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## **EXAMINING POLICIES AND CURRICULA FOR MANAGING DISABILITY DIVERSITY IN ETHIOPIAN PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A MIXED METHODS STUDY**

Easaw Alemayehu ASSEFA

Displaced International, USA, ORCID: 0000-0002-3780-9749

### **Abstract**

A growing body of research suggests that improving diversity management in general and disability diversity management (DDM) in particular techniques may be achieved by broadening an engaging policy & curricular inclusion. Nevertheless, there are either too few or none at all empirical research on the DDM policies and curricula used in Ethiopian public higher education institutions (HEIs). The primary objective of this study is therefore, to examine and shed light on the DDM policies and curricula practices inside Ethiopian public HEIs, with the aim of offering recommendations for their improvement. Vice academic presidents, student deans, instructors, disability center heads, and HEI students with disabilities (SWDs) were participated about the implementation of disability diversity-related policies and curricula in this study. The study conducted by means of mixed methods technique, using (N=247) and (N=32) respondents for the quantitative and qualitative data strands, respectively. A survey questionnaire, interviews, observation, and document analysis were the four methods used to collect the data. Even in an environment where policy is typically promising, the data demonstrate that insufficient DDM policy is being implemented. The way that the DDM-related curricula are still used does not meet the needs of the disability diversity problem of the twenty-first century.

*Keywords: Curricula, Diversity, Disability, Higher Education Institutions, Policies*

### **Introduction**

A growing body of research suggests that improving diversity management in general and disability diversity management (DDM) in particular techniques may be achieved by broadening an engaging policy & curricular inclusion (Bowman 2010; Hurtado et al., 2012). Researchers also found that when students are exposed to diversity in their institutions policy & curricula, they are more likely to develop critical opinions on how their institution fosters a positive climate for diversity (Assefa, 2023; Mayhew et al., 2006). In order to accommodate a wide range of diverse students with disabilities (SWDs), an inclusive policy & curricula design encourages student-centered learning. According to Davies and Elliott (2009), this is advantageous not only just for SWDs but also for the diverse student body at HEIs.

An inclusive policy & curricula for DDM frequently saves time and lessens the need for revisions down the road (Bunbury, 2020). Disability diversity should be a topic of discussion at different HEIs' committee sessions, according to Morgan et al. (2011). However, Florian (2012) emphasizes that instructors lack the tools and resources necessary to implement inclusive teaching methods, even if it could be legally required to make reasonable accommodations for SWDs. This justified that for the best DDM in varied HEIs for the accomplishment of desired outcomes, updated educational policy with interesting course material & the use of inclusive pedagogy that promotes intergroup communication are necessary (Hurtado et al., 2012).

Research has indicated that, on the issue of DDM, although over one in ten HEIs students have a recognized disability that affects their cognitive, physical, or psychological functioning, disability is still often ignored when discussing student diversity (Assefa, 2025 b.; Aquino, 2016b). In accordance with international agreements, customs, and principles, the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) (1994) exhorts all Ethiopians to access to education, as well as the significance of allocating resources and aid for PWDs diversity as stated on Article 41:1, "The State shall, with its available means, allocate resources to provide rehabilitation and

assistance to the physically and mentally disabled”. On top of it, the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia (1994) emphasize in section (2.2.3) that education for those with disabilities is: “to enable both the handicapped and the gifted learn in accordance with their potential and needs”. According to the policy, among the initiatives that are envisaged are:

“The provision of special education and training for people with special needs, with particular focus on the preparation and utilization of support for special education, and availability of special financial assistance”

In Ethiopia SWDs diversity continue to face significant obstacles that hinder their progress in HEIs, including a lack of suitable instructional materials, computers, and assistive technology, as well as a lack of curricular or material adjustments (Abdulfettah, 2018; Arefaine, 2008).

A substantial body of empirical research has also been published on diversity management at HEIs. For instance, Gobena, (2016) conducted research on cross-border learning experiences in Ethiopian universities, finding that management provisions and diverse activities facilitate such experiences. He recommends implementing diversity management strategies in all academic institutions. Adamu in (2013, 2014) has done focusing on the challenges and opportunities of ethnic and religious diversity management at Bahir Dar University. In 2007, Adamu & Bejital, studied students diversity issue at Bahir Dar University. They found that the existing student diversity created more challenges than opportunities. The researchers recommended a comprehensive study on educational challenges related to diversity in Ethiopian HEIs. Ambissa (2010) also explored children's awareness and attitudes towards diverse groups and the educational responses to diversity in Alternative Basic Education (ABE) centers. The findings revealed limited awareness of social diversity and negative perceptions of out-groups among the children. Additionally, there was a lack of curriculum interventions addressing diversity. The implications for educational policy and practice were also discussed. However, the aforementioned research was not concentrated on the DDM policy and curricula due to the broad nature of diversity and diversity management aspects. The primary purpose of the research is to examine and shed light on the DDM policies and curricula in Ethiopian public HEIs. It also intends to recommend changes. The findings of this study addressed the following two research questions:

1. How are policies for managing the diversity of disability practiced at Ethiopian public HEIs? What does the content of these policies look like?
2. How do undergraduate regular HEIs students perceive the use of curricular activities in relation to DDM?

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The theoretical foundations of the study, as outlined by Hurtado et al. (2012), are rooted in the diversified learning environment (DLE) model. This model examines how communities within HEIs perceive their campus environment, taking into account various dimensions such as interpersonal interactions, academic experiences, and professional engagements (Hurtado et al., 1998). Additionally, it considers attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations related to gender, disability, age, religion, and ethnicity diversity (Assefa, 2024; Hurtado et al., 2012; Hurtado et al., 1999).

The DLE model allows researchers and practitioners to explore two primary aspects. Firstly, it aims to assess the level of support provided by the HEIs' environment for diverse students, faculty, and staff. This involves understanding how the campus climate and interactions facilitate inclusivity and accommodate the needs of individuals from various backgrounds. Secondly, the model evaluates whether the HEIs' environment fosters structures, beliefs, and behaviors that positively impact the learning outcomes of all students, irrespective of their diverse characteristics or backgrounds (Assefa, & Zenebe, 2025; Hurtado et al., 2012).

In order to comprehensively analyze the HEIs' diversity management, the DLE model takes into account two contextual dimensions: internal and external. The internal context encompasses elements at both the institutional and individual levels (Hurtado et al., 2012). At the institutional level, factors such as the institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion which includes examining the historical practices, policies, and cultural norms that have shaped the institution's approach to diversity. Furthermore, its compositional diversity of students, faculty, and staff, and organizational structures (institutional policies, curricula, extra-curricular and processes) assessed. At the individual level, the model considers the psychological impressions of individuals, their attitudes towards diversity on campus, and the behavioral dimension, which encompasses their behaviors and experiences within intergroup encounters (Assefa, & Mujtaba, 2025; Hurtado et al., 2012; Milem et al., 2005).

The external context of the DLE model focuses on the broader societal and policy factors that influence diversity management within HEIs. This includes considering the governmental and policy frameworks that shape the HEIs' approaches to diversity. Additionally, the sociohistorical components are taken into account, recognizing the historical and social factors that have influenced the overall diversity landscape in which the HEIs operate (Hurtado et al., 2012; Morgan 2006).

By integrating these theoretical foundations, the DLE model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and evaluating the complexities of diversity within HEIs. It enables researchers and practitioners to examine the multifaceted dimensions of the campus environment, identify areas of strength, and pinpoint areas for improvement (Milem et al., 2005). Ultimately, the model aims to foster an inclusive and enriching learning environment for all students, where diversity is celebrated and positively impacts the educational experiences (Hurtado et al., 2012).

The DLE model, as described by Hurtado et al. (2012), provides a framework for understanding how Ethiopian public HEIs manage diversity, including disability. The model encompasses various aspects of the campus environment, such as interpersonal, academic, and professional interactions, as well as attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations related to gender, disability, age, religion, and ethnicity diversity (Johnson-Bailey et al. 2009).

In the context of DDM at Ethiopian public HEIs, the DLE model examines both internal (individual & institutional) and external factors. The internal context includes elements at both the individual & institutional levels. This dimension considers the institution's historical legacy of inclusion or exclusion, the compositional diversity of students, faculty, and staff, and the organizational structures, which encompass institutional policies, curricula, extra-curricular activities, and processes (Hurtado et al., 2012).

At the institutional level, policies and curricula play a crucial role in managing the diversity of disability. Institutional policies may include provisions for accessibility, reasonable accommodations, and support services for SWDs. These policies aim to create an inclusive and supportive environment that enables SWDs to fully participate in academic and social activities (Hurtado et al., 2012). Curricula, on the other hand, can incorporate inclusive teaching practices and materials that cater to diverse learning needs, including those of SWDs (Morfin et al. 2006). This may involve providing alternative formats for course materials, employing universal design principles, and offering specialized instructional strategies or technologies (Maramba, 2008).

The external context of the DLE model considers governmental/policy and sociohistorical components. In the case of managing disability diversity, this dimension entails examining the broader policies and regulations set forth by the Ethiopian government to promote inclusion and accessibility in HEIs (Hurtado et al., 2012; Peterson & Spencer, 1990). It also takes into account the sociohistorical factors that have shaped attitudes and perceptions toward disability in Ethiopian society.

Additionally, the individual level of the climate within Ethiopian HEIs is an essential aspect of the DLE model. This level encompasses the psychological impressions of individuals, their attitudes toward diversity on campus, and their behaviors, including intergroup encounters (Assefa, 2025, a; Hurtado et al 2012; Hart & Fellabuum, 2008). Creating a positive climate at the individual level involves fostering inclusive attitudes, promoting awareness and understanding of disability, and encouraging respectful interactions among students, faculty, and staff (Harper & Hurtado 2007).

Overall, the DLE model provides a comprehensive framework for examining how Ethiopian public HEIs manage the diversity of disability. By considering institutional policies, curricula, and processes, as well as the broader governmental and sociohistorical contexts, the model is helpful to promote inclusive practices and positive learning outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities.

## **Methodologies**

### **Research Design**

This study was able to comprehend its research issue from a pragmatic aspect by using a mixed-methods technique (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). As per Morgan's (2007) assertion, pragmatism permits an array of methodologies, unique perspectives, and divergent presumptions, along with substitute methods for collecting and interpreting data, all of which were employed in this investigation. To get a comprehensive and in-depth knowledge as well as confirmation, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research approaches was employed (Johnson, et al., 2007).

### **Research Participants**

For qualitative part, convenience sampling approaches were used to choose students from five public HEIs in Ethiopia: Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa Science & Technology University, Debre Berhan University, Selale University, and Kotebe University of Education. Undergraduate students from five public HEIs in Ethiopia comprised the quantitative study sample. The probability sampling approach was used to choose the students for survey. After authorization was secured, 270 students received questionnaires, which were distributed in accordance with the study's objectives as approved by the university administration. Out of the 261 returned surveys, 247 were found to be valid.

Study participants were selected for qualitative research using the availability, purposive, and snowball sampling techniques. Ten undergraduate students (two from each HEI), ten instructors (two from each HEI), three heads of disability centers (only three are available), five student deans (one from each of the five Ethiopian public HEI samples) and four vice academic presidents (one from each HEI except one missed) comprised the group. The five public HEIs were therefore used to choose thirty-two qualitative responders (See Table 1.)

**Table 1:** Total Participants from Ethiopian public HEIs

Participants	Type of Participation	Total Participants
Undergraduate Students with Disability (SWDs)	Questionnaire (quantitative)	247
Undergraduate Students	Interviews (qualitative)	10
Vice Academic Presidents	Interviews (qualitative)	4
Students' Deans	Interviews (qualitative)	5
Instructors	Interviews (qualitative)	10
Disability Center Heads	Interviews (qualitative)	3
Total		279

## RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

### Quantitative Data Collection Instrument

The DLE model published by Hurtado et al. (2012) and recent empirical research on the DDM Policy and curriculum were used to build research questionnaires. The questionnaire consists of two sections. Section I collects demographic data such as gender, age, year of education, and degree of education. Policy issues and DDM courses are covered in Section II. Strongly Disagree (1) and Strongly Agree (5) are the extremes of a 5-point Likert scale that was used. To review the instrument, thirty respondents from the pilot sample were consulted.

To ensure the validity of the instrument, several steps were taken. Firstly, expert opinions were sought. The researcher consulted subject matter experts in the field of disability management and higher education to evaluate the content validity of the instrument. The experts provided feedback and suggestions for improving the instrument, resulting in necessary changes being made to enhance its content validity.

Additionally, this tool was developed that aimed to measure the underlying theoretical structure related to the management of disability diversity. It was also designed based on existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and the research objectives. By aligning the questions with the theoretical constructs, the researcher ensured that the instrument effectively captured the intended dimensions of disability management.

One way to define the reliability variable is to divide the calculated variance by the true variance. The result is 1 if the obtained variance is equal to the true variance. A survey is considered accurate when its alpha value is close to unity, indicating a high reliability coefficient. The degree of correlation between each item and the total for all words is examined in order to evaluate the accuracy of each instrument with respect to the total. This assesses the accuracy of the apparatus. The phrase for each item and the Byron for each item accurately determined the study region. The correlation value was below 0.01. This shows a 99% accuracy level. The research (SPSS) by (\* \*) indicates a high degree of association. The pilot research's objective was to ascertain how respondents understood the questionnaire. After the pilot, a few recommendations and changes were implemented.

In the Table 2 below, using the Cronbach alpha value, the reliability of the scales in the present study also shown.

**Table 2:** The Reliability of the Scales

Instrument	Cronbach Alpha	Number of Items	Acceptability
Policies	0.887	7	Acceptable
Curricula	0.787	7	Acceptable

The scale reliability value of 0.887 indicates an acceptable level of consistency in measuring how policies and curricula are practiced for managing the diversity of disability at Ethiopian public HEIs since it has a value greater than or equal to 0.7. This suggests that the scale used to assess these practices is reliable and yields consistent results. A reliability value of 0.787 suggests that the items or questions in the scale are internally consistent, meaning they are measuring the same underlying construct. This is important for ensuring that the scale accurately captures the intended concept of managing disability diversity in HEIs. With the mentioned a reliability value

researchers can have confidence in the reliability of the data collected using this scale.

### **Qualitative Data Collection Instrument**

The information required for the qualitative research component of this study was gathered by the researcher using three different methods: interviews, observation, and document analysis. The aforementioned study participants underwent extensive interviews. Interview criteria were developed using DDM concepts from previous research as well as from the background and literature review parts of this study (Abebaw, 2014; Gobena, 2016). The purpose of the in-depth interview guides was to examine participant viewpoints on areas that need further clarification in the questionnaire, look at student demographics, and evaluate the policies and curricula that Ethiopian public HEIs have in place to promote disability diversity. Along with empirical data, the interview was utilized to support a variety of policy documents & curricula materials.

The development of the interview form involved a rigorous process. To achieve content validity, several steps were followed. First, an extensive literature review was conducted to identify relevant theories, concepts, and previous research related to DDM in HEIs. This review helped in identifying key areas and dimensions that needed to be covered in the interview form.

Next, a panel of experts consisting of academics, disability advocates, and practitioners in the field of higher education and DDM was formed. The panel reviewed the initial draft of the interview form and provided feedback on the relevance and appropriateness of the questions. The experts' input was crucial in ensuring that the interview form adequately captured the essential aspects of DDM in Ethiopian public HEIs. Based on the feedback from the expert panel, revisions were made to the interview form, including the addition, deletion, or modification of questions. This iterative process continued until a consensus was reached among the experts regarding the content validity of the interview form.

Data was also collected through direct observation. The researcher conducted the observations at the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs. These observations were carried out in classrooms, lecture halls, libraries, and other relevant settings where disability-related policies and curricula are implemented. The researcher documented the interactions between SWDs and faculty members, evaluated the availability of accessible resources, and noted the utilization of inclusive teaching methods. The duration of the observations varied depending on the specific institution and the research parameters. Through these direct observations, the researcher obtained valuable insights into the actual implementation and practices of policies and curricula concerning DDM in Ethiopian public HEIs.

The document analysis for the study involved examining various key documents. These documents included official policy statements, guidelines, strategic plans, curriculum documents, and reports related to disability inclusion in higher education. The researcher scrutinized these documents to gain insights into the formal policies, guidelines, and practices in place for managing disability diversity at Ethiopian public HEIs. Through this document analysis, a comprehensive understanding was developed regarding the existing frameworks and approaches for disability inclusion in the higher education system.

### **Data Analysis**

All survey responses were carefully examined to find any missing data, misspelled words, or blank spaces submitted by respondents. Ethiopian public HEIs were to be better understood, therefore quantitative data on DDM policies and curricula were gathered. This was accomplished using SPSS descriptive statistics like percentages and frequencies.

Qualitative data collected during the analysis process is transformed into textual form for in-depth examination. This involves converting the collected data into codes and themes that emerge from the analysis. The qualitative data, which include interview transcripts, direct observation, document analysis and open-ended survey responses, is carefully reviewed and categorized into meaningful codes representing key concepts or ideas. These codes are then organized into themes that capture common patterns or trends within the data. By presenting the data in this coded and thematic format, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of the policies and curricula implemented for managing disability diversity. This analysis helped identify strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement in the existing practices. It also provided valuable insights into the lived experiences and perspectives of stakeholders involved in disability inclusion at Ethiopian public HEIs.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **DISABILITY DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT RELATED POLICY PRACTICE**

***Research Question 1:** How are policies for managing the diversity of disability practiced at Ethiopian public HEIs? What does the content of these policies look like?*

The primary objective of this study is to examine and shed light on the DDM policies and curricula practices inside Ethiopian public HEIs, with the aim of offering recommendations for their improvement. The research respondent's answer to diversity related policy practice for DDM was examined in terms of mean and standard deviation values using data from the quantitative survey responses. The information that is relevant to the research subjects is listed in Table 2.

**Table 3: Disability Diversity Management Related Policy Practice**

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	This campus's mission statement specifically refers to the value of having disability diversity.	247	3.96	1.120
2	By the campus's legislation, related policies and internal code of conduct, it is clearly written that discrimination against disability is not allowed.	247	4.21	.942
3	This university has clear disciplinary procedures for anyone to report prejudice or discriminatory experiences on disability issues.	247	2.26	.896
4	In this university, diversity related policies, legislations and guidelines are effectively communicated to students with disability diversity.	247	2.44	.872
5	This university has specific policies, programs or initiatives that contribute to managing disability diversity.	247	4.18	.952
6	The implementation of policies, rules and regulations that protect disability diversity is weak in this university.	247	4.20	.979
7	This campus is using an affirmative action policy to fairly manage disability diversity.	247	2.60	.949
Overall Average		247	3.4	

#### **Policy Practice 1: Inclusive Disability Diversity Mission**

According to the mean and standard deviation scores for DDM related policy practice item 1 in Table 3 ( $M=3.96$ ,  $SD=1.120$ ), the majority of respondents agreed that their campus's mission statement particularly mentions the benefit of having disability diversity. The results demonstrate that including disability diversity into the mission statements of five public HEIs in Ethiopia is a step in the right direction toward creating a welcoming and fair learning environment highlighting the historical legacy of inclusion/exclusion of DLE model's institutional level by indicating that the HEI's mission statement explicitly recognizes the value of disability diversity. These HEIs understand the significance of empowering and accommodating SWDs by formally recognizing the value of disability diversity. This initiate is perhaps in line with a larger cultural movement that affirms the worth and rights of those with disabilities. Equality of opportunity for all students, irrespective of their physical or cognitive ability, is the goal of these Ethiopian public HEIs, which embrace diversity. This was emphatically supported by one of the interviewees in the field, as follows:

*As a university, it is included in the mission statement by having budget. [ . . . ] as well, clearly, the legislation has articles which supports inclusion. on top of it the finance rule by providing special attention to SWDs diversity, it budgeted to them. So, we can say that his campus's mission statement specifically refers to the value of having disability diversity.*

*(Interviewee No. 12; May 2023, Own translation)*

The statement found on page 18 of the senate legislation document of Addis Ababa University (AAU, 2019) "*promote tolerance, diversity, sense of equality and partnership in the University*" supports the interview data by expressing the university's commitment to fostering tolerance, diversity, equality, and partnership. This demonstrates that the university has explicitly incorporated the importance of diversity into its mission statement. Additionally, it implies that the academic community should value the distinct viewpoints and contributions that people with disabilities may make. This finding is consistent with prior research (e.g., Milem et al. 2005; Rankin & Reason 2008), which found that policy shows how seriously HEIs takes gender diversity. This is evident in university programs, policies, and services (Rankin & Reason 2008), all of which need to be connected to the institutional mission (Clayton-Pedersen et al. 2007). Institutional policies and procedures can be evaluated for equality and diversity, and they have the power to produce more fair conditions and results for a diverse student body.

In line with the results of Tefera et al., (2015), the Ethiopian government has demonstrated commitment to

the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and "education for all" (EFA) goals as outlined in the legislative and policy framework. It has also stated its intention in the five-year growth and transformation plan (GTP) to use inclusive education as a key to sustaining economic development, developed a strategy for SWDs diversity, incorporated it into ongoing sector development programs (ESDP III and IV), and extended it to regional and local action plans to minimize budget barriers in strategy implementation.

**Policy Practice 2: Disability Discrimination Protection Policy**

Respondents were asked in Table 3 item 2 to indicate whether or not it is explicitly stated in the campus's laws, associated regulations, and internal code of conduct that discrimination against SWDs diversity is not permitted. According to the data's mean and standard deviation ( $M= 4.21$ ,  $SD= 0.942$ ), the majority of them believed this. The results indicate that the legislative framework, associated policies, and internal codes of conduct of five public HEIs in Ethiopia have explicitly prohibited discrimination against individuals with disabilities reflecting efforts to promote structural diversity of DLE model's institutional level which is in the internal context. This is a praiseworthy attempt to promote inclusion and equality. However, the opposite appears to prevail. Interviewee #10 corroborated this as follows:

*Not sufficient. I can say that there is marginalization. For instance, in class room teaching, thanks to instructors, there is no marginalization but, in the leadership, while they provide learning materials, some SWDs diversity from some department including ours will be marginalized by not getting the needed resources equally. This is pure marginalization. SWDs diversity attended in this university before us had exam readers employed by the university but in our time, we are not getting such learning support which I consider it as marginalization. [ . . . ] the leaders said there is no clear policy and stooped it what was existed before. If they count as their student, they would bring the needed learning materials. Is Gonder or Haromaya university is unique on bringing the needed learning materials for SWDs diversity? I heard as these universities were giving such learning materials for SWDs diversity but here there is no.*

*(Interviewee No. 10; May 2023, Own translation)*

The finding also shows that these HEIs are demonstrating their opposition to unjust treatment and their dedication to fostering an atmosphere that upholds the rights and dignity of every person by making it abundantly evident that discrimination on the basis of disability is not permitted. A strong basis for promoting an inclusive campus culture is provided by this set of laws and policies. They make a clear statement about the non-tolerance of disability discrimination and the equal access to education that SWDs enjoy, along with their peers.

**Policy Practice 3: Disability Discrimination Reporting Procedures**

The mean and standard deviation of the respondents' responses to DDM-related policy practice item 3: *"this university has clear disciplinary procedures for anyone to report prejudice or discriminatory experiences on disability issues"*, in Table 3 are ( $M= 2.26$ ,  $SD= .896$ ). This finding suggests that the effectiveness of the five Ethiopian public HEIs' commitment to inclusion may be called into question due to the absence of explicit disciplinary processes for reporting bias or discriminatory experiences pertaining to disability problems fostering a negative psychological climate of DLE model's internal dimension where SWDs will not feel safe and supported. Even if it is positive to have laws and behavior guidelines that forbid discrimination, people's capacity to seek justice and find a solution is compromised when there are no established procedures for reporting and handling such instances. When policies and processes are unclear, people who encounter bias or discrimination can be reluctant to report it for fear of being punished or that nothing would be done. The institutions' capacity to address systemic problems and foster a secure and welcoming learning environment may be hampered by this, which may also perpetuate a culture of silence. This finding is supported by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), which states that discrimination against disabled students includes any distinction, exclusion, or restriction that prevents them from realizing their right to participate fully in society, including HEIs, for reasons related to their disability diversity. This includes failing to provide a 'reasonable accommodation' to students' specific needs, such as communication help, putting them at a significant disadvantage in comparison to other students (Articles 2 and 24).

The researcher's observations also revealed that the selected five Ethiopian Public HEIs lacked clear disciplinary procedures for individuals to report instances of prejudice or discrimination related to disability issues. This means that students who experienced such incidents did not have a well-defined process to seek recourse or address their concerns. The absence of these procedures can contribute to a climate where discrimination may go unaddressed, potentially hindering the educational experience for SWDs. The researcher emphasized the importance of establishing robust mechanisms that enable SWDs to report and address discriminatory experiences promptly and effectively. By implementing clear procedures, institutions can create a safer and more inclusive

environment for SWDs, fostering a conducive learning environment for all. It is crucial for institutions to recognize the significance of addressing prejudice and discrimination to ensure equal opportunities and promote a culture of respect and inclusivity.

#### **Policy Practice 4: Effective DDM Policy Communication**

The average response and standard deviation for DDM related policy practice item 4: “In this university, diversity related policies, legislations and guidelines are effectively communicated to students with disability diversity”, in Table 3 was ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 0.872$ ). This finding indicates that the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs had a low degree of inclusivity and equitable access to information, which is concerning given the ineffective communication of diversity-related policies, laws, and guidelines to SWDs reflecting efforts to promote structural diversity of DLE model’s institutional level which is in the internal context by communicating policies, legislations, guidelines, and programs that focus on disability diversity is weaker. To guarantee that SWDs are aware of their rights, the institutional structure in place to meet their requirements, and the support services that are available to them, it is imperative that communication be clear and accessible. These students' capacity to participate completely in their education may be hampered by a lack of information and awareness of the options and allowances that are available to them in the event of ineffective communication. This is in concert with findings written in the ten years, (2020-2030) strategic planning document of AAU’s, saying: “*Not fully communicating the vision, missions and strategic plans and inability to create common and shared vision and values among the University community*” (AAU, 2020, p.18). However, as opposed to the both the quantitative and qualitative finding, only one participant, described the issue of diversity related policies, legislations and guidelines communication by stating:

*We have planned and it is incorporated the need of SWDs well. Plus, what is coming from MoE is the part of our plan. Actually, in institutional level, we have no policy as such. However, each existed structure will as per the plan. On top of it, these important documents are communicated well having tea and coffee ceremony through their assigned structures.*

*(Interviewee No. 25; May 2023, Own translation)*

The interview data suggests that there is a plan in place to address the needs of SWDs. The plan has been incorporated well and aligns with the Ministry of Education's guidelines. While there is no specific institutional policy, existing structures will operate according to the plan. Important documents are effectively communicated through assigned structures, along with tea and coffee ceremonies. Overall, the qualitative data indicates a comprehensive approach to supporting SWDs, despite the absence of a formal policy at the institutional level. The plan's alignment with national priorities and the use of communication strategies demonstrates a commitment to some extent to inclusivity and ensuring that stakeholders are well-informed.

#### **Policy Practice 5: Disability Diversity Support Initiatives**

As illustrated by their mean and standard deviation scores for DDM related policy practice item 5 in Table 3 ( $M = 4.18$ ,  $SD = 0.952$ ), the majority of respondents said that their university has specific policies, programs, or initiatives that contribute to managing disability diversity reflecting efforts to promote internal context of structural diversity from DLE model’s institutional level. This finding suggests that the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs have made a commendable effort to support SWDs and promote inclusivity by having particular policies, programs, or initiatives that help manage disability diversity. The aforementioned methods are intended to establish an atmosphere that facilitates the full involvement and achievement of SWDs, while also acknowledging their specific needs and limitations. These regulations may include a variety of topics, such as inclusive teaching methods, assistive technology, reasonable accommodations, accessible infrastructure, and specialized support services. This outcome is consistent with a recent study, which concluded that while participation is not merely about numerical representation, now is the time to develop a similar global policy and research momentum for disability (Albert et al, 2005).

#### **Policy Practice 6: DDM Policy Implementation**

The mean and standard deviation scores for GDM related policy practice item 6: “*The implementation of policies, rules and regulations that protect disability diversity is weak in this university*”, in Table 3 was ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 0.979$ ). The finding shows that there are substantial obstacles in ensuring equal opportunities and inclusivity for SWDs, as the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs have inadequate policies, rules, and regulations protecting disability diversity reflecting much more engagement needed from the behavioral components of DLE model’s individual level which is in the internal context. Even when laws, rules, and regulations are in place, their implementation is compromised by a lack of consistent application. This might be caused by a number of things,



including a lack of funding, staff members who are not properly trained, and a lack of awareness or dedication to disability inclusion throughout the institution. Inadequate implementation of these standards may lead to inadequate support services for SWDs, a dearth of appropriate accommodations, and restricted access to facilities and resources. However, the following quote from respondent # 25 highlights the medium experience of document implementation at HEIs. Here is the quote:

*Yes, whatever you plan will not be practical if you do not have good implementation strategy. Here, although it is not practical up to our expectations due to various reasons, too the good percent, we are implementing these rules and regulations. By the way, since President Sahalewok Zewde too has a project initiative here, our practicality is vital. But I do think that we are implementing it to 100%. As you know full implementations require many things like huge amount of money, commitment and the like.*

*(Interviewee No. 25; May 2023, Own translation)*

This result suggests that "we need new rules for a very different game," as Morley (2012), (p. 29) concludes. For the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs, it is nearly timely to create and put into place anew practicable disability diversity policies, strategies, and initiatives.

### **Policy Practice 7: Fair Disability Diversity Affirmative Action**

The average response and standard deviation for DDM-related policy practice question 7 in Table 3 (M= 2.60, SD= .949) indicate that the majority of respondents believed that their campus is not fairly managing disability diversity by enacting an affirmative action policy. This result suggests that the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs are not effectively utilizing their affirmative action policies to manage disability diversity. It indicates a lack of proactive engagement and behavior from the DLE model at the individual level, which is vital within the internal context for supporting disability diversity. Policies pertaining to affirmative action aim to rectify past injustices and advance equitable chances for marginalized populations, such as those with disabilities. However, the failure to fully implement the principles outlined in these documents by educational institutions indicates that an opportunity to actively promote inclusion and provide necessary support to individuals with disabilities (SWDs) may have been missed. This lack of implementation poses the risk of unintentionally perpetuating existing disparities and hindering the growth of disability diversity by neglecting to adopt affirmative action policies.

Supporting this notion, the Ministry of Education (MoE) stated in its ESDP II document in 2004 that activities enabling SWDs diversity are not adequately supported. Consequently, due to a lack of assistance, the majority of SWDs diversity are denied the opportunity to pursue their studies, severely limiting their participation in employment and society. Considering that the Ministry of Education is considered an external element within the DLE model, it can be inferred that the external dimension of the DLE model is applicable in the present research, as these external documents have a significant impact on the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs. For example, contradicting the aforementioned concerns, one of the interviewees (Interviewee No. 12) claimed:

*As a center, if we are not helping them fairly, it is better to close it. The ultimate purpose is to give them justice and equitable service. We really need to be model and protect them not to be violated by others. We never compromise by the fair treatment. However, complain with the fair treatment will come? Yes, some out of controlled in relation to grade or unnecessary cheating case may occur. Or some SWDs diversity may be questioned how they got exaggerated exam result etc. When this reported, as a right, we fight for SWDs diversity. As the same time, we will teach them to know their responsibilities as well. A SWD diversity does not mean he has no duty at all. No! [ . . . ] we tell them to discharge their duties and respect the rule of the university and not to be violated their rights as well.*

*(May 2023; Interviewee No. 12, Own translation)*

It appears that a similar situation exists at a South African institution of higher education, resulting in a policy gap in which there are 'wonderful' affirmative action policies on paper, but they are not completely implemented and do not address the welfare of SWDs diversity for whom they are designed (Ndlovu & Woldegiorgis, 2023). The current study's finding validates since SWDs diversity, who are the intended beneficiaries of the institutional affirmative action policy are not benefiting from the practicality of the existed policy.

## **CURRICULAR PERCEPTIONS FOR DISABILITY DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT**

**Research Question 2:** *How do undergraduate regular HEIs students perceive the use of curricular activities in relation to DDM?*

The primary objective of this study is to examine and shed light on the DDM policies and curricula practices inside Ethiopian public HEIs, with the aim of offering recommendations for their improvement. Based on the information acquired from the replies to the quantitative survey, the study group's reaction to curricular perceptions for DDM was assessed in terms of mean and standard deviation value. Table 3 provides a summary of

the information that is pertinent to the research subjects.

**Table 4:** *Curricular Perceptions for Disability Diversity Management*

No	Items	N	Mean	SD
1	Most part of the course materials include a variety of students with disability interests.	247	2.68	1.024
2	There is a positive campus climate in which students with disability are comfortable on asking and answering diversified questions.	247	4.06	.937
3	Students with disability receive adequate diversity training to engage with non-disabled students.	247	2.39	1.106
4	The university library has a wide variety of reading materials on disability diversity issues.	247	2.35	1.112
5	In classes, the same amount of attention will be paid to all students regardless of their disability.	247	2.68	1.148
6	In class, instructors make students aware of the harm of stereotyping other students on the basis of their disability.	247	2.40	.973
7	In class, instructors encourage students with disability to participate in discussions and ask questions.	247	2.25	.902
Overall Average		247	2.84	

#### **Perception on Inclusive HEIs' Curriculum**

According to Table 4's curricular perceptions item 1's mean and standard deviation scores of ( $M=2.68$ ,  $SD=1.024$ ), the majority of respondents had a low curricular perception for the most part, on their HEIs, the course materials contain a range of SWDs diversity interests. This indicates a lack of inclusion and an insufficient consideration for the interests and preferences of SWDs in the content of these courses. The participants hold the perception that the course materials exhibit inadequate representation and thoughtfulness towards the unique obstacles and preferences of SWDs indicating less efforts done to achieve structural diversity of DLE model's institutional level. This perception implies that while creating course materials, there should be more focus placed on taking into account different viewpoints and meeting the requirements of SWDs. Through this approach, educational establishments may establish a more welcoming and dynamic learning atmosphere that caters to the needs of all students, irrespective of their disability.

In his observations, the researcher also found that the course materials used by the selected five Ethiopian Public HEIs lacked interest for SWDs. This means that the content did not sufficiently address or accommodate the needs and interests of these students. The researcher emphasized the importance of incorporating a variety of materials that cater to the diverse abilities and interests of all students in order to promote equal educational opportunities. Overall, the findings suggest a need for improvement in ensuring accessibility and inclusivity within the higher education system in Ethiopia. This illustrates as there is an urgent need for the development of interesting, flexible, learner-centered, or individual education curricula to enhance the education of SWDs (Tirussew, 2023). This further demonstrates that creating curricula that are accessible to SWDs at HEIs requires administration and other key stakeholders to work together to identify students' interest and create opportunities for success (Phasha, & Mosia, 2017). The quotes below from the interview number 4 and number 13 illustrated how the course materials failed to contain a range of SWDs diversity interests and conditions:

*Well, by emphasizing the students' interest and condition, the course materials are not developed. I don't think it appeals to SWDs diversity in particular. For example, SWDs assigned to the geography department are unable to make calculations, read maps, perform cartography, and practically do Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and statistical work. Just they are assigned. So, I can say that the curriculum not prepared to their standard and due to this I do not think the course materials is well organized by considering the situations of SWDs diversity.*

*(Interviewee No.4, May 2023, Own translation)*

*"No, I do not think it attract their interest. Because in general the course was prepared by focusing the students without disability".*

*(Interviewee No.13, May 2023, Own translation)*

According to the aforementioned quote from respondent number 4, students are more likely to feel welcome on campus when faculty demonstrate inclusive teaching practices and include disability in the curriculum; however, more research on these topics is required; otherwise, the interest of SWDs will not be cached. The finding from interview # 13 is also contrary to the notion that *"although the curriculum may be dictated by the*

*school system, teachers teach it. Where the curriculum falls short in addressing the needs of all students, teachers must provide a bridge . . .”* (Richards, et al., 2007, p. 68).

Similarly, consistent with the above finding, a 2011 UN assessment found that there was a failure to serve unique educational interests of excluded populations, including SWDs diversity. Similarly, UNESCO's the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) calls on states to tailor curricula to the interests of SWDs diversity rather than vice versa. As a result, educational institutions should provide SWDs diversity with curricular options. The external context of the DLE model, which includes the 2011 UN assessment and UNESCO's Salamanca Statement, aligns with its goals and principles. These external documents emphasize the significance of acknowledging and addressing the educational needs of excluded populations, specifically individuals with disabilities (SWDs). By incorporating this external perspective into the DLE model, educational institutions can aim to offer SWDs a range of curricular choices that meet their specific requirements. This approach fosters inclusivity and promotes fair educational opportunities. Thus, the external dimension of the DLE model is relevant in this context.

Concerning the course materials cover a wide spectrum of SWDs diversity interests, similar to this researches' finding, UNESCO (2007) also mentions the following notable accomplishments for SWDs: The new continuous curricular framework development takes learners' diversity into account. Textbooks are transcribed in braille to ensure that blind students have equal access to education. Sign language is used as a medium of instruction to guarantee that deaf students have access to learning.

This demonstrates that although the most part of the course materials was expected to include a variety of disabled students' interests as one of the prerequisites for a favorable atmosphere for disability diversity management. However, the majority of participants perceived that the majority of the course materials failed to address the interests of SWDs diversity at the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs indicating that DDM still has a long way to go towards making the most part of the course materials to include a variety of SWDs interests. The consequences of these results for HEIs are clear; instructors must provide students ample opportunity to practice the interesting skills associated to their diversity (King et al., 2010).

#### ***Perception on Inclusive Classroom Dialogue***

The respondents were asked about their perceptions on whether or not there is a welcoming campus environment where SWDs diversity feel comfortable posing a variety of inquiries and receiving thoughtful responses, as shown in Table 4, for curricular perception item 2. The results, with a mean and standard deviation of ( $M= 4.06$ ,  $SD=.937$ ), indicate that the majority of them perceived they did. This implies that these academic institutions have established an all-encompassing educational setting that stimulates the active involvement and interaction of SWDs which is the presence of supportive psychological & Behavioral climate from DLE model's individual level perspective. Regardless of their limitations, the respondents perceived that there is a friendly environment that supports students' self-expression.

This relatively conducive learning environment shows a dedication to advancing equitable opportunities and guaranteeing that every student, including those with disabilities, has a voice in the classroom. A setting like this fosters a feeling of inclusion and belonging in addition to assisting SWDs in their academic development. Here again, interviewee number 4 gave his perspective with regard to this issue:

*Since I have taught good number of SWDs diversity, on female SWDs diversity, I usually see the shortage of confidence. But male SWDs diversity, are generally good on their academics. Males do not afraid on questioning and if they do not understand lesson, they will ask us to repeat it. When they need to record and personal reading, males usually ask. So, I can say that male SWDs diversity do not have confidence problems. On females, since the societal culture plus their disability is influencing, they are not confidential as such.*

*(Interviewee No.4, May 2023, Own translation)*

The data from interviewee No.4 indicates that male SWDs tend to exhibit confidence in their academics, actively participating by asking questions and seeking assistance when needed. However, female SWDs face confidence challenges influenced by societal and cultural factors, compounded by their disabilities. This difference suggests the need for targeted support for female SWDs to foster their confidence and academic success. Addressing societal expectations and promoting an inclusive environment that empowers female SWDs to speak up and seek help can help bridge this gap. By providing tailored support, we can ensure that both male and female SWDs have equal opportunities to thrive academically and overcome any confidence barriers they may face. This is in line with what Salmi & Bassett (2014) say about access being denied when there isn't a welcoming campus environment for SWDs to thrive in the programs they've selected.

### ***Perception of the Preparedness for Diversity Training***

The majority of respondents firmly agreed that SWDs diversity failed to receive appropriate diversity training to interact with non-disabled students, according to the mean and standard deviation scores for the respondents for curricular perception item 3 in Table 4: ( $M= 2.39$ ,  $SD= 1.106$ ). This suggests that SWDs are not adequately prepared or supported to navigate social situations and build inclusive connections in the context of higher education representing a behavioral component from DLE model's individual level. focused on not promoting inclusivity and effective interactions. The responders are inflexible that tackling this problem is essential to encouraging inclusion, empathy, and understanding among all students. Ethiopian public HEIs may create a respectful and cooperative atmosphere by giving SWDs the skills and information they need to interact with their peers who are not impaired through proper diversity training. Additionally, by increasing awareness among students who are not impaired, such training may foster an environment of acceptance and support. This also implies that HEIs can ultimately establish a more welcoming and peaceful studying environment for all students by addressing this training gap. This investigation supports earlier research conducted in different countries, which suggests that it is critical to examine disability and SWD education and training at the campus level because institutional actions can affect how staff, faculty, and students internalize these efforts (Harbour & Greenberg, 2017). Similarly, Malle et al. (2015) found that the policy's approach of SWD diversity and training needs did not clearly correlate with the policy's primary thematic assumptions. By the same token interviewee number 13 added this:

*“Now, to be honest, I did not see such training. Only one time, I have seen a kind of training concerning on how to handle the remedial students. Rather on DDM issue, there was no training or conference”.*

*(Interviewee No.13, May 2023, Own translation)*

These findings provided nuanced evidence by showing that DDM in HEIs is the process of building and sustaining a more favorable diversified learning environment where students with disability receive adequate diversity training to engage with non-disabled students. It is quite unlikely that respondents at the five public HEIs in Ethiopia selected for this study firmly perceived that SWDs diversity failed to receive sufficient diversity training to interact with non-disabled students, indicating that DDM is not operating effectively in this respect. This means also that as institutional activities may impact the form and internalization of these efforts among campus students, teachers, and staff, the lack or absence of training and education on disabilities and students with disabilities must be reviewed at the campus level (Harbour, & Greenberg, 2017). This result is also in line with earlier studies (e.g., Wilson et al., 2000), which discovered that administrators and staff felt a little unsupported when it came to the university's capacity to offer the tools, information, and training required to enable successful interactions with SWDs.

### ***Perception on Disability-Inclusive Library Materials***

According to the respondents' average score and standard deviation for curricular perception question 4 in Table 4, which were ( $M= 2.35$ ,  $SD= 1.112$ ), their university library failed to provides a large selection of reading materials on disability diversity concerns reflecting a too less commitment to addressing the extension of DLE model's historical exclusion by not promoting inclusivity on library materials. In the qualitative component, for example, one interviewee participant (Interviewee, #10) voiced the identical of the reported quantitative result:

*In the library, the materials are for SWDs diversity learning in the law department. For other departments, there is no. And, as I stayed here for four solid years, I never seen posters, fliers etc. in the library for DDM.*

*(Interviewee No.10, May 2023, Own translation)*

On this regard the researcher also observed that the selected five Ethiopian Public HEIs have a limited collection of reading materials in their libraries specifically designed for SWDs. These materials could include textbooks, research papers, and other academic resources in accessible formats such as braille, large print, or electronic formats.

The researcher's observation highlights a concerning issue in Ethiopian public HEIs. The limited collection of reading materials specifically designed for SWDs indicates a lack of accessibility and inclusivity in these institutions. Without adequate resources in accessible formats such as braille, large print, or electronic formats, SWDs may face significant barriers to accessing and engaging with the required academic materials. This finding underscores the need for urgent attention and measures to address the accessibility gap and ensure equal educational opportunities for all students.

This implies that there aren't many resources available in libraries that especially cater to the interests and requirements of SWDs. The participants strongly concur that this is a deficiency, given that an extensive library of reading materials is essential for fostering inclusion, awareness, and understanding. University libraries may help SWDs improve academically and personally by offering a wider range of reading materials on disability diversity

issues. They can also inform other students about the value of inclusive practices.

### **Perception on Equitable Care for All**

The mean and standard deviation scores of the respondents were ( $M = 2.68$ ,  $SD = 1.148$ ) for curricular perception item 5: *"in classes, the same amount of attention will be paid to all students regardless of their disability"*. This shows that there may be a perception of unequal treatment between SWDs and their counterparts without impairments indicating too less efforts to promote structural diversity of DLE model's institutional level. The respondents wholeheartedly concur that there is unequal treatment, which suggests that efforts to create an inclusive learning environment ought to be strengthened. This finding emphasizes how critical it is to solve this problem and make sure that every student in the classroom, regardless of handicap, receives equal attention and assistance. For example, reflecting a similar view, interviewee No. 4; and number 13 said respectively:

*Me, I try to give the same amount of attention. But there are factors forcing me to ignore SWDs diversity. For instance, if I have a partially hearing student, and if I have a student who can see but not hearing, I cannot provide same amount of attention without having translator. In this campus there are only one or two translators, you can guess for how many departments they will be assigned. The other one, the translators may not know our technical language. I have a suspect on the translation quality. So, it will be false if we say we are treating them equally although there is kindness of human nature, the infrastructure will not allow us.*

(May 2023; Interviewee No. 4, Own translation)

The above interview and survey data result implies that although disability diversity management in HEIs is the process of building and sustaining a more favorable diversified learning environment by providing the same amount of attention to all students regardless of their disability, it is quite likely that respondents firmly perceived that in Ethiopian public HEIs regardless of their disability diversity, were not receiving the same amount of attention in class, indicating that on DDM, there is still a long way to go towards providing the same amount of attention to all students regardless of their disability.

### **Perception on Challenging Stereotypes About Disability**

According to the mean and standard deviation scores for curricular perception item 6 in Table 4 ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = .973$ ), the majority of respondents strongly agreed that instructors failed to educate students about the dangers of stigmatizing other students because of their disability's diversity. This suggests that students are not aware of or comprehend the detrimental effects of stigmatization contributing too less to a positive psychological climate from DLE's model. The responses are adamant that educators have a duty to address this matter and advance an environment of respect and acceptance. Higher education institutions unintentionally support prejudiced attitudes and actions toward SWDs by neglecting to teach students about the risks of stigmatization. In the qualitative area, one participant provided the following response, which is equal to the numerical value:

*No, they do not. Me, still I never heard them while doing so. Let alone telling to students on the issue of stereotyping, I remember my health and physical education instructor said as "...since you are a student, you have to do the activity by any means as a regular student!" You see, the instructor was not thinking for SWDs diversity.*

(May 2023; Interviewee No. 10, Own translation)

This finding highlights how important it is for instructors to actively involve themselves in teaching students about the value of accepting diversity, cultivating empathy, and dispelling preconceptions. By doing this, educational institutions may help foster a more welcoming and encouraging learning atmosphere where all students, with or without disabilities, are valued for their individual experiences and skills.

### **Perception on Promoting Disability-Inclusive Participation**

As shown in Table 4, curricular perception item 7, the respondents were questioned about their perceptions of whether or not their instructors encouraged SWDs diversity to participate in class discussions and ask questions with a mean and standard deviation of ( $M = 2.25$ ,  $SD = .902$ ) in the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs. This implies that there aren't enough inclusive teaching strategies that support SWDs' equal participation and opportunity fostering non-inclusive and less supportive psychological climate from DLE's model's point of view. For example, two respondents made the following remarks during the qualitative phase, which were not as such congruent with the quantitative result:

*To some extent, yes. That is, despite the fact that it is different from our high school experience, here, one chapter may be completed in one session, which is challenging for SWDs diversity. Personal assistance was thus necessary to fully grasp it.*

Interviewee No. 6 (May 2023, Own translation)

Another interviewee, (#4) confirmed this by saying:

*[...] yes, me by calling their name, I encourage them. I also do physical contact with them [With SWDs diversity, seeing disabilities]. They [SWDs diversity] want to hear to be called by their instructors.*

*Interviewee No. 4 (May 2023, Own translation)*

It also shows that the respondents are adamant that educators have a responsibility to help foster an inclusive learning environment in which all students, regardless of their disability, feel free to participate and express themselves. Instructors run the risk of inadvertently excluding SWDs from important learning opportunities and impeding their academic progress if they do not aggressively encourage their involvement.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on critical issues concerning DDM in Ethiopian public HEIs. The implications of these findings are discussed below, along with their significance within the broader context of DLE model and DDM in HEIs.

One of the findings underscores the absence of clear disciplinary procedures for reporting prejudice or discriminatory experiences related to disability issues within the institutions. This lack of clear procedures can discourage students from reporting incidents, perpetuating a negative campus climate for SWDs. From a theoretical perspective, these findings indicate a deficiency in the institutional-level element of the DLE model (Hurtado et al., 2012), as institutional support and accountability mechanisms are lacking.

Another significant finding is the ineffective communication of diversity-related policies, legislations, and guidelines to SWDs. This communication gap results in limited awareness and access to crucial resources for SWDs (Shallish, 2017). Similarly, this finding points towards an institutional-level deficiency within the DLE model, highlighting the need for improved communication strategies. The study also reveals the absence of an affirmative action policy to manage disability diversity within the institutions. This finding raises concerns about equal opportunities for SWDs and the institutions' commitment to inclusivity. Addressing this issue aligns with the institutional-level element of the DLE model, which emphasizes proactive measures to promote diversity and inclusion (Hurtado et al., 2012). Furthermore, the limited representation of SWDs interests in course materials is a significant concern. This limitation inhibits a comprehensive understanding of disability diversity among students. By diversifying course materials, institutions can address this issue and enhance the organizational structures, such as curricula, in alignment with the DLE model (Biggs, 2012).

Inadequate diversity training for SWDs is another crucial finding. This insufficiency hampers their social integration and participation in the educational environment. Improving diversity training aligns with the individual-level element of the DLE model, which emphasizes the importance of fostering inclusive mindsets and behaviors among students. The absence of a wide variety of reading materials on disability diversity issues in the selected five Ethiopian public HEIs' library is another noteworthy finding. A well-stocked library with diverse resources is essential for creating an inclusive learning environment (Ezeala, 2023). Ensuring the availability of such materials aligns with the organizational structures, particularly within the university library, as per the DLE model. Lastly, the finding that instructors do not actively encourage participation from SWDs in discussions and question-asking is significant. Instructors play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive classroom environment. Encouraging participation aligns with the individual-level element of the DLE model, emphasizing the importance of inclusive teaching practices (Shim, & Perez, 2018).

To sum up, the findings of this study highlight critical issues in DDM within Ethiopian public HEIs. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses institutional-level changes, such as the development of clear disciplinary procedures, effective communication of diversity-related policies, and the adoption of affirmative action policies. Additionally, improvements in organizational structures, including course materials and library resources, are necessary. Moreover, individual-level efforts, such as enhancing diversity training for students and promoting inclusive teaching practices, are vital for creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment. By addressing these issues, Ethiopian public HEIs' can work towards a more inclusive educational system that values and supports the diverse needs of SWDs.

## CONCLUDING REMARK

The primary objective of this study is to examine and shed light on the DDM policies and curricula practices inside Ethiopian public HEIs, with the aim of offering recommendations for their improvement. Applying convergent parallel mixed research (QUAN + QUAL) methodologies, we have stayed true to the pragmatic research paradigm in terms of philosophy. The study questions that this paper aimed to answer were as follows: *How are policies for managing the diversity of disability practiced at Ethiopian public HEIs? What does the content of these policies look like? How do undergraduate regular HEIs students perceive the use of curricular activities in relation to DDM?* The findings provide valuable insights toward the policies and curricula practices of DDM in the selected

five Ethiopian public HEIs. The findings show that inadequate DDM policy is being implemented, even in an environment where policy is generally positive. The disabilities diversity challenge of the twenty-first century is not being met by the DDM-related curricula. The utilization of Hurtado et al (2012)'s DLE model evidenced to be highly effective for this study, successfully addressing the research objectives and providing valuable insights. Its ability to generate accurate predictions and handle complex data sets demonstrated its potential as a powerful tool for future research in various fields. While the study's results can offer diverse perspectives, its reliance on data from only five public HEIs suggests that their conclusions may not be as broadly applicable to the remaining private and public higher education institutions. More study is required to determine how DDM may affect the teaching and learning process at the national level, given the expanding number of government and private HEIs in Ethiopia and their potential diversity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are four recommendations specifically focusing on policies and curricula practiced for managing the diversity of disability at Ethiopian public HEIs:

**1. Develop Comprehensive Disability Policies:** Ethiopian public HEIs should develop comprehensive disability policies that explicitly address the needs and rights of SWDs in alignment with all dimensions of the DLE model. These policies should encompass provisions for enhancing accessibility, providing reasonable accommodations, promoting inclusive teaching practices, and offering robust support services. Regular reviews and updates should be conducted to ensure that the policies remain consistent with evolving best practices and legal requirements, fostering an inclusive learning environment for SWDs.

**2. Promote Collaboration and Consultation:** Ethiopian public HEIs should actively engage in collaboration and consultation, guided by the holistic dimensions of the DLE model, to ensure comprehensive disability policies. This collaborative approach should involve stakeholders such as SWDs, faculty members, disability service offices, and relevant experts. By incorporating diverse perspectives and input, policies and curricula can be developed to address structural diversity, compositional, historical legacy, psychological climate, and behavioral elements. Regular forums, focus groups, and feedback mechanisms should be established to facilitate ongoing improvement and meaningful engagement in policy development and implementation. This collaborative effort will contribute to the creation of an inclusive learning environment that meets the needs and rights of SWDs.

**3. Integrate Universal Design Principles:** Ethiopian public HEIs should adopt universal design principles that consider the DLE dimensions of structural diversity, compositional, historical legacy, psychological climate, and behavioral elements. By incorporating multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression, curricula can be designed to be accessible and inclusive for students with diverse learning needs, including students with disabilities. Faculty members should receive comprehensive training and ongoing support in implementing universal design strategies that address these dimensions in their teaching practices. This approach ensures equal access, fosters a positive learning environment, and promotes meaningful engagement for all students.

**4. Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Ethiopian public HEIs should establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, guided by the DLE dimensions of structural diversity, compositional, historical legacy, psychological climate, and behavioral elements, to assess the effectiveness of policies and curricula practices related to disability inclusion. Regular audits, surveys, and feedback loops should be implemented to identify gaps, measure progress, and gather valuable insights for continuous improvement. By utilizing data-driven decision-making, HEIs can inform policy adjustments, allocate resources effectively, and implement targeted interventions to enhance disability inclusion across the institution. This systematic monitoring and evaluation process will facilitate ongoing improvement and ensure the creation of an inclusive learning environment for all students, including those with disabilities.

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