

University Administrative Staff Understanding of Inclusion
in the Context of Higher Education in Kazakhstan

Yuliya Palkina

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

In

Educational Leadership

Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education

June, 2020

Word count: 17,855

CITI Training Certificate



Completion Date 08-Oct-2019
Expiration Date 07-Oct-2022
Record ID 31901942

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Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Nazarbayev University



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Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor Dr. Michelle Somerton, who have always supported me during this two-year journey at the Graduate School of Education. Even though sometimes I experienced difficulties to balance between my work and studies, Michelle convincingly guided and encouraged me not to give up. Thank you for being here for us and for making sure that we are all happy.

I want to acknowledge the support of my fellows from the Inclusive Education cohort. You always find the right words to keep me going even when the road is tough. Without your support and advise, it would be really hard for me to complete my work.

I wish to thank my colleagues and family for their support and understanding. I would like to recognize the invaluable assistance of faculty and staff at the Graduate School of Education.

**University Administrative Staff Understanding of Inclusion in the Context of Higher
Education in Kazakhstan**

Abstract

The present study aims to explore the attitudes and understanding of inclusion of administrative staff in one autonomous Kazakhstani university with an English Medium of Instructions. The study was developed under the dimensions of the “Index for Inclusion” framework, and investigated inclusion within institutional culture, policy, and practices. The research approach was constructivist in nature, and it was designed to explore individuals’ conceptions and attitudes towards inclusion through semi-structured interviews. The study involved five participants who were administrative employees at the university. In addition, the research approach involved the analysis of the institutional strategic document and promotional brochure to explore the university’s policy and plans towards the development of inclusion. Results of the study illustrate that administrative staff generally have positive attitudes towards inclusion in higher education, however, their understandings of inclusion vary, based on personal beliefs and knowledge. Lack of shared vision and understanding among administrative employees correlates with inconsistencies within institutional strategy and absence of comprehensive guidelines for implementation of inclusion at the university.

**Понимание концепции инклюзии среди административных сотрудников
университета в контексте высшего образования в Республике Казахстан**

Аннотация

Целью данного исследования является изучение восприятия и понимания концепции инклюзии среди административных сотрудников в автономном казахстанском университете с английским языком обучения. За теоретическую основу исследования взята модель «Индекс инклюзии» (Index for Inclusion), которая изучает вопросы развития инклюзивного образования через призму культуры, институциональной политики и практики. Конструктивистский подход в методологии позволил изучить понимание и восприятие концепции инклюзии у сотрудников посредством проведения интервью. В исследовании приняли участие пять работников администрации. Дополнительно в рамках исследования также был проведен анализ стратегии университета для более полного понимания местной политики и планов по развитию инклюзии. Результаты показали, что сотрудники университета в целом положительно относятся к инклюзии в контексте высшего образования. Однако понимание этой концепции варьировалось в зависимости от личных убеждений и знаний. Отсутствие единого понимания инклюзии коррелирует с отсутствием комплексной политики по развитию инклюзии в университете.

**Қазақстан Республикасындағы жоғары білім контекстінде университеттің
әкімшілік қызметкерлері арасында инклюзия тұжырымдамасын түсіну**

Андатпа

Бұл зерттеудің мақсаты - ағылшын тілінде оқытатын, автономды қазақстандық университетінің әкімшілік қызметкерлерінің арасында инклюзия тұжырымдамасын қабылдау және түсіну болып табылады. Зерттеудің теориялық негізі ретінде инклюзивті білім беруді дамыту мәселелерін мәдениет, институционалдық саясат және практика призмасы арқылы зерттейтін "Инклюзия индексі" (Index for Inclusion) моделі алынды. Методологиядағы конструктивистік көзқарас қызметкерлерден сұхбат алу арқылы инклюзия тұжырымдамасын түсіну мен қабылдауды зерттеуге мүмкіндік берді. Зерттеуге әкімшіліктің бес қызметкері қатысты. Сонымен қатар, зерттеу шеңберінде инклюзияны дамыту бойынша жергілікті саясат пен жоспарларды толық түсіну үшін университет стратегиясына талдау жүргізілді. Зерттеу нәтижелері университет қызметкерлерінің инклюзияға жоғары білім беру контекстінде оң қарайтынын көрсетті. Алайда, бұл тұжырымдаманы түсіну жеке сенім мен білімге байланысты өзгерді. Инклюзияның бірыңғай түсінігінің болмауы университетте инклюзияны дамыту бойынша кешенді саясаттың жоқтығымен байланысты.

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University Administrative Staff Understanding of Inclusion in the Context of Higher Education in Kazakhstan

Chapter One: Introduction

Inclusion and access to education can be considered as primary factors shaping educational reform in many countries. Initially, inclusion emerged as a guiding principle and philosophy for mainstream education, providing a framework for policy and practice at schools (Moriña, 2017). However, according to Bausela (2002), it is higher education that needs more attention, where universities are characterized by a greater level of discrimination and segregation, not only in terms of accessibility, but also retainment (as cited in Morgado, Cortés-Vega, López-Gavira, Álvarez, & Moriña, 2016). Barriers to higher education may arise from different institutional domains, such as structure, organization, and, not least, from attitudes of faculty and staff (Morgado et al., 2016). Gradually, inclusive policies and practices have found their way into higher education, nevertheless, there are still many challenges for inclusion (Moriña, 2017). The purpose of this thesis is to explore inclusion in the context of higher education through the Index for Inclusion, culture, policy, and practice - the three dimensions described by Booth and Ainscow (2002). This chapter provides an overview of the development of inclusive education, inclusive education reform, and the system of higher education in Kazakhstan. Additionally, this chapter describes the theoretical framework, problem statement, and the research site which have shaped the overall study.

1.1 Definition of Inclusive Education

Emerging from 1975 with the first “Least Restrictive Environment” and mainstream movements, inclusive education has now become a global challenge and a subject of debates over the past couple of decades (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Even though there is no universal understanding of inclusive education, one of the commonly accepted definitions is provided by the United Nation Education and Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which describes inclusive education as a “process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education” (UNESCO, 2005). In other words, inclusion promotes education for all, disregarding individual differences in culture, religion, sexuality, socio-economic background, health, and other factors, which may serve as a basis for discrimination. Reducing marginalization and enhancing equity became fundamental values for social justice education, facilitating the development of “more accessible” institutions (Barnes, 2007).

The development of inclusive education is strongly associated with the Salamanca Statement and Framework of Actions, which was presented for the World Conference on Special Needs Education in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994). Under the Education for All agenda, the Statement promotes the fundamental rights of every child to receive education and urges to create an educational system that can include the whole diversity of individual needs, characteristics, interests, and abilities (UNESCO, 1994). The Statement focuses primarily on the development of inclusive education in mainstream schools and calls upon governments to create supportive mechanisms for enrollment of all children to regular schools.

1.2 Inclusive Higher Education in International Perspective

The development of inclusive education was initiated in a secondary education context and thus most research literature focuses primarily on inclusive schools (Moriña, 2017). However, the field of tertiary education experiences even higher exclusion and discrimination levels, and it still remains least accessible for many groups of people, including students with special needs (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2011). The major barrier for transitioning from school to tertiary institutions is said to be the meritocratic system of admission and a general lack of regulatory mechanisms or policies, which could ensure the implementation of inclusive practices in higher education (OECD, 2011). In contrast with secondary education, in many countries, universities are not required to provide additional support to address individual educational needs (OECD, 2011)

The promotion of inclusive values in higher education started to emerge only fairly recently. The European Union Association (EUA) members expressed commitment to ensure inclusive practices and to foster education among underrepresented groups (EUA, 2018). Despite the initiated promotion, “only a few countries have followed up with concrete action at the system level to foster social inclusion in higher education” (EUA, 2018, p. 4). For example, countries such as the Netherlands initiated a female academic support program to facilitate gender equality in higher education, and Ireland developed a national plan for higher education to study factors and strategies which may increase enrolment and retention at universities (EUA, 2018).

1.3 Higher Education and Inclusive Education in Kazakhstan

In order to build a competitive and internationally recognized higher education system, Kazakhstan needed to reform the post-Soviet system of higher education. As a part of this strategy, in 2010 Kazakhstan ratified the Bologna Process, becoming its 47th member (Yergebekov & Temirbekova, 2012). Following the process, Kazakhstan accepted the ten core principles which are represented by comparable degrees, two-cycle system, credits-based system, academic mobility, lifelong learning, autonomy, and other core values (Yergebekov & Temirbekova, 2012). Despite the fact that some of the changes were made towards implementation of these principles, such as internationally comparable degrees, such as Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral Degrees, "it is not yet possible that Kazakhstan's higher education practices fully match the Bologna Process' requirements" (Yergebekov & Temirbekova, 2012, p.1477). For example, one of the major barriers is associated with the centralized system of Higher Education, where state universities need to follow the instructions from the Ministry of Education, and this can be clearly observed on grading and marking systems (Yergebekov & Temirbekova, 2012).

Along with the Bologna process, Kazakhstan has initiated state programs supporting inclusive education (Rollan & Somerton, 2019). Even though these programs focus primarily on secondary education, to some extent they also touch upon inclusion in higher education. For example, according to the Ministerial Order of the 1st of June 2015, implementation of a national model of inclusive education in all preschool and secondary school institutions is planned for 2018-2020 (Ministry of Education and Science [MES], 2015). Moreover, it was pointed out that higher education in Kazakhstan still lacks a comprehensive basis for inclusive practices. The only type of support developed by the Ministry, is a quota for university

admissions of students with disabilities. The quota constitutes a meagre 1%, but most importantly it does not provide for other inclusive practices needed after enrollment (MES, 2015). According to the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, only 0.3% of all students, receiving tertiary education, are represented by students with special needs (as cited in OECD, 2017).

Studying at university is often perceived as an important investment in the future because it benefits and increases an individual's competitiveness in the human labor market (Tomlinson, 2008). Taking into account the idea that tertiary education is an advantage in the further competition for economic resources, admission to universities often depends on the capacities of applicants to perform on higher academic levels (OECD, 2011). Higher education in Kazakhstan is regulated by the Law on Education, established in 2007 (MES, 2007). According to this law, state grants for higher education are provided on a competitive basis. Unlike in secondary education (which is guaranteed to everyone), students must compete to enroll at university, which by nature hinders the accessibility of tertiary education and translates principles of social inequality and stratification (OECD, 2017).

Additionally, Kazakhstan actively promotes the ideology of the competitiveness of the nation, entailing the idea that individuals should be involved in higher education (HE) to succeed in the labor market and the competition for resources (OECD, 2017). The current situation in higher educational institutions in many countries, and Kazakhstan in particular, creates a mostly exclusive environment, where accessibility to tertiary education is predefined by students' capacities to compete and to succeed in the market. Moreover, in most countries, the legislation lacks mandatory policies, thus ensuring the implementation of a fully inclusive environment at universities, because higher education itself is not obligatory (Martins, Borges,

& Gonçalves, 2018). Whereas schools are enforced to comply with inclusive policies, because they form obligatory educational enrolment for all children, higher education does not.

Therefore, “educational environments in HE are more prone to segregation” (Martins et al., 2018, p. 529).

1.4 Problem Statement and Research Site

The values of Inclusion and diversity have become promoted not only in a broader educational context but also in many professional settings and organizations. For example, McKinsey and Company argue that “companies with more diverse workforces perform better financially” (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015, p.1). Thus, in order to provide a labor market with a more diverse population of employees, it is necessary to review the nature of diversity and inclusion in higher education. Considering the increasing number of inclusive schools globally, the ability to meet the needs of a whole range of students and their individual needs at the tertiary level, becomes questionable if these issues are not addressed.

The purpose of this research is to identify potential barriers to inclusion in higher education by analyzing how the competition-based and mostly exclusive nature of Kazakhstani universities, affects administrative staff and their perceptions of higher education and inclusion. Recent studies in the field of inclusive education focus mostly on the early years, primary, and secondary levels of education, whereas the topic of inclusive education in higher education contexts remains understudied, forming a gap in the literature. Thus, the main purpose of this research is to investigate the attitudes and understandings of university administrative employees towards inclusion in tertiary education and to explore how these attitudes align with the institutional strategy. In particular, the study will focus on the

exploration of the institutional context through document analysis and further comparison of documentary data with staff conceptualizations on inclusion in higher education. This approach will help to identify the beliefs of administrative staff regarding inclusive universities, and to explore potential barriers to inclusion at the university.

The research is conducted at a relatively recently established autonomous university with English as a medium of instruction (EMI). The university was opened in 2010 and aims to build a strong internationally recognized research reputation that embeds innovative approaches in education, autonomy, and academic freedom. The university bases its policies and practices on international standards of higher education, implementing them in a rigorous merit-based admission and students' academic progression requirements. The university is envisioned to "give Kazakhstan and the world the scientists, academics, managers, and entrepreneurs needed to prosper and develop". And the institutional mission reflects the following:

"To be a model for higher education reform and modern research; to contribute to the establishment of Astana as an international knowledge, innovation, and medical hub; and to prepare students for a world of increased volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Strategy 2018-2030, p. 25)."

Aiming to become a world-class university and incorporating international higher education standards into educational practices, the institution is focused on the admission of those students recognized as the top-talented in Kazakhstan. At the same time, the university partially embeds inclusion as a part of the institutional building blocks. As it is arguably the most developed policy and practices in inclusive education over other higher education institutions in the country, it was selected for the current study to identify the understanding and attitudes of administrative staff towards inclusion, their ideas concerning necessary

supports for, as well as potential barriers to the development of inclusive education in the context of higher education in Kazakhstan. Accounting for the previously mentioned factors, the site chosen for the current research, plays an important role in the transference of knowledge, skills, and practices to other universities around the country.

1.5 Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

Exploring inclusion in any education institution requires a complex holistic approach, which involves not only examining regulations and practices, but also individual and community perspectives. One of the frameworks developed to develop inclusion in education is called the “Index for Inclusion” by Booth and Ainscow (2002). According to the Index, inclusion can be explored through the prism with three interconnected dimensions: culture, policy, and practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Institutional culture is represented by principles and values shared within the community (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). The policy dimension of the Index focuses on the strategies employed to promote institutional change and development, whereas the practice dimension describes the actual processes that happen at schools (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Even though the Index was initially developed as a tool for secondary education to evaluate inclusion at schools, the authors also suggest that it can be applied for a broader context (Rollan & Somerton, 2019). Thus, the Index was used to develop the data collection instrument and to analyze documents and interview data through a three-dimensional framework.

1.5.1. Research questions.

The present study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways is inclusion represented in the strategic documents and plans of an English Medium of Instruction (EMI) higher degree university in Kazakhstan?
2. How do local administrative staff understand the concept of inclusive education within the context of higher education?
 - 2a To what degree do their views align with institutional policy and strategy?
3. What do local administrators believe are necessary supports for inclusion in higher educational institutions?
 - 3a What do they feel are some of the barriers and challenges to the development of inclusion in higher education?

1.6 The Importance of the Research

Higher education is still considered as a more segregated and exclusive educational system, compared to the primary and secondary levels of education (Moriña, 2017). Taking into account worldwide initiatives to reduce inequality and discrimination, and to develop more inclusive forms of education, it is vital to conduct research within higher education institutions such as universities, to identify potential barriers to inclusion. Moreover, the research will be useful for the particular university, where the study was conducted, because it provides insights into the current situation at the institution in terms of inclusive culture, policy, and practice.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the study, focusing on the development of inclusive education, reforms in Kazakhstan, particularly those involving higher education institutions, the research statement, and questions, as well as an overview of the research site. Chapter two focuses on research and literature concerning with inclusive education theories,

and factors that influence modern systems of higher education. Chapter three describes the methodology framing the research and data collection process. Chapters four and five provide an overview and discussion of the results collected during the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the rationale behind the current study and described the importance of this work for the field of inclusive higher education. The conceptual framework used to guide this study is based on the “Index for Inclusion” by Booth and Ainscow (2002), which underlines the importance of a three-dimensional approach in the research on the development and evaluation of inclusive school or institutional contexts. This chapter provides a more detailed overview of the studies relevant to these dimensions. The first section discusses the general background of higher education and the factors leading to exclusionary practices at universities. The following section investigates the cultural aspects of inclusion, discussing public conceptions about disability, diversity, and inclusive education. The final section overviews the current studies on inclusive policies and practices in higher education.

The literature was searched via web engines, such as Google Scholar and Nazarbayev University Library, utilizing the following keywords: *higher education, inclusive education, disability, diversity, campus climate, inclusive policy, inclusive practice, attitudes towards inclusion*. The articles were selected based on the principle of thematic and timely relevance. The review involves studies published in such journals as “Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability”, “Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management”, “International Journal of Inclusive Education”, “Journal of Diversity in Higher Education”.

The selection criteria also included publishing date, so the articles were selected for the period from 1994 to the present year, to ensure that the studies reflect the period of time after the Salamanca Statement was introduced (Hernández-Torrano, Somerton, & Helmer, 2020).

2.2 Higher Education Background

Higher Education systems vary greatly around the world: in some states, the model of tertiary education is highly decentralized and diversified, in other countries universities are unified under rigid governmental regulations (Shavit, Arum, & Gamoran, 2007). A good example of decentralized higher education can be found in the United States (U.S.), where the tertiary educational sector is represented by various private and public institutions, providing higher and lower-tier education. In other words, the system is “stratified by prestige, resources, and selectivity of both faculty and students” (Shavit, Arum, & Gamoran, 2007, p.5). The U.S. model of higher education is characterized by demand-based expansion, which means that deregulated institutions can adjust to address consumer’s needs (Shavit, Arum, & Gamoran, 2007). For example, the majority of American universities can change their admission criteria to either seek for clients (lower competition) or to seek status (high-stakes competition), creating social differentiation. In contrast, in a centralized education system expansion can be constrained. For example, some governments impose certain quotas on admission to regulate the proportion of elite and mass education (Shavit, Arum, & Gamoran, 2007).

One of the most important characteristics of higher education is the degree of autonomy of an institution, which contributes to the development of “behavioral imperatives that are relatively independent of forces emerging from the economic and political fields”

(Naidoo, 2004, p.458). United by a common intellectual field, different agents within tertiary institutions are expected to act in consensus. Nevertheless, in most cases, universities are guided by permanent internal conflicts, when individual employees or departments develop strategies to “improve or defend their positions in relation to other occupants” (Naidoo, 2004, p. 459). Relative autonomy and disagreement between various agents in one field contribute to the “social reproduction function” of higher education, which is conceptualized as a “sorting machine” (Naidoo, 2004, p.459). According to this theoretical model, higher education institutions select students based on their inferred social class and transform these students in accordance with an academic classification that reflects their social status. In other words, tertiary education prioritizes students with certain “cultural capital” originating from their social background. “The higher education system thus acts as a ‘relay’ in that it reproduces and reinforces the principles of social class and other forms of domination under the cloak of academic neutrality” (Naidoo, 2004, p.460).

The problems of exclusion and differentiation are extensively studied in the current literature. Van Vught (2008) builds his theoretical framework based on three main approaches: population ecology, resource dependency, and institutional isomorphism. The theory of population ecology explains processes within tertiary educational settings through the prism of the Darwinian evolutionary perspective. This approach draws attention to the competition for limited resources “such as membership, capital, and legitimacy” (Hannan & Freeman, 1989, as cited in Van Vught, 2008, p.13). Competition for resources is a part of general dependency on the outside environment. According to the resource dependency theory, organizations and environments are interrelated. Often the environment affects organizations, but sometimes organizations also attempt to change the environment. In order to prosper, organizations must

adjust to the existing pressures of the environment and competing agencies. However, sharing the same environment, organizations tend to have common patterns during the adaptation process. This phenomenon is explained by institutional isomorphism, “a constraining process that forces organizations to resemble other organizations that face the same set of environmental conditions” (Van Vught, 2008, p.154). Following its definition, isomorphism hinders the development of diversity in institutions and it arises from the three major factors: external pressure from other agencies, uncertainty, and ambiguity in institutional goals, and formal professionalism, which leads to the homogeneity among employees (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Competing for resources, universities are often driven by the desire to maximize and improve their human capital. This phenomenon is described as a “reputation race” when higher education institutions seek top talented and qualified students to raise the academic prestige of a university (Schuetze & Slowey, 2002 as cited in Van Vught, 2008). “This results in social stratification based on merit”, leading to the situation when ‘less-advantaged students become victims of this development” (Van Vught, 2008, p.171). The race for reputation intensifies proportionally with the degree of autonomy leading to further social stratification (Van Vught, 2008).

Some authors support the idea that equitable access to higher education and quality/prestige of education at the universities are two mutually exclusive terms. Lunt (2008) claims that higher educational institutions are elite institutions and making them more accessible to people will impede the economic development of the country. The reason, Lunt argues, is that mass higher education will result in lower spending on the educational sector, creating financial problems (2008). Moreover, competition for higher education is considered

a necessary response to the development of a “high skills economy”, with a direct link between the knowledge and the labor market (Lunt, 2008, p. 742).

Other authors completely disagree with the idea that greater access to higher education will necessarily aggravate the quality. Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler, and Bereded-Samuel (2010) argue that “equitable access and success are intimately linked with the notion of social inclusion” and they represent three “essential ingredients” in the development of higher education (Gidley et al., 2010., p. 2). The authors argue that within the context of tertiary education, inclusion may exist in degrees: social inclusion as access, inclusion as engagement, and inclusion as empowerment (Gidley et al., 2010., p. 2). Interpretation of inclusion as access refers to neoliberal ideology, which is represented by the idea that investment in human capital will boost economic growth and increase competition on the global market (Gidley et al., 2010). However, investment in students and providing higher access to education do not guarantee full inclusion and participation in the learning process, resulting in a hindered possibility of success (Gidley et al., 2010). In contrast, social inclusion is defined through the prism of social justice ideology that advocates for equal opportunities, human rights, dignity, and fairness (Gidley et al., 2010). This ideology brings up the importance of participation in education and addresses the full range of interests, enhancing human potential not only from an economic perspective (Gidley et al., 2010). The most inclusive interpretation emphasizes the importance of possibilities of each individual, rather than their deficiencies, to empower all people to succeed (Gidley et al., 2010).

One of the projects, which has promoted inclusive values in higher education and evaluated the level of inclusive culture at universities in the United Kingdom (U.K.), is a project known as “Developing and Embedding Inclusive Policy and Practice in Higher

Education” coordinated by the Higher Education Academy. According to the authors, higher educational institutions for a long time were part of a difficult economic and political environment (May & Bridger, 2010). Historically, political and economic circumstances have shaped a restrictive environment in higher education, creating more negative attitudes towards the inclusion of people from underrepresented backgrounds (May & Bridger, 2010). These findings are also supported by the study on challenges and opportunities for inclusion in higher education conducted by Moriña (2017). The author indicates that university employees and faculty in particular may have negative attitudes towards inclusion (Moriña, 2017).

Taking into account inclusive education has been developed and studied primarily in the context of secondary education, the current literature lacks extensive research on inclusive education in higher education contexts, therefore it is necessary to investigate the attitudes towards inclusive education in tertiary education to fill in the existing gap (Moriña, 2017). As the literature shows, historically, higher education is represented by the least accessible and highly competitive environment and this representation might have an influence on the general perception of higher education among people.

2.3 The Cultural Dimension of Inclusion in Higher Education

2.3.1 Understanding disability.

The way disability is understood plays a very important role in the framework of special needs education and inclusive education. For a long period of time, special needs education operated under a medical model of disability, individualizing special needs, and perceiving them as personal problems of a child (Chappell, Goodley, & Lawthom, 2001;

Reindal, 2008). According to Crow (1996), the medical approach underpinned the idea that functional limitations of an organism are the main cause of all negative experiences and social disadvantage, which can only be eliminated if the source of a problem is treated (as cited in Goering, 2015). This approach assumes that disability is internal in nature and requires a medical cure (Goering, 2002). Reindal (2008) argues that the medical model of disability completely ignores other external factors which may lead to social disadvantages, such as cultural and environmental aspects (Reindal, 2008). As a result, “people with disabilities often report feeling excluded, undervalued, [and] pressured to fit a questionable norm” (Goering, 2015, p. 134).

The reconceptualization of disability started with the social justice approach as the opposing view to the medical model of disability. For example, Olievier (1996) criticized the medical model for trying to fit people with disabilities into the non-disabled world, and when rehabilitation was impossible, the model was used to segregate these people into special medical facilities (as cited in Chappell et al., 2001). Social model proponents, however, argued that the source of disability is not always associated with bodily impairment. Whereas, it often stems from social norms, attitudinal barriers, and an inaccessible physical environment, which is initially designed for people without disabilities (Goering, 2015). Therefore, the social model draws a distinction between impairment and disability, where impairment corresponds to the functional limits of an organism, and disability is associated with “the meaning society attaches to the presence of impairment” (Chappell et al., 2001, p. 46). In contrast to the medicalized approach, the social model calls upon curing social barriers to disability instead of trying to treat biological impairments in the first place (Reindal, 2008).

Even though the social model provides a broader understanding of disability, one of the main critiques of this approach is ignoring personal experiences associated with impairments (Reindal, 2008). Another important question arising from this model, are the responsibilities society holds towards disability (Goering, 2002). There are two main theories that attempt to describe the measures needed to accommodate disability from the perspective of justice. One theory is called formal justice and it was advocated by Silvers (1998) (as cited in Danermark & Gellerstedt, 2004). The formal model suggests that the inclusion of people with disabilities into society requires no more than a provision of equal access and equal opportunities (Goering, 2002). Other scholars consider formal justice as an oversimplification, since changes in a physical and cultural environment require additional resources, and thus support the theory of distributive justice (Wasserman, 1998 as cited in Danermark & Gellerstedt, 2004). However, a distributive approach is also criticized for imposing a risk of discrimination of people with disabilities, since they will be labeled as “special needs” (Danermark & Gellerstedt, 2004).

Davis (2005) argues that society fails to understand other subtle issues that underpin exclusion, while focusing more on physical changes to mitigate disability and creating very limited opportunities to be a full member of society. One of the reasons is “partly because we tend to understand being disabled in narrow terms and to see it primarily as consisting of, or caused by, the failure to meet able-bodied standards” (Davis, 2005, p. 198). Trying to understand disability through the prism of non-disabled standards forms a belief that disability is a minority, which tends to be disadvantaged. As a result, it shapes negative attitudes towards people with disabilities, because it is “unfair to expect ‘us’ to make sacrifices to benefit ‘them’” since they belong to a very small proportion of the society (Davis, 2005, p. 177). In

fact, disability is a very broad concept, which is not limited to visible impairments and functional abnormalities. In some cases, disability might be invisible to others, and it is not necessarily defined only by the biological or physiological characteristics of our organisms. For example, an invisible disability may also be represented by changes in the psychological state. The absence of a profound or visible disability does not mitigate the social impact in form of discrimination or stigmatization. Thus, it is important to consider disability not only through the prism of “able-bodied standards”, but to acquire a deeper understanding of other forms of disability (Davis, 2005).

Nowadays, more and more students with disabilities are receiving access not only to secondary but also to higher education, however, in most of the cases “Campus communities do not address disability as part of diversity and campus climate efforts” (Harbour & Greenberg, 2017, p.4). Common barriers to inclusion of students with disabilities arise from the physical environment as well as from negative attitudes and perceptions. Thus, many institutions do not place much effort in accommodating students' needs, because these “accommodations can be seen as a burden placed on a college or university” (Grossman, 2014, p.18, as cited in Harbour & Greenberg, 2017). Other institutions perceive inclusion as an innovative and essential approach and try to provide opportunities for students with disabilities (Angeli, 2009; Harbour & Greenberg, 2017). However, sometimes faculty and staff may lack the necessary knowledge and understanding of disability to provide adequate accommodations for students.

“Unfortunately, higher education staff who need to be involved in facilitating access and equity on campus for students with disability (e.g., faculty, financial aid officers, residence hall staff) may be uninformed about ways to understand, act toward, and work with disabled students without stereotyping, stigmatizing, or alienating them”

(Harbour & Greenberg, 2017, p.9).

It is important to understand that there is a large diversity of students with disabilities that require different approaches based on the type of disability (Leake & Stodden, 2014). For example, it is critical to distinguish between visible and invisible (or hidden) disabilities. Visible disabilities, such as physical impairments that require a wheelchair), are “most likely to come to mind for members of the public in response to the term ‘disabilities’” (Leake & Stodden, 2014, p. 400). Whereas hidden disabilities, such as learning difficulties, correspond to a greater number of students (Leake & Stodden, 2014). Another factor that contributes to the overall lack of awareness about disability is that in many cases, research literature focuses on technical and physical supports that involve medical interventions and assistive technology (Leake & Stodden, 2014). As a result, responsible staff members interpret equal access for students with disabilities through the provision of accessible physical environment (e.g., ramps and housing facilities), and classroom supports (e.g., reading devices for students with vision impairments). In contrast, social inclusion and the psychological well-being of students with disabilities are often overlooked (Fleming et al., 2017; Leake & Stodden, 2014).

Nevertheless, the social aspect of inclusion is important for the admission and retention of students with disabilities in higher education, because they more often report that they do not “fit in” to the community due to attitudinal barriers (Fleming et al., 2017). Some studies show that attitudes towards disability often depend on the nature of the disability. For example, faculty experience more negative attitudes towards inclusion of students with behavioral and psychiatric disorders, and they are more positive towards the inclusion of students with visible physical or learning disabilities (Hindes & Mather, 2007, as cited in Baker, Boland & Nowik., 2012). It is also believed that learning disabilities may become a

barrier to perform well in certain majors and to receive a degree (Houck, Asseline, Troutmer & Arrington, 1992, as cited in Baker et al., 2012). Baker et al., (2012) conducted a quantitative study among $n=268$ students and $n=76$ faculty members in a liberal arts college in Pennsylvania. The study aimed to explore attitudes towards disability among faculty and students. The results indicated that faculty members were generally positive towards the provision of accommodations for students with disabilities. However, the study also illustrated that faculty have more positive impressions about available college accommodations to support students with disabilities. In contrast, less students shared a similar positive perception of campus provisions. Another finding of the study indicated that faculty members generally were not familiar with laws and regulations related to disability (Baker et al., 2012). The authors of this study suggest that it is essential to increase awareness about disability to improve overall campus climate (Baker et al., 2012).

Similar results were reported from a quantitative study in a public university in Jordan, conducted by Abu-Hamour (2013). The author surveyed $n=170$ faculty members to explore their attitudes towards students with disabilities. The results showed that the majority of faculty members have positive attitudes towards students with disabilities. At the same time, they were not familiar with disability legislations in Jordan (Abu-Hamour, 2013).

Some studies also indicate that university staff may have generally positive attitudes towards including students with disabilities, agreeing that they have a right to access education. Martins, Borges, and Gonçalves (2018) conducted a study among academic and non-academic staff in two Portuguese universities. The context of Portuguese higher education is similar to Kazakhstan in a way that students with disabilities are guaranteed to have equal access to universities, however, there are no national regulations on how to support students in

terms of social inclusion and academic performance. However, in response to the increasing number of students with disabilities, universities in Portugal signed a cooperation protocol to develop support for students with disabilities in higher education, which still varies greatly among institutions (Martins et al., 2018). The study was qualitative in nature, and aimed to explore and describe perceptions of academic and non-academic staff towards students with disabilities. Eighteen participants, selected from academic lecturing, management, and non-academic staff, participated in semi-structured interviews. The data analysis utilized a category-coding approach to identify emerging themes in staff attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. The results of the study indicated that despite a growing number of students with disabilities, they remain a minority in the context of higher education. Nevertheless, participants agreed that “students with disabilities should have the right to access the educational system” (Martins et al., 2018, p. 533). The staff representatives interviewed were generally supportive towards the inclusion of students with disabilities, however, they also pointed out that lack of information and training are the main obstacles in meeting students’ needs (Martins et al., 2018).

The overview of current literature on disability in higher education shows that there is still a lack of awareness and understanding of disability among university employees. As a result, institutions may fail to provide adequate support for students with disabilities by focusing only on the physical accessibility of the environment and overlooking the social aspect of inclusion. Nevertheless, attitudinal barriers may impede the retention of students with disabilities because students lose a sense of belonging. In the contexts, where the staff has positive perceptions towards the inclusion of students with disabilities, a lack of institutional awareness may also hinder the development of inclusion. In order to ensure the

inclusion of students with disabilities into higher education, it is essential to increase awareness of faculty and staff about disability and inclusion.

2.3.2 Understanding diversity.

Disability is not the only focus of inclusive education, but it is rather a part of a broader notion - diversity. Some scholars define diversity as “counting heads”, opposing this term to inclusion, which is viewed to be the process of welcoming and accommodating different people in one setting (Winters, 2014). Other scholars utilize the word diversity to describe the characteristics of a certain group, such as differences in demographics, culture, identity, and other observable and non-observable characteristics (Roberson, 2004).

Addressing the needs and embracing diversity became a guiding principle of social justice education, which aims to ensure full inclusion and equal participation of all students (Hackman, 2005). According to Bell (1997), the goal of social justice education is defined by the principles of empowerment, social responsibility, and distribution of resources (as cited in Hackman, 2005).

Diversity has become an integral part of inclusive education, which advocates for the right of all children to receive an education (Haug, 2017). However, some scholars argue that the definition of inclusive education is vague, and in most cases, it is interpreted in different ways by various stakeholders (Armstrong et al., 2010, as cited in Hornby, 2015). Some people identify inclusive education through the principle of full inclusion, meaning that all children are educated in mainstream schools (Hornby, 2015). Others support the idea that inclusion is represented by the increasing number of students with special needs in educational settings. At the same time, special educational institutions should be also available for those who need

them, since full inclusion could be considered is unrealistic, and it may create even more discrimination in mainstream institutions (Hornby, 2015; Terzi, 2014). Nevertheless, both of these ideas involve broadening access and education for a wider diversity of needs (Hornby, 2015).

In the context of higher education, equity became one of the main concerns for policymakers (James, 2012). On a university level, equity is characterized by several factors, such as the absence of barriers to access higher education, enrollment based on academic merit, absence of discrimination of students' differences, and provision of equal opportunities for development (James, 2012). Relying on these principles, higher education institutions strive to achieve a more heterogeneous composition of the student population to achieve equity (James, 2012). The cultural and socioeconomic diversity of students became key diversification factors for university communities. Despite this, students from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds may still experience attitudinal or environmental barriers to education. For example, some studies show that cultural and racial minorities often face negative experiences, bias, and discrimination at universities (Rankin & Reason, 2005, as cited in Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). The socioeconomic background of a student may become the main reason for students dropping out from higher education, since students from financially less advantaged groups may face a lack of financial support from the institution. As a result, they need to engage in part-time work, or get into debt to pay for daily necessities (Yorke & Thomas, 2010). Thus, some institutions offer different types of financial support, such as consultations, direct funding, and work on campus (Yorke & Thomas, 2010).

The studies on student' diversity indicate that there are different reasons for the negative experiences experienced by students, and retention in higher education. These

reasons include a lack of institutional cultural sensitivity, and a lack of systematic support for students.

2.4 Inclusive Policy and Practice in Higher Education

Despite many scholars, policymakers, and educationalists are focused on developing inclusive policies and practices in education, comparative studies show that this process is highly dependent on national contexts and local understandings of inclusive education in general. Professionals might share their values and beliefs about the importance of inclusion, however, consensus around the meaning of this concept and its effects on policy and practice has not been reached yet. (D'Alessio & Watkins, 2009). "Consequently, it appears that this international commitment to inclusion has not resulted in a common interpretation of the concept of inclusive education, which still means different things to different researchers, reflecting contrasting theoretical and ideological contexts in which inclusion is considered." (D'Alessio & Watkins, 2009, p. 235).

In the context of higher education, research has been focused primarily on students with disabilities and faculty (Moriña, 2017). Even though inclusion is a broader concept that embeds not only students with disabilities, but the whole diversity of individual needs, these studies still provide useful insights into institutional policy and practice. For example, Moriña, (2017) discusses three principles that should be utilized in an inclusive university. The first principle points out that an inclusive institution should not have any physical barriers and should have an accessible environment for all students. According to the second principle, universities should pay more attention to the transition of students from secondary to higher education and to ensure proper adaptation to a new academic and social context. Thirdly,

professional training for all employees should be established to increase awareness about student needs (Moriña, 2017).

Inclusive policy and practice in higher education may be initiated in response to many factors, including external state policies, however, within a university, the change should involve both institutional and individual levels of transformation (May & Bridger, 2010). McKinsey (1980) developed a model that embeds both institutional and individual change (as cited in May & Bridger, 2010). According to the McKinsey 7S Framework (1980), institutional transformation is built around three key factors: strategy, structure, and systems. The strategy is essential to communicate and direct changes within the organization, whereas structure and system correspond to clear arrangements within the network, and collaborative efforts targeted on implementation of inclusive policy and practice, as well as a general evaluation of institutional equity (May & Bridger, 2010). The individual change focuses on the development of shared values and responsibilities among staff, as well as the development of professional style and skills in the implementation of inclusive education practice (May & Bridger, 2010). “The methods used, sought to go beyond raising the awareness of staff about the agendas, to improving their understanding and encouraging them to take action.” (May & Bridger, 2010, p. 96). The overall development of inclusion in higher education requires a holistic and flexible approach, that allows gradual ongoing changes based on internal evaluations and analysis. And One of the key elements in such a transformation process, is to ensure that all employees share the same mission and common understanding of inclusion (May & Bridger, 2010). This framework coincides with the framework of the “Index for Inclusion” by Booth and Ainscow (2002), who also underlined the importance of a common

understanding of inclusion among all employees within the institution, and the strong connection between culture, policy, and practice.

2.5. Summary

The chapter provided an overview of the general higher education context, exploring the characteristics of current university systems. It has discussed public conceptions regarding disability and diversity in the context of inclusive education, which corresponds to the cultural dimension of inclusive education research. The studies on inclusive policy and culture in higher education were also reviewed in this chapter to provide a framework for policy and practice dimensions.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology employed for the present study, and justifies the qualitative approach chosen for the purpose of answering the research questions. The focus is on the exploration and interpretation of a topic through two phases, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The first phase examines the topic of inclusive education through the analysis of publicly available documents that are strategic in nature. The second phase interprets the understanding of inclusive education in higher education from the perspective of the local administrative staff at a university in the Kazakhstani context.

3.2 Research Design

Considering the exploratory nature of the research questions, which aim to investigate participants' understanding of a broad concept within their work setting, a qualitative approach was selected to explore the attitude of administrative staff towards inclusion in higher education. The research approach is constructivist in nature premised ontologically and epistemologically on the basis that individuals develop their meaning and understanding of the world shaped by their personal experiences within a complex socio-cultural environment (Creswell, 2014). To explore the complexity of views, the research will focus on both the context, where participants live or work, and open-ended questioning to understand individual meanings and the experiences or values that shape them (Creswell, 2014). These individual views and meanings are captured through a case study approach, which focuses on a single system, such as university (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Case study research reveals the complexity of human systems by examining unique and dynamic environments (Cohen et al., 2007). It involves a thorough description of the context followed by the analysis of overarching themes.

Case study research design has strengths and weaknesses as on the one hand, it provides unique and more detailed data not always traceable in quantitative research designed for generalizability. On the other hand, the meaning of the data is dependent on the researcher's interpretation which can be prone to subjectivity and selectivity (Cohen et al., 2007). However, this design aligns more closely with the exploratory and descriptive nature of the research questions.

3.3 Sample

3.3.1 Phase 1-document analysis.

For the purpose of better context exploration, an institutional strategic document “Strategy 2018-2030” was selected. The document describes the institutional pathway for future changes and clearly identifies the desired image and position of the university within the global arena of higher education. Apart from strategic goals, the document also analyzes current university outcomes and achievements. This document helps to understand institutional focus and vision towards the development of higher education in the Kazakhstani context. Moreover, it provides some insights into what values are transmitted in the existing university culture. The document is available on the official university website and it does not require institutional affiliation for access.

In addition to the strategic document, an information booklet was selected for analysis because it is designed for institutional self-representation and promotion of its core values. The brochure gives more information about student attributes and the university “building blocks”, which are necessary for a broader understanding of the context. The document is publicly available on the official university website.

The document analysis sought to explore the context where research is conducted, but it does not have an aim to thoroughly investigate institutional policies and practices. That is why the sample size includes only documents that contain a concise self-image, core institutional values, and development plans. Also, English versions of the documents are selected to define the emergent themes with the existing literature.

3.3.2 Phase 2 – interviews.

Since this case study research does not aim to obtain generalizable data, the predetermined sample size is irrelevant (Emmel, 2013). However, case study research typically recruits a small number of participants (Creswell, 2014). The researcher received permission from the Director of the division to disseminate information about the current study via the corporate mailing list. The information contained a short description of the research, its aim, purpose, and research questions, selection criteria, risk and benefits, and the contact information of the researcher. Participants who were interested in the research, voluntarily contacted the researcher for additional information, and were selected based on their willingness to participate and their fit to the selection criteria.

As the study focuses on the understanding of inclusive education from the perspective of local administrative staff, the research requires the articulation of certain sample selection criteria. The target group for this research was represented by administrative employees who are involved in decision-making processes that have a direct impact on institutional policies and practices. Five participants (three females and two males) from manager and senior management positions were selected. Work experience at the selected institution varied from 12 months to 3 years prior to their participation in the study. Four of the participants received Bachelor level education at local Kazakhstani universities and one of the participants studied abroad in a post-Soviet country. Additionally, two of the participants received Master's degrees in international universities abroad.

3.4 Research Site and the Role of the Researcher

The research focuses on one higher educational institution in Kazakhstan and as an employee at the site, the researcher is fully aware of her role in the study and holds the responsibility for keeping all data confidential. An investigator's affiliation with a research site is a debatable topic in academia. It is argued that a researcher from outside might have lower subjectivity and bias levels. However, there is a risk that this researcher will not be able to fully understand the context and community (Merton, 1972). On the other hand, an "insider" might be more subjective, but also this investigator is more familiar with the context, which helps with data interpretation (Zulfikar, 2014). Moreover, some of the communities are inaccessible to an outsider not only in terms of institutional policies, but also from the matter of trustworthiness and what can or cannot be shared with a not affiliated person (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Speaking of subjectivity, "being an outsider does not create an immunity to the influence of a researcher's perspective" (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 29).

One of the risks of what is considered to be a "backyard" research study, is a potential breach in confidentiality because it "leads to compromises in the researcher's ability to disclose information" (Creswell, 2014, p.237). The researcher is fully aware of potential risks and harm to the participants if identifiable information is disclosed. Thus, following the recommendations provided by CITI training in the "Social and Behavioral Research" course, procedures are designed to minimize this risk as described in "Data Collection" and "Ethical Consideration" sections below.

3.5 Instruments

To explore both context and participants' understanding of inclusion, a combination of two methodological approaches will be utilized to collect all relevant data.

3.5.1 Phase 1- document analysis.

The university's strategic documents were examined thematically. This approach involved the analysis of each document to ultimately understand the nature or place of inclusive education within the overarching institutional mission, vision, and goals topics and concepts. The documents are publicly available on the university website.

3.5.2 Phase 2 – interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with open-ended questions to explore administrative employees' understanding of inclusive education in a higher education context. Following the conceptual framework of culture, policy and practice, and a constructivist lens through which research is interpreted, a set of interview questions were prepared. However, some additional questions were asked during the interviews when explanation or elaboration was needed. This data collection process provided a more in-depth understanding of each participant's view. Interview questions were drawn from the literature related to previous research of Booth and Ainscow (2002), who developed an instrument to evaluate inclusion at school and to support its further development. The interview questions are presented in the Appendix 1. The interview protocol and informed consent forms were produced in three languages, Kazakh, Russian, and English so that participants are able to

choose to participate in the language where they can best articulate their understanding and response.

3.6 Data Collection

3.6.1 Phase 1 - document analysis.

As this phase of data collection does not involve human subjects, the data collection process began prior to the interview phase. The researcher utilized the university's website and downloaded the "Strategy 2018-2030" and university booklet publicly available on the official website.

3.6.2 Phase 2 – interviews.

Participants were invited to participate in interviews that were conducted in recreational areas on the university site. These were indoor sites, such as a small cafeteria inside the institutional building to ensure a comfortable environment for the participants. This case study can be considered as a "Backyard" research because it is conducted at the researcher's workplace (Creswell, 2014).

Prior to beginning an interview, each participant was informed about the goals of the study, research questions, the voluntary nature of participation, risks and benefits of the research, and how the researcher intends to protect the identity of the participant and the confidentiality of their data. An informed consent form was provided to each participant in the language that they are most comfortable with (in this study all participants were comfortable signing the form and to give the interview in Russian). The informed consent (see Appendix 2)

contained the information listed above to ensure that the participant is aware of their rights, either to answer or not answer a question, and the voluntary nature of their participation.

The researcher asked if the participant was happy for the interview to be recorded. All participants agreed for the interview and signed the consent form. All participants were informed that if at any stage they feel uncomfortable with the questions, the researcher will stop and ask the participant if they wish to continue and comply with their wishes accordingly. No such cases happened during the interviews.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The researcher has completed the institutional requirement for ethics known as CITI training. No data was collected from human subjects until institutional approval was received by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) through the school peer-review process. All participants were provided with an informed consent form in Russian (the language they were most comfortable with) before the beginning of an interview. The consent form meets the institution's ethical requirements and contains related information about research procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and contact information if an interviewee wants to express concerns or complaints regarding the study.

3.7.1 Potential risks and how they will be addressed in the research.

The obvious potential risk of conducting this research is the disclosure of identifiable data, because it may affect participants' further work or relationships at the institution. Thus, to maintain confidentiality, no names were associated with any of the audio recordings and written transcripts. A code number was used instead to designate an audio and corresponding

transcription during the analysis. The audio was recorded and stored on the researcher's mobile phone device, which is secured by a fingerprint protection system so that only the researcher has access to the device. This information was deleted after transcription was completed.

Participants' transcripts were de-identified by the allocation of a code. These transcripts with codes are stored on the researcher's password-protected personal computer, the password is known only to the researcher. Code numbers with their corresponding participants' identities are stored in a separate file on the researcher's laptop. This laptop and file are both protected by a password to ensure the confidentiality of the data is maintained to the best of the researcher's capacity. All participants were informed that there could be unanticipated risks that cannot be controlled by the researcher, such as theft or loss of data storing devices. However, the researcher followed the above-mentioned procedures to minimize the risk of a third party accessing actual data and identifiable information.

3.7.2 Benefits of the research.

The research does not provide direct benefits to the participants, but it will provide an analysis of the current understanding among local administrators on inclusion at the university, which might be used for the development of institutional policies and practices.

3.8 Data Analysis

Qualitative research in general and interviews, in particular, generate enormous amounts of data, which may also contain a lot of unrelated content (Rabiee, 2004). That is why data analysis involved several steps, which included examining, finding categories and

themes, tabulating and re-structuring the content to define better evidence (Yin, 1989, as cited in Rabiee, 2004). In order to avoid analyzing unrelated information, Krueger and Casey (2000) suggest that the analysis should be driven by the research purpose and question (as cited in Rabiee, 2004). The research utilized a Framework Analysis approach, which consisted of several interconnected stages (Rabiee, 2004). The process consisted of familiarization, identification of themes, mapping out and interpretation of data (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). Following this process, document and interview data were categorically and thematically analyzed.

3.8.1 Phase 1 - document analysis.

The first step in the document analysis process was aimed to familiarize the researcher with the main topics discussed in the university strategy and brochure. In the next review process, topics related to the research purpose and questions were identified and relevant codes were highlighted within each document. In the third step of the analysis, codes were combined into emerging themes, which were categorized into three dimensions according to the framework: culture, policy, and practice.

3.8.2 Phase 2 - interview analysis.

After the transcription, the interviews were translated into English for consistency in data analysis and represented results. In the same manner, as the document analysis, the interviews were reviewed, and the topics related to the research questions and purpose were identified. The analysis was conducted on the Russian versions of the transcriptions, to prevent any loss of information and meanings. Corresponding parts in English translation were highlighted to report findings of the research. The codes and topics identified were united

under emerging themes, which fitted and also overlapped all three dimensions of the framework: culture, policy, and practice.

3.8 Summary

This chapter has provided an explanation and justification for the methodological approach to the study, focusing on the theory behind the selected research design, potential limitations, and ethical considerations. This chapter has summarized the data collection and data analysis processes utilized to explore the understanding of and attitudes towards inclusive education, as well as institutional policy and practice on inclusion. The following chapter will present the results of the two phases of data collection, document analysis, and interviews.

Chapter Four: Results

4.1 Introduction

The present study involved a two-phased data collection and data analysis process. The first phase was concentrated on the institutional strategic document and the self-representation brochure available to public access via university web-portal. The second phase involved semi-structured interviews with five participants from various administrative units within the institution. Both datasets were thematically analyzed using the framework of the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). This chapter reports all findings and emerging themes from the document and interview analysis.

4.2 Themes and Categories

According to the Index for Inclusion, a study on inclusive education can be approached through the prism of three interconnected dimensions: culture, policy, and practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). During the analysis, all themes emerging from both strategic documents and interviews were distributed into three dimensions of the Index. Institutional culture was represented by the understanding and attitudes towards inclusive education in the context of higher education. The cultural dimension is represented primarily, by themes emerging from the interview data collected from university administrative employees. Other themes that related to practices and policy were placed under these respective dimensions. All findings can be illustrated by three interconnected tables. Table 1 represents the strategic document analysis, with a connection to employees' understanding and awareness about the current institutional state. Table 2 focuses on staff ideas and attitudes towards inclusive education and their conceptions towards policy, and practices they believe are necessary for an inclusive university. Table 3 draws connections between the interview data and document analysis to identify re-emerging themes across all dimensions.

4.3 Document Analysis

This phase of the research involved a thematic analysis of the two university documents available in open access. The first document is the institutional strategy for 2018-2020, which overviews the main university goals and approaches identified as how to achieve these goals. The second document is the institutional brochure, which discusses key characteristics and building blocks of the university. This document is used as a self-representation tool for the university. All major themes emerging from the document analysis

were distributed according to the dimensions: culture, policy, and practice, as represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Document Analysis Represented via Culture, Policy, and Practice

Dimensions	Culture	Policy	Practice
Themes	Model of HE reform Global recognition and competition Inclusion Embracing Diversity Social lift for poor and talented	Rigorous merit-based admission International progression standards Admission irrespective of special needs Internationalization Multicultural Environment	Training programs Technology Graduate attributes Internationalization committee International Faculty International Students

4.3.1 Cultural dimension.

The document analysis showed that one of the primary institutional missions is to be a model of higher education in Kazakhstan, establishing a center for higher education reform and modern research, and translating institutional values and achievements to other universities in the country. The analysis also indicated that one of the main drivers for the institutional strategic development is global competition and recognition of the university, which shapes the overall institutional culture.

“International recognition requires playing by existing global rules - in other words, competing effectively in the global ranking “League Tables” game. The competition is driven primarily, but not exclusively, by a university’s research

and publishing track record, but also by student achievements and university characteristics...” (Strategy 2018-2030, p.23)

“...the world will be increasingly demanding [of the university] to demonstrate that it measures up to global standards. Therefore, continued growth in the quality and success of its graduates and its research will be critical in achieving international recognition and standing.” (Strategy 2018-2030, p.27)

Document analysis also indicated several emerging themes in institutional culture in relation to students: inclusion and embracing diversity, and social lift. These themes emerge as institutional building blocks and core values. For example, the institutional brochure identifies inclusion at the university as “an environment for all qualified students irrespective of their special needs” (Brochure, 2019, p.15). The university also positions itself as a “social lift for poor, but talented young people” (Strategy, 2018-2030, p.16). This value is reflected in the admissions policy discussed in the next subsection.

Other emerging themes in the documents are reflected through the curriculum, instructional methods, technology applied for teaching and learning, and interactions with international faculty and students. Similarly, these themes are only superficially discussed in the analyzed documents, whereas the main attention is drawn to institutional growth, research, human resources, and university development. All these themes are related to operational needs of the university; however, they do not provide guidance on the implementation of inclusive and diversity values in the daily work of administrative staff, which will be represented by the interviews.

4.3.2 Policy dimension.

Striving to be a model of higher education in Kazakhstan, and to receive recognition in a global competition where the institutional “primary product is its graduates” shapes the

overall university policy and practice (Strategy, 2018-2030, p.16). It is specifically reflected and described in the admissions process and learning and teaching standards. In order to effectively compete in the international arena, the university aims to ensure that it admits students who are considered talented. Thus, one of the institutional key policies is merit-based admission, which selects students with “sufficient academic achievements and level of English” (Strategy, 2018-2030, p.20). This policy is also described in the institutional self-representation document:

“Merit based admission and progression: rigorous admission and progression requirements reflecting international standards.” (Brochure, 2019, p.15).

The Brochure also mentions progression requirements that reflect international standards. According to the Strategy, the university sets up academic excellence as an essential policy in teaching and learning. Following the global models of higher education, the policy advocates for “instilling academic integrity and critical thinking in students” (Strategy 2018-2030, p.27). The strategic document and brochure do not cover the implementation of these policies at the university. However, the practical aspect of merit-based admission is discussed in the interview sections.

In response to the institutional values on inclusion and diversity, the Strategy specifies that the university signals to the population of Kazakhstan being “a university for all” (Strategy, 2018-2030, p.20). This agenda is reflected in the admission policy, meaning that the candidates are evaluated only based on their academic merits, and “regardless of wealth, connections (or lack of thereof), ethnicity, or gender” (Strategy, 2018-2030, p.20).

“The composition of NU’s student body reflects the importance of this admissions policy as it is representative of all the country’s socioeconomic, gender, and geographical groupings. NU’s admissions policies also produced a near perfect gender distribution among students” (Strategy, 2018-2030, p.20)

The policy focuses on providing access for students irrespective of their demographic characteristics. It partially reflects the inclusive values of the institution and to a greater extent are associated with the theme of being a “social lift” for students.

Along with international standards in the academic domain, global recognition also drives institutional goals to enlarge the university's international community. The institution strives to create a multicultural environment for students and employees. As a result, one of the predominant themes found in document analysis is internationalization.

“Internationalization of the Student Body - in the next decade, a major [university] goal is to diversify and internationalize its student body...”

The internationalization policy corresponds to a “large-scale activity, related to the University academic, research, and innovation activities” (Strategy 2018-2030, p. 57). This policy ensures that the institution utilizes relevant internationalized curriculum, stays competitive, and strives to receive international recognition to attract international scholars and students. Being a primary university goal, internationalization is accompanied by ongoing and concrete changes in institutional practice. For example, the university launched the internationalization committee which develops guidelines to attract more students from the global community.

4.3.3 Practice dimension.

In relation to the institutional mission to become a model of higher education in Kazakhstan, the university launched training and professional development courses for professionals who work in other universities in Kazakhstan. However, this practice became essential not only for the outside community, but also it is highly prioritized within the university. So, schools and administrative departments organize training programs for employees to advance their knowledge and to enhance their professional skills.

The implementation of institutional mission and policies is associated with the use of technology, as it is repeatedly mentioned in the Strategy. From a practical dimension, technologies are considered as a driver for research and innovation, which are important components for the overall university goal to achieve international recognition and competitiveness. In addition, teaching and learning processes are designed in a way to bring technology-competent graduates to the world. The use of technology in university life is also described in the interviews.

In order to translate institutional values to students, the university developed the set of graduate attributes, which serve as guiding principles and characteristics that students should have after graduation. The attributes include not only professional qualities, but also the concepts of being an open-minded and cultured citizen of the world. Most importantly the attributes also advocate for embracing diversity as one of the key values of university graduates.

As mentioned in the previous subsection, internationalization and development of a multicultural environment are some of the key institutional policies. Practical implementation

of this policy, as described in the strategic document, is the formation of a special committee that develops practical strategies to attract more international faculty and students to the institution.

4.4 Interview Analysis

Following the process involved for document analysis, interview data were thematically analyzed, and all themes were distributed according to the three dimensions from the Index of Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). The dominant themes identified in the analysis are disability, diversity, provision, equality, and equity. Some of these themes appear across all three dimensions, so sub-themes were also included in Table 2 to provide a better overview of the results.

Table 2. Conceptions of Inclusive Education, Relevant Policies and Practices among Administrative Staff

Category	Culture	Policy	Practice
Theme	Disability		
Sub-themes in Disability	Limited capabilities Special needs Minority Discovering talents	Additional technological support Promotion Increase in number of students	Ramps Pathways Special equipment Discounts Lack of awareness

Theme	Diversity		
Sub-themes in Diversity	Not like me Mindset Danger Cultural diversity Socio-Economic background Institutional image Physical disability Intellectual disability Emotional and behavioral difficulties	Opportunity for education Complex approach and training Financial supports Admission standards	Work on Campus Specialists Welcoming environment
Theme	Equality and Equity		
Sub-themes in Equality and Equity	Equal rights Opportunities for all Access	Full picture Common understanding	Professional trainings

4.4.1 Cultural dimension.

The cultural dimension in the interview data is associated with the administrative staff's understanding and attitudes towards inclusive education at the university. Analysis of the interviews indicated that respondents' interpretation of inclusion is either limited to students' disability or can be interpreted with a wider perspective on diversity. Interviewees,

who defined inclusion with the focus on a visible disability, also indicated that inclusive education is represented mostly by the adjustments in the physical environment, and provision of special equipment or professionals. Interviewee 1 describes inclusive education as:

“Well, ah, inclusive education, as far as I understood, - this is when all students study together, disregarding, ah, their physical or psychological state. Hmm, and every student will be provided with different necessary technologies, conditions and etc, there are language and cultural barriers, if they can be called like that” [Interviewee 1].

However, when this interviewee was asked about how inclusive education can be applied in the context of higher education, the focus was shifted to “limited capabilities”:

“Well, definitely, it will require special equipment for people with limited capabilities, certain rooms” [Interviewee 1].

Similarly, Interviewee 3 also focused on special needs and disabilities while giving the definition of inclusion. It is important to note that one of the frequently appearing words throughout the interview is the word “invalid”, which is commonly used in Russian language to refer to people with disabilities.

“Inclusive education for me is a special approach and creation of, ah, hmm, an environment for special people. Special people, ah, I mean, hmm, it may be children with disabilities [originally used Russian term - invalid] or very smart, gifted children” [Interviewee 3].

Even though this interviewee mentioned gifted children in the general definition of inclusive education, when the respondent was asked to describe her understanding of inclusive higher education, it was shifted to visible disabilities and necessary physical adjustments or equipment:

“Ah, especially in higher education there could be different children. Hmm, in general, ah, for example, people in wheelchairs could, hmm, receive education in IT, for example, so that they do not need to physically move. In literature, they can also become political scientists” [Interviewee 3].

“Inclusive university I view as, ah, for example, rooms with, ah, special equipment for reading, for example, for blind people. Or, hmm, with headphones. Ah, for those, who can’t, ah, who do not have hands, there could be some sort of robots, which could help reading, turning pages over” [Interviewee 3].

Other interviewees expressed a broader understanding of inclusion and their views encompass a more diverse group of students and their needs. Interviewee 2 defines inclusive education and an inclusive university as embodying diversity, accessibility, and a welcoming environment:

“Inclusive education is education for all, not depending on physical, intellectual, social and psychological differences” [Interviewee 2].

“Inclusive higher education is accessible education, which is provided by professionals with deep knowledge of psychophysical, emotional, intellectual differences of people with limited capabilities, to create a welcoming environment where a person does not feel alienated.”[Interviewee 2].

Interviewee 4 expresses a similar understanding of inclusive university:

“Ah, inclusive education in the context of higher education, I would say, this is the accessibility of higher education for all, ah, social groups, for people with different needs. Meaning people, who do not have certain financial opportunities, [people of] different race, culture, regions, I don’t know, ah, people who require special conditions for physical presence, I mean, people with certain needs, can apply to the university. University gives opportunities for ALL and provides education for all, disregarding who has what kind of listed characteristics” [Interviewee 4].

The theme of diverse needs and accessibility of higher education is also interconnected with the notions of equality and equity. Interviewee 4 and 5 also identified inclusion as equal opportunities for all students:

“For me, inclusive education is, ah, probably, I don’t know, ideology or something like that. It assumes, ah, or to be more precise, excludes any kind of discrimination of, ah, students. And provides equal, ah, attitudes towards all people, equal opportunities” [Interviewee 4].

“I understand this term as a type of education when the opportunity for education is provided to every person, independently of any physical, intellectual, social, and other differences. Also, it is the creation of equal conditions for all students” [Interviewee 5].

Even though the idea that education should be available for all people in some way was mentioned in all of the interviews, several interviewees expressed mixed attitudes towards inclusion in higher education. Interviewee 1 takes the neutral stance towards inclusive education, pointing out that “being not dangerous” is the main factor influencing his attitude:

“Hmm, overall, I am not against admitting people, ah, who are not like me, if we can say that. I do not care about a person's origin. Again, if a person is not dangerous for the community, let him receive education, no matter at my university or at any other university” [Interviewee 1].

Nevertheless, this interviewee also expressed uncertainty in his perceptions towards inclusion in the context of higher education:

“Well, the university supports this idea in general. Well, ah, at the university they say inclusion is good, we need to support it, etc. But is it necessary for a certain field or for a certain goal, I don’t know exactly. We can live without it” [Interviewee 1].

Other participants expressed generally positive attitudes towards inclusive higher education. Interviewee 2 stated that inclusion is necessary for higher education because people with special needs also should have a choice of enrollment:

“Hmm, I think, inclusion is needed in every university, because people with special needs also should have a choice where to apply, as well as any other person” [Interviewee 2].

Interviewee 3 also pointed out that inclusion at universities is specifically important for the Kazakhstani context:

“Inclusion is important, ah, in our university as well, because in Kazakhstan there are many special students. Meaning children, who have very high intelligence that needs to be developed. They may become good scientists, writers, engineers. It is necessary to help them, to create conditions”
[Interviewee 3].

These data showed that participants’ attitudes towards the inclusion of particular groups of students to higher education depend on the nature of diversity. For example, most of the interviewees strongly supported the inclusion of students from different cultural backgrounds.

Interviewee 2 pointed out:

“Cultural exchange is one of the important factors of personal development, from my point of view. This is an exchange of experiences, history, culture, broadening horizons and mindsets” [Interviewee 2].

Overall, the codes associated with cultural diversity include “broadening mindset”, “development”, “open-minded” “understanding”. Similarly, a very positive attitude was related to the inclusion of students with physical disabilities which sometimes are also called “special needs” in the interviews. The Interviewee 3 supported inclusion of students with special needs:

“All people should have the right for education. Also, people with special needs will, ah, socialize more, and people, ah, who are not ill, I mean, standard, let’s stay, they will also get used [to it] and will try to create an environment for others”[Interviewee 3].

Interviewee 4 expressed a positive view on the inclusion of students with physical disabilities:

“Well, to the admission of students with disabilities, I am, actually, very positive. For example, in our university, students with disabilities show that

impossible is possible” [Interviewee 4].

Intellectual disabilities, however, were perceived as the main potential barrier for studying at the university, because of the academic standards. The Interviewees 3 and 4 stated:

“Admission of students with intellectual difficulties, I think, for them, there should be a separate group because they can be behind the main group. Main group can study according to [educational] plans, and, ah, students with intellectual problems can be behind since they require a special approach. If, for example, there are a couple or one student in the group with this kind of development, so, I think, additional lessons are required for this person” [Interviewee 3].

“Regarding students with intellectual disabilities, probably, there would be no problem, however, unfortunately, our university does not provide education for these children and it would be difficult for them to study here” [Interviewee 4].

Emotional and behavioral difficulties (EBD) were not considered as problematic, however, it was pointed out that students with EBD will require supervision and additional control:

“Students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Well, we have these students, we can say. I would tell nothing bad, but, ah, it should be under control, since some of the students can be very-very unstable. But, I have no problems with this, however, it requires mandatory control” [Interviewee 4].

Since institutional strategic plans are strongly related to global competition and recognition, all interviewees were asked whether they believe that inclusive universities can achieve a high score in the international ranking. Interviewee 1 expressed an opinion that inclusion cannot influence the overall image of the university, because students with “limited capabilities” will be in minority:

“Well, let’s assume among five thousand five hundred students there will be, ah, fifty students with limited capabilities. This is around, ah, one percent of all students. Hm, it does not matter, whatever they do, they are always in the minority” [Interviewee 1].

Interviewee 4 pointed out that inclusion usually is not considered in the rankings. The key factors which affect the ranking are education, research, and the number of students:

“Inclusion can be a certain factor in rankings, but, unfortunately, it is not a key factor. I mean, in international rankings attention is paid on different aspects, more on type of education, research, and the number of students” [Interviewee 4].

Other participants perceived inclusion as an additional asset in global institutional rankings. One of the reasons is that accessibility of the institution should be assessed with “extra points” as it is pointed out by the Interviewee 2:

“In my opinion, ah, it is not a key factor, but at the same time, the inclusive university should receive additional points for its accessibility for all” [Interviewee 2].

Interviewee 3 expressed concern that many of the talented students who have special needs are often excluded from higher education. If a university starts to discover these talents, it will be represented in the top rankings:

“So, it is necessary to discover, hmm, talents are dying in these people. It is necessary to discover all these and so it can easily get into top rankings” [Interviewee 3].

The beliefs of administrative staff and their attitudes towards inclusion embedded various themes, such as disability, diversity, equality, and equity. Beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion vary greatly on the basis of an individual’s understanding, which also influences employees’ conception of what changes in policy and practice are needed to build an inclusive university.

4.4.2 Policy dimension.

All interviewees were asked to share their opinion on what changes are required for the current institutional policy and practice to develop inclusion at the university. One of the interviewees found it difficult to provide comments on this question, because he does not know much about the current situation, so he assumed that better promotion of institutional policy within the university could be necessary:

“Well, ah, first of all, it is necessary to promote this topic, since I don’t even know the policy of the university to suggest any changes [laughs]”
[Interviewee 1].

Interviewee 4 considers a lack of a common understanding of inclusive education as one of the key issues in the current policy. She also connects it to the general underrepresentation of different groups of students in university policy, which creates a disruption in addressing individual needs in practice.

“Well, ah, speaking about the policy of inclusive education at the university... To begin with, people do not have an understanding of inclusion - what it is, and that is why, probably, there are certain problems” [Interviewee 4].

“Hmm, those children with certain physical needs, there are not so many of them, and that is why the university is not really interested. Not to say not interested, but doesn’t do much to develop inclusion” [Interviewee 4].

Interviewee 2 could not provide any comments and claimed that she is not aware of the institutional policies and what should be changed in terms of inclusion. Interviewee 5 also could not provide a broader commentary but stated that the university supports inclusion.

Interviewee 3, who focused primarily on visible disabilities as the main characteristic of inclusion, pointed out that she is unaware of the current institutional policy and relied on the actual practice to conceptualize this dimension.

“I do not know a lot about, ah, policy in our university, but, ah, I think the university tries to create an environment and opportunity, ah, to provide education. Well, it is more or less understandable, since in our library we have, ah, special equipment for reading. Ehm, what else do we have... We have special pathways for, ah, blind people. I mean, ah, floors that give direction for people with bad eyesight. But since I haven't read the policy, I cannot tell anything” [Interviewee 3].

The interview data shows that most of the participants do not have enough information on the current institutional policy in relation to inclusion. So, they could not suggest any particular changes in this dimension. It was also pointed out by Interviewee 4 that the major problem with the university policy is that people do not have a common understanding of inclusive education.

4.4.3 Practice dimension.

All interviewees were asked to provide their comments on institutional practice in relation to existing barriers and supports for students. Interviewee 4 draws attention to the socio-economic backgrounds of applicants as one of the main barriers to enrollment and participation:

“To begin with, yes, the university is technically equipped in many terms. Hmm, however, for example, if we talk about certain needs, right, so, for example, some, ahh, not every child can, for example, enroll in our university. In order to get admitted to our university, it is necessary to pass certain exams, which not everyone can afford. So, it already does not include social layers, for example, which are economically, ah, let's say unstable. So, ah, with the current situation at the university, I, of course, disagree, because it is simply difficult to enroll in the university, for some people it is difficult to survive

further. Meaning, all students have no similar conditions for education. Some people need, for example, to work more” [Interviewee 4].

Interviewee 3 who conceptualized inclusion primarily through physical disabilities and technological support also suggested that changes in physical environment and provision of equipment are essential parts of inclusive practice:

“Hm, I will repeat that I haven’t read the policy on inclusive education. However, I would actually add more opportunities, equipment. Ah, such as ramps for movement between, ah, academic blocks and dormitories for, hm, students with disabilities” [Interviewee 3].

“It is necessary to create separate blocks and floors for students with disabilities” [Interviewee 3].

The interviewees, who expressed a broader understanding of inclusion also pointed out necessary adjustments in financial support and provision to address the needs of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and to increase the accessibility of the institution.

However, at the same time Interviewee 4 indicated that the admission criteria should not be lowered:

“Ah, to develop different grants that cover the expenses of the exams for applicants, so that they can enroll in our university. To say that it is necessary to lower admission standards. Well, maybe not. It is better to admit students as we do now. The only thing is that we need to give more opportunities to other people” [Interviewee 4].

According to the strategic documents, the university positions itself as a “social lift for poor and talented.” Even though the “social lift” agenda is not thoroughly described in the document, the current institutional practice involves material support for students, who are considered as “socially vulnerable” (SVC) population. Four out of five interviewees indicated SVC support as the only type of support provided for students:

“Well, it is, probably, a socially vulnerable category, which, ah, assumes a free meal plan and accommodation. This support is provided for certain groups, such as children with disabilities [the term used in Russian language – invalid] or children whose parents are with disabilities [the term used in Russian language - invalid]. Also, large families and, ah, children left without guardians or one guardian. Ah, that’s it” [Interviewee 4].

Some of the areas that were perceived by interviewees as problematic are associated with a multicultural environment. In particular, Interviewee 1 expressed concerns regarding language-culture barriers and discrimination among students:

“Ahh, there are language and cultural barriers, if they can be called like that. Well, when [people] from different regions discriminate against each other. Ah, in general people from the South and West, and those who speak only, ah, Kazakh face it” [Interviewee 1].

“To minimize these barriers, I think, we can only by mixing people from different regions. Well, University actually practices this on a preparatory level” [Interviewee 1].

The Interviewee 2 specified that inclusive practices at the university will require professional training in the first place. And then it should be supported by material provisions:

“First of all, to prepare faculty to work with people with special needs. Namely, to study the specificities of psychology, pedagogy, and then to create necessary conditions in terms of material and technical comfort” [Interviewee 2].

4.5 Summary

The general overview of respondent’s commentary on required changes in policy and practice shows that their opinion is shaped not only by their general knowledge and understanding of inclusion, but also by current institutional practices to some extent. However, the general understanding of current policy imperatives by participants was weak. Thus, it is

mostly their own knowledge and experiences which have influenced their beliefs about an inclusive university. The below (table 3) summarizes the main connections between the document and interview analysis. These connections will be explained in more detail in the discussion chapter.

Table 3. Connections between Document and Interview Analysis

Dimensions	Document Analysis	Interviews
Culture	Inclusion Embracing Diversity	Disability Discovering talents Minority Diversity Equality and Equity
Policy	Rigorous merit-based admission Social lift for poor and talented Admission of students regardless of special needs	Admission standards should not be lowered Financial support Underrepresentation
Practice	Training programs Technology	Specialists and professionals Additional technological support Special equipment for disabilities

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The discussion chapter represents the analysis of the interview and document data using a three-dimensional framework introduced by Booth and Ainscow (2002). Information retrieved from the university documents and interviews is organized in three subsections that correspond to the dimensions: culture, policy, and practice. This chapter will discuss the connections between information derived from the documents and the interviews, and also it will provide answers to the research questions of the study.

5.2 Cultural Dimension

According to the Index for Inclusion, in order to develop inclusive cultures at an institution, it is important to establish inclusive values that are conveyed to all members of that institution (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). The analysis of institutional values starts with the university strategy, which serves as a guide to the university community. The document analysis illustrated common tendencies in higher education that are associated with universities, such as striving to compete for resources and prestige. Van Vught (2008) described this phenomenon as a “reputation race” when higher education institutions seek to admit students that are considered as top talent, to increase institutional prestige. Similarly, the university strategy focuses primarily on global competition and recognition, pulling all the strength to develop a competitive academic and research site, and to become a model of higher education. Thus, global competition and recognition can be considered as institutional values, forming a corporate culture (reference and relate to your literature review).

Working towards international recognition, the university incorporates international approaches to higher education in its own policy and practice. Taking into consideration that inclusive education has become a priority in all sectors of education globally and in Kazakhstan, the university included the notions of inclusion and diversity into the strategy. However, the document analysis indicated that there is no particular explanation of what inclusive education means, and what strategies are in place to implement inclusion in everyday practice. While attempting to incorporate the ideas of inclusion and education for all, the documents indicate a mismatch between the definitions. In the brochure, inclusion is identified primarily as special needs, whereas in the strategy “university for all” is strongly associated with the demographic background of students, and it does not indicate special needs as a part of inclusion.

The findings of the present study indicate that the absence of a certain accepted definition of inclusion in university strategy, causes a lack of common understanding of inclusive education among university administrative staff. The interview data clearly illustrated that inclusive education is interpreted differently by the interviewees. Some defined inclusion through the term of special needs, which corresponds to the definition provided by the brochure. However, the knowledge of special needs is often limited to disabilities, which are also associated primarily with visible impairments (Leake & Stodden, 2014). The data shows that some interviewees define inclusion as providing access to students with special needs, where special needs mean students with physical (visible) disabilities. Correspondingly, they conceptualize inclusive higher education through the institutional need to provide physical adjustments to the campus structure and to ensure the provision of supportive learning technologies in the classroom.

Other interviewees expressed a broader understanding of inclusive education while focusing not only on disability but also on other types of needs, such as financial difficulties that students may experience. According to the literature, socioeconomic background of students sometimes becomes the main barrier to receive higher education, because students from financially less advantaged groups may face a lack of financial support from the institution (Yorke & Thomas, 2010). The concern expressed by the interviewed staff was particularly connected with financial opportunities of students to apply to the university and to take exams that require payment. This may potentially lead to exclusion of applicants, who cannot afford expensive examination. The university staff awareness about financial difficulties correlates with the institutional agenda of being a social lift for students, and to accept people disregarding their social status.

Interviewees to some extent associated inclusion with the notions of equal access and opportunities for all students. Regardless of how they conceptualized inclusive education, they agreed that all students should have a right to receive higher education. Inclusive higher education in their perspective should create equal opportunities and eliminate discrimination. These views correspond to the social justice theory, which advocates for equal opportunities, human rights, dignity, and fairness (Gidley et al., 2010). This finding also aligns with the research by Martins et al. (2018), who studied academic and non-academic staff perceptions towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in Portuguese universities. According to the study, university staff were generally positive about inclusion and they indicated that students with disabilities should have the right to access education (Martins et al., 2018).

Most of the interviewees expressed positive attitudes towards inclusion in general, however, their views varied on the nature of diversity. Administrative staff perceived inclusion

of students from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and students with physical impairments more positively than the inclusion of students with emotional and behavioral difficulties. Even though some interviewees claimed that they do not have any problems with students showing signs of EBD, they also stated that these students must be under control. These findings correspond with other findings in the literature. According to Hindes and Mather (2007), faculty experience more negative attitudes towards inclusion of students with behavioral and psychiatric disorders and they are more positive towards the inclusion of students with visible physical or learning disabilities (as cited in Baker et al., 2012). In addition, students with intellectual disabilities were perceived as not fully fitting to the university education process, because it may be “difficult for them to study at the institution”. These statements can be associated with the staff’s beliefs that the university uses “rigorous progression requirements” to ensure its competitiveness in the global arena.

The relationship between administrative staff and their attitudes towards inclusive education and the university’s strive for global education, was also to some extent demonstrated in the interviews. Some interviewees pointed out that inclusion can be considered as an additional asset in international ranking, because the institution is accessible to everyone. One interviewee doubted that it can be included in evaluation criteria because ranking is focused more on research and academic achievements. Moreover, one of the interviewees stated that inclusion will not influence university ranking, because students with disabilities will always be in a minority and their performance will not affect the overall score of the institution. This finding corresponds to the theory of Davis (2005), who argues that understanding disability through the prism of non-disabled standards forms a belief that disability is a minority, which tends to be disadvantaged.

The overall analysis of the cultural dimension illustrates that without a common understanding of inclusion within the university, inclusive education will be open to individual interpretation based on personal beliefs, knowledge, and values. For the purpose of university strategy in this case, it becomes essential to communicate and direct changes within the organization, and to ensure that everyone is on the same track with institutional plans (May & Bridger, 2010). Therefore, the cultural aspect is strongly interconnected with the policy dimension, which, according to the inclusive framework, is designed to eliminate exclusionary practices and to convey clear guidelines for change (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

5.3 Policy Dimension

As discussed in the cultural dimension section above, despite introducing inclusive education as one of the building blocks of the institution, inclusive values are not clearly conveyed to administrative staff, leading to individual interpretations based on personal beliefs and knowledge. In addition, the university strategy focuses more on the achievement of international recognition, which may lead to the formation of exclusionary policies and practices. According to the literature, universities that prioritize global competition as one of the main drivers for strategic development tend to increase the social stratification in the community (Van Vught, 2008; Naidoo, 2004). The reason is that the “reputation race” shapes the institutional strive to seek students that are considered top-talented. As a result, many higher education institutions apply merit-based enrollment as the policy helping to select the best candidates (Van Vught, 2008). These characteristics of higher education contribute to social stratification, since universities tend to select students with certain cultural capital, which often originates from social background (Naidoo, 2004, p.459).

The findings of the present study are supported in the literature. For example, the document analysis indicated that the institution preserves merit-based admission as one of the essential policies (Van Vught, 2008). The admission policy of the university guides the evaluation of applications based on academic merit, and thus the institution positions itself as “university for all”, meaning that students are admitted regardless of their social status, connections, and geographic area, which to some extent corresponds to social justice approach in education (Barnes, 2007; Gidley et al., 2010). However, the interview data showed inconsistency within this policy. While positioning itself as a “social lift”, the university admission policy also requires applicants to take internationally recognized fee-based examinations. On the one hand, exams help the institution to select applicants with the highest scores and what is considered as highest academic merit. On the other hand, passing these exams requires applicants to pay the fee, and potentially prevents some students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds from applying for the university. So, one of the interviewees suggested introducing financial support for applicants, and at the same time not changing the admission criteria.

Another finding drawn from the interview data shows that administrative staff are not aware of the existing institutional plans on inclusion at the university. Their views to some extent aligned with the present uncertainties in the institutional strategy in relation to the meaning of inclusion, and absence of clear guidelines on its implementation. For example, the university advocates for admission of students “regardless of their special needs”, and at the same time, some types of special needs are not represented in the university strategy. According to Booth and Ainscow, (2002), the development of inclusion requires a holistic approach that facilitates institutional changes based on internal evaluations and analysis. One

of the essential elements of institutional transformation is to ensure that all members of the community share the same mission and common understanding of inclusion (May & Bridger, 2010). The results of the present study illustrate that without a clearly defined inclusive agenda within institutional policy, administrative staff and other members of the university will not share the same vision and understanding of inclusion.

5.4 Practice Dimension

The framework designed by Booth and Ainscow (2002) defines inclusive practices as institutional support for students' full involvement and participation in all aspects of their education. This subsection focuses on institutional supports and existing barriers at the university. As it is discussed in the previous subsection, socio-economic background was indicated as one of the barriers to enrollment and participation at the university. The university provides financial support, such as discounts for accommodation and meal plans, for students that are considered as “socially vulnerable”. Socially vulnerable group is represented by students from large families, students with disabilities, and students who left without care of one or both parents. The interviewees emphasized that despite provision of free meal plans and discounts for accommodation, this support may not be sufficient, and students still experience financial difficulties at the university. Thus, administrative staff suggested to provide more opportunities to work on Campus and to ensure financial assistance for students in need. Similar recommendations are provided by Yorke and Thomas (2010), who argued that financial challenges may become a main reason for dropping out from higher education.

The interviewees also pointed out that the university is working towards building a physically accessible environment by installing tactile tiles in some of the blocks. In addition,

the university tries to incorporate technological support in the library for students with visual impairments, and this was indicated as an essential support for the development of inclusive education at the university. The data indicates that provision of physical accessibility and technological resources are the practices that directed mainly to address disability (Leake & Stodden, 2014). At the same time, practices developed to support socially vulnerable group are not sufficient to address the actual needs of students who may experience financial difficulties. The literature indicates that inclusion is often interpreted through disability and thus institutions try to incorporate physical and technological support to implement inclusion policies on site. In this case other needs and well-being of students remain overlooked (Fleming et al., 2017; Leake & Stodden, 2014)

Discrimination among students was also indicated as a barrier to participation. Campus environment assessment studies illustrate that cultural and racial minorities often face negative experience and discrimination at university (Rankin & Reason, 2005, as cited in Hart & Fellabaum, 2008). Despite the institutional policy on internationalization and the development of a multicultural environment, in practice, one interviewee mentioned some groups of students face discrimination from their peers. This was pointed out by one of the interviewees in relation to Kazakh speaking students, coming from the south and west regions of the country. It was suggested that the university should develop more culture-sharing practices among students.

Analysis of current institutional student support practices and existing barriers illustrated that without clearly developed guidelines and policies, implementation of inclusive practices becomes inconsistent (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). Some of the student needs are

addressed by the university, and some of the needs remain underrepresented, creating barriers to inclusion and participation.

5.5 Summary

The three-dimensional analysis within the framework of “Index for Inclusion” by Booth and Ainscow (2002) indicated that culture, policy, and practice are interconnected, and consistency within these three dimensions is essential in the development of inclusion in higher education. It is important for the institution to identify clearer priorities and a consistent perspective for the strategic development of the university. As the literature and the present findings indicate the focus on global competition, and lack of an holistic approach towards inclusion may lead to discrepancies in university policies and practices, creating barriers to learning and participation. In order to summarize the findings of this study, this subsection is organized according to the research questions of the study.

5.5.1 In what ways is inclusion represented in the strategic documents and plans of an English Medium of Instructions (EMI) higher degree university in Kazakhstan?

The document analysis showed that the university follows the international tendencies in education. These tendencies are represented primarily in the academic processes, that are guided by the principles of academic integrity, ethics, and research excellence. In response to inclusive education that became one of the goals in worldwide education, the university incorporated inclusion as a building block of the institution. However, the analysis also indicated that inclusion is incorporated into the strategic plan without a substantial explanation and guidelines. The document does not include the definition of inclusive education and it is

not reflected in any of the institutional policies. The university strategy is focused primarily on the achievement of global recognition and the development of internationally competitive education, which, according to the literature, are common guiding principles for higher education institutions (Van Vught, 2008).

5.5.2 How do local administrative staff understand the concept of inclusive education within the context of higher education? To what degree their views align with institutional policy and strategy?

Lack of information about the meaning of inclusive education in the university strategy and mismatching definitions in the documents lead to individual interpretations of what inclusive education means in the context of higher education. Some administrative staff associate inclusive higher education with the provision of an accessible physical environment on campus and technological support. This conceptualization is defined by their understanding of inclusion of people with physical and visible disabilities, and demonstrates a lack of awareness about other needs that students may experience at the university (Leake & Stodden, 2014). Some interviewees showed a broader understanding of inclusion and discussed diversity, equality, and equity guiding principles of inclusion. In this case accessibility of the university, trained professionals, and financial support were perceived as the main factors shaping inclusive higher education.

It is important to point out that all administrative staff members initially expressed positive attitudes towards inclusion at the university (Abu-Hamour, 2013; Baker et al., 2012; Martins et al., 2018). However, further analysis of the interview data showed that these attitudes were dependent on the nature of students' needs. Inclusion of students from different

cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and also students with physical disabilities was perceived positively. Inclusion of students with emotional and behavioral difficulties were associated with institutional needs to establish control and supervision. Moreover students with intellectual disabilities were perceived as not perhaps able to meet the requirements of a university level of education due to the perceived difficulty in the learning process (Hindes & Mather 2007, as cited in Baker, 2012) . These views may be associated with the university agenda of competitiveness and admission of students that are considered as top talented in an academic regard. Also, these attitudes are explained by the fact that administrative staff do not have a common understanding of inclusion and they do not have guidelines from the institution on how to address different needs in higher education. As the interview analysis shows, these administrative staff were not aware of inclusion being incorporated into the institutional strategy.

5.5.3 What do local administrators believe are necessary supports for inclusion in higher educational institutions? What do they feel are some of the barriers and challenges to the development of inclusion in higher education?

Beliefs about necessary support towards the development of inclusion in higher education depend greatly on the understanding by administrative staff of inclusive education. Lack of institutional guidelines on inclusion and inconsistencies in the definition of inclusive education in the brochure and strategy, lead to the individual conceptualizations of necessary supports for inclusive universities. Staff members, who conceptualize inclusion through physical disabilities, believe that an accessible physical environment and technological support are the key factors for the development of inclusive education (Leake & Stodden, 2014). Administrative employees who demonstrated a broader understanding of inclusion and

diversity, believe that inclusive universities should be accessible to all, since all people should have a right for higher education (Barnes, 2007; Gidley et al., 2010). In addition, they propose that financial assistance, appropriate professional training, and the formation of a welcoming environment are essential for the development of inclusive education in the context of higher education.

Administrative staff indicated that financial difficulties, lack of accessibility of physical environment, and discrimination based on culture are the current challenges that students are facing at the university (Rankin & Reason, 2005, as cited in Hart & Fellabaum, 2008; Yorke & Thomas, 201). These challenges are rising from the lack of common understanding of inclusion, and inconsistencies between institutional values, policies, and practice. The university positions itself as accessible for all students irrespective of their socio-economic background, however, at the same time institutional admission policy requires applicants to take costly internationally recognized examinations. The university offers education for students regardless of their special needs; however, the university strategy does not include guidelines and policies on how to address students' special needs. The university strives to create a multicultural environment; however, the current policy and practices do not inform the community on how to minimize discrimination based on the language and geographical region. The results of this study indicate that the development of inclusive education within a higher education context requires a holistic and more coherent approach that involves the development of inclusive cultures, policies, and practice (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The present study explored the attitudes and understanding of administrative staff on inclusive education in the context of one autonomous Kazakhstani university. Following the Framework developed by Booth and Ainscow (2002), the research examined and explored inclusion at this institution from a three-dimensional perspective, focusing on culture, policy, and practice. The results of the present study show that these dimensions are strongly interconnected and influence one another. The lack of a thoroughly developed institutional inclusive policy results in low awareness of and no shared understanding of inclusion among university employees. Their attitudes and conceptions of inclusion in higher education arise from their personal beliefs, values, knowledge, and experiences. The findings illustrate that administrative staff generally have positive attitudes towards inclusion at the university level. However, their understanding of inclusion varies depending on a level of awareness about different types of individual needs. Some administrators conceptualize inclusive education through the prism of visible disabilities, and as a result, they perceive an inclusive university as an institution that makes appropriate physical and technological accommodations for students with disabilities. Other administrators show a broader understanding of inclusion and point out that inclusive universities need to create a welcoming environment and equal support for all students.

The results of the present study also show that the university strategy is focused on competition and recognition within the international higher education arena. This finding aligns with the literature that illustrates that universities are often driven by a “reputation race”. However, tension exists between the race for reputation and selection of students that

are considered as talented by implementing a merit-based admission policy, and the desire to position the institution as socially just. The findings illustrate that merit-based admission is represented as a part of an inclusive agenda at the institution, because it is intended to ensure admission of students regardless of their cultural background, socio-economic background, and special needs. However, the interviews showed that in fact this policy may potentially exclude applicants who experience financial difficulties, and who cannot afford to take internationally recognized examinations.

Incorporating an inclusive education agenda into institutional strategy without development of sophisticated guidelines for implementation, and without increasing awareness of inclusion within the community, creates inconsistency in institutional practice and hinders the overall development of inclusion at the university. The main recommendation in this case aligns with the recommendation provided by Booth and Ainscow (2002) in the Index for Inclusion. It is necessary to develop a holistic and coherent institutional inclusive strategy, to increase awareness about inclusion, develop shared values, mission, vision, and a consistent understanding of inclusion among the university community. One of the limitations of these findings is that they are not generalizable, and thus, it is difficult to evaluate the overall campus climate towards inclusion. As an additional recommendation, it is suggested to conduct a quantitative study within the university to find out about faculty, administrators, and students' perceptions towards inclusive education.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Date and Time _____ Interviewee Code _____

Hello! My name is Yuliya and I conduct interviews with university administrative staff for my thesis research. The goal of this study is to explore attitudes and understanding of inclusion among university administrative employees.

You have been invited to the interview because you expressed your interest and agreed to participate in the research. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without prejudice. You are free not to answer any of the questions or stop the interview whenever you feel necessary. The research does not provide direct benefits to the participants, but it will provide an analysis of the current situation on inclusion at the university.

Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the full extent possible. To maintain confidentiality, no names will be associated with any of the audio recordings and written transcripts. A code number will be used instead to designate an audio and corresponding transcription during the analysis.

The interview will take approximately 30-40 minutes. I have printed out a copy of the consent form, which contains a more detailed description of procedures and participation. I would like to ask you to read the consent form and to sign both copies if you agree to participate. [Both copies of the consent form are given to a participant].

Do you have any questions or concerns? If you agree to participate, please, sign both copies, one copy is for you. Are you ready? I will proceed to the questions.

-
1. What degree do you hold and from which institution (local or abroad)?
 2. How do you understand the term “Inclusive Education”?
 3. How does this term align with the context of higher education?
 4. How would you describe inclusive higher education?
 5. What do you know about your institutional policies and strategic plans? Does your institution have inclusive education policies? What do you think about these policies? Are they clear to everyone? Do you agree with the current state?
 6. What changes, if any, would you propose to the existing policies?
 7. What is the purpose of higher education? Whom does it aim to educate? Who should be included in HE?
 8. What are your views on admitting students from different cultural backgrounds, students with physical disabilities, students with literacy difficulties, emotional and behavioral difficulties and etc. into higher education?

9. What kind of student support is provided in your institution? Who is supported? What needs can be accommodated in your institution?
10. What other supports you feel are necessary at the university?
11. What do you think are the barriers to student learning at your institution? Who experiences these barriers?
12. How might these barriers be minimized?
13. What changes, if any, would you propose to the existing practices?
14. Do you think that inclusion is important at your institution?
15. Do you think that inclusive university can perform high in international rankings? Why?

Appendix 2: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

INTRODUCTION: You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “*University Administrative Staff Understanding of Inclusion in the Context of Higher Education in Kazakhstan.*” The study focuses on interviewing university administrators to find out their views and understanding of inclusive education in higher education and to find out more about how inclusive education is represented in their institution.

PROCEDURES: This interview will take approximately 40 minutes to complete. Participants will be asked several open-ended questions regarding their opinion on inclusive education (IE), IE in higher education and IE at their work institution. If participants agree, the interview will be recorded. After the interview, transcripts will be shared with participants to check and ensure that the researcher has captured the participant’s meaning.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND BENEFITS: Participation in this study is strictly voluntary, and if agreement to participation is given, it can be withdrawn at any time without prejudice. You are free not to answer any of the questions or stop the interview whenever you feel necessary. The research does not provide direct benefits to the participants, but it will provide an analysis of the current situation on inclusion at the university.

RISKS: The potential risks of participating in this study is breach in confidentiality, meaning that identifiable data is disclosed. However, all necessary measures will be taken to minimize this risk.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the full extent possible. To maintain confidentiality, no names will be associated with any of the audio recordings and written transcripts. A code number will be used instead to designate an audio and corresponding transcription during the analysis. All audio files and transcripts will be stored on the researcher’s password protected personal computer; the password is known only to the researcher.

Points of Contact. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or you wish to withdraw, contact the researcher via email yuliya.palkina@nu.edu.kz or via mobile phone +77773504139. If you have any other questions, comments, concerns or complaints regarding the study or any of its procedures, you may contact the Master’s Thesis Supervisor via email michelle.somerton@nu.edu.kz. If you need talk to someone independent from the research, contact NUGSE Research Committee via email gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz

Statement of Consent.

I, _____,
Give my voluntary consent to participate in this study. The researchers clearly explained to me the background information and objectives of the study and what my participation in this study involves. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary. I can at any time and without giving any reasons withdraw my consent, and this will not have any negative consequences for myself.

I understand that the information collected during this study will be treated confidentially.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

I also give my consent for this interview to be recorded.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher:

Signed _____ Date: _____

Форма информированного согласия

ОПИСАНИЕ: Вы приглашены участвовать в исследовании на тему «Понимание *“University Administrative Staff Understanding of Inclusion in the Context of Higher Education in Kazakhstan.”* Исследование основано на интервьюировании представителей администрации университета, чтобы больше узнать о их представлениях на тему инклюзивного образования в контексте высшего образования.

ПРОЦЕСС: Интервью займет около сорока минут. Участникам будут задаваться открытые вопросы касательно их мнения на тему инклюзивного образования в контексте высшего образования и на тему развития инклюзивного образования в их университете. При согласии участников будет вестись аудиозапись интервью. После интервью транскрипты будут отправлены участникам для проверки.

ДОБРОВОЛЬНОЕ УЧАСТИЕ И ПОЛЬЗА: Участие в этом исследовании строго добровольно. Вы имеете право отказаться от участия в любой момент. Вы также можете отказаться отвечать на любой из вопросов или прервать интервью, когда необходимо. Исследование не дает прямой выгоды участникам, однако оно дает аналитическую базу касательно развития инклюзивного образования в контексте высшего образования.

РИСКИ: Потенциальные риски от участия в этом исследовании включают в себя возможное нарушение конфиденциальности. Однако исследователь сделает все возможное, чтобы предотвратить этот риск согласно мероприятиям, описанным ниже.

КОНФИДЕНЦИАЛЬНОСТЬ: Любая информация, полученная входе этого исследования, будет носить конфиденциальный характер в полной мере, которая возможна. Чтобы сохранить конфиденциальность, имена не будут привязаны ни к какому из аудио файлов и их письменных транскриптов. Вместо этого будут использоваться коды для сопоставления аудио и транскриптов, а также для проведения анализа. Все аудио файлы и транскрипты будут храниться на личном компьютере, который защищен паролем, известным только исследователю.

Контактная информация. Если у Вас есть какие-то вопросы или сомнения касательно исследования или Вы желаете отказаться от участия, пожалуйста, свяжитесь с исследователем по адресу электронной почты yuliya.palkina@nu.edu.kz или по телефону +77773504139. Если у Вас есть любые другие вопросы, комментарии, сомнения или жалобы касательно исследования и связанных процессов, Вы можете связаться с научным руководителем по почте michelle.somerton@nu.edu.kz. Если Вы хотите поговорить с независимым лицом, свяжитесь с Исследовательским комитетом ВШО (NUGSE Research

Committee) по адресу электронной почты gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz

Согласие

Я, _____,
даю мое добровольное согласие на участие в этом исследовании. Исследователь объяснил мне цели исследования и в чем заключается мое участие. Я понимаю, что участие в этом исследовании полностью добровольно. Я могу в любое время и без объяснения причин отказаться от участия без каких-либо негативных последствий для себя. Я понимаю, что информация, собранная в ходе этого исследования, будет считаться конфиденциальной.

Подпись: _____ Дата: _____

Я также даю свое согласие на запись интервью

Подпись: _____ Дата: _____

Исследователь:

Подпись: _____ Дата: _____

Appendix 3: Sample of Translated Transcript

[English]

010000

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview for my Master's thesis. Let us proceed to the questions.

Question 1: Could you, please, tell me, at what University did you get your degree (local or abroad) and what degree did you receive?

Answer 1: Received higher education at local university. I am Bachelor of Science in Mathematics.

Question 2: How do you understand the term "Inclusive Education"? Have you ever encountered this term?

Answer 2: Well, ah, inclusive education, as far as I understood, - this is when all students study together, disregarding, ah, their physical or psychological state. Hmmm, and every student will be provided with different necessary technologies, conditions and etc.

Question 3: What do you think, how does this term align with the context of Higher Education?

Answer 3: Hmm, to be honest, I've never thought about this before. From my opinion, if a person is not dangerous for others, so why not to give this person an opportunity to study with everyone else.

Question 4: From your perspective, ahh, how would you describe inclusive higher education? Inclusive University?

Answer 4: Well, definitely, it will require special equipment for people with limited capabilities, certain rooms. And specialists, of course.

Additional question 4: For example, what specialists are needed?

Answer to the additional question 4: Speech therapists since we have students with stuttering.

Question 5: Mhm, and what do you know about the policies in inclusive education at your university?

Answer 5: Well, honestly, I do not know much about policies of the university in this type of education. Well, overall university supports this type of education, I think.

Question 6: What changes you would suggest to the existing inclusive education policy at the university?

Answer 6: Well, ah, first of all, it is necessary to promote this topic, since I don't even know the policy of the university to suggest any changes (laughter).

Question 7: What do you think, what is the aim of higher education? For example, who can get higher education?

Answer 7: Well, the aim of higher education, of course, is to prepare certain specialists. Well, I think that everyone should get education, no matter higher or secondary.

Question 8: What are your attitudes towards admitting following students to your university: students from different cultural backgrounds, students with physical disabilities, students with intellectual disabilities, students with emotional and behavioral problems and others?

Answer 8: Hmm, overall, I am not against admitting people, ah, who are not like me, if we can say that. I do not care about person's origin. Again, if a person is not dangerous for the community, let him receive education, no matter at my university or at other university.

Question 9: What kind of support is provided to students at your university? Who receives this support?

Answer 9: Hmm, we have category of students, SVC, socially vulnerable category. Hmm, these are students from low-income families, students with disabilities, ah, students from large families and orphans. Well, they live for free and eat free of charge. I don't know if there are any other privileges. Hmmm, that's it...

Question 10: What do you think, what other types of supports are necessary for students at your university?

Answer 10: Well, to be honest, hmm, well, I don't know if it is related to this topic, but, maybe, work at the university for students. Because, ah, mmm, well, it negatively affects psychological state of a person, when a person does not have, ah, anything to live on, that's it.

Question 11: Mhm, what do you think, what barriers to education exist at your university? Who faces these barriers?

Answer 11: Hmmm, we have language barriers, cultural barriers if it can be called so. Well, when [people] from different regions discriminate each other. Ah, in general, people from south and west often face it, and those who speak only, ahh, Kazakh. Well, ah, I think it is obvious.

Question 12: How can these barriers be minimized?

Answer 12: Well, to minimize these barriers we can only mix students from different regions. Ah, so, I think, they, ah, will start to understand each other more.

Question 13: So, what changes would you suggest to the existing practices at your University?

Answer 13: Well, ah, university practices it on preparatory course – foundation. But it will be better to make something like that for, well, direct students, for master's students, for PhD, well, for all other programs as well.

Question 14: Good. And what do you think, is inclusion needed for your university?

Answer 14: Hmm, well, I am neutral to all of this, to this type of education and I cannot comment on that. Mmm, well, inclusion is generally important for the University, and, ah, well, I don't know if it is needed.

Additional Question 14: Could you, please, elaborate on this?

Answer to the additional question 14: Well, university supports this idea in general. Well, ah, at the university they say inclusion is good, we need to support it, etc. But is it necessary for certain field or for a certain goal, I don't know exactly. We can live without it.

Question 15: What do you think, can inclusive universities perform high in international rankings and why?

Answer 15: Well, ah, overall, I don't think that inclusion can somehow influence university ranking. Well, ah, anyways, percentage of people with disabilities will be, ah, small and will not influence anything. Well, that's my opinion.

Additional question 15: Could you, please, elaborate?

Answer to the additional question 15: Well, let's assume among 5500 students there will be, ah, 50 students with limited capabilities. This is around, ah, one percent of all students. Mmm, it does not matter, whatever they do, they are always in minority. Will they get 4.0 or 0.0, it will not change the overall rating of 5000 students.

Good, thank you so much for your time! I will stop recording the interview right here.

Appendix 4: Sample of Thematic Analysis

Dimension	Theme	Code	Interview Section
Culture	Disability	Limited capabilities	“Well, ah, overall, I don’t think that inclusion somehow influence university ratings. Well, anyways, percent of people with limited capabilities will, ah, be small, and overall, it will not affect. Well, this is my opinion” [I1]
		People with disabilities	“Well, to the admission of students with disabilities, I am, actually, very positive. For example, in our university, students with disabilities show that impossible is possible” [I4]