The progression from normative foundations (social justice), to diagnostic analysis (social model), to pedagogical design (UDL), arrives finally at the organizational question: how can inclusive accommodation

practices be formalized, stabilized, and sustained within institutional structures? Institutional theory, as developed by Scott (2014), provides the analytical framework for addressing this dimension.

Scott identifies three foundational pillars of institutions: the regulative pillar (formal rules, policies, laws, and compliance mechanisms), the normative pillar (professional values, role expectations, and shared standards of appropriate behavior), and the cultural-cognitive pillar (taken-for-granted beliefs, shared meanings, and implicit assumptions about how things work). For accommodation practices to become durable and equitable, they must be embedded within all three pillars simultaneously: formalized through policies and procedures (regulative), normalized through professional training and role expectations (normative), and internalized as a shared organizational commitment (cultural-cognitive).

When accommodation operates only at the level of individual goodwill—without regulative formalization, normative anchoring, or cultural-cognitive embedding—it remains, as the findings of this study confirm, fragile, episodic, and structurally inequitable. Institutional theory therefore provides the organizational logic for the accommodation model proposed in this study, specifying the conditions under which co-constructed accommodation processes can transition from informal, individual-dependent practices to formally structured, collectively sustained institutional systems.

6.5 Integrative Synthesis: Toward a Multi-Level Framework

The four theoretical perspectives articulated above do not function as parallel or competing frameworks; they constitute a cumulative, integrated logic for understanding accommodation as a systemic institutional process. Social justice establishes the normative foundation and defines equity as the governing principle. The social model diagnoses the structural sources of inequality and reframes institutional responsibility. UDL translates normative commitments and diagnostic insights into proactive pedagogical practice. And institutional theory specifies the organizational conditions under which these practices can be formalized, legitimized, and sustained.

Together, these frameworks support a reconceptualization of accommodation that moves beyond individual adjustment toward systemic transformation, beyond reactive compensation toward proactive design, and beyond informal goodwill toward institutionalized governance. This integrated theoretical lens underpins the empirical analysis, the interpretation of findings, and the construction of the six-stage accommodation model presented in subsequent sections of this study.

7. Methodology

7.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study design (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2014), which is particularly suited for examining complex social phenomena within their real-life context. The case study approach enables an in-depth, holistic analysis of accommodation as a process shaped by interactions between multiple actors and institutional structures. Given the exploratory nature of the central research question, this design facilitates the investigation of lived experiences, underlying mechanisms, and context-specific dynamics that quantitative approaches cannot fully capture.

7.2 Research Context

The study was conducted at Saint Joseph University of Beirut (USJ), a private French-language HEI in Lebanon. USJ provides a contextually relevant site for this research due to its formal inclusion policy (adopted

February 2023), its diverse student population, and the variability of accommodation practices documented across its faculties. The study thus offers insights into a transitional institutional moment, as USJ moves from informal practices toward more structured inclusion frameworks.

7.3 Participants and Sampling

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure the inclusion of multiple stakeholder perspectives directly relevant to accommodation processes. The sample comprised 29 participants across four actor categories:

- Students with disabilities (diverse impairment types), providing insight into lived experiences and perceived barriers.
- Faculty members, centrally responsible for implementing classroom accommodations.
- Academic leaders (deans, directors, and coordinators), contributing to institutional decision-making.
- Administrative and support staff, involved in coordination and service provision.

This multi-actor sampling reflects the co-constructed nature of accommodation processes and enabled a comprehensive, polyphonic analysis of institutional dynamics.

7.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews (Kaufmann, 2016), enabling both consistency across participants and flexibility to explore emerging themes. An interview guide was developed in alignment with the research objectives and theoretical framework, covering: experiences of accommodation, perceived barriers and facilitating factors, institutional practices and policies, and roles and responsibilities across actors. Ethical protocols were rigorously observed: participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained prior to each interview, and full anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout.

7.5 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a rigorous, systematic method for identifying and interpreting recurring patterns within qualitative data. The analytical process followed five iterative phases: familiarization with the data through repeated reading; generation of initial codes; development of candidate themes; refinement and review of themes; and final interpretation in relation to the theoretical framework. This process produced four interconnected thematic domains: structural barriers, fragmented practices, co-construction dynamics, and institutional processes.

7.6 Trustworthiness and Rigor

Trustworthiness was addressed through multiple strategies aligned with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility was enhanced through multi-stakeholder inclusion and triangulation of perspectives; dependability was supported through a transparent and systematically documented analytical process; confirmability was maintained through reflexivity and explicit documentation of analytical decisions; and transferability was addressed through detailed contextual descriptions enabling readers to assess applicability to comparable settings.

8. Findings

Analysis of interview data across 29 participants produced three overarching thematic areas: (1) structural barriers to inclusive accommodation, (2) fragmented and informal practices, and (3) co-construction as a central

mechanism. These themes collectively illuminate both the systemic limitations constraining accommodation and the collaborative dynamics that animate it.

8.1 Structural Barriers to Inclusive Accommodation

8.1.1 Absence of Standardized Procedures

A consistently reported challenge was the absence of formalized and standardized accommodation procedures. Participants across actor categories noted that accommodation processes vary markedly across faculties and departments, generating significant inconsistencies in how—and whether—students receive support. The absence of clear institutional guidelines produces uncertainty among faculty and staff, unequal access to accommodations depending on the student's academic unit, and reliance on informal and improvised decision-making rather than systematic protocols.

8.1.2 Limited Resources and Specialized Capacity

Participants highlighted insufficient institutional resources, including limited availability of specialized support staff, inadequate faculty training in inclusive pedagogy, and insufficient pedagogical support infrastructure. Faculty members frequently reported feeling under-prepared to respond to the diverse needs of SWD, particularly in the absence of professional development opportunities, thereby creating practical barriers to the effective implementation of accommodations.

8.1.3 Inter-Faculty Variability

Findings revealed pronounced disparities between faculties and academic departments. While certain units demonstrated relatively advanced inclusive practices—attributable largely to the engagement of motivated individuals—others exhibited limited awareness of or engagement with institutional accommodation processes. This inter-faculty variability generates unequal student experiences contingent on academic affiliation rather than institutional policy.

8.1.4 Under-Recognition of Invisible Disabilities

A particularly significant barrier identified across participants concerns the systematic under-recognition of non-visible disabilities—including learning disabilities, mental health conditions, and attention disorders. Participants reported that invisible disabilities are frequently misunderstood, underestimated, or minimized, resulting in inadequate accommodation and reinforcing structural inequities within the institution.

8.2 Fragmented and Informal Practices

8.2.1 Individualized, Case-by-Case Responses

Despite structural constraints, accommodation does occur within the institution. However, it is predominantly enacted through individualized, ad hoc responses rather than systematic institutional processes. Accommodations are typically negotiated case-by-case, depending on individual faculty member dispositions, personal histories with disability, and immediate situational demands. While this affords flexibility, it also produces inconsistency, unpredictability, and inequity.

8.2.2 Informality and Limited Traceability

Many accommodation practices operate entirely outside formal institutional frameworks. Decisions are frequently reached through informal negotiations, unrecorded agreements, and personal initiatives, without

documentation or formal oversight. This informality limits both transparency and institutional learning, as successful practices cannot be systematically identified, shared, or replicated.

8.2.3 Dependence on Individual Goodwill

A critical structural vulnerability identified across the data is the deep reliance on individual commitment and goodwill. Inclusive practices are frequently driven by motivated faculty members, supportive administrators, or proactive students—creating a fragile system in which the quality and availability of accommodation are contingent on individual rather than institutional factors.

8.3 Co-Construction as a Central Mechanism

8.3.1 Multi-Actor Collaboration

Beyond structural barriers and informal fragmentation, the analysis identifies a qualitatively distinct dynamic: accommodation, when effective, emerges through processes of multi-actor collaboration. Students articulate their needs and negotiate their expectations; faculty members adapt teaching and assessment practices in dialogue with students; institutional services provide coordination, documentation, and resource support. This interaction reflects a shared—if unevenly distributed—responsibility for inclusion.

8.3.2 Negotiation, Dialogue, and Contextual Adaptation

Rather than constituting a fixed or standardized response, effective accommodation is characterized by negotiated, dialogic, and contextually adaptive processes. Participants consistently emphasized that successful accommodation requires sustained communication between actors, willingness to adapt to evolving student needs, and sensitivity to disciplinary and pedagogical contexts. This negotiated quality is central to what renders accommodation effective and equitable.

8.3.3 Dynamic and Evolving Process

The data further underscore the dynamic, iterative nature of accommodation. Practices evolve across the academic year in response to changing student needs, pedagogical requirements, and institutional context. This dynamic character reinforces the argument that accommodation cannot be reduced to a one-time administrative decision but constitutes an ongoing, adaptive process requiring institutional mechanisms for monitoring and adjustment.

8.4 Synthesis: A Paradox of Emerging Inclusion

Taken together, the findings reveal a productive paradox: accommodation is simultaneously constrained by structural barriers and fragmentation, and enabled through collaborative and co-constructed practices. This tension situates USJ at a transitional institutional moment, between informal individual-based approaches and an emerging potential for structured, institutionalized inclusion. These findings provide the empirical foundation for the accommodation model proposed in the following section.

9. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a fundamental tension between individualized and institutional approaches to accommodation. Inclusive practices, while present, operate largely at the micro level, functioning as compensatory mechanisms that address—but do not transform—systemic shortcomings. This section situates these findings within relevant theoretical and empirical debates in inclusive higher education.

9.1 The Limits of Micro-Level Inclusion

The prevalence of individualized and informal accommodation reflects a micro-level inclusion logic in which faculty members and staff respond reactively to student needs without the support of institutional frameworks. While this approach allows for situational flexibility, it generates structural inequities through inconsistency in practice across faculties, unequal access to support depending on actor engagement, and the absence of transparency, traceability, and accountability. These findings resonate with broader critiques in the literature documenting the limitations of informal inclusion and the unsustainability of relying on individual goodwill in the absence of formalized systems (Moriña, 2020; Fichten et al., 2022). From a social justice perspective, such conditions undermine the principle of equity: when accommodation quality varies according to which faculty member a student encounters rather than institutional policy, formal equality masks structural inequality.

9.2 The Fragility of Informal Inclusion

The depth of reliance on individual commitment identified in this study reflects what institutional theory characterizes as a low level of institutionalization (Scott, 2014): practices have not yet been embedded within regulative, normative, or cultural-cognitive structures. As a consequence, inclusion functions as a peripheral rather than integral dimension of institutional life—episodic rather than systemic, contingent rather than guaranteed. This fragility has direct implications for equity: when key individuals leave or disengage, students lose access to previously available accommodations, reinforcing precarity rather than stability.

9.3 Toward Meso-Level Institutional Processes

In response to these micro-level limitations, this study argues for a transition toward meso-level institutional processes in which accommodation is formally structured, collectively coordinated, and embedded within governance systems. At this level, inclusion is no longer dependent on individual actors but becomes formally organized, with clear procedures, designated coordination structures, and institutionally distributed responsibilities. This transition is consistent with calls in the literature for HEIs to move from reactive, compliance-oriented approaches to proactive, transformation-oriented strategies (Moriña, 2020).

9.4 Co-Construction and Social Justice

The co-construction processes identified in the findings strongly resonate with Fraser's (2008) dual framework of recognition and redistribution. Effective accommodation requires not only material adjustments (resource redistribution) but the recognition of SWD as legitimate, active participants in academic life. The co-constructed accommodation processes observed at USJ reflect this participatory dimension—students are not passive recipients of predetermined support but active contributors to defining their own needs and co-designing responses. This shift from beneficiary to partner is normatively significant and practically consequential for accommodation quality.

9.5 Institutional Integration and Student Success

The findings align with Tinto's (1993) theoretical framework, which identifies institutional integration as central to student persistence and academic success. Fragmented and inconsistent accommodation processes generate barriers to academic participation, reduce students' sense of belonging, and contribute to disengagement and attrition. Conversely, structured, coordinated, and co-constructed accommodation can substantially enhance

academic integration and well-being, underscoring the strategic case for embedding inclusion within institutional systems rather than treating it as an administrative add-on.

9.6 Toward Systemic Transformation

This study ultimately supports recent scholarly calls to reconceptualize inclusion in higher education as a process of systemic transformation rather than a set of compensatory measures (Moriña, 2020). Such a reconceptualization implies a shift from reactive to proactive institutional orientations, from individual adjustments to systemic and universal strategies, and from isolated actions to coordinated institutional processes aligned across policy, pedagogy, and organizational culture.

10. A Co-Constructed Accommodation Model for Higher Education

Building on the empirical findings and their theoretical interpretation, this study proposes a co-constructed accommodation model that conceptualizes accommodation as a structured, systemic, and institutionalized process. The model directly addresses the core limitations identified—fragmentation, informality, variability, and lack of traceability—by providing a coherent, six-stage framework integrating individual student needs with institutional governance requirements.

The model is grounded in the normative principle of social justice (ensuring equitable outcomes), the social model of disability (addressing structural rather than individual barriers), UDL principles (promoting proactive and universal design), and institutional theory (ensuring formal embedding and sustainability).

Stage 1: Identification and Process Initiation

This stage involves the formal recognition of a student's accommodation needs and the structured activation of the institutional process. Initiation may be triggered by the student through self-disclosure, by a faculty member who observes difficulties, or by institutional services. Formalizing this entry stage—establishing a standardized, accessible, and clearly communicated access point—directly addresses the barrier of non-standardized procedures and ensures equity in access regardless of which faculty the student belongs to.

Stage 2: Contextual Functional Assessment

Rather than relying on medical diagnosis alone, this stage involves a comprehensive, contextually situated evaluation of the student's needs in relation to the specific academic environment. The assessment adopts a functional perspective: it examines the interaction between the student's learning characteristics and the conditions of their academic context—including teaching formats, assessment methods, and physical environments. This approach aligns with the social model of disability by directing attention to contextual barriers rather than individual deficits.

Stage 3: Co-Construction of the Individualized Intervention Plan (IIP)

The model's central innovation is the formalization of co-construction through a collaborative, documented Individualized Intervention Plan (IIP), developed jointly by the student, relevant faculty members, and institutional support services. The IIP is characterized by negotiated and participatory decision-making, context-sensitive adaptation to disciplinary requirements, and explicit documentation of agreed accommodations, responsibilities, timelines, and implementation conditions. This stage operationalizes the principle of co-construction identified as central in the empirical findings, ensuring that accommodation is not imposed but jointly designed.

Stage 4: Coordinated Implementation

This stage involves the practical, coordinated application of agreed accommodations within the academic setting. Key elements include: structured communication across institutional levels, clear delineation of faculty and administrative responsibilities, adaptation of teaching methods and assessment practices, and access to required resources and support infrastructure. Formalizing implementation directly addresses the fragmentation identified in the findings by introducing consistency and accountability.

Stage 5: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment

Accommodation is inherently dynamic, requiring continuous monitoring and adaptive adjustment. This stage includes regular structured follow-up with the student, systematic evaluation of accommodation effectiveness, and iterative adjustments in response to evolving needs, academic progress, or contextual changes. This stage reflects the dynamic nature of co-constructed processes evidenced in the findings and ensures that accommodation remains responsive across the academic cycle rather than static following initial agreement.

Stage 6: Institutional Evaluation and Strategic Development

The final stage extends beyond individual cases to the institutional level. It involves the systematic analysis of accommodation practices across the institution, identification of systemic patterns, persistent challenges, and good practices, and integration of these insights into policy development and strategic planning. This stage is essential for transforming accommodation from an individual-level process into an institutional learning mechanism, enabling continuous improvement and the progressive strengthening of governance structures.

Key Features and Contributions of the Model

The proposed model is distinguished by four defining features: (1) coordination and traceability, through documented stages and responsibilities ensuring transparency and consistency; (2) integration of individual and institutional levels, bridging student needs with governance structures; (3) a continuous and dynamic process orientation, conceptualizing accommodation as an iterative cycle rather than a one-time decision; and (4) co-construction as a governing principle, embedding collaboration and shared responsibility throughout. Together, these features support a transition from fragmented to systemic inclusion.

11. Contributions of the Study

11.1 Theoretical Contribution

This study reconceptualizes accommodation as a systemic, relational, and institutionalized process—advancing beyond prevailing individual-centered frameworks. By integrating social justice theory, the social model of disability, UDL, and institutional theory into a unified analytical framework, it develops a multi-level conceptual lens that bridges individual, pedagogical, and organizational dimensions. Notably, it positions co-construction as a central theoretical mechanism linking participatory values with institutional governance.

11.2 Empirical Contribution

Empirically, the study provides in-depth, contextualized evidence from a non-Western higher education setting—a significantly underrepresented context in inclusive higher education research. By capturing polyphonic

stakeholder perspectives across students, faculty, academic leadership, and administrative staff, it generates a multi-actor, institutionally grounded understanding of how inclusion operates and fails in practice. This empirical grounding strengthens both the validity of the findings and the transferability of the proposed model.

11.3 Practical Contribution

At the practical level, the six-stage accommodation model constitutes a structured, actionable, and context-sensitive framework designed for direct implementation by institutional actors. Its modular architecture allows adaptation across diverse institutional structures and governance systems while maintaining coherence as an integrated process. The model provides HEI administrators, disability services coordinators, faculty developers, and policymakers with a practical roadmap for transitioning from fragmented practices to sustainable, equity-oriented inclusion strategies.

12. Limitations

Several limitations should be acknowledged in the interpretation of these findings. First, the study is based on a single institutional case (USJ), which, while enabling analytical depth, constrains direct statistical generalizability. The study aims for analytical generalization—the transferability of conceptual insights and operational frameworks—rather than empirical generalization. Second, the exclusive use of qualitative methodology does not allow for the measurement of quantitative outcomes such as academic performance, retention rates, or longitudinal accommodation effectiveness. Third, while the multi-stakeholder sample provides a comprehensive institutional picture, it does not extend to policy-level actors or to comparative analysis across multiple institutions. Finally, the findings capture accommodation dynamics at a particular institutional moment; the dynamic and evolving nature of inclusion means that findings may require updating as policies, structures, and awareness continue to develop.

13. Future Research Directions

This study opens several promising avenues for future inquiry. First, comparative validation studies testing the proposed six-stage model across multiple institutions, national contexts, and governance structures would strengthen its empirical robustness and assess transferability. Second, mixed-methods research integrating quantitative indicators of accommodation effectiveness—academic performance, retention, engagement—would provide a complementary evidence base for policy advocacy. Third, longitudinal studies tracking institutional transformation over time would yield crucial insights into how HEIs sustainably embed co-constructed accommodation practices within organizational culture. Fourth, multi-level and policy-oriented research examining the interactions between institutional practices, national regulatory frameworks, and broader socio-cultural factors would advance systemic understanding. Finally, further theoretical and empirical exploration of co-construction dynamics—including power relations between stakeholders, student agency, and disciplinary variability—would contribute to refining both the conceptual and operational dimensions of co-constructed accommodation.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine accommodation processes for students with disabilities in higher education and to explore how these processes can be reconfigured to support more equitable, coherent, and sustainable inclusion. The findings demonstrate that current practices at USJ remain predominantly individualized, informal,

and fragmented—reflecting a genuine but structurally limited commitment to inclusion that is contingent on individual actors rather than institutional frameworks.

In response, the study advances a fundamental conceptual shift: accommodation must be understood not as an individualized administrative response, but as a co-constructed, institutionalized, and systemic process. The proposed six-stage model operationalizes this shift, providing a structured framework for transitioning from reactive and ad hoc practices to transparent, coordinated, and sustainable institutional processes.

More broadly, this study contributes to ongoing debates in inclusive higher education by demonstrating that achieving equity requires not only the provision of accommodations, but their integration within institutional governance, pedagogical culture, and organizational structures. Inclusion, in this sense, is not an addendum to institutional functioning but a dimension of institutional transformation.

Ultimately, embedding accommodation within formally structured, collaboratively constructed, and institutionally governed frameworks is not merely a matter of compliance—it is a prerequisite for higher education systems that aspire to be genuinely equitable, participatory, and sustainable for all students.

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