

# INCLUSIVE POLICIES AND SUPPORT SERVICES FOR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE SDG-4 AT HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine the association between inclusive policies and support services that help students in achieving academic success in higher education institutions. Having a particular emphasis on advancing Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4). The objective is to ensure that all individuals receive high-quality education that is inclusive and equitable. A quantitative survey was conducted that was descriptive in nature at Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology (KFUEIT) in Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan. Data was collected from 320 students in eight faculties using stratified and simple random sampling. Confirmatory factor analysis confirmed that the self-developed scale of inclusive policies (6 items) and academic achievement (5 items) was valid (KMO = .867, overall  $\alpha$  = .92). The results indicate that 60% of respondents agree that inclusive policies prevent discrimination, while 64% confirm practical accommodations like sign language interpreters and alternative exam formats. The findings show that inclusive policies and support services are not just ethical demands, but they can also have a direct impact on improving educational outcomes. In order to close achievement gaps and meet SDG-4 targets, universities need to focus on the systematic implementation of financial aid, flexible assessments, mental health services, and mandatory diversity training.

**Key Words:** Inclusive Policies, Support Services, academic Achievement, SDG-4, Higher Education

## INTRODUCTION

The Inclusive education is a foundation of international determinations to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG-4). It provide inclusive and rightful quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. Higher education institutions (HEIs) have a profound responsibility in this endeavor (Snoddon & Murray, 2023). The task is ensuring that all students particularly with disabilities and marginalized backgrounds receive the support necessary to thrive academically and socially. Inclusive education exceeds the mere integration of diverse learners into mainstream settings (Monaco, 2024). It demands a systematic transformation of policies, pedagogies, and institutional cultures to actively disseminate from the barriers and foster environments where every student achieve their full potential (Rončević & Rieckmann, 2025).

The inclusion is protected in international frameworks like; the United Nations Convention on the Rights of persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (Graham et al., 2023). These instruments frame a fundamental human rights of inclusion. It emphasize that educational system adapt to the needs of all learners rather than expecting learners to confirm, to rigid, often exclusionary norms (Byrne, 2022). In higher education, it demands to a complex interplay of strategic policies, responsive support service, accessible infrastructure, critically shift in institutional ethos from a deficit-based to a diversity embracing model. The academic achievement of students, especially with disabilities, is inextricably linked to the quality and coherence of these inclusive culture (O'Callaghan, Leane, Maxwell, & Busteed, 2025).

The global setting of inclusive higher education demonstrate a stark disparity between rhetorical commitment and tangible reality (Kotzmann, Griffith, & Morss, 2022). The national and institutional narratives around inclusion often shape by the deep seated socio historical and political ideologies, leading to varied and sometimes contradictory implementations. In some countries, for instance, inclusion frequently framed within a communitarian, pragmatic discourse centered on individual rights and localized adaptation, manifesting in policy tools like the core content framework mandating adaptive teaching (Hwami & Bedeker, 2025). Conversely, some countries emphasis on universalism and centralized state authority, paradoxically obscure specific diversities, create a gap between the political narrative of inclusion and the everyday under supported experiences of teachers and students. This policies and practice chasm is not in unique to Europe, it is a global phenomenon with particular acuity in resource constrained context (Mehra, Coris, & Pointet, 2026).

Research consistently shows that effective support services are an essential factor in academic achievement (Yang, 2025). Academic accommodations, assistive technologies, human support, and universal design for learning all come under these interventions, which include extra time and alternative exam formats. However, their investigation reveals the persistent obstacles that hinder these efforts: lecturer reluctance, inadequate expertise, student misinformation about disability, and even the misuse of support systems (Malli & Forrester-Jones, 2025). Infrastructure and policy alone are not enough without concurrent attitudinal shifts and professional development, as these barriers underscore (Wang et al., 2023).

Filippou, Acquah, and Bengs (2025) have compiled two decades of global research into a systematic review that confirms that while there has been an increase in inclusion research, it is still disproportionately focused on students with disabilities in Western contexts. At national, regional, and institutional levels, the derived framework defines three interdependent pillars for inclusive higher education, which include policies, practices, and accessibility. With the help of this tripartite model, it is made clear that academic achievement is not a singular outcome, but rather a result of a comprehensive, eco-systemic approach in which accessible facilities, inclusive pedagogies, and supportive policies come together

Effective support services are consistently shown to be a critical factor in academic success through research. Academic accommodations, assistive technologies (screen readers, braille devices), human support (note-takers, sign language interpreters, personal assistants), and pedagogical flexibility (universal design for learning) are just some of the interventions that are included (Biagiotti, Bellacicco, Moriña, & Tontini, 2025). The persistence of challenges that hinder these endeavors is revealed in their research, such as lecturer reluctance, limited expertise, student failure to disclose disability, and even the misuse of support systems. These obstacles demonstrate that infrastructure and policy alone cannot suffice without concurrent attitudinal shifts and professional development (Filippou et al., 2025).

Filippou et al. (2025) synthesized two decades of global research, confirming that despite the increase in studies on inclusion, they are still disproportionately focused on students with disabilities in Western contexts. Three key components are identified in their framework for inclusive higher education, which are policies (local, regional, and institutional), practices (administration, curriculum, and teaching/learning), and accessibility (physical, digital, social, and attitudinal). The tripartite model demonstrates that academic achievement is not merely a result of a single approach, but rather an integral one that incorporates accessible facilities, inclusive pedagogies, and supportive policies.

However, the implementation gap is particularly severe in developing regions. Legal and policy frameworks are present but do not translate into meaningful student experiences due to infrastructural deficits, limited resources, and entrenched stigmas, as evidenced by this broader pattern (Maina, Svard, & Mwai, 2025). The Ethiopian case demonstrates the importance of systematic failures in execution, capacity building, and cultural transformation in hindering the journey to SDG-4 (Gloria, Pelayo, & Castro, 2024).

Therefore, this paper argues that advancing SDG-4 at the higher education level requires a dual focus. The architectural design of inclusion involves careful design and integration of robust policies, multifaceted support services, and accessible environments. The dynamics of implementation involve the processes that ensure effective implementation, sensitive communication, and continuous evaluation through stakeholder engagement. The ultimate metric of this system's success is academic achievement, especially for students with disabilities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The concept of Inclusive Education and SDG-4 in Higher Education**

The concept of inclusive education has gone through significant changes from its origins in special needs of educating to a broad-based human rights principle that aims to transform entire education systems (De Beco, 2022). The UNESCO Salamanca Statement aims to achieve sustainable development Goal 4 (SDG-4). The concept of inclusion now encompasses addressing and responding to the diversity of all learners by expanding participation and decreasing exclusion in education (Rončević & Rieckmann, 2025). This mandate in higher education goes beyond just physical access to include full academic participation, social integration, and equitable achievement. SDG-4's objective of guaranteeing equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with

disabilities, specifically connects institutional policy to developmental outcomes, making HEIs essential agents for societal equity (Ydesen & Elfert, 2023).

This mandate can be analyzed using theoretical frameworks such as Campus Climate Theory of Assefa (2025) as a lens. Policies, practices, perceptions of inclusivity, and interpersonal interactions shape the campus climate, which is the quality and character of the institutional environment. Perceived support, institutional commitment to diversity, physical and psychological safety, and social integration are all characteristics of a positive and inclusive climate. Engagement and success for students with disabilities are dependent on a supportive environment where policies are known, facilities are accessible, and attitudes are welcoming. Academic achievement and well-being are directly impacted by a negative climate marked by stigma, inadequate support, and bureaucratic obstacles. The theory demonstrates that inclusion is not a one-size-fits-all program, but rather the omnipresent environment in which all educational activities take place (Assefa, 2025).

It is important to recognize that inclusion in higher education is a political and contextual construct (Taff & Clifton, 2022). Inclusion is shaped by national ideologies in Malet (2023) comparative analysis of the UK and France. Differentiation and adaptive teaching are the focus of policies in the UK's liberal, communitarian model, which frames inclusion around individual rights and localized adaptation. The republicanism model of France, which stresses universal citizenship and state centralization, can make specific diversity invisible, leading to a rhetorical commitment to inclusion that is disconnected from classroom realities and teacher preparedness. Through cultural, historical, and political filters, 'inclusion' is not a single concept and is interpreted and executed differently, affecting everything from teacher training curricula to resource allocation.

### **Levels, gaps, and implementation challenges of inclusion policy architecture**

To ensure effective inclusion, it is necessary to have a coherent multi-level policy architecture (Carrasco & Perez Lopez, 2025). Filippou et al. (2025) found three important categories: national, regional, and institutional policies at the university level. Foundational legal and strategic direction is established by national policies. The list includes anti-discrimination laws, national inclusion strategies, financing requirements for supportive services, and accommodations guidelines. The UK and France, for instance, have national laws requiring reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. The Education and Training Policy's existence does not guarantee effectiveness, as highlighted by Assefa (2025) study in Ethiopia. The study found that stakeholders were not well-informed (mean score 2.03/5) and did not perceive the policies as effective (mean score 1.84/5), which indicates a severe implementation gap. Insufficient funding, lack of monitoring mechanisms, and poor dissemination often lead to this gap.

Federal systems can benefit from regional/sub-national policies as a mediator between national mandates and local contexts (Desjardins, Jang, & Walder, 2025). It is possible for them to coordinate resources, training, and ensure compliance across institutions within a jurisdiction. The most direct way to affect student experience is through institutional policies at the university level. Universities have disability policies, strategic plans for inclusion, procedures for accessing support, and curriculum design principles. A strong institutional framework that operationalizes inclusion through concrete directives on examinations, assistive technology, and personal assistance Kisanga and Matiba (2023) is demonstrated by these guidelines and their associated guidelines.

The systematic review highlights key policies that lead to success, including regular policy audits, mandatory staff training, the creation of specific disability offices/coordinators, targeted enrollment initiatives, and the proactive use of technology for inclusion (Marsh, Hough, & Bigby, 2025). The literature suggests that policies fail not only in their design but also in their implementation and communication (Hammond, 2022). Teachers feel unsupported due to the vertical, top-down, and injunctive nature of policies in France, as described by (Malet, 2023). Policies in Ethiopia have no clear definition or accessibility (Assefa, 2025). To ensure effective implementation, it is necessary to consult with students with disabilities regularly, allocate sufficient resources, and integrate inclusion into quality assurance mechanisms.

### **Support Services as the Engine of Academic Achievement**

Support services are the practical expression of policies, and they are directly associated with the retention, performance, and success of students with disabilities (Kisanga & Matiba, 2023). Academic and Examination Accommodations are crucial academic support and can be categorized into four interconnected domains. Provisions include extended exam time, alternative assessment formats (oral exams, braille, large print), flexible deadlines, and the right to record lectures. Such accommodations are meticulously outlined in UDSM's policy, including the ability for visually impaired students to take exams in braille or computerized formats, and oral exams for physically impaired students (Kisanga & Matiba, 2023). To level the playing field in education, it is essential to provide these legally mandated accommodations.

### **Assistive Technology and Resource Support**

Technology can be a powerful tool for achieving equality. To provide effective support, it is necessary to offer students assistance with software (such as JAWS and speech-to-text), hardware (braille note-takers and video magnifiers), and

ensure digital accessibility of learning materials and websites. In (Kisanga & Matiba, 2023), students have access to a well-furnished resource room at UDSM's CDS, which features modern devices such as Orbit Readers and laptops with screen readers. As mentioned in the Tanzania study, the effective use of new technologies can be hindered by the lack of training for support staff, as noted.

### **Human Support and Personal Assistance**

Direct human intervention is necessary for many students. Those with physical or severe disabilities can receive help from sign language interpreters for deaf students, note-takers, readers for blind students, and personal assistants (PAs). The job of PAs is a complex one, encompassing everything from academic note-taking to personal care. Kisanga and Matiba (2023) show that PAs are necessary and also face challenges such as contractual breaches, student exploitation, and lack of recognition. This demonstrates the requirement for clear guidelines, ethical training, and support for the support staff themselves.

### **Pedagogical and Curricular Support**

Support should ultimately be integrated into the teaching and learning process. The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) advocate for flexible curricula and multiple ways to represent, engage, and express from the beginning, which are beneficial to all learners. Faculty must adjust methods to meet diverse needs for differentiated instruction and adaptive teaching, as emphasized in the UK's Core Content Framework. Lack of adequate faculty training is a major hindrance worldwide. According to studies from Ethiopia Assefa (2025) Tanzania (Kisanga & Matiba, 2023), and the global review Filippou et al. (2025) the lack of faculty awareness and skills is a crucial obstacle. Inadvertently creating exclusionary environments, refusing to provide materials in advance, and holding negative attitudes are all possibilities for faculty who are unaware of policies or untrained in inclusive pedagogies.

### **Barriers to Effective Inclusion and Support**

Academic achievement is directly threatened as formidable barriers persist despite well-intentioned policies and services. Perhaps the most insidious obstacles are attitudinal barriers caused by stigma, prejudice, and low expectations. Social isolation, micro aggressions, and a refusal to provide accommodations are possible due to negative attitudes from faculty, staff, and peers (Assefa, 2025; Matiba & Kisanga, 2025). Filippou et al. (2025) define 'attitude accessibility' as a unique and essential category, necessitating strategies such as exposure to diverse cultures and compulsory professional development to modify mindsets.

Chronic underfunding in many Global South contexts can result in a shortage of experts (such as too few sign language interpreters), outdated or missing assistive technology, and inaccessible physical infrastructure (ramps, elevators, accessible toilets). According to Assefa, 2025, Ethiopia's study showed a very poor perception of physical accessibility with a mean of 2.11/5).

Many students don't disclose their disabilities because they fear stigma or jeopardize admission, which can prevent them from receiving essential services cited in (Filippou et al., 2025). The ineffectiveness of existing services is due to a lack of awareness among the general student and staff body. The lived reality in classrooms and campuses is often different from the high-level policy rhetoric in France and Ethiopia. The cause of this is the lack of grassroots input in top-down implementation, lack of ongoing monitoring, and failure to address the practical needs of educators (Gamage, 2022).

### **Toward an Integrated Framework for Achieving SDG-4**

The literature suggests an integrated, systemic approach to overcome these barriers and take advantage of inclusive policies and support services for genuine academic achievement (Karim, 2023). The insights from all four articles would be consolidated in this framework. Make coherent and multi-level policies that are clear, widely disseminated, and developed in consultation with students with disabilities. It is necessary to have specific actions mandated and backed by budgetary commitment (Heilmann, Bertone, & Wojtyna, 2024).

It is necessary for institutions to invest in comprehensive, multi-domain support services that include academic, technological, and human support, and ensure that they are well-resourced, staffed by trained professionals, and easily accessible (Karim, 2023). All faculty and staff members across the university are required to undergo continuous professional development. Compulsory training on disability awareness, inclusive pedagogy (UDL), legal responsibilities, and the use of assistive technology is mandatory (Jackson-Summers et al., 2024). Leadership needs to actively promote a culture of belonging that values diversity in order to cultivate an inclusive campus climate. This encompasses awareness campaigns, encouraging social integration, addressing attitudinal barriers, and maintaining physical and digital accessibility (Khan, Draper, Bjelobaba, Razi, & Sivasubramaniam, 2023). Policies must have dedicated offices (Disability Resource Centers), liaison officers, and regular climate assessments to ensure robust implementation and feedback mechanisms. In order to achieve iterative improvement, it is crucial to have feedback loops from students to administrators. Establish partnerships with disability advocacy groups, other HEIs, and international bodies to promote community and international collaboration, providing valuable expertise, sharing best practices, and advocating for necessary resources (Lindner et al., 2022).

The academic success of students with disabilities in higher education is not solely based on luck or individual determination (Los Santos, Bain, & Mundy, 2019). Intentionally designed and effectively implemented inclusive ecosystems are the direct cause of this result. The foundation of these ecosystems is based on rights-based policies, energized by a comprehensive network of academic and personal support services, and maintained by a campus climate that actively promotes belonging and equity (Römhild & Holleder, 2024). In the UK, France, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, the comparative and case study evidence reveals both promising models and persistent contextual challenges, especially the prevalent implementation gap and the crucial need for faculty empowerment. Moving beyond symbolic compliance is necessary to achieve SDG-4's promise of inclusive and equitable quality education at the tertiary level. To successfully translate policy into practice, equip educators, emphasize student voices, and systematically dismantle all barriers requires a sustained, resource-backed commitment (Reyes, Meneses, & Melián, 2022).

## METHOD

The study is descriptive and survey type in nature. Population of the study was all students of Khwaja Fareed UEIT Rahim Yar Khan Pakistan (KFUEIT). Stratified and simple random sampling techniques applied. We collected data from all faculties (total 8) of KFUEIT. About 400 questionnaire was distributed in students of each department from each faculty. Near 357 students return their survey. About 37 rejected because of incomplete information provided by respondents. The final sample contained 320 usable responses (response rate = 80%).

### Measurement Scale

Inclusive Policies and Support Services for academic Achievement of Students to Achieve SDG-4 at Higher Education Level. The Practice of IPSS and its impact on students' academic achievement in inclusive education setting were measured by using a self-developed scale. The scale was consisted of 7 items of IPSS and 5 items of Academic achievement with five point likert scale ranging from 1 Never, 2 rarely, 3 sometimes, 4 often, and 5 always. We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure the validity of the questionnaire. The finding supported the single dimensional structure, the significance of the KMO measure of sampling adequacy was .867, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was  $df(1035) = 10496.898, p < .000$ . The factors of IPSS&AA produced by EFA were IPSS (IPSS1, IPSS2, IPSS3, IPSS4, IPSS5, IPSS6, IPSS 7 Cronbach's  $\alpha = .876$ ), ACA (ACA1, ACA2, ACA3, ACA4, ACA5, Cronbach's  $\alpha = .813$ ). Factor loadings of two dimensions range from 0.543 to 0.785. Overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability scale was .92.

### Confirmatory factor analysis

Sr. No.	Item	Accessible Campus Infrastructures	Academic Achievement
IPSS1		.643	
IPSS2		.718	
IPSS3		.695	
IPSS4		.741	
IPSS5		.705	
IPSS6		.686	
IPSS7		.543	
ACA1			.747
ACA2			.785
ACA3			.742
ACA4			.678
ACA5			.751
	Eigen Value	5.677	1.081
	Total Variance Explained % (51.61)	53.230	9.82
	Sig.	.000	.000

### Data Analysis

We used SPSS-25 for descriptive statistics and ANOVA results. The data screening stage incorporated missing value analysis, multivariate outliers, normality, descriptive statistics, CFA, and ANOVA.

## RESULTS

Table 1 indicate descriptive statistics of respondents' views regarding inclusive policies and support services in universities. The results show that (31.9+28.4) 60% of respondents agreed that inclusive policies of the university

ensure equal opportunities for all students by eliminating discrimination based on disability, gender, or background. About (27.2+27.2) 54% of respondents agreed that support services such as academic counseling, tutoring, and mentorship programs help students with diverse needs succeed in their studies. Nearly (25.7+28.7) 55% of respondents agreed that flexible attendance and assessment policies accommodate students with disabilities or chronic illnesses, thereby promoting fairness in education. Around (33.8+30.6) 64% of respondents agreed that universities with inclusive policies provide sign language interpreters, note-takers, and alternative exam formats for students. Similarly, (21.6+31.9) 54% of respondents agreed that mental health services, including counseling and peer support groups, create a safe and inclusive campus environment. Furthermore, (24.1+36.9) 61% of respondents agreed that financial aid and scholarship programs for marginalized students reduce barriers to accessing higher education. Finally, (23.1+37.2) 60% of respondents agreed that regular training for staff and faculty on diversity and inclusion fosters a more welcoming and supportive academic community.

**Table 1** Inclusive policies and support services in IE

S.No	Statements	Level of Agreement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Std. Deviation	Mean
IPSS1	Inclusive policies of university ensure equal opportunities for all students by eliminating discrimination based on disability, gender or background.	F	30	38	59	102	91	1.27	3.58
		%	9.4	11.9	18.4	31.9	28.4		
IPSS2	Support services like academic counseling, tutoring, and mentorship programs help students with diverse needs succeed in their studies.	F	34	26	86	87	87	1.26	3.52
		%	10.6	8.1	26.9	27.2	27.2		
IPSS3	Flexible attendance and assessment policies accommodate students with disabilities or chronic illnesses, promoting fairness in education.	F	17	33	98	80	92	1.15	3.61
		%	5.3	10.3	30.6	25.7	28.7		
IPSS4	University with inclusive policies provide sign language interpreters, Note-takers, and alternative exam formats for students	F	37	30	79	76	98	1.32	3.52
		%	11.6	9.4	24.7	33.8	30.6		
IPSS5	Mental health services, including counseling and peer support groups, create a safe and inclusive campus environment.	F	50	33	66	69	102	1.42	3.43
		%	15.6	10.3	20.6	21.6	31.9		
IPSS6	Financial aid and scholarship programs for marginalized students reduce barriers to accessing higher education.	F	34	23	68	77	118	1.31	3.69
		%	10.6	7.2	21.3	24.1	36.9		

S.No	Statements	Level of Agreement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Std. Deviation	Mean
IPSS7	Regular training for staff and faculty on diversity and inclusion fosters a more welcoming and supportive academic community.	F	46	13	68	74	119	1.38	3.64
		%	14.4	4.1	21.3	23.1	37.2		
	Total								

**Table 2** shows that the results for academic achievements in relation to the level of inclusive policies and support services. The findings show that students with rare exposure to inclusive policies reported a mean of 1.45, those with medium exposure had a mean of 2.14, while students with high exposure demonstrated the highest mean of 2.86. The F-value of 133.92 with a significance level of  $p = .000 (< 0.05)$  indicates that there are statistically significant differences across the groups. This result highlights that universities with stronger inclusive policies such as financial aid, counseling services, flexible assessments, and diversity training contribute significantly to enhancing students' academic performance compared to institutions where such policies are rarely implemented.

**Table 2** Academics Achievements by Inclusive Policies

Statements	N	Mean	Std deviation	Std error	Sum of squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Rare usage	31	1.451	.623	.112	70.011	2	35.00	133.92	.000
Medium Usage	126	2.142	.628	.056	82.86	317	.261		
High Usage	163	2.858	.366	.028					
Total	320	2.440	.692	.038					

## DISCUSSION

Table 1 reveals that the majority of respondents acknowledge the significance of inclusive policies and support services in promoting equity within university settings. Institutional inclusive policies were agreed upon by 60% of participants, while 64% confirmed that practical accommodations like sign language interpreters and alternative exam formats can be provided. The gap could be caused by a lack of consistency in implementation across departments, a lack of awareness among students, or a perception of inadequacy of existing services.

Academic counseling, tutoring, and mentorship programs received a 54% agreement rate, which is identical to that recorded for mental health services. Students acknowledge the value of both academic and psychological support, but neither is perceived as easily accessible or effective, as evidenced by the congruence between these two areas. The quantitative evidence provided in Table 2 is convincing and connects inclusive policies to academic achievement. The dose-response relationship between mean academic performance and exposure increases continuously, demonstrating a clear relationship between low exposure (1.45) and medium exposure (2.14) and high exposure (2.86). These differences cannot be attributed to random variation as confirmed by the large F-value (133.92) and statistically significant p-value (.000). This discovery validates the argument that inclusive policies are not only ethical or legal demands, but also directly linked to better educational outcomes. Financial aid, flexible assessments, counseling, and diversity training can help students focus on learning, persevere through challenges, and excel academically.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that both perceived equity and actual academic performance are positively associated with inclusive policies and support services in universities. The role of these policies is supported by a majority of respondents who believe that they can prevent discrimination, accommodate disabilities, provide mental health and academic support, and reduce financial barriers. With a majority of agreements between 54% and 64%, there is still room for improvement in service reach, quality, and student awareness. According to the comparative analysis, students who have had a lot of exposure to inclusive policies have significantly better academic outcomes (mean =

2.86) than those who have had very little exposure (mean = 1.45). Academic success is not dependent on ancillary policies, as the statistical significance ( $p = .000$ ) confirms. To improve student performance, universities must prioritize the systematic implementation of financial aid, flexible assessments, counseling services, accessibility accommodations, and ongoing diversity training for faculty and staff. Institutions are at risk of perpetuating achievement gaps and undermining the equitable learning environment they are required to provide without such policies.

### Recommendation

Universities should make it a priority to inform students about the existing inclusive policies and support services. Increase access to counseling and peer support groups to create a safer campus environment by expanding mental health services. Regular diversity and inclusion training should be mandatory to create a welcoming academic community. The expansion of targeted funding for marginalized students is necessary due to the high impact of financial aid and scholarships on access. Improve the quality and availability of academic and tutoring support to tutoring and mentoring. Implement flexible assessment policies across the globe. Since flexible attendance and exams promote fairness implement them systematically for students with disabilities or chronic illnesses. Prioritize the full implementation of inclusive policies across all departments, given the significant performance gap and scale up high-exposure inclusive practices.

### Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the manuscript preparation process

During the preparation of this work the authors used Deep Seek in order to [most relevant literature]. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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