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**Inclusive Higher Education Training: Fostering Diversity, Equity, and
Inclusion in Academic Communities**

Supervisor

Assistant Professor Sara Santilli

Candidate: Mehmet Çağlar Akyiğit

Student ID number: 2040723

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive Higher Education Training: Fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Academic Communities

This master's thesis critically evaluates the impact of inclusive higher education training on the attitudes and perceptions of students within academic communities, with a particular emphasis on fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion. Anchored by the Inclusive Higher Education Training (IHET) initiative at the University of Padova, the study navigates the complexities of promoting an inclusive academic environment, taking into account multifaceted challenges such as migration, financial problems, and the spectrum of inclusivity beyond disability. Through a rigorous literature review and an innovative mixed-methods approach comprising surveys and data analysis, this research engages 40 diverse participants to unravel the transformative potential of the "Psychology of Inclusion and Social Sustainability" master's course. The findings unequivocally support Hypothesis 1 (H1), revealing that inclusive higher education programs significantly increase students' attitudes and perceptions, thereby cultivating a more diverse and inclusive learning environment. Contrary to Hypothesis 2 (H2), the data illustrates a notable positive shift in attitudes and perceptions post-training, underscoring the efficacy of such educational interventions. This study contributes to the developing discourse on inclusive higher education by providing empirical evidence of the beneficial impacts of inclusivity training. It highlights the imperative for higher education institutions to embed diversity and inclusion within their strategic frameworks, thereby paving the way for a more equitable academic community. In light of these findings, the thesis proposes actionable recommendations for institutions aiming to enhance inclusivity. By leveraging a comprehensive educational model that addresses the inclusivity challenges, from disability to cultural diversity, this research outlines a blueprint for achieving an inclusive higher education ecosystem. The conclusion encapsulates the critical insights gathered from the study, emphasizing the pivotal role of inclusive training in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion across academic settings.

Keywords: inclusion, inclusive education, diversity, higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

This master's thesis aims to investigate the factors necessitating inclusive higher education from a comprehensive viewpoint, elucidate the literature framework of inclusive education, and finally, discuss the potential for structured training programs to encourage positive changes in university students' attitudes toward inclusion in terms of perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes. The author was motivated to undertake this research based on the importance that the University of Padova gives to inclusion, his personal experiences of exclusion throughout his educational life, as well as those of his classmates and international students. This research aims to enhance the inclusivity of the university environment for students with diverse needs. The author is enrolled in an international master's program at the University of Padova. The position of the University of Padova on the topic has provided the author with an opportunity to concentrate on this subject. Utilizing the latest theoretical models and contemporary discussions on the subject of inclusion in the 21st century, the University of Padova also recognizes the significance of this topic and endeavors to fulfill its obligations through advocacy and practical actions (Università di Padova, n.d.). These advocacy movements and actions can be exemplified as follows: the university management's political vision, defining research and training initiatives, establishing a widespread support network, clearly communicating the university's public engagement initiatives, providing services and offices for inclusion and disability, promoting inclusion through teaching courses, advocating for inclusive language, and implementing various other initiatives (Università di Padova, n.d.). These examples serve as strong evidence of our university's dedication and emphasis on inclusion. During the pursuit of the master's degree, the author had the opportunity to enroll in a course called Psychology of Inclusion and Social Sustainability, which Assistant Professor Sara Santilli instructed. During the course, she introduced the Inclusive Higher Education Training (IHET) initiative, which aimed to improve attitudes towards inclusion at the University of Padova. The aim of this program was to promote knowledge and positive attitudes toward inclusion among a group of university staff members using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Thanks to her invitation, the author had the opportunity to participate in and observe this training program. Participation in the University of Padova's Inclusive Higher Education Training (IHET) highlighted the program's commendable focus on promoting awareness and education about inclusion, particularly physical and intellectual

disabilities. Following the participation in the training program, two primary factors compelled the author to delve further and select inclusive higher education as the thesis topic. Firstly, while the University of Padova defines inclusion in a broad sense, the majority of services, actions, and advocacy movements primarily revolve around the disability aspect of inclusion. Secondly, the focus group meetings with participants of the IHET program unveiled an opportunity to address other crucial needs, such as migration backgrounds, financial challenges, students' sexual orientations, etc., which might have a significant influence on university inclusion. Therefore, this thesis aims to outline the related factors for university inclusion, delve into methodologies, and assess the effectiveness of inclusive education programs in fostering a positive shift in attitudes. The goal is to propose a holistic and inclusive approach to the university that extends beyond the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in higher education. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of considering a diverse range of factors that impact inclusion in higher education. The work aims to comprehensively understand inclusive education by examining various trends and impacts, including sustainability, migration, globalization, sexual orientation and gender identity, financial challenges, disability, and cultural/ethnic diversity. Therefore, we created a comprehensive educational program to promote knowledge and improve positive attitudes toward inclusion among a group of university students with the support of Assistant Professor Sara Santilli under her Psychology of Inclusion and Social Sustainability master's course. Under this research, we had three main research questions: Is it possible to enhance students' knowledge from an inclusive perspective? Is it possible to positively alter the students' perspectives and attitudes towards inclusion? What constitutes a comprehensive framework for inclusive education?

Chapter 1

Definition and Challenges of Inclusion

Before moving forward with examining various trends and impacts it is important to define some of the following key terms. These definitions will help the readers throughout the thesis. As regards inclusion, different researchers and organizations have presented varying definitions based on their comprehension of the subject matter or their specific requirements. This occasionally adds complexity to the field, but it also demonstrates and substantiates the vast and all-encompassing nature of the field we are working and advocating for. We will provide three illustrations: one from everyday speech, one from global institutions, and one from academia. According to the Cambridge Dictionary definition, inclusion refers to the action of incorporating an individual or an object into a group or a list. It can also refer to the individual or object that has been incorporated (Inclusion, 2024). According to the UN, inclusion is a social process that guarantees individuals who are vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion have the necessary opportunities and resources to fully engage in education, economy, society, politics, and culture, and to have a standard of living that is considered typical in their society. It guarantees increased involvement in decision-making processes that impact their lives and ensures their access to fundamental rights (Identifying Social Inclusion and Exclusion, 2016). In academia, inclusion is defined as the deliberate and continuous endeavor to enable individuals with diverse identities to actively engage in all aspects of an organization's activities, including leadership and decision-making. Tan (2019) emphasizes the significance of recognizing and embracing individuals from diverse backgrounds as respected members of an organization or community. The definitions emphasize the wide range of situations where the concept of inclusion is relevant, such as education, workplaces, communities, and different social contexts. Essentially, inclusion aims to establish environments that embrace diversity and provide equal opportunities, rights, and recognition to every individual. Regarding Inclusive education, as defined by academia and international organizations, is a comprehensive and flexible concept that seeks to improve and optimize the educational experience and results for all students, with a particular emphasis on those who have been historically marginalized or excluded from conventional education systems. UNESCO (*Inclusion in Education*, 2024) defines inclusive education as a comprehensive approach that identifies and eliminates any obstacles to education, including curriculum and teaching methods. It ensures equal importance is given to every learner, regardless of their background, identity, or abilities. In accordance with UNICEF, inclusive education refers to an

educational perspective that encompasses all students, embracing and assisting them in their learning endeavors, regardless of their identities or individual capabilities and needs (UNICEF, 2017). This entails ensuring that the instruction and educational program, school infrastructure, classrooms, recreational spaces, transportation, and restroom facilities are suitable for every student, regardless of their level of education. Inclusive education refers to the practice of educating all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, in the same educational institutions. It is imperative that everyone is included. Every individual is entitled to inclusive education, which encompasses students with disabilities, students from diverse backgrounds, and so on. According to UNICEF (2017), inclusive education is significant as it enhances learning for all individuals, regardless of their diverse needs. It fosters comprehension, diminishes bias, and enhances social integration. Additionally, it guarantees that students with diverse needs are prepared to participate economically and socially in their communities. Academically (Namanyane & Shaoan, 2021), inclusive education is characterized by a comprehensive transformation of the entire educational system, encompassing legislation, policy, financing, administration, design, delivery, and monitoring of education, as well as the organization of schools. The essential prerequisites for implementing inclusive education involve eradicating discrimination, guaranteeing universal access to education for every student, offering practical assistance or adjustments to facilitate learning for students, developing individualized education plans for students with diverse needs, and ensuring that teachers receive sufficient training to work in inclusive environments (Namanyane & Shaoan, 2021). Providing a single comprehensive definition for an inclusive education framework is challenging due to the varying definitions and interpretations of inclusive education frameworks across different countries, universities, and the specific needs of their people. Nevertheless, we can define it as an inclusive education framework that incorporates principles, guidelines, and practices to guarantee equal opportunities for all students, irrespective of their backgrounds, abilities, or characteristics, to achieve success in education (National Council for Special Education, 2011). This framework adopts a comprehensive approach to inclusivity, going beyond simple adjustments for individual students and taking into account the needs of a diverse student population as a whole. It highlights the significance of developing educational settings, curricula, evaluations, and teaching methods that are accessible, user-friendly, and inclusive for all students. The European Commission (2019) defines the Inclusive Education Framework as a guideline for schools to follow in order to achieve inclusion. The framework aims to provide an effective and efficient service to all learners, educators, parents, and the wider community. This framework encompasses the principles of Ownership, Diversity,

Autonomy, Planning, and Research (European Commission, 2019). The University of Hull (2023) presents another example that emphasizes its dedication to delivering a varied, decolonized, and inclusive education framework. This approach aims to equip all students with the necessary skills and values of inclusivity, preparing them to become future leaders. The primary objective of this framework is to guarantee equal opportunities for success, regardless of students' background or demographic traits. It employs an intersectional approach to cater to the requirements of historically marginalized groups while avoiding the use of stereotypes or generalizations. (Inclusive Education Framework: What Is Inclusive Education?, 2023). These different explanations of inclusive education frameworks exemplify a strong dedication to inclusivity that is thorough and diverse, with the goal of eliminating obstacles and establishing educational settings that are inviting and accommodating to the learning requirements of all students. These frameworks are useful examples for institutions looking to improve their inclusive education practices.

1.1 UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGES OF INCLUSION

In order to gain a thorough understanding of inclusive education and why do we need a comprehensive model, it is crucial to examine the significance of different trends, challenges, and influences, such as sustainability, migration, globalization, sexual orientation and gender identity, financial difficulties, disability, and cultural/ethnic diversity.

1.1.1 Sustainability and Role of the University.

When we talk about sustainability, the first thing that usually comes to mind is the environment. However, the field of sustainability is a field much bigger than that and it holds an important connection with inclusion, inclusive education, and the role of the university. The report (2018) titled "Universities and Sustainable Development Towards the Global Goals" by the European University Association (EUA) offers a comprehensive understanding of the interconnection being discussed. As also mentioned in the report (EUA, 2018), in our current time, we are facing unique and significant global difficulties, making the need for sustainable development more crucial than ever before. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a comprehensive framework that aims to tackle these challenges by 2030 (UN, 2023). The role of higher education institutions, especially universities, is crucial in promoting sustainable development through education, research, and innovation (Berchin et al., 2021). Universities have a distinct advantage in their ability to make a meaningful impact on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by fulfilling their primary objectives: high-quality

education (Goal 4), fostering innovation (Goal 9), supporting civil society (Goal 16), and establishing global and local partnerships (Goal 17) (EUA, 2018). By incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their institutional strategies, universities not only adopt sustainable practices for managing their campuses but also can adopt a comprehensive approach that involves all members of the university community and external stakeholders in sustainability initiatives. Therefore, it is important to understand the topic of sustainability as well as the university's members. Inclusive education in universities goes beyond simply providing access to education. It involves offering fair learning opportunities to all students, including those who come from marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds (LEVELS, 2008). Universities promote sustainable development by creating an inclusive learning environment that allows everyone to participate and gain advantages. This approach is consistent with the overarching objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which prioritize reducing inequalities (Goal 10) and guarantee that no individual is excluded or disadvantaged. The relationship between sustainability, inclusion, and education is apparent in the way universities address the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Universities engage in interdisciplinary research to develop creative solutions to global challenges, prioritizing an inclusive approach that takes into account diverse perspectives and disciplines. This research is crucial for comprehending intricate matters, thus aiding in the creation of a more sustainable and inclusive world. In summary, universities play a leading role in promoting sustainable development, with a strong focus on inclusion and inclusive education. By incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their fundamental objectives, these organizations not only advance the principles of sustainability but also guarantee the availability and inclusivity of education, thereby fostering a more fair and prosperous future.

1.1.2 Migration and globalization.

In a global context, migration is the act of a person moving across an international border (international migration) or within a state (internal migration) for a period exceeding one year. This movement can occur for various reasons, both voluntary and involuntary, and by any means, regular or irregular (European Commission, n.d.). Migration has significant consequences in various areas, such as development, politics, social relations, labor, humanitarian issues, legal frameworks, security, and education. The global migrant population is increasing due to various reasons for their movements (Mikac & Wahdyudin, 2021). Therefore, migration analysis is crucial in today's world, as the global population of migrants continues to grow every year. According to the International Organization for Migration

(McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021), there were an estimated 281 million international migrants in 2020, which accounted for 3.6% of the global population. Discussing the relationship between globalization, migration, and higher education is essential. Globalization refers to the process of enhancing economic and labor market integration, which leads to increased mobility (IMF, 2008). Although primarily an economic phenomenon, globalization has significantly impacted student mobility, increasing the number of students who travel abroad for education. Globalization has transformed higher education into a market-driven enterprise, attracting foreign investment, promoting competition, and generating profits that often surpass those of other industries (Varghese & UNESCO IIEP, 2008). Migration, a crucial component of globalization, directly influences trends and the impact of globalization on migration, both of which are significant factors to consider in discussions about inclusive higher education. Based on the analysis of UNESCO Institute of Statistics data by the Migration Data Portal, the number of international students worldwide in 2021 exceeded 6.4 million (International Students, 2023). This information is corroborated by the University of Padua's most recent figures, which show that their student body includes over 5,200 international students and 1,700 exchange students annually (Università di Padova, n.d.). Examining historical migration trends in an educational setting reveals distinct patterns. In the colonial period, many students moved from colonies to world capitals. During the Cold War, opposing nations attempted to influence migration patterns. Nowadays, student mobility has become a market-driven activity, sometimes even commercial (Weber & Van Mol, 2023). Recent trends in international student migration indicate that Europe and the United States remain the primary destinations (Varghese and UNESCO IIEP, 2008). In higher education, it is crucial to cultivate an inclusive mindset to meet the diverse needs of these students. This includes those from different cultural backgrounds, such as international students, who often face challenges like language barriers, cultural adjustment, and navigating unfamiliar academic systems (Wu et al., 2015). Not only students but also educational institutions face significant challenges in educating a diverse student population, particularly those from migrant backgrounds, due to a variety of educational barriers (Pugh et al., 2012). Therefore, inclusive education should not only focus on accessibility but also address these challenges. The institution must acknowledge and appreciate the diversity that international students bring, creating a globalized learning environment that equips students for success in a multicultural world. Universities have both national and international characteristics. Although the knowledge they provide is universal and international, their ownership, structure, and organization are primarily national (Varghese & UNESCO IIEP, 2008). This national

orientation can increase the risk of exclusion for international students who enroll in these institutions. Higher education globalization is often seen as a part of internationalization (Varghese and UNESCO IIEP, 2008). In this context, globalization suggests that higher education institutions should foster an international and multicultural perspective, with a focus on a comprehensive and inclusive approach. In the discourse on migration, it is crucial to consider various factors, including forced migration. Academic research indicates that students who are refugees encounter unique challenges in comparison to other migrant groups, primarily as a result of the negative impacts of involuntary displacement. A significant number of these students have undergone severe violence, trauma, and upheaval in their home countries (Taylor and Sidhu, 2012). Students with refugee backgrounds might be especially vulnerable to emotional and psychological distress. They may exhibit symptoms of trauma, such as memory issues, physical conditions, and difficulty forming relationships (Rousseau et al., 1996; Tayebjee, 2005). Attending school in a new country requires significant cultural and linguistic adjustment, especially for those who are not enrolled in international programs. It is crucial to be aware of the potential challenges that students may encounter in an unfamiliar environment, particularly for those with limited prior education in the country (Cassity and Gow, 2005). Educational research suggests that language barriers can present significant challenges for students with migration backgrounds, impacting their academic performance and social integration. (Davies, 2008). Education policies can have a significant impact on the discussion of migration and education. Neoliberal policies often benefit individuals with economic, social, and cultural advantages while ignoring the importance of social justice (Reid, 2002). This approach, which focuses on individual successes and failures, tends to place undue blame on 'at-risk' students while ignoring the larger social, cultural, and economic contexts that influence their educational journeys (Thomson, 1998). Students from migrant backgrounds may face additional challenges, as they may have limited resources and may be unfairly labeled as 'at risk' (Miller, 1997). Finally, the interplay between migration, globalization, and higher education emphasizes the need for inclusivity in academic settings. Increasing global student mobility, driven by economic and cultural forces, presents opportunities and challenges for educational systems worldwide. International students bring diversity to the learning experience but also present challenges that require inclusive educational strategies. Higher education institutions must adapt to globalization and create welcoming, supportive environments for all students to succeed, regardless of their origin. Universities can play a crucial role in creating a more inclusive, equitable, and multicultural future by addressing the obstacles faced by students with migration backgrounds, especially those who have been

refugees, and reevaluating the impact of current education policies. Achieving inclusive higher education involves not only recognizing diversity but also leveraging it to enhance the educational experience, equipping students to succeed in an interconnected and multicultural world.

1.1.3 Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity.

Establishing an inclusive and equitable environment in higher education institutions is crucial for fostering a sense of safety, belonging, and acceptance among all students, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2008), sexual orientation is a person's emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to others. Gender identity is an individual's internal perception of their gender, which may differ from the gender they were assigned at birth (Gender Identity and Gender Expression | Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.). This foundational comprehension supports the significance of establishing universities that embrace diversity and foster every student's mental well-being and academic achievements (Kosciw et al., 2014). A welcoming and inclusive university atmosphere can enhance students' mental well-being and academic achievements by making sure they feel appreciated and esteemed (Roldán et al., 2021). LGBTQ+ individuals frequently encounter distinctive obstacles, such as discrimination, harassment, and inadequate supportive measures, which can adversely affect their educational and personal growth (Miller, 2023). Addressing these issues by advocating positive changes in attitudes and policies is crucial to fostering an educational environment that values diversity and promotes inclusivity for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities. We know that coming out for LGBTQ+ individuals can be an essential step that can help them for better psychological well-being. Still, there is also the risk of discrimination and peer victimization (Kosciw et al., 2014). Coming out may reflect resilience in some situations but also manifest differently depending on the ecological context, with some areas more or less supportive of LGBTQ+ individuals than others (Kosciw et al., 2014). Considering these, we can see the necessity of addressing sexual orientation and gender identity issues within the university and promoting and advocating for positive attitude changes. When we talk about discrimination and victimization, it is essential to say that we see rapid positive changes in our society year by year. However, we still live in a society that accepts and promotes heterosexuality as the 'normal', 'acceptable', and 'good' option (Chesir-Teran and Hughes, 2009) and marginalizes the individual who does not represent and live according to the gender norms of the binary system (Connell, 1996). Therefore, LGBTQ+ students who do not live within the normative rules and constructs of our

society are at risk of being subject to violence, discrimination, and marginalization, including sexual harassment and physical assault (Kosciw et al., 2012). According to the research and reports from the field, we know that LGBTQ+ students are at a bigger risk compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers, and the research has consistently revealed higher rates of victimization (Harris Interactive and GLSEN, 2005). If our educational systems and organizations do not take these effects seriously into consideration, these students might face negative consequences related to their academic achievement, connection to the school community, and psychological and physical well-being (Russell et al., 2011). If we need to talk about the adverse effects of school-based victimization, we can link them to several academic aspects such as lower grades, decreased desire and motivation to pursue further education, and risks of disrupting and dropping out of school (Kosciw et al., 2012; Seelman et al., 2012). These findings might bring light to why LGBTQ+ students report more mental and psychological problems compared to their non-LGBTQ+ peers due to their educational experiences (D'Augelli, 2002). When we talk about victimization due to sexual orientation, we need to mention the importance of contextual factors, for example, the region or the country of the student. Even though the attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals developed year by year in a positive direction, there are substantial discrepancies in different regions and countries, especially in conservative and rural areas (Kosciw et al., 2014). Therefore, it is important to consider all these findings in terms of working on increasing awareness and advocating for positive attitude change towards LGBTQ+ individuals in educational settings, including higher education institutions. Another important factor when we talk about sexual orientation and gender identity in educational institutions is psychological safety. These organizations should work on creating these safe environments for their students because LGBTQ+ students report the fear of losing social support and being victims due to their identities (Katz-Wise and Hyde, 2012). The research shows that educational institutions should take responsibility for increasing the resources so that their students feel included (Kosciw et al., 2014). However, this responsibility does not only burden educators and administrators but also every member of the educational community, such as non-LGBTQ+ students, parents, local authorities, and governments. Because we know that educational policies, combined with the involvement of all these groups, focused and worked on sexual orientation and gender identity, resulted in positive change in fighting against bullying, discrimination, and exclusion of students (Russell et al., 2016). In conclusion to this section, creating an inclusive and equitable environment in higher education is crucial for the well-being and academic success of all students, particularly those who identify as LGBTQ+. The literature highlights the significant obstacles these students

encounter, including discrimination, harassment, and the psychological strain of navigating an educational environment that is frequently unsupportive. Addressing sexual orientation and gender identity issues involves advocating for systemic changes to promote positive attitudes and inclusive policies, going beyond mere acceptance. The key to enhancing the psychological well-being and academic performance of LGBTQ+ students is for the entire educational system to work together to create environments that promote diversity, guarantee psychological safety, and actively address victimization and exclusion. Upholding these principles will benefit LGBTQ+ students and enhance the educational experience for everyone, fostering a generation of individuals ready to succeed and make valuable contributions to a diverse and inclusive society.

1.1.4 Financial Problems.

One might question the relevance of discussing students' financial issues in the context of inclusive education. Inclusive education aims to develop a comprehensive curriculum and establish educational settings that foster a sense of belonging for all students (Equity and Quality in Education, 2012). Access to university education has been crucial for the development of individuals and societies throughout history (UNESCO et al., 2020). With rising economic crises and the increasing cost of living, many students are facing various economic and financial challenges during their academic journey (Swain, 2023). These issues include school fees, textbook expenses, housing, and transportation expenses. We can include examples from various contexts, such as visa expenses and relocation costs for international students. Financial problems, negative situations, or difficulties have a significant impact on students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Vadivel et al., 2023). Amid escalating financial challenges, students strive to pursue a university education and maintain academic productivity. However, they may feel excluded and lack a sense of full inclusion in the university environment. When discussing this subject, it is crucial to take into account the key terms, such as tuition fees, living expenses, and material costs. University tuition expenses are a significant financial challenge for students and families, and they can vary between institutions and countries. It could hinder the pursuit of certain students, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds, of higher educational programs. Another significant effect is the cost of living for students in addition to tuition fees. Students are facing financial challenges due to rising inflation, particularly in areas such as housing, food, transportation, and other daily expenses (Lewis, 2023). Before moving forward, it is important to mention that students who must relocate from another city or country face additional burdens such as visa

applications, residence permits, or health insurance costs. For instance, the registration of Italian Health Insurance for international students has been increased to 700 Euros from 150 Euros for the year 2024. Transitioning from one location to another can result in difficulties meeting fundamental requirements. Textbooks and educational supplies are another factor that imposes a burden on students. These educational materials can increase the financial strain of attending university. Some students may face risks when purchasing these educational materials, potentially impacting their academic performance (Castleman & Meyer, 2019). Restricted availability of financial aid could result in reduced higher education accessibility and higher dropout rates (Modena et al., 2020). Students facing economic challenges may seek part-time employment opportunities, which could introduce further limitations. These students may encounter academic obstacles or difficulties in completing their degrees because of the time they dedicate to work. These issues stem from socioeconomic disparities. Students from low-income families might face more significant challenges compared to their privileged and wealthier peers (Ravhuhali et al., 2022). The students encounter economic challenges and social issues, including widening social inequalities, restricting chances for advancement, and perpetuating current economic gaps. We also need to address the correlation between student loan debt and restricted financial aid. For instance, over one thousand eligible students at the University of Padova were unable to receive the scholarship. These can compel students and their families to depend on loans to pay educational costs, potentially leading to a persistent financial issue. This issue can affect students in various ways, including their financial flexibility post-graduation, career decisions, ability to own a home, and overall financial health. According to the literature and the framework, we know that inclusive education is a perspective to work on and remove these kinds of barriers with the focus of guaranteeing all students have equal access to quality education regardless of their background and personal situations (UNICEF, 2017). Therefore, if we go deeper, the first goal of inclusive education in terms of financial problems is to make higher education accessible to students from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Primarily due to economic crises, we know that states and universities implemented cost-recovery measures in public universities, and the emergence of private universities attests to these developments. The fact that costs were now being borne by students rather than the state provided them with additional options to consider (*Varghese & UNESCO IIEP, 2008*). As we can see, families and students began to face additional financial burdens day by day due to these kinds of changes in the educational and economic systems. If we consider the University of Padova as an example, we all know the problems with housing and scholarships, which negatively affect the “Right to Education” of students. Therefore, it is

crucial for governments, local authorities, and universities to implement policies and practices such as financial aid programs, scholarships, tuition waivers, and subsidized housing, as well as ensuring that textbooks and learning materials are affordable. Through these interventions and perspectives, inclusive education can mitigate the needs of students to access and fully participate, which, therefore, can foster a more equitable and diverse academic environment.

1.1.5 Disability.

The link of inclusive education to disability is a crucial and extensively researched subject. Students with disabilities may face physical or academic obstacles, limited access to resources, and societal prejudices. Educational organizations should prioritize inclusive education by focusing on creating accessible environments, offering accommodations, and fostering a culture of understanding and support for individuals with disabilities. Our educational practices are evolving quickly, with a shift towards inclusive education. One common practice and tendency is to educate students with disabilities alongside those without disabilities in general education classrooms (Kart & Kart, 2021). For example, if we look at the US, according to the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (2010), only 20% of the students with disabilities were able to go to public schools in 1970. The schools and their services were minimal and problematic, and some children who have disabilities have been excluded from schooling. Following structural policy changes and legal improvements emphasizing inclusivity, 95% of students with disabilities were educated in general education schools in the autumn of 2017, as reported by the NCES (National Center for Education Statistics) (Fast Facts: Students With Disabilities, Inclusion of (59), n.d.). Even though this data focuses on general education numbers and not only higher education, it is essential to show our direction. It is crucial to recognize that statistics on the inclusion of students with disabilities differ depending on the type of disability. Students with mild or moderate disabilities are more inclined to be educated in inclusive settings compared to those with severe disabilities (Rhoad-Drogalis & Justice, 2019). In this context, Italy is in a good position thanks to the legislation. In Italy, legislation ensures the inclusion of students with disabilities in educational settings. Schools must establish Groups for Territorial Inclusion (GITs) and Work Groups for Inclusion (GLIs), consisting of educational staff and specialists focused on creating inclusive plans. Additionally, the law mandates further measures for school staff training and the development of specific inclusion plans (*Italy: New Legislation Guaranteeing Inclusive Education to Students With Disabilities Takes Effect*, 2019). Even though the number of students with disability is rising day by day at school levels before university education,

research still indicates that students with disabilities have been inadequately represented in higher education (Macleod & Cebula, 2009). Gibson (2012) and Liasidou (2014) also found that people with disabilities are not well-represented in higher education. However, there is also some recent evidence showing that there is a positive trend with more students with disabilities enrolling in universities. The positive change is demonstrated by data from the UK (HESA, 2014), reflecting the trend seen in the US regarding general education enrollment, as mentioned earlier. Therefore, we can say that we should give more attention to making our universities more inclusive and accessible to students with disabilities. Moving from student numbers, we know that students with disabilities who are enrolled may encounter barriers during their university education, and universities must enhance an inclusive education approach to address these barriers. Kendall (2016) identified barriers such as university staff (academic and administrative) being uninformed about a student's disability, reluctance to implement reasonable accommodations, and limited assessment options during examination. When discussing the accessibility and inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education, it is crucial for institutions to make tailored adjustments. Elcock (2014) recommended that these adjustments should be individualized for each student and aligned with the program's requirements. It is crucial to emphasize the importance of making sure that these adjustments are in place before the student starts their education and supports them until they graduate (Taylor et al., 2010). Supporting all students is a complex issue for universities that requires additional research to comprehend the students' needs. This could be achieved through specialized units like the University of Padova Inclusion Center. One of the important key terms when we talk about disability is disclosure. Per the Federation for Children with Special Needs (2021), disclosure can be defined as sharing information about one's disability with others. While it is crucial for students to inform the university about their disabilities for necessary accommodations, it is essential to recognize that revealing details about a disability is a voluntary and highly personal choice. Personal choice is significant as some students choose not to reveal their disability before admission due to concerns about its impact on their admission process (Redpath et al., 2013). These students may choose not to disclose personal information due to a tendency to avoid stigma, a desire to avoid negative perceptions, or concerns about being treated differently by their peers and instructors during their academic experience (Kendall, 2016). Despite the increasing presence of students with disabilities in higher education and the implementation of legislation to promote equal treatment in many countries, research indicates that these students still encounter obstacles to learning and integration into the university setting (Kendall, 2016; Black et al., 2015). Reed et al. (2015)

suggest that students with disabilities may encounter obstacles that impede their academic performance, placing them at a disadvantage compared to their peers without disabilities because of the barriers they face. Crow (2003, p. 136) attributes the risk of poor academic performance of these students to social, environmental, and attitudinal barriers, known as the social model of disability, rather than lack of ability. The barriers we are discussing may be physical, social, attitudinal, or educational. Physical barriers refer to obstacles that students with disabilities encounter in their physical surroundings, such as difficulties in accessing campus facilities, rooms, accommodations, libraries, and support services (Redpath, 2013). For instance, a demonstration of these physical obstacles can be observed at our institution, the University of Padova. Although our university prioritizes removing these barriers, students with disabilities still encounter occasional challenges. As a psychology department student, the author recalls numerous instances when the elevators on our campus were out of order, preventing students from reaching their classes. Or, not all of our historical buildings have fully accessible designs. On the other hand, we can see attitudinal barriers as they stem from preconceived ideas, stereotypes, and prejudices that individuals may have regarding disabilities (Disability and Health Disability Barriers | CDC, 2019). These barriers may appear as negative attitudes from peers, discriminatory attitudes and practices from university staff, lack of awareness among teaching staff regarding students' needs, low expectations, and stigma (Redpath, 2013). Social barriers are obstacles stemming from the institution's structure and culture, as well as broader societal norms, that hinder the full participation of students with disabilities in academic and social activities. Social barriers can lead to reduced functioning in individuals with disabilities (Disability and Health Disability Barriers | CDC, 2019). These barriers include exclusion from social activities and inflexible policies and procedures. Educational barriers are the difficulties and hindrances that students with disabilities encounter within the educational environment (Kendall, 2016). These obstacles can significantly affect their capacity to acquire knowledge, engage in classroom activities, and achieve academic success. Kendall (2016) states that these educational obstacles frequently hinder full inclusion, putting students with disabilities at a notable disadvantage in comparison to their peers without disabilities. In order to eliminate educational obstacles, academic staff should provide reasonable accommodations to assist students with disabilities, such as providing lecture notes or slides before the lecture (Hopkins, 2011) or permitting students to record lectures (Mortimore, 2012). One significant educational barrier that must be addressed is examinations and assessments, despite the presence of other obstacles like lack of accessible learning materials, inadequate support services, and inflexible teaching methods. Research indicates

challenges in assessing students with disabilities (Hanafin et al., 2006). Research in the field suggests that conventional assessment methods, like exams, are viewed as limiting and impede students' academic advancement, as Fuller et al. (2004) emphasized. Pavey et al. (2009) stress the significance of using alternative assessment methods, especially for students with specific learning disabilities like dyslexia, highlighting the crucial role these approaches play in ensuring a fair assessment of their capabilities. A challenge arises due to the lack of unanimous agreement among faculty members regarding the implementation of alternative assessments for students with disabilities, as some are hesitant to modify their evaluation methods (Kendall, 2016). Ultimately, analyzing the impact of disability on inclusive education highlights the complex obstacles and difficulties encountered by disabled students in higher education. The path to achieving genuinely inclusive education is intricate, involving physical, academic, educational, and societal challenges. Institutions need to adapt by implementing personalized accommodations and robust support systems to guarantee that every student, irrespective of disability, can engage in and excel in higher education settings. This call to action emphasizes the need for increased awareness, research, and policy creation to break down existing obstacles and promote an educational environment that recognizes and celebrates diversity.

1.1.6 Cultural and Ethnic Diversity.

As previously mentioned in the migration section, a significant number of individuals migrate annually from one location to another for various reasons. Italy is fulfilling its part as a country. In 2021, Italy experienced a 91% increase in the number of new immigrants arriving on a long-term or permanent basis compared to 2020, totaling 241,000 individuals (OECD, n.d.). Also, as we can remember from the University of Padova data, our university is hosting more and more students from different countries and cultures every year. Hence, discussing cultural and ethnic diversity is crucial in understanding its impact on promoting inclusive higher education. Embracing cultural and ethnic diversity enhances the educational experience, equips students with a multicultural society, and promotes a sense of belonging among all students (UNESCO, 2004). Universities must acknowledge and welcome diversity to avoid excluding students from various backgrounds. As we know, international students are increasingly enrolling in higher education institutions worldwide. To promote diversity and inclusion, these institutions should actively involve themselves in understanding and valuing students' cultural backgrounds and previous educational experiences to ensure a fair and inclusive environment for academic success (Fitzpatrick, 2023). How is the question to be answered? Institutions and staff members should begin by comprehending international students' academic and social challenges

(Fitzpatrick, 2023). It is clear that the initial step involves comprehending and promoting awareness of this requirement. However, it is also clear that practical changes must be implemented to bring about the desired change. Universities should offer support for sociocultural and institutional adjustment to students from diverse backgrounds instead of imposing compliance standards and culturally biased knowledge models in order to foster an inclusive environment through international programs. Embracing this perspective benefits students from diverse backgrounds and contributes to the development and growth of university staff in pedagogical, educational, and administrative aspects (Fitzpatrick, 2023). Yet, adopting this new viewpoint is challenging. Higher education institutions and their staff must comprehend the particular challenges and barriers that international students may encounter when adapting to a new academic environment and lifestyle in a foreign country or city (Dervin, 2016). What are the challenges that international students face? The challenges can be categorized into three main clusters: (1) culture shock and cross-cultural adjustment, (2) educational adjustment, and (3) understanding cultural context. The culture shock model proposed by Oberg in 1960, previously considered a universal explanation for intercultural adaptation regardless of circumstances or personal experiences, is now deemed not enough to address the complexities of modern and swiftly evolving migration patterns, as noted by Fitzpatrick in 2017. Landis et al. (2004) have emphasized the necessity for a detailed and personalized explanation, coping strategies, and growth models to tackle the challenges of adjusting (cross-cultural adjustment) to new life and the associated stresses. Fitzpatrick (2023) defines culture shock as a continuous process of 'adjustment' rather than a temporary challenge. This involves acquiring the skills to exist, act, and engage in a different cultural environment and handling the psychological aspects of adjusting to these modifications. The significant changes in your life can lead to stress due to uncertainties and the sense of unfamiliarity. Fitzpatrick (2016) emphasizes that individuals with a migration background encounter diminished social capital after overcoming initial obstacles. This requires creating a new social and professional network from the beginning in their new surroundings, which adds complexity to the adjustment process. These models are more complex and challenging in both theory and application. Still, they can provide an improved strategy for addressing individuals' unique and diverse challenges when dealing with change or 'cultural stress.' This approach avoids oversimplifying the experience of culture shock by assuming that everyone goes through it in a similar way (Berry, 2006). Universities can help students adapt to new cultures by recognizing and emphasizing the positive aspects of starting a new life in a different place from a cross-cultural adjustment perspective. This can enhance the student experience in facing

culture shock and benefit the university (Sercombe & Young, 2015). Next, we address the second major challenge faced by these students, particularly concerning educational adjustments. Gu & Maley (2008) defined 'learning shock' as a challenge in adapting to a new learning environment due to its unfamiliarity, which students from diverse backgrounds may encounter. 'Unfamiliarity' encompasses challenges such as adapting to local language details, navigating intercultural communication differences, adjusting to different classroom dynamics and cultural norms, comprehending academic protocols and procedures, and coping with limited educational support, as Li & Campbell (2006) outlined. Fitzpatrick (2023) emphasizes the significance of acknowledging how students' prior educational experiences impact their learning approach and interaction in the current setting. It is essential to comprehend this in order to assess and adjust our educational methods to effectively cater to various perceptions, expressions, learning styles, and communication techniques. Being conscious of and dealing with these complex educational adjustment challenges is crucial for establishing an inclusive and supportive academic setting that meets the varied needs of students from diverse backgrounds. Let's conclude this part by addressing our final challenge, which is understanding cultural context. We may discuss cultural tightness (Gelfand, 2018), individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 2001), or interdependence (Triandis, 2018), which are common subjects in cross-cultural management literature to understand the cultural context. These topics aim to comprehend the range of behavioral traits found in entire populations that can be easily grouped and organized within the context of unique national cultures. Yet, this method may pose issues as it has been frequently criticized for being essentialist and overly simplistic (Signorini et al., 2009). Therefore, our institutions and their members should prioritize understanding the diverse experiences and expectations that students may bring to the educational environment from their cultural perspective or context (Fitzpatrick, 2023) instead of assuming it based on the general knowledge we might have. We should understand and accept that context is a dynamic behavioral domain, and individuals find their way and influence through interaction and social construction, as Duranti & Goodwin (1992) stated. Before finishing this section, it is crucial to explore the concept of context, defined by Fitzpatrick (2023) as a complex construct influenced by sociocultural norms and historical elements. This discussion highlights the difference between proximal context, which pertains to immediate surroundings, and distal context, which includes personal interpretations and resources. This distinction is crucial for comprehending the intricate relationship between an individual's surroundings and their distinct reactions. Day (2008) emphasizes the significance of comprehending social relationships and group affiliations rather than material surroundings

in determining contextual relevance. The discussion delves into a "messo" level, exploring the impact of institutions within universities on educational experiences. Understanding the reciprocal connection between individuals' sociocultural integration and personal adaptation processes, influenced by institutional dynamics and power relations, significantly affects students' adjustment and experiences in higher education settings (Fitzpatrick, 2023). After thoroughly examining cultural and ethnic diversity in inclusive higher education, it is clear that educational institutions must adopt a multifaceted and sensitive approach to address the challenges and opportunities a diverse student population poses. Higher education institutions must adapt beyond traditional education models to support international students dealing with cultural shock, educational adjustment, and understanding of cultural contexts due to the substantial increase in their numbers. Institutions must actively work to create environments that recognize and appreciate diversity, fostering a feeling of belonging and inclusivity for all students. This requires a persistent endeavor to comprehend the distinct backgrounds and experiences that students bring to the educational environment and to adjust pedagogical strategies, support systems, and institutional policies accordingly. Universities can ensure they are not only centers of academic learning but also environments where cultural exchange and mutual respect thrive, thus preparing students to succeed in a multicultural world. The journey towards achieving truly inclusive higher education is ongoing and requires commitment, creativity, and collaboration from all stakeholders as we progress. By directly confronting these challenges and recognizing diversity as a valuable asset, higher education can take the lead in promoting a more inclusive and empathetic society.

This “understanding the challenges of inclusion” section has set the foundation for a thorough examination of the challenges that is important for inclusive higher education, supported by personal experiences, statistical data, and academic studies. The topic has covered migration, globalization, sexual orientation, gender identity, financial difficulties, disability, and cultural and ethnic diversity. The different parts emphasize the complex difficulties that students from various backgrounds encounter in higher education and also showcase the chances for institutions to promote a genuinely inclusive atmosphere. This thesis aims to explore the literature on inclusive education in order to connect theoretical frameworks with practical implementation. This work aims to inspire positive changes in university policies and practices by suggesting a comprehensive approach that goes beyond just meeting requirements to actively addressing the various needs of the student body. The ultimate objective is to create an academic environment where all students, regardless of their background, can flourish and

participate in a diverse and inclusive academic community. This thesis will progress to the literature review section to explore established theories, methodologies, practices, and historical accounts with current perspectives. It will then use this information to suggest practical strategies for improving inclusivity in higher education environments.

Chapter 2

Inclusive education: theoretical framework

Under the literature review, when examining the concept of inclusive education in higher education, it is crucial to compare and contrast historical accounts with current perspectives on inclusion. The development of inclusive education is characterized by a shift from exclusion to integration and, ultimately, inclusion (Ainscow, 2013). Traditionally, certain demographics, such as women and minority groups, faced substantial restrictions in obtaining higher education. These limitations were primarily caused by obstacles associated with gender, race, and socioeconomic status (Crosnoe, 2019). The mid-20th century witnessed a significant transformation as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s actively challenged racial segregation and promoted equal rights in multiple aspects of society, including the realm of education (Wilkins et al., n.d.). The legislative achievements of this period, particularly the Civil Rights Act of 1964, played a crucial role in dismantling the legal obstacles to desegregation within institutions of higher education (Leffler, n.d.). The Disability Rights Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, along with civil rights advocacy, brought about substantial transformation by advocating for equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities (*Disability History: The Disability Rights Movement (U.S. National Park Service)*, n.d.). Such examples as The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 were significant laws that established important frameworks to prevent prejudice against students with disabilities, thereby fostering a more inclusive educational setting. The latter half of the 20th century saw a growing recognition of the importance of diversity and inclusion, leading to the implementation of affirmative action policies aimed at improving the presence of marginalized populations in higher education institutions (Altbach, 2016). In recent years, educational institutions have made a deliberate endeavor to embrace a broader global outlook on inclusion (Schleicher, 2018). This entails promoting international partnerships, facilitating exchange initiatives, and nurturing a diverse student population, all of which collectively contribute to the establishment of a globally inclusive academic environment. The significance of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives has been emphasized in recent decades, as higher education institutions have implemented a wide range of programs and policies with the objective of fostering diversity (Gurin et al., 2002). Various initiatives are implemented to foster inclusive environments, encompassing affirmative action, targeted recruitment endeavors, and diversity training programs. The progress in technology has significantly enhanced the potential for inclusivity, as evidenced by the availability of online learning

platforms, easily accessible digital resources, and assistive technologies that cater to diverse learning needs and preferences (Sparks, 2019). Moreover, there is a growing recognition of mental health difficulties in the context of higher education, as institutions are implementing support services, education initiatives, and policies to cultivate an inclusive and nurturing academic atmosphere (Università di Padova, n.d.). During this era, there was a notable emphasis on the importance of Inclusive Pedagogies, which involved acknowledging and accommodating various learning styles and preferences. Methods like Universal Design for Learning (UDL) have played a crucial role in meeting the diverse requirements of students, demonstrating a transition towards a more comprehensive educational ideology (Burgstahler, 2013). The current scholarly conversation surrounding inclusion also encompasses the notion of Intersectionality, which acknowledges the complex interaction among race, gender, socioeconomic status, and various other factors (Varsik & Gorochevskij, 2023). This approach aims to foster a more comprehensive comprehension of student experiences. Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge the significant contribution of International Organizations and Frameworks, such as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in promoting inclusive education at a global level. The Bologna Process and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) place significant emphasis on the principles of mobility, recognition, and equitable education as fundamental pillars that steer endeavors toward fostering a more inclusive higher education environment.

2.1 FUNDAMENTAL THEORIES, METHODOLOGIES, PRACTICES, AND MODELS SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION.

Developing a universally accepted comprehensive model for an inclusive education framework is challenging. The challenge arises from the divergent definitions, interpretations, and implementations of the inclusive education framework in different countries and universities, as well as in response to the specific needs of their populations. However, we can initially define an inclusive education framework as a set of principles, guidelines, and practices aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their backgrounds, abilities, or characteristics, to succeed in education (National Council for Special Education, 2011). The theoretical framework of inclusion in higher education is based on theories, methodologies, practices, and models that help in understanding and implementing inclusive practices. Therefore, in this section, it is important to discuss and explain the theoretical underpinnings of inclusion, including key concepts and models that can help us to create our own model based

on our needs. We will examine fundamental theories and models that support the advancement of inclusion in higher education.

2.1.1 Models of Disability.

To promote inclusive education, it is crucial to comprehend various models of disability, such as the medical, social, and human rights models. People's attitudes towards disability influence their emotions towards disability. According to academic research and definitions provided by organizations like the United Nations (UN), we can categorize individual viewpoints on disability into primary disability models. **Medical Model of Disability:** in this model, disability is perceived and acknowledged as a pathological or medical impairment of the body or functioning. As a result, it is referred to as the medical model. The objective of this perspective is to restore our body system or functioning to a state that closely approximated as "normal" (Olkin, n.d.) if feasible. When discussing the state of our body systems or functioning, it is important to note that the medical model of disability categorizes disabilities based on how they deviate from what is considered a typical or normal condition (Nankervis, 2006). Pfeiffer (2001) posits that the medical model of disability is founded upon two primary tenets. One belief is that a person's disability can be diagnosed, treated, or rehabilitated using contemporary medical and technological advancements. Furthermore, it is believed that these aforementioned interventions should be conducted by proficient experts. Pfeiffer (2001) emphasizes that the medical model of disability was shaped by the perspectives of American sociologist Talcott Parsons. Parsons (1964) supported using a medical approach to address disorders, as he believed it would benefit both society and individuals. The connection between the medical model of disability and inclusive higher education is intricate and somewhat controversial from an academic standpoint. The medical model focuses on the individual's impairments and seeks to address or eliminate them through a medical approach. In higher education, this approach may result in accommodations aimed at remedying the student's disability to enable them to conform to the current educational frameworks. Nevertheless, this model frequently receives criticism for failing to tackle the systemic obstacles and mindsets that lead to the marginalization of students with disabilities. The medical model of disability has traditionally influenced accommodations in higher education. However, there is now a trend towards models that focus on inclusivity and systemic change to assist a variety of learners, demonstrating a more comprehensive view of disability that goes beyond medical diagnosis and treatment. **Social Model of Disability:** the social and rights movements of the 1960s focused on race, gender, sexuality, and disability, leading to a thorough examination of existing power,

knowledge, and rights disparities (Jackson, 2018). The movements aimed to challenge and redefine societal norms and structures, advocating for equality, recognition, and justice in different aspects of life. These movements also led to action and advocacy in many fields such as disability. The origins of The Social Model of Disability can be attributed to the collaborative efforts and advocacy of individuals with disabilities, particularly in the United Kingdom during the 1970s and 1980s. It is important to note that this model is not credited to a single individual (Social Model of Disability, 2021). This model was created in opposition to the conventional Medical Model of Disability, which perceives disability as an issue inherent to the individual that requires correction or medical intervention (Beaudry, 2016). The Social Model of Disability was greatly influenced by the efforts of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) and their supporters. In 1976, UPIAS released a pivotal document that clarified the difference between "impairment" and "disability," which was crucial for the development of the Social Model (Barnes & Mercer, 2004). This document distinguished impairment as an individual's physical or mental condition and disability as a result of societal barriers and attitudes that prevent the full participation of individuals with impairments in society. The social model of disability shifts the focus from an individual's impairment to the societal barriers that impede full participation and equality, contrasting with the medical model (Cigman, 2010). The model posits that individuals do not experience disability as a result of their impairments but rather due to the barriers that society, institutions, and the environment create and impose upon them (Social Model of Disability | Disability Charity Scope UK, n.d.). The social model has important implications in the realm of inclusive higher education. It encourages universities and colleges to reassess and revamp their physical spaces, curricula, teaching methods, and policies to eliminate obstacles to education for students with disabilities. The social model promotes the establishment of a learning environment that caters to various learning needs and styles rather than requiring students to conform to existing structures.

Human Rights Model of Disability: The human rights model of disability is based on fundamental human rights principles. Disability is seen as a natural part of human variation that should be honored and assisted in all its manifestations (Human Rights Model of Disability | Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, 2021). It highlights that individuals with disabilities have equal rights to those of others in society. Impairment should never be used as a reason to deny or restrict someone's rights under this model. This model supports societal changes and policies that promote full participation, equality, and non-discrimination for individuals with disabilities, which is in line with wider human rights frameworks and initiatives (Introducing the Human Rights Model of Disability, 2019). The human rights model of disability is closely

linked to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which was finalized in 2006. The CRPD is one of the nine international human rights treaties that were established by the United Nations. Its importance is emphasized by the fact that it was crafted with the direct participation of individuals with disabilities. This participation was essential in influencing the Convention's goal to promote increased equality for individuals with disabilities on a worldwide scale. The CRPD specifically targets and defines the responsibilities of governments worldwide. The primary objective is for these governments to recognize, promote, and protect the rights of individuals with disabilities, with a specific emphasis on ensuring their full participation in society on an equal footing with others. This document is a significant milestone in promoting the human rights approach to disability, highlighting the importance of considering disability from a rights-focused perspective rather than a medical or charitable one (Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD), 2006). The human rights model of disability stresses that individuals with disabilities have a fundamental right to access education (UNICEF, 2017). It promotes the removal of obstacles in higher education institutions to guarantee equitable involvement for students with disabilities. This method turns lodging into fundamental entitlements, in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), to promote comprehensive educational inclusiveness (Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD) | Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD), 2006). It encourages a transition to educational settings that prioritize diversity and support the rights of all students to actively participate in higher education. This encompasses accessible campus facilities, inclusive curriculum design, provision of appropriate accommodations, and supportive policies that acknowledge the rights and needs of students with disabilities. When examining disability models and their relationship to inclusive higher education, it becomes clear that the development of these models is not merely an academic endeavor but a vital process in comprehending how to make higher education accessible and fair for everyone. The shift from the medical to the social, and ultimately to the human rights model, represents a larger societal change in acknowledging diversity not as a problem to be controlled but as a valuable asset to be embraced. Each model has played a role in redefining inclusivity in higher education, going beyond just providing physical access to creating a learning environment where all students, regardless of their abilities, are respected and given assistance. Gaining comprehension of these models enables educators, policymakers, and institutions to thoroughly analyze and dismantle the obstacles that have traditionally prevented certain individuals from fully engaging in higher education. This comprehension is

not solely theoretical but rather a practical framework for establishing inclusive educational environments that honor diversity, advocate for equality, and enhance the educational journey for all individuals. By adopting the teachings of these exemplars, higher education can take the lead in constructing a society that is more encompassing and equitable.

2.1.2 Universal Design for Learning.

When considering inclusion in the university or educational context, it is essential to examine the concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) under the inclusive education framework. UDL, or Universal Design for Learning, is a concept that emphasizes the need to create educational materials and environments that can effectively cater to a wide range of learning styles and abilities right from the beginning. The focus is on offering various methods of presenting information, encouraging active participation, and allowing different ways of expressing knowledge to cater to the requirements of every student (Universal Design for Learning: Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners, 2023). Within the realm of higher education, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) promotes the creation of inclusive course structures that offer advantages to all individuals, irrespective of their abilities or background. Comprehending the UDL can assist educational organizations and their members in enhancing educational practices for students from diverse backgrounds. This is because it equips educators with the necessary abilities to create inclusive learning environments by examining UDL concepts, implementation methods, and design considerations (Sharma et al., 2023). The literature indicates that achieving equal access to education, enhancing student participation, and implementing flexible assessment techniques are crucial aspects of inclusive education (Schuelka, 2018). Consequently, comprehending the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) underscores the significance of enabling students to express themselves through diverse means and fostering motivation among all students. Defining what UDL is not can facilitate a clear understanding. The term "universal" can be deceptive, as it implies a singular approach to educating all students. UDL encompasses a wide range of instructional strategies designed to remove barriers to learning, thus providing every student with the opportunity to succeed. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is advantageous for every student. The main objective is to create adaptable learning environments that are tailored to address the unique requirements and abilities of every student (Universal Design for Learning: Meeting the Needs of All Students | Reading Rockets, n.d.). According to the theory, it is essential to comprehend the three fundamental principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in order to achieve inclusive education (Sharma et al., 2023). The principles encompassed are Representation,

Action and Expression, and Engagement. UDL advocates for the presentation of information in multiple formats in accordance with the principle of Representation. Textbooks typically consist of visual and textual elements. However, providing materials in various formats, such as text, audio, video, and hands-on learning, enables students to access content in a manner that aligns with their individual learning abilities and requirements. Furthermore, the principle of Action and Expression suggests the importance of offering students a range of opportunities to interact with the subject matter and a variety of choices for showcasing their comprehension. For instance, students have the option to select a pencil-and-paper examination, give an oral presentation, undergo an oral examination, or engage in a collaborative project. This approach not only amplifies student involvement and drive but also enables them to articulate their comprehension in manners that hold significance for them. Ultimately, the principle of Engagement urges educators to discover various approaches to inspire students. Facilitating student autonomy and allocating assignments that are applicable to their personal experiences are strategies to sustain student engagement. Additional efficacious tactics encompass implementing gamification in skill-building exercises and providing students with opportunities for physical mobility within the classroom. This principle seeks to cultivate learner motivation, engaged participation, and a favorable emotional bond with the learning process. In summary, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an all-encompassing educational approach that aims to promote inclusive learning environments. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) accommodates students with diverse learning preferences, capabilities, and challenges by providing a range of information presentation methods, opportunities for different modes of action and expression, and fostering active engagement (Sharma et al., 2023). Therefore, it serves as a crucial tool for educators to meet the diverse needs of students from various backgrounds, effectively addressing the challenges and considerations mentioned earlier, such as disabilities, sexual orientation, and migration backgrounds, among others.

2.1.3 Critical Pedagogy.

Another significant theoretical framework that should be acknowledged within the context of inclusive education is Critical pedagogy. This theory or approach is informed by the contributions of Paulo Freire (1973). The program centers on the power dynamics inherent in education and seeks to empower students to critically analyze and actively address various societal issues. Within the realm of higher education, critical pedagogy plays a crucial role in fostering inclusivity through the promotion of dialogue, the questioning of established power dynamics, and the recognition of a wide range of perspectives. Freire (1973) emphasizes a

specific approach to address the role of critical understanding in eradicating deprivation and injustice from societies. Prior to delving further into Critical Pedagogy, it is crucial to note that Freire's approach is a manifestation of the ideas and principles of the Frankfurt School in the field of education. This approach originated in Europe and was subsequently expanded upon by numerous theorists (Mahmoudi et al., 2014). According to Freire's approach, educational institutions should serve as environments that prioritize social change and evolution (Freire, 1973). Schools should not only cultivate the development of critical thinking skills in students, but they should also impart knowledge on how to effectively modify and influence their immediate surroundings (Uddin, 2019). As it is also discussed by Mahmoudi et al. (2014), critical pedagogy aims to foster comprehensive growth in students' lives. This approach encourages them to challenge existing theories and explore the relationship between societal structures and their educational content. Through active engagement, students deepen their understanding of their societal roles and are equipped to contribute positively towards societal improvement. The ultimate objective is to empower students to address and eliminate future challenges, inequalities, and injustices. A primary aim of this theory is to support student empowerment, guiding them toward self-awareness and self-actualization. This empowerment enables students to use their educational experiences to transform challenging circumstances into improved conditions. Through this process, education becomes a powerful tool for positive change (Aybar & Kantarcı Bingöl, 2023). Freire (1973) critiqued conventional education systems for their role in maintaining control over individuals and suppressing cultural expression. His pioneering contributions to educational theory positioned him as a forerunner in the field of critical pedagogy. Freire argued that education's primary purpose should be to cultivate critical consciousness, thereby empowering individuals to actively participate in their own development. He highlighted that traditional education often overlooks critical factors such as gender, age, race, and socio-political constraints. Freire's approach emphasized the importance of addressing these topics, which is crucial for achieving inclusive education. Advocating for a shift from traditional methods, he proposed an education system that prioritizes critical thinking, encourages dialogue, and supports cooperative learning, aiming to transform the educational landscape into one that is more engaging and inclusive. Ultimately, critical pedagogy, as defined by Paulo Freire and further developed by multiple theorists, plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive higher education. This theoretical framework prioritizes the acknowledgment and resolution of power dynamics in educational environments in order to cultivate an inclusive culture. Critical pedagogy seeks to empower students by fostering critical thinking, dialogue, and an appreciation for diverse perspectives, enabling them to

actively address and reshape societal concerns. Freire's criticism of conventional educational systems for their discriminatory practices emphasizes the need for an education that recognizes and addresses the complexities of gender, race, age, and socio-political influences. Implementing critical pedagogy in higher education not only fosters the holistic growth of students but also empowers them with the means to actively participate in societal transformation. Hence, the adoption of critical pedagogy is crucial for educational institutions aiming to foster an atmosphere of parity, empowerment, and societal fairness, thereby establishing it as a fundamental principle for attaining genuine inclusiveness in higher education.

2.1.4 Inclusive Excellence.

Inclusive excellence is a crucial concept in discussions related to the topic of inclusive education in higher education. This concept emphasizes the critical role of diversity and inclusion in achieving educational excellence, particularly within the realm of higher education. It encourages institutions to focus not just on expanding diversity but also on creating an inclusive culture that values and leverages diverse perspectives to enhance the learning environment. However, how is inclusive excellence precisely defined, and what is its historical background? The concept of Inclusive Excellence, which originated in the early 2000s and was significantly shaped by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), emerged primarily in the context of higher education (Clayton-Pedersen & Clayton-Pedersen, 2008). It originated as part of a broader initiative aimed at enhancing and reshaping the conversation around diversity and inclusivity within higher education (Inclusive Excellence, n.d.). According to Williams et al. (2005), the AAC&U's efforts on Inclusive Excellence aimed to go beyond conventional approaches to diversity that primarily emphasized enrollment figures and programmatic initiatives. Instead, its objective was to incorporate inclusivity and diversity into the fundamental elements of institutional operation, encompassing academic excellence, organizational culture, and community engagement. This theory by AAC&U (2005), aims to prioritize three key aspects: diversity, equity, and inclusion. The main objective of the framework is to effectively integrate these elements. In this model, diversity ought to occupy a pivotal role in organizations' practical initiatives, serving as a fundamental aspect of their operations (Inclusive Excellence, n.d.). According to this model, the implementation of Inclusive Excellence concepts will facilitate the establishment of an improved educational environment. Integrating diversity within the operational frameworks of an organization, such as through its recruitment and hiring strategies, training initiatives, and

management systems and protocols, with a focused commitment to inclusion and equity, is crucial for propelling the organization toward achieving excellence (Williams et al., 2005). The Inclusive Excellence model comprises five dimensions: Access & Success, Climate & Intergroup Relations, Education & Scholarship, Infrastructure & Investment, and Community & Partnership. According to reports (Inclusive Excellence, n.d.; Milem et al., 2005), the model incorporates multiple dimensions that align with particular areas for implementing initiatives centered on diversity, equity, and inclusion. These efforts aim to achieve excellence across social, academic, professional, and institutional domains. These efforts align with the framework of inclusive education. The Access & Success dimension of a university's operations is dedicated to the recruitment and retention of faculty, staff, and students. It functions as a pipeline for the university. The Climate & Intergroup Relations dimension focuses on the perceptions and attitudes of community members toward their work environment. The Education & Scholarship refers to the university activities that encompass curriculum development and research. It is considered the central focus of the university's mission. The Infrastructure & Investment refers to the aspect of a university that encompasses the physical environment and operational processes, including structures, accountability, housing, and other related factors. The Community & Partnership dimension within the Inclusive Excellence framework highlights the importance of higher education institutions engaging actively with outside communities and forming partnerships, prioritizing innovation as a key objective (Inclusive Excellence, n.d.). According to multiple researchers (Milem, 2003; Williams et al., 2005; Milem et al., 2005), this framework offers numerous advantages in an academic setting. The benefits can be summarized as enhanced academic achievements, enhanced creativity, originality, critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, increased exposure to diversity, cultural consciousness, and dedication to issues of fairness, and greater levels of civic participation and a more knowledgeable population. Ultimately, the Inclusive Excellence framework is a fundamental aspect of promoting a comprehensive and unified approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education. This approach goes beyond conventional diversity efforts that only consider demographic metrics and programmatic initiatives. It emphasizes the importance of integrating these essential elements into the core of an institution's operational, academic, and community-engaged activities. This discussion emphasizes the comprehensive nature of Inclusive Excellence in creating an educational environment that is diverse, inclusive, and equitable. It does so by focusing on five dimensions of the framework: Access & Success, Climate & Intergroup Relations, Education & Scholarship, Infrastructure & Investment, and Community & Partnership. This approach not

only improves academic performance, fosters creativity, and encourages civic engagement but also develops a population that is more aware of different cultures and has a sense of fairness. Hence, Inclusive Excellence is not merely a framework but rather a fundamental transformation aimed at attaining genuine excellence in education. It recognizes that diversity and inclusion are critical to the vibrancy, relevance, and effectiveness of institutions of higher education. The alignment with the inclusive higher education framework demonstrates a dedication to equipping students, faculty, and staff to excel in and make valuable contributions to a diverse and interconnected global society.

2.1.5 Social Identity Theories.

When explaining the inclusive higher education framework, it is crucial to address social identity theories. The Tajfel Social Identity Theory, Cass Identity Model, and Chickering's Theory of Identity Development highlight the significance of comprehending the process by which individuals form their social identities. Within the realm of higher education, the act of acknowledging and providing assistance to students as they progress through different phases of their personal identity formation plays a crucial role in fostering an all-encompassing campus environment. Social Identity Theory, this theory was developed and proposed by Tajfel and his colleagues in the field of social psychology (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1978). According to the social identity theory, a group is defined as a collection of individuals who self-identify as members of a particular social group and adopt the group's social identity. According to the theory, people use attributes that highlight similarities within a group and differences between groups. Tajfel's Social Identity Theory is highly relevant for comprehending and advancing inclusivity in higher education frameworks. According to the theory, individuals obtain a substantial portion of their self-concept from their affiliation with social groups, which in turn affects their behavior towards other groups and people (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1978). Understanding students' group membership and their intergroup relationships can help universities to create a more inclusive environment. So, understanding this theory while working on diversity and inclusion can help us in several ways, such as group identification and belonging, understanding and reducing prejudice, promoting diversity and inclusion, and enhancing group dynamics and collaboration. Cass Identity Model Vivienne Cass is the creator of the Cass Identity Model. This theory is a theoretical framework consisting of six stages that explain the process of identity development, with a specific emphasis on the formation of a homosexual identity. While Cass (1979) originally developed the theory to comprehend the experiences of individuals as they accept their sexual orientation, its principles

can be widely utilized to explore different aspects of identity development, including within the realm of inclusive higher education. The theory consists of six stages: confusion, comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride, and synthesis. According to Cass (1979), Confusion refers to the state of acknowledging emotions and attractions that may deviate from established societal standards. The comparison involves acknowledging that one's emotions may suggest a homosexual inclination, resulting in a feeling of being socially isolated. Tolerance involves acknowledging and embracing the potential for homosexuality while actively seeking out individuals who share similar sexual orientations. Acceptance refers to the complete acknowledgment and embracing of one's sexual orientation, specifically a homosexual identity, with a growing level of commitment. Pride refers to the act of feeling a sense of satisfaction and self-worth in relation to one's sexual orientation, specifically as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Lastly, synthesis refers to the process of incorporating one's sexual orientation into a more comprehensive understanding of oneself, thereby attaining a well-rounded personal identity. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the Cass Identity Model can provide us with valuable insights, including comprehension of identity development, facilitation of inclusivity and support, mitigation of stigma and discrimination, and promotion of empathy and allyship. This theory is particularly significant in relation to the impact of sexual orientation on inclusive higher education.

Chickering's Theory of Identity Development, Chickering's Theory of Identity Development was initially introduced by Arthur Chickering in 1969. This theory delineates seven vectors of personal growth that college students commonly transit as they progress. The vectors discussed by Chickering (1969) are not exclusively linear, but rather they describe processes. Based on the theory, students progress through different stages at their own speed, sometimes going back to previous stages when they face new experiences and challenges (Chickering, 1969). The seven vectors include developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and finally developing integrity. According to the theory (Chickering, 1969), we can succinctly define these vectors as follows. Developing competence entails the improvement of cognitive, physical, and social abilities. The process of managing emotions involves students acquiring the ability to comprehend, acknowledge, and proficiently regulate their emotions. The concept of Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence emphasizes the development of self-reliance while acknowledging the significance of interdependence and cooperation with others. The focus of Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships is on cultivating profound and significant connections that surpass surface-level interactions. This involves valuing diversity and

effectively handling conflicts. Developing Identity is a fundamental aspect in which students cultivate their understanding of self in multiple aspects, such as body image, gender identity, and cultural background. Developing Purpose is the catalyst through which students gain insight into their life aspirations, encompassing their professional objectives, personal passions, and core principles. The process of developing integrity involves ensuring that one's actions are in line with their deeply held values, which can be further categorized into humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. Chickering's Theory of Identity Development underscores a holistic approach to student growth that closely aligns with the objectives of inclusive higher education. Institutions can cultivate environments that promote academic success, personal development, well-being, and a sense of belonging for all students by prioritizing the holistic needs of each individual and acknowledging the significance of their diverse identities and experiences. Ultimately, the examination of social identity theories such as Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, Cass's Identity Model, and Chickering's Theory of Identity Development offers a thorough basis for comprehending and improving inclusivity in higher education. These theories emphasize the significance of acknowledging and promoting the complex process of identity formation among students. By incorporating these theoretical understandings, higher education institutions can enhance their ability to establish environments that not only recognize but also embrace the variety of student identities. This approach not only cultivates a feeling of inclusion and approval among students but also equips them with a worldwide community where compassion, comprehension, and variety are esteemed. Incorporating social identity theories into an inclusive higher education framework is crucial for fostering personal development, diminishing prejudice, and enriching the educational journey for all students. This, in turn, contributes to a more inclusive, fair, and vibrant academic community.

2.1.6 Intersectionality.

The term "intersectionality" was introduced to the field by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Intersectionality emphasizes the interrelatedness of social categories, such as race, gender, and class. In the realm of higher education, it is important to understand it because an intersectional approach acknowledges that students' experiences are influenced by various identities and promotes inclusive policies that take into account these intersections. Crenshaw (1989) formulated her concept in opposition to the narrow-minded perception of individuals. Originally, she used the term to explore the various and overlapping kinds of bias that African-American women face in the United States. Intersectionality is now widely utilized in social

sciences and various subjects. The rationale behind her theory's initial emphasis on the challenges faced by African-American women stems from the fact that this specific demographic had to confront a difficult choice between prioritizing either their racial or gender identity despite experiencing discrimination that arose from the intersection of these two identities (Bešić, 2020). Therefore, when examining discrimination and an individual's encounter with it, it is important to also take into account variations and interactions within groups rather than focusing solely on one aspect (Crenshaw, 1989). From learning about intersectionality, we can say that these discrete forms of discrimination, such as sexism, ableism, and racism, should be perceived as an interconnected system that produces discrimination, such as oppression. Intersectionality suggests that people have various overlapping identities. However, it shouldn't just be seen as a nuanced view of someone's personal identity. It further elucidates the idea of individuality within a group. It is crucial to acknowledge that there are distinctions among these groups and within each individual group (Crenshaw, 1989). The utilization of intersectionality has predominantly been confined to the realm of gender studies (Nash 2008). Nevertheless, other disciplines have incorporated this subject into their investigations (Jiménez-Castellanos and García 2017). Within the realm of inclusive education, certain scholars are employing the concept of intersectionality. However, there are still those who view it as a prospective outlook for the future (Artiles, Dorn, and Bal 2016). Intersectionality in education helps analyze how various identities, such as gender, disability, migrant status, race, and socioeconomic status, converge for each student. It also explores how these identities interact with the responses and actions of schools (Grant and Zwier, 2011). This approach elucidates the reasons behind the varying levels of exclusion experienced by certain students (Bešić, 2020). Schools frequently focus on a single facet of a student's identity, disregarding the intricate interaction of multiple identities (Waitoller and Kozleski, 2013). Ultimately, it can be asserted that higher education institutions can enhance their comprehension and resolution of the complex obstacles encountered by their community members by employing an intersectional perspective. This framework promotes the idea that educators and policymakers should take into account the different ways in which people enter and go through higher education. It also emphasizes the importance of creating inclusive environments that appreciate and respect diversity. It facilitates the creation of policies and practices that tackle systemic inequalities, improve academic achievement, and cultivate an inclusive campus culture. Intersectionality plays a vital role in higher education by promoting social justice, fostering diversity and inclusion, and improving the educational experiences and

results for all students, particularly those from underrepresented and marginalized communities.

2.1.7 Ecological Systems Theory.

While the literature did not provide specific details about the emphasis on inclusive education, the utilization of Ecological systems theory in this context suggests a more comprehensive and sophisticated approach to comprehending and tackling the different needs of students in higher education environments. Therefore, ecological systems theory is another significant theory that contributes to the framework of inclusive higher education to create a comprehensive perspective. Urie Bronfenbrenner is the developer of this theory. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the theory posits that a child's development is influenced by their interactions within a network of relationships in their surrounding environment. The environment is structured in several intricate "levels," each impacting the child's growth and development. Ecological systems theory highlights the impact of different systems, namely the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The main emphasis is on the personal growth of an individual. In the realm of higher education, this theory promotes the comprehension and resolution of the influence exerted by various systems on students' experiences and academic achievements. We can discuss and define the different systems as follows (Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The microsystem refers to the immediate environments in which an individual directly interacts. These environments can include family, peers, and educational settings. Inclusion in higher education entails examining how the dynamics within the classroom, relationships between teachers and students, and interactions among peers impact the learning experiences of students with varying needs. The mesosystem refers to the layer that encompasses the interconnections between the microsystems. As previously stated, these microsystems can include the connection between family environments and educational institutions. Regarding inclusive education, it is worth considering the impact of parental attitudes and involvement with schools on the educational achievements and inclusion of their children. The exosystem refers to a system that encompasses larger social environments. These wider societal contexts may not directly involve the individual, but they still influence their development. Examples of this include workplaces that cater to parents and the current educational policy environment. Regarding inclusive higher education, the main focus is on policies and practices that impact accessibility, accommodations, and support services. The macrosystem refers to the layer that encompasses the broad cultural and societal norms, values, and beliefs that influence the contexts in which the other systems function. Analyzing inclusive

higher education from this perspective involves evaluating how societal attitudes toward diversity, equity, and inclusion influence the development of supportive educational settings. The chronosystem refers to the system that encompasses the dimension of time and examines how changes over time impact and are influenced by the individual. Within the realm of higher education, this could entail analyzing the influence of changing societal norms and policies on the inclusiveness of educational practices and environments. While there is a lack of literature specifically addressing the significance of the relationship between ecological systems theory and inclusive higher education, there is existing literature that examines the connection between Ecological Systems Theory and higher education. A noteworthy illustration is the investigation conducted by Kitchen et al. (2019). Their work primarily centers on the application of their research to comprehend and improve the experiences of college students. Their research focuses on the creation and application of the Ecological Systems Interview Tool, which is designed to collect data pertaining to ecological systems theory and various factors such as individual characteristics, social interactions, environmental context, and the passage of time. This tool aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of college students' experiences and growth throughout their educational journey. This approach is especially applicable to inclusive higher education because it takes into account the diverse backgrounds of students and the different environments they engage with over time. It emphasizes the connection between students' individual traits and the environments they are in, which influences their experiences and results. The research in this publication highlights the importance of utilizing ecological systems theory to develop a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of students' college experiences (Kitchen et al., 2019). This understanding can aid in promoting more inclusive practices in higher education. Another example from the literature is the investigation that explores Ecological Systems Theory and Inclusive Education (Anderson et al., 2014). The researchers aim to demonstrate the interaction between individual characteristics and environmental factors in different systemic layers and how they influence educational experiences and outcomes by utilizing Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory in the context of education (Anderson et al., 2014). They advocated for the practicality of the theory in comprehending and promoting inclusive education by examining the complex interconnections and impacts involved. The authors analyzed Bronfenbrenner's hierarchical environmental systems and then applied these concepts to inclusive education. They focused on the learner and examined the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. Their research emphasizes the interdependence of these systems and their influence on engagement, success, and significance within an

inclusive educational framework. Overall, the utilization of Ecological Systems Theory in inclusive higher education provides a sophisticated and all-encompassing structure for comprehending the various factors that impact student development and learning. This theory examines the different environmental systems, ranging from the immediate to the societal, in order to reveal the important interconnections that influence educational experiences and results. The study and implementation of this theory in higher education emphasize the significance of taking into account the entire ecosystem surrounding students advocating for policies and practices that recognize and tackle these various influences. The research conducted by Kitchen et al. (2019) and Anderson et al. (2014) provides evidence of how Ecological Systems Theory can improve our understanding of the intricate factors involved in creating inclusive educational environments. This statement promotes the idea that educators, policymakers, and researchers should take a comprehensive approach, making sure that their interventions and strategies are well-suited to the different circumstances that impact students' academic progress. Incorporating this all-encompassing strategy can ultimately result in more efficient and equitable educational methods customized to suit the distinct requirements and situations of every student. As a result, their learning encounters will be enhanced, and they will be better equipped to succeed in higher education environments.

2.1.8 Community of Practice (CoP).

This is another crucial subject that we should address in order to comprehend the theoretical framework of inclusive education. The concept of Community of Practice (CoP) is crucial for comprehending the dynamics of learning and knowledge dissemination in diverse contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998), such as education. The theory of Community of Practice (CoP), developed by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in the early 1990s, highlights learning as a social process. It emphasizes that individuals learn by participating in communal activities, sharing their experiences, and collectively acquiring knowledge within a shared domain of interest. According to the theory (Wenger, 1998), this concept comprises three essential elements that delineate a Community of Practice (CoP). The domain element refers to the specific area or subject that is of common interest or relevance. The community element refers to a collective of individuals who participate in collaborative activities and discussions. Lastly, the practice element refers to the collective repertoire of resources, experiences, stories, tools, and other related assets. The significance of Community of Practice (CoP) in relation to inclusive higher education lies in its fundamental principle of social learning and collaboration. Inclusive higher education seeks to ensure fair and equal access to learning opportunities for

all students, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds, abilities, or disabilities (The Power of Letting Children Learn Together, 2019). The recent publication by Adams et al. (2023) is a comprehensive and informative book that elucidates the significance of Communities of Practice (CoPs) in the context of inclusive education. The roles that Communities of Practice (CoPs) play in supporting inclusivity in higher education are outlined. Adams et al. (2023) outline in their publication that Communities of Practice (CoPs) have six main roles in promoting inclusivity in higher education. (1) Facilitating Resource Sharing and Collective Goal Achievement: Communities of Practice (CoPs) provide a forum for educators, students, and leaders to collaborate, exchange resources, and work together to accomplish shared objectives. The collaborative environment facilitates the aggregation of varied perspectives and approaches, thereby enriching the educational experience for all participants, particularly those belonging to marginalized communities. (2) Encouraging Group Problem-Solving and Evaluation of Practices: CoPs utilize collaboration and dialogue to involve members in the resolution of common problems and the critical assessment of practices. This process not only facilitates the creation of inventive solutions but also cultivates a culture of ongoing enhancement and thoughtful examination. (3) Promoting Emergent Learning: Communities of Practice (CoPs) are characterized by their dynamic nature, constantly evolving to meet the changing needs and incorporate the valuable contributions of their members. The adaptability of the community enables emergent learning, which involves the development of new understanding and insights through interactions, fostering a more inclusive and responsive educational environment. (4) Centering Equity, Digital Technologies, and Continuous Improvement: The playbook highlights the significance of deliberately integrating equity, digital technologies, and continuous improvement into Communities of Practice (CoPs). By engaging in this practice, Communities of Practice (CoPs) can guarantee a thoughtful and easily approachable procedure that fosters the participation of all members of the community, thereby promoting greater inclusivity and equity in higher education. (5) Supporting Professional Development and Inclusive Teaching Practices: Communities of Practice (CoPs) function as a platform for enhancing professional growth, enabling educators to acquire knowledge and put into practice inclusive teaching methodologies. By exchanging experiences and strategies within the community, we can spread effective approaches to inclusivity throughout the institution. (6) Creating a Sense of Belonging and Community: Communities of Practice (CoPs) cultivate a feeling of affiliation and friendship among participants, which is essential for creating an all-encompassing educational setting. By valuing and actively involving the varied viewpoints of all participants, CoPs promote social integration and provide

support for both students and educators. The playbook authored by Adams et al. in 2023 presents a thorough framework for conceptualizing, creating, guiding, assessing, and maintaining Communities of Practice (CoPs), with a particular emphasis on promoting inclusivity and equity. This strategy guarantees that Communities of Practice (CoPs) in higher education can actively contribute to developing more inclusive and supportive learning environments for all students, especially marginalized and underrepresented groups. Ultimately, Communities of Practice (CoPs) play a crucial and irreplaceable role in promoting inclusive higher education. CoPs contribute directly to the creation of an inclusive learning environment by prioritizing social learning, collaboration, and the exchange of diverse perspectives and experiences. The playbook authored by Adams et al. (2023) not only sheds light on the substantial influence that Communities of Practice (CoPs) can have on promoting inclusivity in higher education but also offers a thorough guide for successfully establishing and maintaining these communities. By adopting the perspective of Communities of Practice (CoPs), educators, administrators, and students gain the necessary resources to collectively address the obstacles of inclusivity, guaranteeing that the educational environment is not only varied in its participants but fair in its chances for education and development. As we progress, the principles and practices described in the concept of Communities of Practice (CoPs) should act as a guiding light for institutions aiming to achieve the complete potential of inclusive higher education, where every student, irrespective of their background, has the chance to flourish.

2.1.9 Postcolonial Theory and Multicultural Education.

The next and final framework we will discuss is Postcolonial Theory and Multicultural Education. Although these concepts are separate, they are still interrelated frameworks that tackle matters of diversity, inequality, and the lasting effects of colonialism in educational settings. Postcolonial Theory is a field of study that aims to analyze and address the cultural effects of colonialism and imperialism. It specifically examines the historical and socio-political impacts on regions known as the global South. It offers a critical analysis of the prevailing Western narratives and power hierarchies that have marginalized perspectives from non-Western cultures. Its aim is to empower the voices and knowledge systems of previously colonized societies. Postcolonial Theory in education promotes curricula that acknowledge the contributions and viewpoints of all cultures, advocating for a more equitable comprehension of global history, literature, and social studies that do not favor Western perspectives (Barongo-Muweke, 2016). Multicultural Education prioritizes the integration and portrayal of various

cultural, ethnic, and racial groups in the educational curriculum and practices. The objective is to foster fairness, impartiality, and admiration among students of diverse backgrounds, acknowledging and appreciating their cultural disparities as valuable assets rather than obstacles to education. Multicultural Education seeks to provide students with the essential skills and knowledge required for success in a globally diverse society (*The Importance of Multicultural Education*, 2001). It promotes an atmosphere of empathy, tolerance, and equality while actively addressing and diminishing racism and bias (Banks & Banks, 2019). Both of these frameworks share the objective of developing educational systems that are more inclusive and equitable, taking into account and valuing the diversity of the global population. They promote the incorporation of various viewpoints into the curriculum, teaching methods, and educational policies, fostering an appreciation for the intricate connections between culture, power, and history in shaping societies and knowledge. Several crucial points emerge as highly pertinent to the connection and significance of Postcolonial Theory and Multicultural Education to inclusive higher education policies. The book authored by Akkari & Radhouane (2022) is an exceptional resource for examining and condensing various crucial aspects. Their work emphasizes five primary subjects regarding the correlation and importance of Postcolonial Theory and Multicultural Education to inclusive higher education policies. (1) Historical and Theoretical Foundations of Intercultural Approaches in Education: Their research underscores the importance of recognizing and affirming cultural diversity within educational systems (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022). This challenges the conventional ethnocentric viewpoint of education, which sought cultural uniformity, and instead promotes the incorporation of varied voices and perspectives. This transition is pivotal for the development of inclusive higher education policies that uphold and incorporate a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. (2) The Role of International Organizations: The significance of assuming responsibility and demonstrating diligence is emphasized by international organizations (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022). The initiatives undertaken by UNESCO and the Council of Europe, exemplified by the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, showcase global recognition of the importance of integrating diverse cultural perspectives into education. These endeavors highlight the interdependence between Postcolonial Theory and Multicultural Education in shaping comprehensive educational policies that acknowledge past injustices and prioritize fairness and diversity. (3) Key Concepts for Intercultural Approaches: The book (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022) explores fundamental concepts, including culture, cultural identity, ethnocentrism, cultural relativism, equality, difference, social justice, assimilation, integration, and recognition. Comprehending these principles is essential for implementing

Postcolonial Theory and Multicultural Education in higher education policies. They offer a conceptual framework for evaluating current methodologies and developing educational plans that encompass diverse viewpoints and reflect a global outlook. (4) Global Citizenship Education: The authors (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022) emphasize the significance of global citizenship education in preparing students to effectively address intricate global challenges, underscoring the need to integrate Postcolonial Theory and Multicultural Education into higher education. The pedagogical approach proposed emphasizes the importance of diversity, promotes a sense of global responsibility, and equips students to make positive contributions to a global society. This aligns with other theoretical concepts we have previously discussed, such as Critical Pedagogy. (5) The Role of the Teacher in Promoting Intercultural Approaches: The conversation regarding altering teachers' viewpoints on language and cultural diversity, along with the illustration of culturally relevant instruction, emphasizes the tangible consequences of incorporating Postcolonial Theory and Multicultural Education into higher education. Teachers have a vital role in carrying out inclusive policies and curricula, so it is important to involve them in discussions about educational reform and professional development that specifically target intercultural competence (Akkari & Radhouane, 2022). These points demonstrate the complex connection between postcolonial theory and multicultural education and the influence of these theories on the development of inclusive higher education policies. Through the analysis of the lasting impacts of colonialism and the questioning of Eurocentric viewpoints, higher education has the potential to promote the incorporation of a wide range of voices, the removal of colonial influences from curricula, and the cultivation of a more comprehensive approach that encompasses global perspectives.

Overall, we can conclude the literature review section by remembering why we talked about these concepts. This thorough analysis highlights the complex and diverse nature of inclusive higher education. It emphasizes the crucial role of historical and current movements, as well as different theories and models, in creating environments that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. By analyzing the intricacies of disability models and delving into the principles of Universal Design for Learning, Critical Pedagogy, Inclusive Excellence, and other related frameworks, we can enhance our comprehension of how to establish a more accessible, inclusive, and fair academic environment. Through the integration of theoretical insights and practical applications, these models provide guidance for efforts to dismantle systemic barriers and cultivate an educational ethos that recognizes and uplifts every student. Understanding the intricate nature of identity and the interconnectedness of personal experiences enhances this

effort, guaranteeing that policies and practices are responsive to the diverse ways in which societal systems affect educational opportunities. By adhering to these fundamental theories and models, higher education institutions can set a positive example by fostering a learning environment that not only embraces diversity but also actively recognizes it as a valuable asset that promotes strength and innovation. By doing this, they establish the foundation for a future in which inclusivity is not just a goal but a universally accepted norm. This confirms the influential impact of education in shaping a fairer and more inclusive society. In conclusion, we say that these theoretical frameworks collectively enhance comprehension and progress in the field of inclusion in higher education. Implementing inclusive practices necessitates a sophisticated approach that incorporates these theories, taking into account the intricate interplay of individual, social, cultural, and institutional factors within higher education.

Chapter 3

Development and validation of a higher education training for university students

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Even though most of the research literature focuses on teachers' and university staff's attitudes and perspectives, presenting evidence from the literature is crucial in demonstrating the positive effects of a diversity and inclusion perspective on learning outcomes, innovation, and social cohesion. The advantages of this viewpoint in academic settings are strongly substantiated by comprehensive research and literature. The following are fundamental elements substantiated by scholarly evidence: The study "Inclusive Didactic in Higher Education (IHET): A Pilot Project to Promote Inclusion in an Italian University" by Santilli (in press) presents compelling evidence on the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion training programs in higher education. Through a pre-and post-test analysis, the intervention demonstrated a statistically significant increase in positive attitudes toward inclusion among university staff. This suggests that such training programs can profoundly impact learning environments by fostering inclusivity, thereby enhancing learning outcomes and social cohesion. Furthermore, the qualitative analysis revealed a broadened understanding of inclusion, underscoring the importance of inclusive policies and practices in stimulating innovation within educational settings (Santilli, in press). These findings advocate for the integration of diversity and inclusion perspectives into educational strategies to promote equitable learning opportunities and contribute to the formation of cohesive, innovative societies. The study by Avramidis et al. (2000), titled "A Survey into Mainstream Teachers' Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Children with Special Educational Needs in the Ordinary School in one Local Education Authority," provides empirical evidence of the positive impact of inclusive education training on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The research found that teachers with active experience in implementing inclusive programs exhibited significantly more positive attitudes compared to their counterparts from randomly selected. Furthermore, teachers who underwent university-based professional development displayed a more positive stance on inclusion than those without any training, with significant differences observed across cognitive, affective, and conative components of attitude. These findings underline the importance of experiential learning and comprehensive training in fostering supportive attitudes toward inclusive education among teachers, highlighting the potential for such interventions to enhance educational practices and promote equity and inclusivity in learning

environments (Avramidis et al., 2000). The research "The Influence of Racial Identity on White Students' Perceptions of African American Faculty" by Parker and Neville (2019) investigates how white college students' perceptions of African American professors are shaped by their own racial identity development. This study utilizes racial identity development and critical race theory frameworks to explore the complex dynamics at play. The findings reveal that students with limited racial consciousness or those adhering to colorblind ideologies often fail to recognize the impact of race in their interactions, leading to a range of responses from acceptance to discomfort and even resistance toward African American faculty. These reactions are significantly influenced by the students' levels of racial identity development, highlighting the pervasive influence of societal racism and the need for educational environments to actively address and challenge racial biases. The study underscores the critical role that higher education institutions play in facilitating meaningful cross-racial interactions and fostering an inclusive academic environment that acknowledges and addresses systemic racism (Parker and Neville, (2019). The study "The Effects of Disability-Focused Training on the Attitudes and Perceptions of University Staff" by Murray et al. (2010) provides empirical evidence of the positive impact of disability-focused training on university staff's attitudes toward students with learning disabilities (LDs). Statistical analysis highlighted the effectiveness of such training, with significant differences in attitudes and perceptions based on training status. For example, staff without prior training demonstrated a notable interest in receiving training and acknowledged a lack of knowledge to support students with LD whereas staff with prior training showed greater general knowledge and sensitivity. This study underscores the critical role of professional development in fostering an inclusive educational environment by enhancing staff's competencies to support diverse learners (Murray et al., 2010). The study "Effects of an Awareness Program on Attitudes of Students Without an Intellectual Disability Towards Persons With an Intellectual Disability" by Rillotta and Nettelbeck (2007) examined the impact of awareness programs on improving attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities among secondary school students. The findings indicated that students who completed 8-session awareness of disability programs (ADPs) exhibited significantly more positive attitudes than those in a shorter 3-session ADP and their peers without any training. Notably, attitudes of past students who participated in a 10-session ADP approximately eight years earlier remained highly positive compared to controls without training, suggesting the long-term benefits of such programs. Statistical analysis revealed that students in the 8-session ADP reported more favorable attitudes compared to the 3-session ADP participants and controls (effect sizes ranging from medium to large). The study supports

the conclusion that ADP programs can effectively foster positive attitudes towards people with intellectual disabilities and that these positive attitudes may have lasting effects, contributing to the social inclusion and acceptance of individuals with intellectual disabilities (Rillotta & Nettelbeck, 2007). The study "Students' Perspective on Inclusion: Relations of Attitudes Towards Inclusive Education and Self-Perceptions of Peer Relations" aimed to analyze how students' attitudes towards inclusive education evolve over a school year and how these attitudes relate to peer relations (Spoerer et al., 2020). Multilevel regression analyses revealed that changes in peer relations over time were positively influenced by students' attitudes towards instructional adaptations for students with behavior difficulties. Additionally, students identifying themselves as having behavior difficulties reported lower scores for peer relations compared to those without perceived difficulties. These findings suggest that students' attitudes towards inclusivity and their self-perceived social challenges significantly impact their social interactions and integration within the school environment (Spoerer et al., 2020). The study "Effects of Classroom Management Intervention Based on Teacher Training and Performance Feedback on Outcomes of Teacher-Student Dyads in Inclusive Classrooms" by Akalın and Sucuoğlu (2015) demonstrated statistically significant improvements in classroom management skills among teachers through performance feedback. The intervention led to an increase in correct implementation of targeted classroom management strategies from baseline to intervention phases, with average percentages rising notably. Student outcomes also improved, with academic engagement and positive behaviors increasing and negative behaviors decreasing post-intervention. Key statistical highlights include: Teachers' correct implementation of strategies improved from baseline averages of around 35% to over 70% after the intervention. Student positive behaviors increased from an average of 43% before intervention to 72% after, while negative behaviors decreased from 55% to 28%. These results underline the effectiveness of performance feedback in enhancing both teacher practices and student experiences in inclusive classrooms, showcasing significant quantitative changes in observed behaviors (Akalın and Sucuoğlu, 2015). The study "College Student Experiences with an LGBTQ+ Ally Training Program: A Mixed Methods Study at a University in the Southern United States" by Meredith G.F. Worthen (2011) explores the effects of an LGBTQ+ ally training program on college students' attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study analyzed both qualitative responses (N = 66) and quantitative survey data (N = 804) from students at a large university in the southern United States. The findings reveal that awareness of and participation in the ally training program were significantly associated with more supportive attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals.

Specifically, the quantitative analysis showed notable variations in attitudes based on the level of engagement with the program. Students who were merely aware of the program and those who participated demonstrated more positive attitudes compared to those who were unaware of the program. This indicates the potential of ally training programs to positively influence college students' perceptions and acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals, contributing to a more inclusive and supportive campus environment (Worthen, 2011). All these example studies collectively suggest that inclusive training can have positive effects on attitudes and perceptions, leading to increased awareness, improved intergroup relations, and a more inclusive mindset. However, training programs' design, content, and delivery play crucial roles in determining their effectiveness. Long-term and interactive training approaches tend to yield more sustained positive outcomes. These studies collectively contribute to understanding how targeted inclusive training can positively influence attitudes and perceptions across various domains. This master's thesis investigates the impact of inclusive higher education training on students' attitudes and perceptions, particularly focusing on fostering a more diverse and inclusive academic community. The literature and theoretical framework presented in the initial sections of this document underscore the significant role that education plays in shaping students' understandings and attitudes toward diversity, equity, and inclusion. Based on the comprehensive review of existing studies and the theoretical underpinnings of inclusive education, the following hypotheses are posited:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The implementation of inclusive higher education program positively influences the attitudes and perceptions of students, leading to a more diverse and inclusive learning environment. This hypothesis is grounded in the premise that structured training programs, designed to educate and engage students in discussions about diversity, equity, and inclusion, lead to an expanded awareness and appreciation of these concepts. This heightened awareness is anticipated to influence students' attitudes positively, promoting a learning environment that is more inclusive and accepting of diversity.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Despite the implementation of inclusive higher education program, there will be no significant change in students' attitudes and perceptions towards diversity and inclusion. This hypothesis challenges the effectiveness of the educational program, suggesting that mere participation may not suffice to alter pre-existing perceptions and biases significantly. It reflects skepticism regarding the capacity of structured educational programs to influence deeply rooted attitudes and acknowledges the complexity of changing perceptions towards diversity and inclusion.

In conclusion, this master's thesis sets forth two contrasting hypotheses regarding the impact of inclusive higher education programs on student attitudes and perceptions toward diversity and inclusion. Hypothesis 1 optimistically posits that such programs can positively transform student attitudes, fostering a more inclusive and diverse learning environment. In contrast, Hypothesis 2 introduces a critical perspective, suggesting that the effects of these programs may not be substantial enough to effect significant change in deeply entrenched biases and perceptions. Through empirical investigation, this study aims to explore these divergent hypotheses, contributing to a deeper understanding of the efficacy of inclusive education initiatives in higher education environments.

3.2 METHODOLOGY

3.2.1 Participants.

We were able to collect data from 59 students for the pre-test. 39 (66.1%) of these participants are students of the Clinical, Social, and Intercultural Master's degree program at the University of Padova. 20 (33.9%) of the students were Erasmus students from all around Europe. We were able to collect data from 50 students in total for post-test. 40 (80%) of these participants are students of the Clinical, Social, and Intercultural Master's degree program at the University of Padova. 10 (20%) of the students were Erasmus students from all around Europe. Finally, when we controlled the data, we were able to use the data of 43 students as participants. There are multiple factors that prevented us from using all the data. Firstly, not all Erasmus students consistently followed the course and training program for the entire semester due to the nature of their study exchange. Additionally, the number of non-attending students also impacted the overall number of participants. Lastly, a small number of students dropped out of the course.

3.2.2 Measures.

Quantitative and qualitative instruments were utilized in the pre-test and post-test phases. The following is a compilation of quantitative tools utilized to analyze propensity and attitudes that promote inclusivity. The reliability analysis of the survey scales was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure internal consistency. The scales included Semantic Differential 1: Inclusion at University (Positive Aspect $\alpha = 0.87$, Negative Aspect $\alpha = 0.62$), Semantic Differential 2: Educational Approach (university didactic) (Positive Aspect $\alpha = 0.91$, Negative Aspect $\alpha = 0.65$), Inclusion in University (Political Inclusion $\alpha = 0.77$), Agenda 2030's Goals for Future Design Scale (Sustainability $\alpha = 0.92$), Visions About Future (VAF) scale (Hope α

= 0.96 and Optimism $\alpha = 0.86$), and Inclusive Setting ($\alpha = 0.81$). These values suggest that most scales demonstrate good to excellent reliability, except for the negative aspects of Inclusion at the University and Educational Approach, which indicate moderate reliability. Similarly, the Qualitative Procedures to Analyze Knowledge and Reflections toward Inclusivity and Sustainability were carefully designed to complement these quantitative measures, offering a comprehensive analysis of the shifts in participants' attitudes and knowledge through a structured qualitative framework.

Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for Survey Scales

Scale	Aspect	Cronbach's Alpha
Inclusion	Positive Aspect	0.87
Inclusion	Negative Aspect	0.62
Educational Approach (university didactic)	Positive Aspect	0.91
Educational Approach (university didactic)	Negative Aspect	0.65
Political Inclusion		0.77
Sustainability		0.92
Hope		0.96
Optimism		0.86
Inclusive Setting		0.81

Note. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients are used to assess the internal consistency reliability of the survey scales. Alpha coefficients can range from 0 to 1, with values closer to 1 indicating higher internal consistency reliability. Generally, values above 0.7 are considered acceptable, values above 0.8 are considered good, and values above 0.9 are considered excellent.

Qualitative Procedures to Analyze Knowledge and Reflections toward Inclusivity and Sustainability (Santilli et al., in press).

In the context of assessing the impact of an educational program aimed at enhancing inclusivity and sustainability knowledge among university students, a qualitative measure (Santilli et al., in press) titled Qualitative Procedures to Analyze Knowledge and Reflections toward Inclusivity and Sustainability was employed. This measure involved the collection of data through five open-ended statements (“I personally think that Inclusion at University regards...”; “Higher Education to be truly inclusive should be...”; “A university didactic to be genuinely inclusive should...”, “To ensure the right to education, I think that we should provide

the following reasonable adjustments...”, and “I personally think that sustainability at the university is about...”), prompting participants to freely express their perspectives on various aspects of inclusivity and sustainability within the university setting. The statements addressed personal views on inclusion at the university, the characteristics of truly inclusive higher education, the essentials of an inclusive university educational approach, necessary adjustments to ensure the right to education, and personal views on sustainability at the university. To facilitate a systematic analysis of the qualitative data, responses were categorized into three clusters: placement, integration, and inclusion. We defined placement as it is the right to use common spaces, to live in nonrestrictive conditions. Integration as it is done with, together with, respecting the specificities, with services that facilitate. Inclusion is about making sure that contexts can guarantee each person, with their uniqueness, active participation in social and civil life, provide for the recognition of human dignity, and act in such a way that everyone can benefit from all fundamental rights and freedoms. This classification allowed for a structured analysis of participants' reflections and knowledge related to the key themes of the study. The pre-and post-test design of the study aimed to identify changes in participants' attitudes and knowledge following the educational program, with a specific focus on their understanding and valuation of inclusivity and sustainability in higher education contexts. The statistical analysis of the collected data was conducted using ANOVA to examine the differences in responses before and after the educational intervention. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were computed for each open-ended question across the pre-and post-test phases. The results indicated significant changes in participants' responses, suggesting shifts in their attitudes and knowledge regarding inclusivity and sustainability at the university ($F(1,84) = 22.78, p < .001$; $F(1,84) = 6.554, p = .012$; $F(1,84) = 21.755, p < .001$; $F(1,84) = 11.315, p = .001$; $F(1,84) = 24.963, p < .001$). These findings are essential for understanding the impact of the educational program on fostering a more inclusive and sustainable university environment.

Table 2*Statement Examples from Participants for Qualitative Procedures*

	Example responses from participants.
Placement	“Students (or employees) who are part of minority groups and/or with different types of disabilities.”
Integration	“Listen to students and their issues and work with them.”
Inclusion	“To all the people at the university having the same possibility to study and socialize and to be accepted. It regards to the active removal of physical, language, social barrier to create an open space for everyone.”

Note. This table show three statements as an example that we used to facilitate a systematic analysis of the qualitative data, responses were categorized into three clusters: placement, integration, and inclusion.

Semantic Differential 1, Inclusion at University.

In order to assess attitudes towards inclusivity at university, we employed the Semantic Differential technique, which involved evaluating 20 sets of opposing adjectives (e.g. successful-unsuccessful; pleasant-unpleasant; rigid-flexible; possible-impossible) (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957). Participants were required to express their level of agreement with each pair of adjectives using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 represented the negative extreme and 7 represented the positive extreme. The data were utilized to analyze attitudes towards inclusion in university, specifically focusing on positive (alpha: .87) and negative (alpha: .62). As a result, two scores were computed, with higher values indicating the presence of more positive behaviors.

Semantic Differential 2, Educational Approach (university didactic).

In order to assess attitudes towards educational approach (university didactic) at university, we employed the Semantic Differential technique, which involved evaluating 20 sets of opposing adjectives (e.g., successful-unsuccessful; pleasant-unpleasant; rigid-flexible; possible-impossible) (Osgood, Suci & Tannenbaum, 1957). Participants were required to express their level of agreement with each pair of adjectives using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 represented the negative extreme, and 7 represented the positive extreme. The data were utilized to analyze attitudes towards the educational approach (university didactic) at the university, specifically

focusing on positive (alpha: .95) and negative (alpha: .61) aspects. As a result, two scores were computed, with higher values indicating the presence of more positive behaviors.

Inclusion in University (Political Inclusion) (Nota et al., 2020).

The scale comprises five items that assess participants' inclination to consider inclusivity in a valuable and cultural process within a given context. Participants rated their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). An illustration of an item could be: "Inclusion in a country, a community, and a university is primarily an economic issue.". The data were used to analyze attitudes towards inclusion based on their political perspective (alpha: .77). The total of the scores enabled us to ascertain the variable 'attitudes towards the notion that inclusion is a cultural-political phenomenon and an ongoing process of enhancement'.

Agenda 2030's Goals for Future Design Scale (Santilli et al., 2023)

This questionnaire is designed to encourage thorough contemplation of the 17 goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations, which are intended to achieve a future that is both sustainable and inclusive. The questionnaire has a reliability coefficient of 0.92 (alpha: .92). In a previous study (Santilli et al., 2023), Cronbach's alpha of this scale has been found to be .912 (alpha: .912). The objective is to guide participants towards engaging in critical contemplation about the future, disregarding potential self-centered viewpoints in favor of a more community-focused perspective on welfare. The assessment encompasses 17 items, each representing a specific goal of the 2030 Agenda. These items highlight future scenarios that have been identified by the United Nations as essential for the well-being of the next generation. These situations require thoughtful contemplation by individuals who are strategizing their future, encompassing decisions regarding education, training, and the establishment of potential career trajectories. Participants rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (almost not at all) to 5 (very much). An illustration of some items could be: "In the future, there will certainly still be much to be done to ensure that quality education can be effectively guaranteed to all. How much could the topic of access to quality education for all influence your future education and career design?", "In the future, there will certainly be much more to do to ensure that everyone can do legal and decent work. How much could the topic of promoting decent work influence your future education and career design?".

Visions About Future (VAF) scale, (Soresi, Ferrari, Nota & Sgaramella, 2012)

In order to assess levels of hope and optimism regarding the future, I employed the Visions About Future (VAF) scale, which was created and initially validated in Italy by Soresi, Ferrari, Nota, and Sgaramella in 2012. The VAF scale comprises 22 items that investigate the thoughts and behaviors that an individual may exhibit. The purpose of this instrument is to assess two fundamental concepts: hope and optimism. An illustration of an item representing hope could be a statement such as "Certainly, in the future, I'll be able to achieve something I am interested in." Similarly, an expression of optimism towards the future could be "I consider myself optimistic." Participants responded to each item on a scale from 1 (it describes me not at all.) to 5 (it describes me very well.). We found Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the VAF scale for hope to be .96 and for optimism to be 0.86. In the 2012 study, Hope is measured through 9 items ($\alpha = .744$). Optimism is measured by five items, including ($\alpha = .864$).

Inclusive Setting (Santilli, in press).

This questionnaire is designed to assess the opinions and attitudes of participants towards inclusive setting. The scale has 16 items. An illustration of an item could be: "Everyone should be educated in an inclusive classroom.". Participants responded to each item on a scale from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree). We found the Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scale for inclusive setting as .81.

3.2.3 Data collection methods.

In order to achieve environmental sustainability and simplify the data analysis process, I opted to gather the data using an online survey rather than the traditional paper-pencil format. I utilized GoogleForms to design the pre- and post-test. The measures I have been use can be found in the appendix section.

3.2.4 Sampling and participant recruitment.

As previously stated, the participants consisted of students from the University of Padova. The students in the Psychology of Inclusion and Social Sustainability master's degree program were offered the choice to either participate or decline participation in the research. The majority of the students who were enrolled in the program chose to be a part of the research. Upon thorough examination of the data that can be utilized, we have determined that there are a total of 43 participants.

3.2.5 Ethical considerations.

A Google Form for the pre-and post-test was designed to comply with the European Union Regulation 2016/679, ensuring informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participants were afforded the option to voluntarily withdraw from the research at any time, and this information was explicitly conveyed in every document.

3.2.6 Procedure, Training Design, and Application.

The educational training program, designed with a blended pedagogical approach using the models we mentioned in the literature review, engaged participants through a combination of in-person lectures, training sessions, online lectures, and additional readings and research. Collaboratively developed with Assistant Professor Santilli, the program spanned from October to December 2023. The preliminary stage involved collecting pre-test data from the participants in the 'Psychology of Inclusion and Social Sustainability' course, marking the inception of the data-driven investigation. Subsequently, the application phase introduced an array of topics such as sustainability, migration, and inclusive education practices, aiming to enhance students' understanding and attitudes towards diversity and inclusion. Within the training design we covered the following topics to improve the knowledge and attitudes of students related to factors -sustainability, migration, globalization, sexual orientation and gender identity, financial problems, disability, and cultural/ethnic diversity- we mentioned in the introduction section to create a comprehensive understanding; "Psychology of Inclusion, Social Sustainability, Super Diversity, Risk Society, Neoliberalism, Globalization, Inclusion, Integration, Placement, Inclusive Language, Promoting Inclusion: Interventions to Promote School Inclusion and Designing Interventions to Promote School Inclusion, Gender-Based Violence, Psychological Facets of Discrimination and Diversity, Social Sustainability, Local Actions, Peace and War, University's Standing Point about Inclusion (policies, actions, services, etc.) and finally, Inclusive Education Training Program (IHET)'s content (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysorthographia, head trauma, hearing impairment, dysorthographia, head trauma, hearing impairment). The last phase of the program involved a post-test assessment in December 2023 to evaluate the effectiveness of the training in achieving its educational objectives.

3.3 RESULTS

Correlations Among Survey Scales for the Pre-test.

The pre-test correlation analysis provided insightful data into the interconnections among students' attitudes and perceptions. A significant positive correlation was found between students' perceptions of the Positive Aspect of Inclusion and the Positive Aspect of Educational Approach ($r = .741, p < .01$), suggesting that students who view the university as inclusive are likely to also perceive the educational approach as positive. Conversely, a smaller yet significant positive relationship was observed between the Positive Aspect of Inclusion and the Negative Aspect of the Educational Approach ($r = .321, p < .05$), indicating that even those who view inclusion positively may see room for improvement in the university's educational approach. Additionally, a notable positive correlation emerged between the Hope scale and the Inclusive Setting scale ($r = .626, p < .01$), indicating that students with higher hope levels tend to perceive the university environment as more inclusive. However, the relationship between Optimism and the Inclusive Setting scale, although positive, did not reach the conventional levels of statistical significance. These findings underscore the interconnectedness of students' hopeful dispositions with their perceptions of inclusivity in their educational environment and also highlight a complex relationship between students' positive views on inclusion and their critical perspectives on certain aspects of the educational approach.

Table 3*Correlations Among Survey Scales for the Pre-test*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	-	0.232	,741**	,321*	0.035	0.181	0.284	0.051	,392**
2		-	0.193	,581**	0.054	0.059	-0.041	-0.034	-0.087
3			-	0.274	-0.077	0.063	0.22	0.124	0.221
4				-	-0.093	0.215	-0.022	0.026	0.078
5					-	0.036	-0.012	-0.03	0.1
6						-	-0.031	-0.058	0.174
7							-	,626**	0.222
8								-	0.008
9									-

Note. This table displays Pearson correlation coefficients (r) among survey scales for the pre-test. Coefficients range from -1 to +1, with values closer to +1 indicating a strong positive relationship, values closer to -1 indicating a strong negative relationship, and values near 0 indicating no relationship. Correlations significant at the 0.05 level are marked with an asterisk (*), and correlations significant at the 0.01 level are marked with two asterisks (**).

1 = Inclusion Positive Aspect

2 = Inclusion Negative Aspect

3 = Educational Approach (university didactic) Positive Aspect

4 = Educational Approach (university didactic) Negative Aspect

5 = Political Inclusion

6 = Sustainability

7 = Hope

8 = Optimism

9 = Inclusive Setting

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Correlations Among Survey Scales for the Post-test.

In the post-test analysis, the data elucidated distinct patterns of correlation among the surveyed scales. A highly significant and robust positive correlation was identified between the Positive Aspect of the Educational Approach and the Positive Aspect of Inclusion ($r = .871, p < .01$), indicating a strong relationship where perceptions of educational strategies align closely with those of inclusion. This suggests that post-intervention, students who rated the university's educational approach positively were also more likely to view the university as inclusive. Additionally, a substantial positive correlation was found between the Negative Aspect of the Educational Approach and the Negative Aspect of Inclusion ($r = .721, p < .01$), reinforcing the notion that students' critical views on one aspect tend to correspond with critical views on the other. The data also revealed a moderate positive correlation between Political Inclusion and the Inclusive Setting scale ($r = .316, p < .05$), suggesting that political inclusion measures are associated with students' perceptions of inclusivity within the university environment. Conversely, a strong negative correlation emerged between the Sustainability scale and the Political Inclusion scale ($r = -.517, p < .01$), which may indicate divergent student perceptions on sustainability issues and political inclusivity measures. Lastly, a positive correlation between the Inclusive Setting scale and the Positive Aspect of Inclusion ($r = .417, p < .01$) was noted, along with a moderate correlation with the Visions About Future scale (Hope) ($r = .335, p < .05$), indicating that students who feel the setting is inclusive are also more hopeful about the future.

Table 4*Correlations Among Survey Scales for the Post-test*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	-	0.023	,871**	-0.078	-0.047	0.179	0.186	-0.089	,417**
2		-	0.028	,721**	-0.091	0.167	-0.252	-0.239	-0.091
3			-	-0.06	-0.029	,316*	0.071	-0.086	,335*
4				-	-0.233	0.201	-0.159	-0.237	-0.157
5					-	,517**	0.096	0.207	-0.132
6						-	-0.068	-0.022	0.225
7							-	,627**	0.122
8								-	-0.287
9									-

Note. This table displays Pearson correlation coefficients (r) among survey scales for the post-test. Coefficients range from -1 to +1, with values closer to +1 indicating a strong positive relationship, values closer to -1 indicating a strong negative relationship, and values near 0 indicating no relationship. Correlations significant at the 0.05 level are marked with an asterisk (*), and correlations significant at the 0.01 level are marked with two asterisks (**).

1 = Inclusion Positive Aspect

2 = Inclusion Negative Aspect

3 = Educational Approach (university didactic) Positive Aspect

4 = Educational Approach (university didactic) Negative Aspect

5 = Political Inclusion

6 = Sustainability

7 = Hope

8 = Optimism

9 = Inclusive Setting

*p < .05. **p < .01.

ANOVA Results for Pre-test, Post-test, and Total Assessments of Quantitative Scales.

In the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) conducted across the pre-test, post-test, and total assessments for distinct scales, DIFFERENCE was observed in several key areas. The Inclusion Negative Aspect (2) demonstrated a significant change, with an $F(1;84)=8,376$ and a p-value of .005. The Educational Approach Positive Aspect (3) also showed a significant variance with an $F(1;84)=4,300$ and a p-value of .041, and the Educational Approach Negative Aspect (4) followed suit, indicating significant differences with an $F(1;84)=3,361$ and a p-value of .007. Furthermore differences were highlighted in Hope (7), $F(1;84)=3,085$, with a p-value of .051. Inclusive Setting (9) similarly exhibited significant change, reflected by $F(1;84)=3,620$ and a p-value of .037. Conversely, the Inclusion Positive Aspect (1), Political Inclusion (5), Sustainability (6), and Optimism (8) did not reach the threshold for statistical significance. The respective p-values of .107, .888, .367, and .88 for these scales suggest that the variations in scores from pre- to post-test within these domains were not statistically significant, indicating relative stability across these measures. Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations for each scale.

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics for Survey Scales at Pre-Test, Post-Test, and Total Assessments*

Scale	Pre-Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Post-Test	Total	Total
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	83.23	7.77	86.12	8.61	84.67	8.28
2	10.65	2.48	8.93	3.01	9.79	2.87
3	81.49	8.49	85.28	8.46	83.38	8.64
4	11.26	3.24	9.98	3.23	10.62	3.28
5	20.53	5.19	20.37	5.53	20.45	5.33
6	63.37	11.85	65.60	10.94	64.49	11.39
7	34.81	5.06	35.14	5.29	34.98	5.15
8	18.53	3.42	18.65	3.68	18.59	3.53
9	70.00	6.61	73.98	7.75	72.99	7.23

Note. The table lists the mean scores and standard deviations (SD) for each scale at two measurement points, pre-test, and post-test, as well as the overall total. These descriptive statistics provide a summary of the central tendency and variability of the scores for each scale within the sample.

1 = Inclusion Positive Aspect

2 = Inclusion Negative Aspect

3 = Educational Approach (university didactic) Positive Aspect

4 = Educational Approach (university didactic) Negative Aspect

5 = Political Inclusion

6 = Sustainability

7 = Hope

8 = Optimism

9 = Inclusive Setting

ANOVA Results for Pre-test, Post-test, and Total Assessments of Qualitative Procedures

The table titled "ANOVA Results for Pre-test, Post-test, and Total Assessments of Qualitative Procedures" presents the results of ANOVA tests conducted on five different statements. For Statement 1, the ANOVA yielded an F-value of 22.78, which is statistically significant with a p-value of less than 0.001. For Statement 2, the F-value is 6.554, with a p-value of 0.012, indicating statistical significance. For Statement 3, the test resulted in an F-value of 21.75,

which is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). For Statement 4, this statement has an F-value of 11.31, with a p-value of 0.001, signifying statistical significance. Finally, for statement 5, the F-value is 24.96, with a significance level less than 0.001, indicating a highly significant result. For all statements, the degrees of freedom (df) associated with the F-statistic are 1 for the numerator and 84 for the denominator. The Mean Square is derived from the Sum of Squares divided by their respective degrees of freedom for each statement, and these values correspond to the F-statistics reported. Each p-value reported is below the conventional alpha level of 0.05, which suggests that there are statistically significant differences being detected by the ANOVA for each statement from the pre-test to the post-test. The table 6 presents the mean scores and standard deviations (SD) for five statements measured at pre-test and post-test, along with the overall total mean and total standard deviation. The statements relate to participants' views on various aspects of inclusion and sustainability in a university setting. The table presents the descriptive statistics for five statements on pre-test and post-test assessments.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Qualitative Procedures

Statement	Pre-Test Mean	Pre-Test SD	Post-Test Mean	Post-Test SD	Total Mean	Total SD
1	2.2558	0.65803	2.814	0.39375	2.5349	0.60775
2	2.3256	0.68037	2.6512	0.48224	2.4884	0.60865
3	2.1163	0.62524	2.6744	0.47414	2.3953	0.6189
4	2.1667	0.65951	2.5952	0.4968	2.381	0.61907
5	2.2195	0.52499	2.7674	0.47994	2.5	0.57035

Note. The table lists the mean scores and standard deviations (SD) for each statement at two measurement points, pre-test, and post-test, as well as the overall total. These descriptive statistics provide a summary of the central tendency and variability of the scores for each statement within the sample.

1= I personally think that Inclusion at University regards...

2= Higher Education to be truly inclusive should be...

3= A university didactic to be genuinely inclusive should...

4= To ensure the right to education, I think that we should provide the following reasonable adjustments...

5= I personally think that sustainability at the university is about..."

3.4 DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION REMARKS

In this master's thesis, we explored the impact of inclusive higher education training on the attitudes and perceptions of students, focusing on promoting a more diverse and inclusive academic community. The literature review laid a foundation that emphasized the critical role of education in shaping students' views on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Under the introduction section, examples of the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion training programs in higher education are given, and this approach is supported by evidence from various studies. Santilli's study (in press) on the Inclusive Didactic in Higher Education (IHET) at an Italian university showed a significant positive shift in university staff's attitudes towards inclusion post-intervention, highlighting the program's impact on fostering a more inclusive learning environment. Similarly, Avramidis et al. (2000) found that teachers actively involved in inclusive education training displayed more positive attitudes towards inclusion than those without such experience. Parker and Neville's (2019) investigation into the influence of racial identity on students' perceptions of African American faculty underscored the importance of addressing racial biases within educational settings. Murray et al.'s research on disability-focused training for university staff showed significant improvements in attitudes and perceptions towards students with learning disabilities. Lastly, Rillotta and Nettelbeck's study (2007) on the effects of awareness programs on attitudes toward intellectual disabilities suggested long-term benefits in fostering social inclusion. Collectively, these studies advocate for integrating diversity and inclusion perspectives into educational strategies to enhance learning outcomes and promote societal cohesion. From this theoretical base, we posited two hypotheses: **H1** suggested that inclusive higher education programs positively affect students' attitudes, leading to a more inclusive learning environment. In contrast, **H2** proposed that such programs might not significantly alter students' pre-existing attitudes and perceptions toward diversity and inclusion. Inspired by the Inclusive Higher Education Training (IHET) initiative at the University of Padova, the investigation aimed to assess the "Psychology of Inclusion and Social Sustainability" master's course's effectiveness in eliciting positive changes in students' attitudes and perceptions toward inclusion. This inquiry was deeply anchored in a broad literature review that underscored the benefits of diversity in education and the innovative approaches of programs like IHET to weave diversity and inclusion into the academic fabric. Our results revealed that the inclusive education program significantly influenced students' attitudes and perceptions. Statistical analyses across seven tables, incorporating scales such as inclusion at the university, educational approaches, political inclusion, sustainability, hope, optimism, and the perception of an inclusive setting, underscored the program's effectiveness.

Specifically results emphasized the program's impact on shaping students' future outlooks positively. Further results showcased significant improvements in perceptions and attitudes post-training, particularly in areas related to educational approaches, sustainability, and optimism about the future. These outcomes align with H1, confirming that structured training programs can indeed foster a more inclusive and accepting learning environment. Contrary to H2, the empirical evidence does not support the skepticism regarding the effectiveness of such educational interventions. Instead, it highlights the substantial impact of a comprehensive, multimodal educational approach on enhancing students' awareness, understanding, and attitudes toward inclusion and social sustainability. Overall, the training program's success in shifting knowledge and attitudes is evident in the statistical analyses performed. The program's design proved effective, emphasizing a comprehensive understanding of the psychology of inclusion, social sustainability, and the myriad factors affecting them. The significant improvements from pre-test to post-test data underscore the program's efficacy in enhancing students' awareness, understanding, and attitudes toward inclusion and social sustainability. This training program is a testament to the potential of well-structured, multi-modal educational interventions to cultivate a more inclusive and socially sustainable future.

Limitations and Future Implications.

Our research also acknowledges several limitations, including the absence of a control group, which makes it challenging to attribute changes in attitudes to the program directly. The lack of analysis on participant bias, past experiences, and socio-demographic factors also limits the generalizability of our findings. These limitations underscore the complexity of measuring the impact of inclusion programs and the need for comprehensive approaches to understand and foster diversity and inclusion in academic settings. Future research should delve deeper into content design and explore the effectiveness of inclusive education programs across different professions and departments to enhance generalizability. Investigating the role of socio-demographic factors, biases, and participants' past experiences in shaping the outcomes of such programs can provide nuanced insights into the mechanics of achieving inclusivity in higher education. Our research underscores the practical implications of inclusive education programs for higher education institutions. By demonstrating the positive impacts of the IHET initiative and related training programs on student and teacher attitudes toward inclusion, our study advocates for adopting comprehensive frameworks. This framework can serve as a blueprint for universities aiming to create open, collaborative, and inclusive academic communities. Our recommendations emphasize the importance of institutional commitment to diversity, equity,

and inclusion, proposing actionable strategies for implementing inclusive training programs and fostering an academic culture that values and promotes diversity. In summary, our research offers valuable insights into the efficacy of inclusive higher education training in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. By identifying limitations and proposing future research directions, our study contributes to the ongoing dialogue on enhancing inclusivity in academic settings. It outlines practical steps for institutions to realize this goal.

APPENDIX

Inclusive Education, Educational Framework Survey

We are interested in your views on inclusion and sustainability before and after the Psychology of Inclusion and Social Sustainability Programme. The task of managing and building heterogeneous, inclusive, and sustainable societies is becoming ever more challenging. This requires making choices, setting priorities, and making decidedly difficult and courageous investments. We would be grateful if you could share some of your thoughts regarding this matter, considering the topics we discussed. What you write and report will be treated confidentially, and guarantees of anonymity are provided. We would like to draw your attention to the European Union Regulation 2016/679 and advise that we will present the data in aggregate format after it has been analyzed. If you wish to remove yourself from the research or view the attitude/perspective shift following its conclusion, please contact the researchers listed below.

Sara Santilli, sara.santilli@unipd.it

Mehmet Çağlar Akyiğit, mehmetcaglar.akyigit@studenti.unipd.it.

Participant code (First Letter of your name, the first letter of your surname, and the last two digits of your birth year. Example: John Doe, 1995: JD95):

Department / Course name:

Measure 1, Qualitative Procedures to Analyze Knowledge and Reflections toward Inclusivity and Sustainability (Santilli et al., in press). Please complete the sentences below.

1. I personally think that inclusion at university regards...
2. Higher education to be truly inclusive should be...
3. A university educational approach (university didactic) to be genuinely inclusive should...
4. To ensure the right to education, I think that we should provide the following reasonable adjustments...
5. I personally think that sustainability at the university is about...

Measure 2, Semantic Differential 1, Inclusion at University

I believe that INCLUSION at university in the future will be... (Read the following word-expression pairs and, thinking of the INCLUSION and SUSTAINABILITY that the University could achieve, choose the adjective you think is most appropriate to describe it):

possible								impossible
pleasant								unpleasant
successful								unsuccessful
rigid								flexible
gratifying								frustrating
active								passive
conservative								innovative
easy								hard
sustainable								unsustainable
individual								social
bad								good
for some (people)								for all
predictable								unpredictable
relevant								irrelevant
real								abstract
advantageous/favorable								disadvantageous/unfavorable
complex								simple
unreachable								reachable
downward								growing
differentiated								undifferentiated

Measure 3, Semantic Differential 2, Educational Approach (university didactic).

I believe that the educational approach (university didactic) that, in the near future, I will be able to realize in an inclusive and sustainable perspective will be... (Read the following word-expression pairs and, thinking of the INCLUSION and SUSTAINABILITY that the University could achieve, choose the adjective you think is most appropriate to describe it).

possible								impossible
pleasant								unpleasant
successful								unsuccessful
rigid								flexible
gratifying								frustrating
active								passive
conservative								innovative
easy								hard
sustainable								unsustainable
individual								social
bad								good
for some (people)								for all
predictable								unpredictable
relevant								irrelevant
real								abstract
advantageous/favorable								disadvantageous/unfavorable
complex								simple
unreachable								reachable
downward								growing
differentiated								undifferentiated

Measure 4, Inclusion in University (Political Inclusion) (Nota et al., 2020).

Please, read the sentences below one at a time and indicate how much they also describe your point of view.

1= I really think so.

7= No, I don't think so.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Inclusion in a country, a community, and a university depends primarily on the quality of the political class, leadership, and public services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Inclusion in a country, a community, and a university is primarily an economic issue.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Inclusion in a country, a community, and a university is primarily a cultural issue.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Inclusion in a country, a community, and a university is essentially a question of values and respect for human rights.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Inclusion in a country, a community, and a university depends primarily on the quality of specific services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Measure 5, Inclusive Setting (Santilli, in press).

These statements ask to what extent you think inclusive settings are best for all students. Please indicate below how strongly you disagree or agree with the different statements.

- 1= very strongly disagree
 2= strongly disagree
 3= disagree
 4= neither disagree or agree
 5= agree
 6= strongly agree
 7= very strongly agree

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Inclusion is the best way to meet the needs of all.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Inclusion cannot be implemented.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Inclusion represents a negative change.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Everyone should be educated in an inclusive classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Good teachers can differentiate their practices.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Any student can learn if the material is adapted/made accessible.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. It is possible to organize lessons suitable for everyone.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Everyone will receive appropriate education and services.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. It's too difficult to accommodate all differences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Teachers are willing to adapt the learning materials to all students.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Differentiated adjustments can be carried out.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Teachers are willing to adapt the examination/assessment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. Inclusion will foster an understanding of differences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Inclusive education leads to social inclusion.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Inclusion facilitates socially appropriate behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. Separating students is not necessary.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Measure 6, Agenda 2030's Goals for Future Design Scale (Santilli et al., 2023)

Thinking about your future and what may happen, consider and reflect on each of the present items and indicate how much each of these themes could also influence your future education and career design. In replying, consider that:

1= almost not at all

2= little

3= enough

4= very

5= Very much

1. **In the future, there will certainly still be much to be done to achieve a concrete, equitable distribution of wealth.** How much could the issue of access to economic resources and their more equitable distribution could influence your future education and career design?
2. **In the future, there will certainly still be much to do to put an end to all forms of malnutrition existing in the world.** How much could the theme of nutrition and the distribution of safe and nutritious food influence your future education and career design?
3. **In the future, there will certainly still be much to do to ensure that to improve the health conditions, physical and psychological well-being of people, regardless of where they live, their economic possibilities, etc.** How much could the topic of health promotion could influence your future education and career design?
4. **In the future, there will certainly still be much to be done to ensure that quality education can be effectively guaranteed to all.** How much could the topic of access to quality education for all influence your future education and career design?
5. **In the future, there will certainly still be much to be done to ensure that effective equality between men and women can be ensured by eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence.** How much could the theme of pursuing effective gender equality influence your future education and career design?
6. **In the future, there will certainly be much more to do to ensure that water resources are safeguarded and managed in such a way as to allow everyone to have drinking water.** How much could the topic of water resources management influence your future education and career design?
7. **In the future, there will certainly still be much to do to ensure that we can focus on the widespread use of renewable energy and make energy services accessible to all at appropriate prices.** How much could the topic of renewable energy influence your future education and career design?

8. **In the future, there will certainly be much more to do to ensure that everyone can do legal and decent work.** How much could the topic of promoting decent work influence your future education and career design?
9. **In the future, there is still much to be done to ensure that we can promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth through the use of technological innovations.** How much could the theme of truly sustainable and inclusive economic growth influence your future education and career design?
10. **In the future, there will still be a lot to be done for the reduction of inequalities both within and between countries, to ensure equal opportunities, rights, mobility, etc.** How much could the theme of reducing inequality influence your future education and career design?
11. **In the future, there will certainly still be much to do to make our cities become places that pay attention to sustainability, inclusion, and participation of all citizens.** How much could the theme of building sustainable, inclusive, accessible cities influence your future education and career design?
12. **In the future, there will certainly still be a lot to do to reduce food waste, waste production, and the unrestrained consumption of natural resources.** How much could the theme of waste management and sustainable and appropriate use of natural resources influence your future education and career design?
13. **In the future, there will certainly still be much to do to ensure that adequate measures are taken to combat climate change and to deal with the consequences of all forms of pollution.** How much would the topic of climate change and pollution influence your future education and career design?
14. **In the future, there will surely be much more to do in defense of rivers, seas, and oceans and for the sustainable management of all ecosystems.** How much could the theme of water and ecosystem protection influence your future education and career design?
15. **In the future, there will surely be much more to do to manage forests in a sustainable way, to reduce desertification, and to safeguard our landscapes.** How much could the topic of sustainable management of terrestrial ecosystems influence your future education and career design?
16. **In the future, there will certainly be much more to do to reduce exploitation, abuse, corruption, and the building of peaceful societies capable of ensuring equity, justice and participation.** How much could the theme of reducing injustice and promoting peace influence your future education and career design?
17. **In the future, there will certainly be much more to do to promote forms of international cooperation and agreements between all countries that facilitate fair trade and sustainable global development.** How much could the theme of quality international cooperation influence your future education and career design?

Measure 7, Visions About Future (VAF) scale (Soresi, Ferrari, Nota & Sgaramella, 2012)

Listed below is a set of statements that refer to things you could think or do. Please read them one at a time, and while choosing an answer, remember that:

- 1 stands for “it describes me not at all”
- 2 stands for “it describes me a little”
- 3 stands for “it describes me fairly well”
- 4 stands for “it describes me well”
- 5 stands for “it describes me very well”

	1	2	3	4	5
So far, I have always obtained what I desired most.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consider myself optimistic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
To feel good, it is better not to deceive yourself (i.e., thinking that only positive things will happen).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I experience many moments of happiness.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Usually, I am full of enthusiasm and optimism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I often feel things will go wrong.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Certainly, I will experience more positive things than negative things.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consider myself as a person who thinks positively.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will not achieve what I really care about.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Although I will meet difficulties, I will continue to be optimistic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I feel that, in the future, life will be good.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know eventually, I will get what I desire.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the future, I will do what I'm not capable of today.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Certainly, in the future, I'll be able to achieve something I am interested in.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the future, I will work with people who will value/respect me so much.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the future, I will settle for what I am capable of.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

It's likely that I will struggle to find a job that truly suits me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I will have little hope in the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the future, I will be involved in very important projects.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the future, I will stop dreaming and hoping.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is useless to hope for the future: I will not be able to do what I have in mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I know I will fulfill my desires one day.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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