The Role of Accessibility and Equality in Open Leadership and Management

Fahriye Altınay[1], Gülsün Başarı[1], Gökmen Dağlı[2] and Zehra Altınay[1]

[1]Faculty of Education, Educational Sciences Institute, Societal Research and Development Center,
Near East University, Nicosia, Cyprus
[2]Faculty of Education, Kyrenia University, Near East University, Nicosia, Cyprus

Keywords: Accessibility, Quality, Higher Education, Technology.

Abstract: Accessibility and equality in higher education for quality improvement become crucial research challenge that need to be undertaken as part of the quality strategies and innovation in higher education. With the development of information technologies and its applications on higher education policy and strategies, diffusion of accessibility and equality to all learners comes across as the strategic quality movement in order to underline importance and nature of openness, access and equality into practice. Therefore, accessibility and equality are the quality indicators to set opportunities in learning with disabilities. This research has qualitative nature which the quality, accessibility, equality, technology, and management practices were examined upon semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was done to reveal the findings that the model can be significant to set barrier free education and future plans for accessibility, equality and management in higher education.

1 INTRODUCTION

Quality is a key philosophy in higher education policies and strategies in development cycle of institutions. At the same time, higher education practices become a tool for social empowerment in diffusing equality and access to learning environment without any location and time limitations for all human being. In this respect, information technology has a role as bridge to foster learning opportunities and opens insights to acquire equal look and lives for the learners with disabilities. Furthermore, accessing learning environment and openness show how polices and strategies of higher educational institutions play a great role to demonstrate their policy on quality improvement and internalization (Jungblut, et al., 2015). Today, it is widely known that, there is competition among universities in global market which opening up education is a way to show how accessibility and equality policies and strategies can contribute for (Quinn, et al., 2009).

In order to maintain a sustainable development and dynamic strategies, higher educational institutions need to work an ongoing structure to develop common quality standards for all learners.

In this regard, universities should agree on common principles on taking standards, should practice effective organizational quality and ethics, and prioritize accreditation and ranking in order to develop in quality circles. Considering innovation as opening up education within a frame of life long learning and professional development raise the dynamic system, prestige and attraction of higher education (Filippakou, 2011; Jungblut, et al., 2015).

Bearing in mind the requirements of the business world, higher education programmes should constantly be overviewed and improved to match international standards. In order to achieve bencmarking and business model through opening up education, it has already considered that quality circles and standards should be implemented, evaluated, and applied to higher education sectors too (Zineldin, et al. 2011).

Inline with the developments all around the world regarding the equality, accessibility and openness in higher education, there is shift from traditional education to learner centered approach for learning. In this respect, creating accessible campus and its facilities for all learners put those universities in a leading position. In this regard, open education resources, resources for learners with

disabilities have great importance on the right of education, equality and socialization of the learners with disabilities (Yssel, et al., 2016).

The aim of this study is to evaluate quality standards of universities upon accessibility, equality and openness regarding the learning environments for learners with disabilities. The following research questions are investigated during the research process:
1. What are the accessibility standards in higher education institutions for learners with disabilities?
2. What are the learning opportunities of higher education institutions for learners with disabilities in terms of equality?
3. How do higher education institutions implement strategic policies for accessibility, equality, openness?

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study relies on quality research nature which patterns, experiences, perceptions of specialist in the field were examined upon the quality, accessibility, equality, technology, and management practices. The framework of the research design covers socially constructed interaction which methodological path capture inner perspective and emic understanding within inductive process (Creswell, 2003; Cohen, et al., 2000). In order to understand how meaning and experiences are constructed, this study is reflective to examine accessibility, equality and openness in higher education institutions.

2.2 Participants and Ethical Concerns

The participants were picked through snowball sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Through this sampling, it is aimed at collecting the most data from university lecturers (Miles and Huberman, 1994). 180 participants, as shown in Table 1, from universities in Cyprus took part in this study. The informed consent form was employed to guarantee confidentiality and autonomy during the process.

Table 1: Participants.

Participants	Lecturers
University 1	45
University 2	35
University 3	35
University 4	30
University 5	25
University 6	10
Total	180

2.3 Data Collection Technique and Analysis

An interview technique – a qualitative method- was conducted in this study, which can be categorized as structured, semi-structured, and non-structured interviews. For a semi-structured interview, questions are prepared in advance and data is collected (Cresswell, 2003). The analysis of soft data as qualitative nature was done through thematic analysis which selected themes and codes help revealing standards of accessibility, equality (Cohen, et al., 2000). 45 minuted inverviews aim to evaluate quality strategies related to the education of the learners with disabilities in higher education policy. The interview form consisted of questions to define perceptions and experiences of professionals as regarding the quality strategies for learning opportunities. To provide the content validity, three experts in the field overviewed the form and mismatching or similar questions were either omitted or reorganized. Then a pilot study was conducted with five lecturers and the content of the form was finalized. Meanwhile, all said was recorded and put into written version afterwards. All the documents were reviewed by two other experts for the consolidation of the content on which there was a %91 agreement on the validity of the questions.

2.4 Coding the Data

The data was analysed through thematic analysis in four steps. All recordings were analysed, each line was numbered and the interview document was formed. The cassettes and interview documents were overviewed and finalized by an expert. The data collected was examined and put into meaningful sections in groups of ten and then named and coded, which became the key list. The coding keys and interview documents were read separately by the researchers for "agreement" or "disagreement" and necessary corrections were made. For the reliability of the research (Miles and Huberman, 1994) reliability format was conducted and the average was calculated as %89. According to (Miles and Huberman, 1994), %70 and above average is

assumed as reliable. So, the finding in this try is acceptable. The codes given by the researchers were taken as the basis in reaching the themes. While analyzing and modeling the research data, "QSR Nvivo 8" was made use of.

The specified codes at this stage were put under specific categories. Four dimensions were formed to define and evaluate the education of the disabled in higher education in North Cyprus in the light of the views raised by university staff. Participants' views, at this point, were explained in a comprehensible way and presented to the reader from first hand. All the data was dealt with through a qualitative research step, interpreted and some conclusions, which were supported by literature, were drawn.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed the question of quality standards in accessibility, learning opportunities and future policies as regards the perceptions and experiences of specialist and experts in the field within the frame of higher education policies. For this reason, the data was shown in tables in percentage and the participants' views were presented in every dimension with discussion.

3.1 Dimension 1: Quality Indicators in Accessibility and Openness

This dimension deals with specifying digital and barrier-free education in which 180 participants were reflected their experiences and perceptions. Their views are presented in Table 2 under themes and rates.

Table 2: Quality Indicators in Accessibility and Openness.

Themes	Respondentes	%	Non-Respondent	%
Accessible materials for deaf and blind people	121	67%	59	33%
Distance education and material based insruction	132	73%	48	27%
Criteria for teacher education	138	76%	42	24%
Unit for people with disabilities	144	80%	36	20%
Family education	101	56%	79	44%
Digital literacy	122	67%	58	33%
Courses for awareness for learning disabilities	70	38%	110	62%
Policies for people with disabilities	154	85%	26	15%
Barrier free campus and unit	154	85%	26	15%
Accessible web sites and open resources	144	80%	36	20%

%85 of the participants, the highest rate, emphasized the need for an education policy for the learners with disabilities which accessibility and openness are the significant indicator of quality. Meanwhile, at the same rate of (%85) university specialist raised the same view, saying that there is intensified need for counselling and information unit for those learners in higher education institutions as a service policy within competitive educational market. As an answer to the government's policy for the learners with disabilities, L.21 raised significant point as, "*The government still lacks a "policy for those learners" and hasn't asked for any support or collaboration with universities, which is a clear indication that this issue is not been taken seriously*". %85 of the participants agreed that there should be barrier-free university campus and facilities for learners with disabilities. "*I can sincerely argue that nothing has been thought or tried for the benefit of those learners. Whereas, universities should try to raise their standards among world universities by providing barrier-free education. Universities should urgently set barrier-free education units and policies*" (L.32). Another participant, (L.47), commented on the same issue and said, "*In today's overwhelmingly developing technology, accessibility and widespread use of the internet should be developed more for openness and opening up education for professional learning*". As it can be seen in Table 2, accessible websites for all learners is one of the most frequently raised issues by the participants. %67 agreed that books and presentation formats for the use of the blind and the deaf should be in the reach as service for those people that it reflects service variation and support for those learners. "*I very much hope and want to see that the authorities prepare sample material,*

books and presentations, in the reach of the learners with disabilities" (L.89).

3.2 Dimension II: Future Policies in Opportunities for Learning Disabilities

180 participants were questions about their views on the subject-matter. Their views are shown under rates and themes in Table 3.

%85 of the participants emphasized the need for people with disabilities to be able to have access to programs and services. The biggest majority agreed on this theme compared to the other themes. The participant lecturers stressed saying that developed technology should be put at the service of the people with disabilities in enriching learning. The same rate, %85, raised views about the necessity that course books should be supported by special education and interaction topics urged by the government. "*I can, without hesitation, say that the government has not put any effort to meet such needs of the disabled. The mentioned topics should be integrated in the programs without delay" (L.32).* The same wish came from students, families, and educators as well. "*During the integration process, the Ministry of Education should take responsibilities. All the involved seriously need such an implementation in plans and programms" (L.49).* %80 of the participants stressed the need that units should be formed in the Coordination by law. Related to the same theme, a lecturer, (L.47), stated views as, "*The committees and units in the Coordination bylaw should try for more contribution from the universities, which can place them among world universities".* %67 of the participants strongly supported this statement. (L.89) pointed out saying, "*If copyright and IT (Information Technology) offences are legally dealt with, it will support the fight of the people with disabilities to meet their needs and protect their rights and help solve their problems".*

Table 3: Future policies in opportunities for learning disabilities.

Themes	Respondentes	%	Non-Respondent	%
Regulations and coordinations in higher education	121	67%	59	33%
Commissions and collaboration	132	73%	48	27%
Accessibility and openness	138	76%	42	24%
Appropriate teaching and instruction methods for people with disabilities	144	80%	36	20%
Scholarship and support services	101	56%	79	44%
Special needs education programs and courses	122	67%	58	33%
Physical and digital accessibility	70	38%	110	62%
Awareness in society for people with disabilities	154	85%	26	15%
Funding	154	85%	26	15%
Database for information	144	80%	36	20%

4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research relies on accessibility and equality in higher education for quality improvement. It fosters the quality strategies and innovation of higher education in terms of learning disabilities. By the role of information technologies and its applications in order to improve higher education policy and strategies, the importance of openness, access and equality into practice are highly intensified need to be examined. Therefore, this research encapsulated that higher education institutions pay attention to be barrier-free campuses and have the policy to establish standards of accessibility and equality for quality in higher education. Possible solutions as a model for the practices of accessibility are highlighted to point out learning with disabilities.

As accessibility and equality are the quality indicators to gain opportunities in learning with disabilities, this chapter aimed to identify in evaluating the quality strategies applied in higher education in North Cyprus. It also enriches to define lecturers' conceptions on the education of people with disabilities. As digital and barrier-free education was examined to set strategies and policies, it can clearly be seen that the most frequently stressed theme in this situation was the preparation of materials – books, presentations – in an acceptable format, which could be easily accessible by the people with disabilities (Altinay, et al., 2016). In addition, the participants expressed views saying that there should be supporting units in distance learning programs at universities to facilitate meeting the needs of the people with disabilities. Douce (2015) suggests that teachers to

teach the people with disabilities could gain trainings for enriching their learning at education faculties. Through community support programs, higher education should prepare programs to educate families. Digital literacy and subjects dealing with the people with disabilities in terms of sensitivity could be integrated in programs. Furthermore, the government should have a great interest in working in collaboration with higher education systems and draw policies for learning disabilities. This can be practiced through providing widespread access to websites by the barrier-free education units of higher education (Gabel and Miskovic, 2014).

In addition, future policies and strategies about activities and implementations in educating the people with disabilities can be achieved through digital and barrier-free education. In this respect, it is crucial that the government takes emergent policies and strategies in arranging legal procedures for future implementations (Cardoso et al., 2016).

Once the legal procedures are put in force, coordination for accessibility and openness by law can be drawn, which will eradicate in all learning disabilities in the way to form commissions and units to provide easy access to programs and services (Vickerman and Blundell, 2010). One of the biggest deficiencies at universities is the lack of teaching methods for the people with disabilities. Therefore, higher education should carry out more scientific studies to develop teaching methods and give a budget for grants and other supports for enriching to overcome learning disabilities. Moreover, there should be special education and interaction activities on both academic and social programs.

In order to fulfil expectations, the government should finance higher education to set up accessible physical and digital infrastructure (Tuomi et al., 2015). It is also suggested that higher education actively participate in making the community aware of the disabled and their needs. Altinay, et al. (2016) point out that for future implementations in barrier-free education for the people with disabilities, a data-base needs to be developed, which will enable it to reach families and help will be served easily by the guidance and consultancy unit.

REFERENCES

Altınay, Z., Ossiannilsson, E., Kalaç, M. O., Başarı, G., Aktepebaşı, A., Altınay, F. (2016). Establishing a Framework on OER Practices for ICT Competence of Disabled Citizens. *Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology.*

Altinay, Z., Menemenci, N., Saner, T., Altinay, F. (2016). The Role of Social Media Tools in Accessible Tourism for Disabled Citizens. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society.*

Cardoso, S., Rosa, M. J., Stensaker, B. (2016). Why is quality in higher education not achieved? The view of academics. *Assessment & Evaluation In Higher Education, 41*(6), 950-965.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education.* London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Creswell, J.W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* California: SAGE.

Douce, C. (2015). *E-learning and disability in higher education. Open Learning: The Journal Of Open, Distance And E-Learning, 30*(1), 89-92.

Filippakou, O. (2011). The idea of quality in higher education: a conceptual approach. *Discourse: Studies In The Cultural Politics Of Education, 32*(1), 15-28.

Gabel, S. L, Miskovic, M. (2014). Discourse and the containment of disability in higher education: an institutional analysis. *Disability & Society, 29*(7), 1145-1158.

Jungblut, J., Vukasovic, M., Stensaker, M. (2015). Student perspectives on quality in higher education. *European Journal of Higher Education, 5*(2),157-180.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). California: SAGE Publications.

Quinn, A., Lemay, G., Larsen, P., Johnson, D. M. (2009). Service quality in higher education. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence, 20*(2),139-152.

Vickerman, P., Blundell, M (2010). Hearing the voices of disabled students in higher education. *Disability & Society, 25*(1), 21-32.

Tuomi, M. T., Lehtomäki, E., Matonya, M. (2015). As Capable as Other Students: Tanzanian Women with Disabilities in Higher Education. *International Journal of Disability, Development And Education, 62*(2).

Yssel, N., Pak, N., Beilke, J. (2016). A Door Must Be Opened: Perceptions of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education. *International Journal Of Disability, Development And Education, 63*(3), 384-394.

Zineldin, M., Camgoz Akdag, H., Vasicheva, V. (2011). Assessing quality in higher education: new criteria for evaluating students' satisfaction. *Quality In Higher Education, 17*(2), 231-243.