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Inclusive Learning Support in Higher Education: Analysing the teachers' views on inclusion in Lund University

Inkluderande lärandestöd inom högre utbildning: En analys av lärarnas syn på inkludering vid Lunds universitet

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Abstract

Inclusive education is a key principle in higher education (HE), aiming to ensure equal access, participation, and success for all students, including those with disabilities. While universities increasingly develop policies and support systems to promote inclusion, less is known about how these are implemented in everyday teaching and how staff perceive their effectiveness. This study examines how learning support policies and strategies at Lund University (LU) align with inclusive education principles and how teachers and support staff experience their implementation in relation to students with disabilities.

The study is guided by three sub-questions focusing on institutional policies and responsibilities, the implementation of inclusive practices in teaching and assessment, and staff perceptions of their impact on students' academic success and future opportunities. A mixed-method case study design was used, combining document analysis with questionnaires from teaching and support staff at LU.

The findings show that LU has a strong institutional framework for inclusion, including legal requirements, support services such as Pedagogiskt studentstöd, national systems like Nais, and pedagogical training through *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. These structures reflect the social model of disability, inclusive education theory, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), particularly in their focus on removing barriers and promoting participation. However, there is a clear gap between policy and practice. Although inclusion is promoted as proactive, staff report that implementation often depends on individual effort, collegial support, and reactive accommodations. Limited training, time constraints, and coordination challenges were also highlighted.

Overall, inclusion at LU is well established at policy level but inconsistently applied in practice, indicating a need for stronger staff development and better alignment between policy intentions and everyday teaching.

Key words: Inclusion, equity, Universal design for learning (UDL), higher education (HE), social model of disability, Inclusive education theory, learning support

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1. Introduction

1.1. Inclusion in HE

Throughout the years, education has been transformed to adapt to a changing society. The way education was structured 100, 50, or even 20 years ago differs significantly from what we see today in most developed countries. In the field of special needs education, these changes have been particularly radical, evolving from the complete exclusion of people with disabilities to a focus on inclusion. The idea that everyone should have access to education has been shaped and established through international agreements and policy development over time.

The UNESCO **Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action** (1994) marked a turning point in the movement toward more inclusive education. Although individual countries had previously implemented policies, this was the first international agreement of its kind, signed by 92 countries. The Salamanca Statement emphasized the principle of inclusive education, advocating for the education of all children, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, or other conditions within mainstream schools (UNESCO, 2024). This movement toward inclusion has continued to develop through additional international initiatives. The United Nations **Sustainable Development Goal 4:** Quality Education (2015), and the **Transforming Education Summit (TES)** in 2022 are further examples of major global agreements in recent decades.

Education is a fundamental human right that contributes to reducing poverty, decreasing social inequalities, and helping individuals reach their full potential. Governments are responsible for ensuring this right for everyone, from children to adults. Furthermore, governments have a responsibility to guarantee this right through equitable and inclusive education systems for all individuals across the lifespan (UNESCO, 2026).

Inclusion may not look the same in compulsory education as it does in higher education, but both share common goals, such as providing equal opportunities and preparing individuals for the future. In higher education, this future often involves entering the labor market or pursuing further studies. Moreover, inclusion in higher education is not only about access to university but also about participation and a sense of belonging within the learning environment. Research on inclusion in HE has increased in recent decades, yet it remains an evolving field. This makes it important to examine how inclusion is understood and implemented by teachers (Filippou et al., 2025). In this paper, I will explore this research area in greater depth, focusing on teachers'

perspectives on inclusion and how they work to implement inclusive practices in order to achieve these goals.

1.2. Lund University (LU)

LU is a highly reputable institution with a strong global presence. In the **2026 QS World University Rankings**, it was ranked 12th in Europe among more than 950 universities across 42 European countries. It has also been ranked first in the Nordic region and placed first globally in sustainability. Beyond its leadership in sustainability, the university has performed exceptionally well in other areas, such as social impact, where it was ranked 22nd in the world. This category aligns closely with the theme of this paper, as described on the university's website: it measures efforts related to equality, health, cooperation, knowledge exchange, and the broader societal benefits of education (Lund University, 2026).

Looking more closely at the structure of LU, it includes nine faculties as well as a range of research centres. According to recent data, the university has approximately 46,000 students annually, of whom 31% are international. In addition, there are around 2,700 research students, with 51% coming from international backgrounds. The university employs about 8,500 staff members, 41% of whom are international. These figures from 2025 reported on the university's website, clearly demonstrate the institution's strong international orientation. Such diversity in cultures and backgrounds reflects the concept of inclusion and provides a foundation for examining how LU implements policies and practices to promote equity and inclusion in practice (Lund University, 2026).

1.3. Research question and research purpose

Universities are increasingly working to make higher education more inclusive for all students, including students with disabilities. To support this, many institutions provide different types of learning support, such as academic accommodations, counselling services, assistive technologies, and more flexible teaching and assessment methods (UNESCO, 2024). These measures are intended to give all students equal opportunities to participate in their studies, succeed academically, and prepare for life after university, including employment or further education. Despite these developments, it is still not fully clear how well universities prepare their teaching staff to use inclusive practices in everyday teaching. It is also not well understood how effective these strategies are in practice, especially in relation to students with disabilities in HE (Newman et al., 2020; Svendby, 2024). Research suggests that although inclusive policies exist, their

implementation often depends on individual teachers, available time, and institutional support, which can lead to differences between policy and practice (González-Castellano et al., 2021). This study focuses on LU as a case study. It explores how prepared and confident lecturers and teaching staff feel when using inclusive teaching practices and when making adaptations for students with different needs. It also examines how the university trains and supports staff to implement inclusion, and how consistent these practices are across different departments. The main **research question** is:

How do learning support policies and strategies at Lund University align with inclusive education principles, and how do teachers and support staff perceive their implementation and effectiveness in promoting academic success and future opportunities for students with disabilities?

The study is guided by the following sub-questions:

- What inclusion and learning support policies, strategies, and guidelines exist at Lund University (including teacher responsibilities)?
- How do teachers and support staff experience and implement these policies in daily teaching and assessment practices?
- What are teachers' and support staff's perceptions of the strengths, challenges, and impact of these supports on students' academic progress and preparation for employment/further studies?

2. Literature overview

The aim of this literature review is to present existing research within the field of inclusion in HE. Some of the selected articles focus specifically on teachers' perspectives, which are closely related to the research question. There is extensive literature on inclusion and equity in education, as well as on the importance of removing educational barriers to promote education for all, therefore, this review represents only a small portion of the broader field.

2.1 Principles of Inclusive Education and Academic Success

Inclusive education aims to provide **equal learning opportunities** for all students, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. It focuses on addressing diverse learning needs within the classroom by creating an environment in which every student can actively participate and succeed. Inclusive education also promotes social integration and values the contribution of each learner within the educational process (UNESCO, n.d.)

In *Applying the Social Model of Disability to Higher Education: Viewing Inclusion as a Social Good*, Donald, W. E., & Frank, M. (2023) explain that disability is not only caused by an individual's impairment,but rather is produced by social, cultural, and environmental barriers that restrict participation. The authors emphasize that universities have a responsibility to create inclusive systems, environments, and pedagogical practices that enable equal participation for all students. They further emphasise that inclusion benefits not only students with disabilities, but also higher education institutions and society more broadly. They further emphasise that inclusion benefits not only students with disabilities, but also HE institutions and society more broadly. In this sense, inclusion should be seen as a social good that promotes belonging and equal participation. By removing barriers and implementing accessible approaches to teaching, assessment, and campus design, institutions can enhance equality, student wellbeing, innovation, employability, and social justice outcomes.

In connection with that idea, Donald, W. E., & Frank, M (2023) also note that inclusive HE benefits all students, not only marginalised groups, by enhancing critical thinking, collaboration, and global awareness. They stress that institutions must actively foster inclusion, ensuring that all students feel valued, supported, and able to fully participate in academic and social life. They also argue that universities are inherently diverse in terms of disability, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background, which requires targeted strategies to ensure equity and success. Inclusion, therefore, requires structural, pedagogical, and cultural transformation rather than isolated initiatives.

To further explore the concept of academic success for students with disabilities, Pais, M. E. M., Moriña Díez, A., & Morgado, B (2025) expose that university success should not be measured merely through academic grades. Instead, they conceptualise academic success as a multidimensional and dynamic construct that includes academic achievement, personal development, social participation, independence, self-improvement, and professional opportunities. They also highlight that success is closely linked to a sense of inclusion and belonging within the university environment.

Finally, Newman, L. A., Madaus, J. W., Lalor, A. R., & Javitz, H. S. (2020) examine how support services influence the academic persistence of students with disabilities in higher education. Through quantitative analysis, they found that students who accessed academic accommodations were more likely to continue their studies compared to those who did not. However, the authors

also conclude that many students do not request accommodations due to stigma, fear of discrimination, or lack of awareness of available support.

2.2 Implementation of Inclusive Practices and Institutional Effectiveness in HE

Research on teaching staff perspectives in HE consistently shows strong support for inclusive education and recognition of its benefits for student participation, learning, and academic success. Many lecturers believe that inclusive practices help create fairer learning environments where students with diverse backgrounds and needs feel supported and valued. At the same time, the literature highlights several challenges lecturers face when implementing inclusive practices.

Rydeman, B., Eftring, H., & Hedvall, P. O (2018) identify key challenges universities face in responding to increasingly diverse student populations, including students with disabilities and varied learning needs. They emphasise that lecturers often lack sufficient training, knowledge, and institutional support to effectively implement inclusive teaching. The authors advocate for a shift towards the implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a proactive approach to inclusion.

Similarly, González-Castellano, N., Colmenero-Ruiz, M. J., & Cordón-Pozo, E. (2021) examine the role of faculty in developing inclusive learning environments. They argue that inclusive education depends on a combination of institutional support, teacher attitudes, professional training, and accessible teaching practices. Despite generally positive attitudes toward inclusion, many professors report difficulties in implementation due to limited preparation, insufficient resources, and weak institutional coordination.

Svendby, R. B. (2024) also explores lecturers' experiences of inclusive teaching in HE. Based on qualitative interviews with university lecturers, the study examines their perspectives on inclusive practices, institutional expectations, and the challenges of teaching increasingly diverse student groups. The findings show that although lecturers generally express positive attitudes toward inclusion and recognise its importance, they often experience uncertainty about how to implement inclusive teaching effectively. Participants also reported challenges related to heavy workloads, limited time, and a lack of institutional guidance and professional training when addressing diverse student needs. The study highlights the need for stronger institutional support and clearer strategies to help lecturers create more inclusive learning environments.

Focusing on employability outcomes of HE students with disabilities, Moriña, A., & Biagiotti, G. (2022) in their research identify common barriers, supports, and experiences that these students encounter. Although progress has been made in promoting inclusion in HE, graduates still encounter significant challenges in the labour market, including discrimination, inaccessibility, and difficulties finding jobs from their field of study. The article highlights the importance of implementing inclusive university practices in preparing students for successful transitions into employment.

To conclude this section, Espada-Chavarria, R., González-Montesino, R. H., López-Bastías, J. L., & Díaz-Vega, M. (2023) highlight the effectiveness of UDL in reducing barriers to learning in higher education. The authors describe UDL as a proactive and flexible teaching framework that aims to make learning accessible to all students from the beginning, rather than relying only on individual accommodations. They emphasise that UDL benefits both students and teachers by promoting flexibility in teaching methods, increasing student engagement, and improving participation, motivation, and academic achievement among diverse learners. The study also stresses the importance of offering multiple ways for students to access information, participate in learning activities, and demonstrate their knowledge. According to the authors, implementing UDL strategies can contribute to creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments in higher education.

3. Theoretical framework

To understand how institutions can accommodate all students and create inclusive learning environments, it is important to refer to two main theories: the Social Model of Disability and Inclusive Education Theory. Exploring these theories provides key concepts that support the later analysis and interpretation of the findings. This section also includes the UDL framework, as it is a highly relevant concept that appears frequently throughout the literature on inclusion. Developing a clearer understanding of UDL will also support the interpretation of the data.

3.1. Social model of disability

The social model of disability is a theoretical framework that explains disability not as a direct result of an individual's impairment, but as something created by social, environmental, and attitudinal barriers. (University of Edinburgh, 2024). In contrast to the medical model, which focuses on diagnosing and "fixing" the individual, the social model shifts attention to the structures of society that restrict participation. These barriers may include inaccessible buildings,

inflexible teaching practices, and discriminatory attitudes, all of which can limit full participation in education and society (Murnan, 2025).

From this perspective, disability is understood as something produced by the interaction between individuals and their environment rather than being an inherent limitation. As Donald and Frank (2023) argue, applying the social model in HE reframes disability as a matter of institutional responsibility. Instead of expecting students to adapt to existing systems, universities are encouraged to adapt their environments, teaching methods, and support structures to ensure equal access and participation. This approach positions inclusion as a social good, benefiting not only students with disabilities but the entire academic community by promoting equity, participation, and a more accessible learning environment.

In HE, the implementation of the social model has led to a stronger focus on removing barriers within teaching and learning practices. This includes improving physical accessibility on campus, offering flexible assessment methods, and adopting inclusive pedagogical approaches such as UDL. These strategies aim to proactively design learning environments that anticipate diversity among students rather than responding to individual needs only after barriers have been identified (University of Edinburgh, 2024).

Furthermore, the social model has influenced institutional policies and disability support services by shifting responsibility from individual adjustment to systemic change. Universities are increasingly encouraged to review their policies, teaching practices, and assessment methods to ensure they do not unintentionally exclude students. This includes recognising the importance of staff training and institutional awareness in creating truly inclusive environments (Donald & Frank, 2023).

However, if barriers remain within higher education, such as limited accessibility, inflexible assessment methods, or insufficient support, these can negatively affect students' academic success and, in turn, their future employment opportunities. From a social model perspective, reduced employability should therefore not be seen as an individual limitation, but as a consequence of unequal educational structures that fail to fully support all learners. (Donald & Frank, 2023; Murnan, 2025).

Overall, the social model of disability plays a central role in shaping inclusive education in HE by shifting attention from individual limitations to institutional responsibility. Its application encourages universities to actively remove barriers and create environments where all students can participate fully and equally.

3.2. Inclusive education theory

Inclusive Education Theory is more specific than the previously explained Social Model of disability and only applied to education systems. It focuses on how schools and universities can create equitable learning environments for all students by ensuring that regardless of their background, abilities, or individual needs, all students have equal opportunities to participate fully in higher education. It is grounded in the principle that diversity is a normal and valuable aspect of learning environments and that educational institutions should actively remove barriers that limit participation. Rather than requiring students to adapt to existing systems, inclusive education emphasises the responsibility of institutions and educators to create flexible and accessible learning environments that support all learners (UNESCO, 2024).

Inclusive teaching practices involve designing pedagogical approaches that address diverse learning needs through flexibility in teaching methods, learning materials, and assessment strategies. The University of California, Los Angeles, Teaching and Learning Center (2025) highlights that inclusive teaching is not an additional component of education but an intentional approach that integrates equity into everyday teaching practice. Similarly, the University of Newcastle (2014) emphasises that inclusive pedagogy requires rethinking traditional teaching spaces and practices in order to accommodate different learning styles and promote active participation for all students.

Recent research further highlights that inclusive education in HE is closely linked to student success, retention, and employability. Moriña and Biagiotti (2022) demonstrate that inclusive practices contribute not only to academic achievement but also to the development of transferable skills and improved transition into the labour market for graduates with disabilities. In addition, Filippou et al. (2025) emphasise that effective institutional policies and inclusive practices are essential for embedding equity within HE systems, although implementation often varies across institutions and contexts.

Overall, inclusive education theory positions diversity as a normal and valuable aspect of HE rather than an exception that requires special treatment. It calls for systemic change in teaching, assessment, and institutional culture to ensure that all students can fully participate, succeed academically, and progress into meaningful employment (UNESCO, 2024).

3.3. Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

UDL is an educational framework that aims to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all students by designing flexible learning environments from the outset. Rather than making adjustments after barriers have been identified, UDL promotes proactive course design that anticipates learner diversity and reduces the need for individual accommodations. According to CAST (2025), UDL is based on the idea that variability among learners is the norm, not the exception, and therefore teaching should be structured to support different ways of engaging with content, understanding information, and demonstrating knowledge.

UDL is closely connected to both the social model of disability and inclusive education theory. From the perspective of the social model of disability, UDL aligns with the idea that barriers to learning are not located within the individual student but within the design of the learning environment. By restructuring teaching practices and materials, UDL directly addresses these barriers and shifts responsibility towards institutions and educators to create accessible learning conditions. In relation to inclusive education theory, UDL provides a practical and structured approach to implementing inclusion in everyday teaching. It translates the principles of equity and participation into concrete pedagogical strategies that support diverse learners within the classroom.

Research highlights the importance of UDL in promoting inclusive higher education. Rydeman, Eftring, and Hedvall (2018) emphasise that UDL supports teachers in managing increasingly diverse student populations by encouraging flexible teaching approaches and reducing reliance on reactive accommodations. Similarly, Espada-Chavarría et al. (2023) argue that UDL improves accessibility and enhances student engagement, motivation, and academic performance by offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. These principles ensure that students can access learning content in different ways, participate meaningfully, and demonstrate their knowledge through varied formats.

The importance of UDL in education lies in its preventative and inclusive nature. Instead of addressing exclusion after it occurs, UDL aims to eliminate barriers at the design stage, benefiting all students, not only those with disabilities. This approach contributes to greater equity, reduces stigma associated with individual accommodations, and supports a more flexible and responsive learning environment. Overall, UDL serves as a key bridge between inclusive education theory and the social model of disability, operationalising their principles into practical strategies that enhance participation and success in higher education.

4. Methodology: Mixed- methods case study

A **mixed-methods approach** was used to collect data for this study, combining **qualitative questionnaires** and **document analysis**. One of the main advantages of questionnaires is their cost-effectiveness and ability to reach a broad and diverse population, allowing researchers to gather comprehensive insights within a relatively short period (Kumar, 2024).

One questionnaire was administered to teaching staff at LU (Appendix 1), and the other was administered to the Pedagogical Support Department at LU (Appendix 2). The aim was to gather different perspectives on the topic and to support the next stage of the research, which involved analysing documentation and institutional policies. In the questionnaires, participants were asked to identify the policies and documentation used for inclusion and adapted teaching practices. This helped ensure that the documents identified were consistent with those officially provided by the institution. The standardised format of a questionnaire ensures that all participants respond to the same questions, which increases the reliability and comparability of the data (Kumar, 2024). The questionnaires were sent to 80 people and 15 people replied.

In addition to the questionnaires, a **document analysis** was conducted to examine relevant institutional policies and official documentation related to inclusion in HE. Document analysis is a qualitative research method that involves the systematic review and interpretation of written materials to gain a deeper understanding of a specific phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). The selected documents included policy frameworks, institutional guidelines, and strategic plans addressing inclusion, accessibility, and diversity within the educational context. These documents were chosen based on their relevance to the research focus and their role in shaping institutional practices.

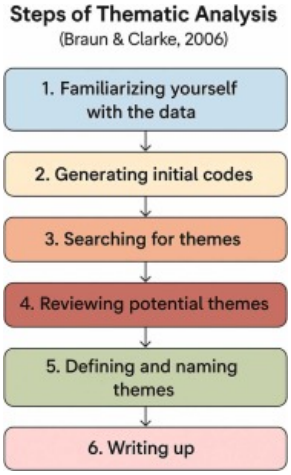
4.1. Procedure

Teaching staff and pedagogical support staff were provided with questionnaires following the same format, although the questions were adapted to reflect their different roles and perspectives. Both questionnaires were anonymous and began with a short introduction in which participants were asked to provide consent by selecting an agreement option. Informed consent is a fundamental ethical requirement in research, ensuring that participants voluntarily agree to take part based on a clear understanding of the study and its purpose. It involves providing sufficient information and ensuring that participation is free from coercion (Kumar, 2010). Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequences. At the end of the questionnaire, an open-ended question allowed participants to further elaborate on any aspects they considered relevant.

In addition to the questionnaires, a document analysis was conducted to examine institutional policies and official documentation related to inclusion in HE. The data were analysed using **thematic analysis**, a method that enables the identification, organisation, and interpretation of recurring patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved a careful reading of the documents, followed by coding key concepts and grouping them into broader themes related to inclusion (see figure 1). Particular attention was given to how inclusion was defined, the goals outlined in the policies, and the strategies proposed for implementation. These themes were then compared with the questionnaire findings to explore the relationship between institutional policy and actual practice. This approach enabled a more comprehensive understanding of how inclusion is conceptualised and implemented in HE, particularly at LU.

Figure 1

Thematic analysis steps (Braun & Clarke, 2006)



4.2. Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were developed and distributed to collect qualitative and mixed data from relevant stakeholders. One questionnaire was directed at teaching staff, including lecturers and professors, while the second was aimed at pedagogical and disability support staff at LU. The purpose of using two distinct questionnaires was to capture multiple perspectives on inclusive education practices and institutional support mechanisms.

4.2.1. Design

The questionnaires were designed based on the research question and sub-questions, as well as an analysis of what information could be obtained from each of the target groups in order to ensure more reliable responses.

The aim of the **first questionnaire**, targeted to teaching staff, was closely related to the main research question: *How do teachers perceive the implementation and effectiveness of learning support strategies and policies in promoting academic success and future opportunities for students with disabilities?* With this in mind, it was possible to design clear and focused questions that would provide the necessary data for a reliable analysis of this issue.

The **second questionnaire**, targeted to support staff, was also related to the main research question and focused on understanding what support is being provided to these students, as well as identifying relevant policies and documentation needed for the analysis. These perspectives were intended to contribute to a more comprehensive and reliable interpretation of the findings.

Both questionnaires included a variety of question types, such as open-ended questions, yes/no questions, multiple-choice questions, and linear scales. They were also divided into sections, which will now be further explained. Sections 1, 2, and the final section were the same in both questionnaires, while the remaining sections were adapted to the respective target groups.

Section 1: Background

In this section, the aim was to understand the role of the participants and the length of their experience working at LU. This information is important for the analysis of the findings, as it allows for comparisons between staff roles, levels of responsibility, and years of experience within

the institution. It also provides contextual insight into how professional background may influence perceptions of inclusive education and institutional practices.

Section 2: Policies and Institutional Framework

The aim of this section was to gather information regarding existing policies, guidelines, and frameworks currently implemented at LU, as well as to assess staff awareness and understanding of these documents. This section also helped to identify whether institutional policies on inclusion are clearly communicated and how well they are understood by staff members in different roles.

The final section in both questionnaires consisted of an open-ended question, allowing participants to add any additional comments or information they considered relevant to the topic. This provided an opportunity to capture insights that may not have been addressed through the structured questions.

Inclusive Learning Support – Teacher/ Lecturer Questionnaire

Section 3: Teaching practices and training

The aim of this section was to explore how lecturers adapt their teaching and assessment methods to accommodate students with diverse learning needs, as well as to examine the type of training they have received on inclusive practices at LU. This section also included questions about lecturers' perceptions of existing inclusion policies in relation to their practical implementation. This allowed for an exploration of potential gaps between policy and practice, as well as challenges experienced in everyday teaching.

Section 4: Challenges and effectiveness

This section focused on the perceived effectiveness of current support strategies implemented at LU. It also explored the challenges and barriers that lecturers face when applying inclusive practices, and how these challenges may affect students' academic success and future opportunities, including employment or further studies. In addition, this section included questions regarding possible improvements that could be made to enhance the inclusivity of teaching and learning practices.

Inclusive Learning Support – Support Staff Questionnaire

Section 3: Collaboration and implementation

In this section, participants were asked about the training and support provided to teaching staff at LU in relation to supporting students with disabilities and implementing inclusive practices. They were also asked about the challenges lecturers commonly encounter, as well as their perceptions of how effectively teaching staff implement inclusive approaches in practice.

Section 4: Effectiveness and Impact

This section examined the effectiveness of current support strategies in promoting academic success and preparing students for employment or further studies. A key focus was also placed on how the university evaluates the effectiveness of its support services and whether existing evaluation methods are sufficient to assess their impact.

Section 5: Policy and Practice

Finally, this section focused on identifying gaps or alignments between institutional policies and actual practice. It also explored the extent to which UDL principles are integrated into teaching and support structures, and whether there is consistency between policy intentions and everyday implementation.

4.2.2. Participants

The target group of this research consisted of teaching staff in HE, more specifically lecturers and professors at LU, as well as staff members from the Disability Support Services and pedagogical support departments. These groups were selected because of their direct involvement in the implementation of inclusive practices and support strategies for students with disabilities.

A total of 10 members of the teaching staff completed the questionnaire, together with 5 participants from the support staff. The participants represented a variety of academic and professional backgrounds, as well as different levels of teaching experience within HE. Although information regarding years of experience was collected, this variable was not central to the final analysis. The primary focus of the research was not to evaluate individual teaching competence, but rather to examine how effectively Lund University prepares and supports its staff in implementing inclusive practices.

An important aspect of this research involved comparing institutional policies and support documentation with staff perceptions and experiences of their implementation. For this reason, the pedagogical and disability support staff were included as a key participant group. Their

perspectives provided valuable insight into the official policies, support systems, and expectations established by the institution. These perspectives were then compared with those of the teaching staff in order to identify possible gaps between institutional policy and everyday educational practice.

4.2.3. Response Rate

The use of questionnaires also presents certain limitations, such as the risk of low response rates and potential bias due to non-response or misinterpretation of questions (Kumar, 2024). Through a contact in the Humanities Department, I received support in reaching out to participants and distributing the questionnaires. After observing a low initial response rate, I decided to open the study to all faculties and therefore contacted programme administrators and asked them to share the questionnaires with their teaching staff. However, as this approach did not produce the expected response, I subsequently sent the questionnaires directly to individual teaching staff across different departments.

In total, the questionnaire was sent to over 80 individuals. For the pedagogical support team, the number of distributed questionnaires was lower, resulting in a higher response rate. The low response rates may be attributed to limited familiarity with the departmental structures and uncertainty about appropriate contact persons. In some departments, contact details were easily accessible through their websites, while in others they were more difficult to locate. Another contributing factor may have been my inexperience with this type of research, particularly regarding professional communication and email design.

4.3. Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations were taken into account throughout this research in order to ensure the protection, privacy, and voluntary participation of all participants. The questionnaires were conducted anonymously, and no personal information such as names, addresses, or other identifying details was collected. This anonymity was intended to encourage honest responses and reduce any potential discomfort when discussing institutional practices and experiences related to inclusion.

Initially, the questionnaires were distributed through heads of departments, who were asked to share them with relevant staff members. In order to increase the response rate, the questionnaires were later sent directly to publicly available university contacts found on the LU website. When

sending emails to multiple participants, Blind Carbon Copy (BCC) was used to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality by ensuring that email addresses were not visible to other recipients.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Participants were provided with a flexible timeframe to complete the questionnaires, allowing them to respond at their convenience. At the beginning of each questionnaire, participants were presented with an informed consent statement explaining the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants indicated their consent by selecting an agreement option before proceeding with the questionnaire. Informed consent is considered a fundamental ethical principle in research, as it ensures that participants understand the nature and purpose of the study before agreeing to participate (Kumar, 2010).

In addition, responses could only be accessed by the researcher once participants had completed and submitted the questionnaire. All collected data were treated confidentially and used solely for academic research purposes.

4.4. Analysis

4.4.1.Documents analysis

In addition to the questionnaires, a document analysis was conducted to examine relevant institutional policies and official documentation related to inclusion in HE. Document analysis is a qualitative research method that involves the systematic review and interpretation of written materials to gain a deeper understanding of a particular phenomenon (Bowen, 2009). The selected documents included:

- **Pedagogiskt studentstöd Lund University (education support)**: This webpage describes Lund University's Learning Support services for students with disabilities or specific learning needs. It promotes equal access to education and aims to ensure that all students can fully participate in their studies through appropriate accommodations and support.
- **Equal Opportunities Plan for Lund University, 2022–2027:** This document sets out goals that promote equality, diversity, and inclusion for all students and staff. It aims to create a respectful and accessible environment where everyone has equal opportunities to participate, develop, and succeed, regardless of background or identity.

- **Study with disabilities- Lund university website:** This webpage explains the support and accommodations available for students with disabilities, including learning support, adapted examinations, mentoring, note-taking assistance, and accessible study resources. The university's goal is to ensure equal opportunities and participation for all students by reducing barriers to learning and academic success.
- **Nais (Swedish Council for Higher Education)– coordination of targeted study support:** This is a national administrative system for coordinating targeted study support in higher education. Students admitted to LU can apply for learning support through this platform.
- **Division for Higher Education Development- Lund University:** This is a professional development unit for teaching staff at LU. It offers courses and workshops on teaching and learning, including learning activities, examination and assessment, course evaluation, learning environments, sustainable teaching practices, and research supervision.
- **Transforming education in a digital world -Unit for Educational Services, Lund University:** This internal resource is aimed at teaching and administrative staff at LU. It supports the development of accessible and inclusive teaching by providing workshops, articles, and guidelines that aim to strengthen staff competence in inclusive education.
- **Accessible teaching A handbook for staff who interact with students in their everyday work -Lund university:**This handbook is produced by Disability Support Services at LU. It supports staff who interact with students with disabilities, including teaching staff, study advisors, course administrators, and directors of studies. It provides practical guidance to help ensure equal opportunities for students with long-term disabilities.
- **List of Rights – Lund University Students' Rights and Responsibilities:** This document outlines students' rights and responsibilities, including regulations on how examinations should be planned and conducted. Fair and structured assessment processes are presented as part of ensuring equal opportunities for students with disabilities.
- **Towards equity and inclusion in higher education in Europe (included in uhr):** This report focuses on equity and inclusion in higher education systems more broadly, including students with disabilities as a key group. It also highlights increasing attention to the transition from secondary to higher education for underrepresented groups.
- **Diskriminering ombudsmannen:**This source defines accessibility as a legal requirement and as protection against discrimination for persons with disabilities. It highlights the responsibility of institutions to ensure equal access and participation.

- **Studiepaket vuxen (SPSM) Specialpedagogiska skolmyndigheten:** It provides a framework supporting understanding inclusive education for students with special educational needs in adult education. It focuses on accessible learning environments, participation, and inclusion, and provides guidance for supporting learners with ADHD, autism, dyslexia, intellectual disabilities, and mental health conditions.
- **Sveriges Riksdags Diskrimineringslag (2008:567):** The aim of this law is to promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of disability. Universities are required to ensure that students with disabilities can participate on equal terms with others. Disability is recognised as a protected characteristic, and discrimination includes failing to provide reasonable accessibility adjustments.

Together, these documents and sources address inclusion, accessibility, and diversity within HE. They were selected due to their relevance to the research focus and their role in shaping institutional policies and practices at LU. The materials are publicly accessible and show a high degree of interconnection, as they frequently refer to similar principles of equality, accessibility, and inclusive education.

On top of these sources, professional development is offered and expected from teaching staff at LU. According to one of the *Avdelningsföreståndare* (Department Head) at LU, it is a requirement for employment that teachers complete at least five weeks of pedagogical training. The course *Teaching and Learning in HE* is one of the introductory courses provided by Avdelningen för högskolepedagogisk utveckling (AHU) - the Division for Higher Education Development. According to the AHU website, the course lasts two weeks (80 hours), is offered in both English and Swedish, and introduces fundamental pedagogical concepts and approaches within the Swedish HE context. It is aimed at teachers across all academic levels and faculties at LU. To receive the certificate, participants must complete all course requirements within three years. One of the seven learning outcomes states that participants should be able to *"describe inclusive teaching and learning practices that allow for participation among diverse student needs and identities."* This course also functions as an entry requirement for further AHU courses and is followed by a continuation course, *Course Development in HE*, where inclusion in heterogeneous student groups is further developed.

Both these courses, as well as other AHU offerings, include elements of inclusive teaching strategies regardless of whether the focus is supervision, assessment, research supervision, or

other areas. According to the same source, UDL is not presented as a universal solution, but rather as one of several approaches used to support inclusive teaching. The aim is instead to build awareness of student diversity and provide practical strategies for adapting teaching to different needs. This includes opportunities for staff to reflect collegially on how diverse student needs can be met in different contexts, rather than assuming a single "one-size-fits-all" approach. Comparable courses are also offered at faculty level, such as *Perspektiv på lärande* at MedCUL (Faculty of Medicine), as well as similar initiatives at CEE (Faculty of Engineering) and PLUS (Faculty of Science). In some faculties and departments, teachers are also allocated time within their workload to complete these courses, although this is not consistently applied across LU.

4.4.2.Themes

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, which allows for identifying, organising, and interpreting recurring patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involved repeated reading of documents, coding key concepts, and grouping them into broader themes related to inclusion. Particular attention was given to how inclusion is defined, how policies frame responsibilities, and how implementation is described in practice. These themes were then compared with questionnaire findings to explore the relationship between institutional intentions and everyday teaching practices, supporting a more comprehensive understanding of inclusion at LU. Five themes were identified as relevant to the study: policies and legal frameworks, UDL and inclusive teaching practices, Teacher's role and experience, Student support system and Broader outcomes of inclusion.

4.4.2.1. Policies and legal frameworks

The first theme, ***Policies and legal frameworks***, captures how inclusion is shaped through laws, institutional strategies, and governance documents that define rights, responsibilities, and accessibility in HE. The Swedish Discrimination Act (2008:567) states that failure to provide reasonable accessibility measures for students with disabilities can be considered discrimination. Universities are therefore required to design teaching and assessment in ways that reduce barriers to participation (Swedish Parliament, 2008, Chapter 1, Section 4(3), p. 2; Chapter 2, Section 5, p. 5). In addition, the Swedish Agency for Participation (MFD) emphasises that universities should ensure full participation in both academic and social life by removing barriers not only in physical environments but also in digital learning spaces (Swedish Agency for Participation (MFD), n.d.).

LU's Equal Opportunities Plan (2022–2027) strengthens this responsibility by promoting equality, diversity, and systematic anti-discrimination work. Its third goal focuses on systematic preventive work against discrimination (SFAD), requiring LU to actively identify, analyse, address, and follow up risks of discrimination related to gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and age (Lund University, 2022, p. 6). The LU List of Rights further reinforces these principles by ensuring fair examination processes, accessible learning environments, and structured support for diverse student needs (Lund University, 2024, p. 5).
Together, these frameworks establish inclusion as both a legal and institutional responsibility. They align with inclusive education theory, which views inclusion not only as compliance with legislation, but as a proactive approach to designing equitable learning environments from the outset (UCLA Teaching and Learning Centre, n.d.). This is also consistent with Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which emphasises multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression to reduce barriers to learning (CAST, n.d.). In this way, policy requirements are translated into pedagogical expectations that move beyond individual accommodations towards more systematic curriculum design.

The social model of disability is also reflected in these policies. Disability is understood not as an individual limitation, but as the result of environmental, social, and institutional barriers (Donald & Frank, 2023). From this perspective, responsibility lies with institutions to remove barriers and ensure equal participation. Within LU policies, this responsibility is clearly placed on the institution, reinforcing the idea that inclusion requires structural and systemic change rather than individual adjustment.

4.4.2.2. UDL and inclusive teaching practices

The second theme, ***UDL and inclusive teaching practices***, focuses on how teaching guidance, staff development, and course design are structured to support inclusion. LU recognises that many academics are subject experts but may lack formal training in pedagogy. To address this, LU provides training and guidelines aimed at strengthening teaching competence, including introductory courses such as *Teaching and Learning in HE*. As noted, this course includes learning outcomes related to inclusive teaching and participation in diverse student groups, although its mandatory status appears to vary between faculties. In the questionnaire data, only a small number of participants explicitly referred to this course, suggesting limited awareness or uneven uptake.

In addition, LU provides the *Accessible Teaching Handbook*, which offers practical guidance on inclusive teaching. It highlights the importance of flexible teaching, clear communication, and proactive adaptation of learning environments. It also encourages reducing barriers in course content and offering multiple ways for students to engage with and demonstrate learning (Lund University, 2026, pp. 4–5). Although the handbook does not explicitly frame its content within UDL, it is closely aligned with its principles and includes references to further resources. The handbook also includes practical strategies for supporting students with different types of disabilities, including ADHD, autism, dyslexia, sensory impairments, and mental health conditions (Lund University, 2026, p. 6). It provides guidance on adapting teaching and assessment, as well as advice on improving accessibility in digital platforms such as Canvas. There is also clear alignment with external frameworks such as SPSM guidelines, reinforcing its connection to broader inclusive education principles grounded in the social model of disability, inclusive education theory, and UDL (SPSM, n.d.).

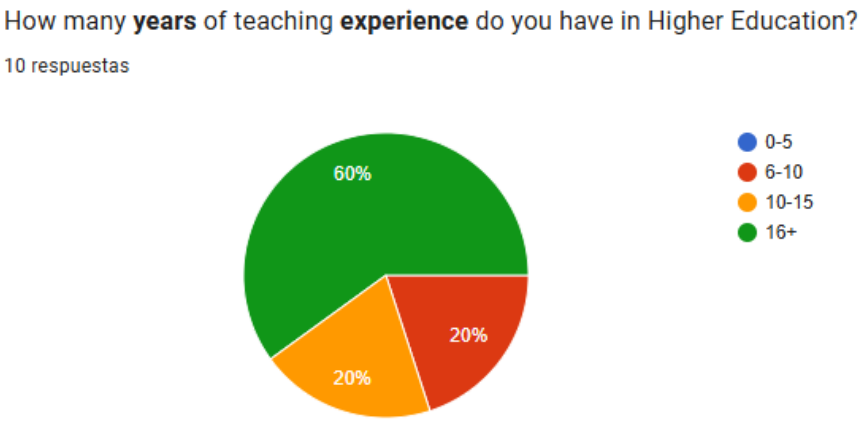
Despite the existence of these resources, questionnaire responses suggest that implementation is inconsistent. Few teachers mentioned institutional resources such as Pedagogiskt studentstöd or formal training courses, and most reported learning inclusive practices through experience or colleagues rather than structured training. This indicates a gap between available institutional support and its practical use in everyday teaching.

4.4.2.3. Teacher's role and experience

The third theme, ***Teacher's role and experience***, highlights how teachers act as key actors in implementing inclusion but operate within varying institutional conditions. Participants in the study represented a range of experience levels, with the majority having worked at LU for over 10 years (see figure 2).

Figure 2

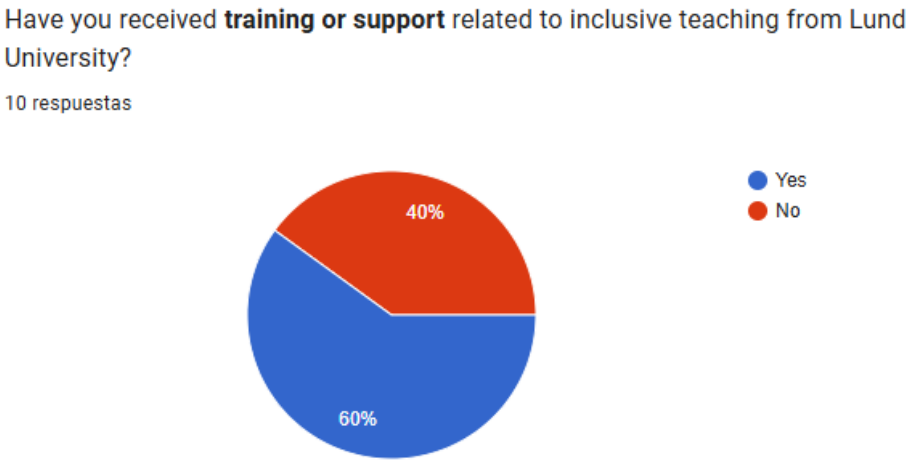
Teacher/ Lecturer Questionnaire: How many years of teaching experience do you have in Higher Education?



They are all lecturers and researchers, and one of them also holds the role of programme director. In addition, 60 percent of the participants reported having received some form of training or support related to inclusive teaching from LU (see figure 3).

Figure 3

Teacher/ Lecturer Questionnaire: Have you received training or support related to inclusive teaching from Lund University?



All participants stated that they have taught students with learning support needs or disabilities, including ADHD, dyslexia, autism, reduced hearing, reduced vision, and anxiety (see figure 4). They also described different ways in which they adapt their teaching and assessments to accommodate these students. However, not all participants felt fully prepared to support students with disabilities in a consistent or structured way (see figure 5).

Figure 4

Teacher/ Lecturer Questionnaire: Have you taught students with learning support needs or disabilities?

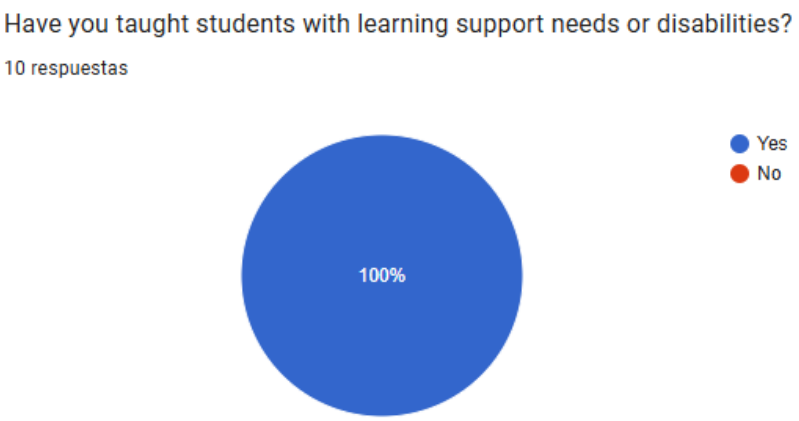
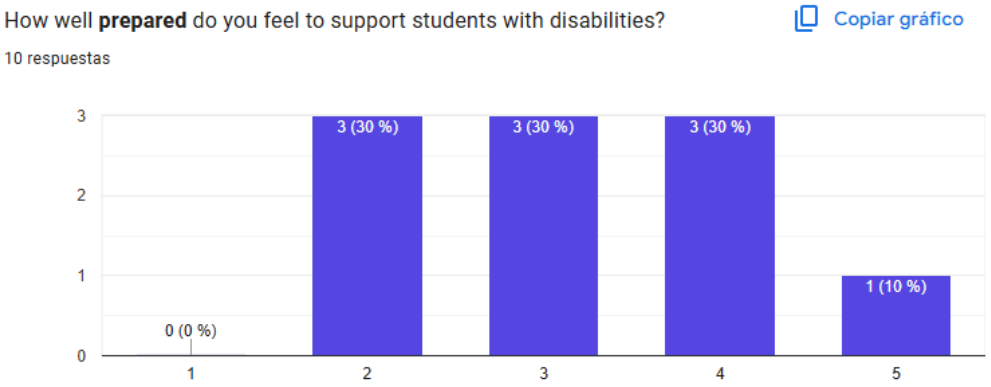


Figure 5

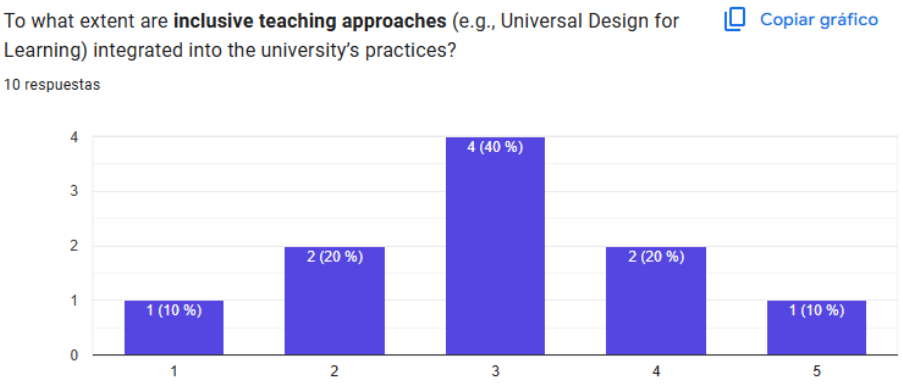
Teacher/ Lecturer Questionnaire: How well prepared do you feel to support students with disabilities?



These findings lead to a further examination of the relationship between policy and practice. As highlighted in previous research, policies do not always translate directly into practice, and gaps often exist between institutional expectations and everyday teaching realities (Svendby, 2024). While LU policies and guidelines promote inclusive teaching and expect staff to implement inclusive practices, participants' responses show variation in confidence, knowledge, and implementation (see figure 6).

Figure 6

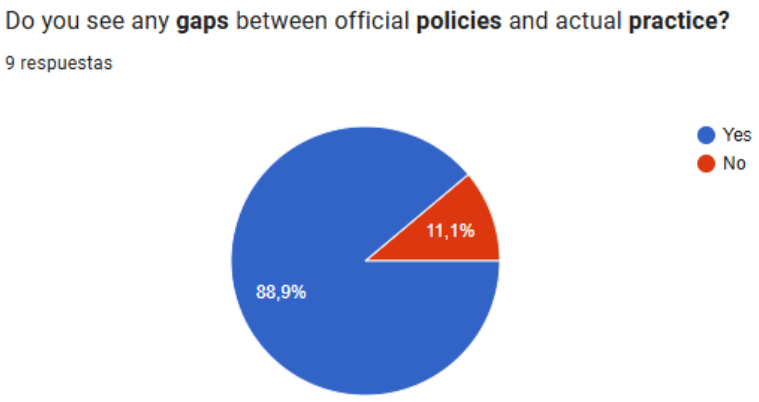
Teacher/ Lecturer Questionnaire: To what extent are inclusive teaching approaches (e.g., Universal Design for Learning) integrated into the university's practices?



In addition, most participants identified a gap between policy and practice and highlighted several challenges in implementing inclusive teaching. These included lack of time, limited resources, insufficient training, and administrative bureaucracy. Time constraints, large class sizes, lack of training, and unclear guidelines have also been identified in previous research as key barriers to inclusion (Svendby, 2024). Participants further noted an increasing number of students with disabilities, which makes it more difficult to respond to a wide range of needs within existing structures. According to the *Transforming Education in a Digital World* newsletter from the Unit for Educational Services at LU, the number of students with special needs has increased by 70 percent over the past five years (Lund University, 2025, p. 2). In response, LU has outlined three main goals: to make the university more inclusive and accessible, to strengthen staff competence in accessible teaching, and to develop a more unified approach to inclusive teaching across the institution (Lund University, 2025, p. 3) (see figure 7).

Figure 7

Teacher/ Lecturer Questionnaire: Do you see any gaps between official policies and actual practice?



Based on these findings, it can be concluded that teachers at LU function as key mediators of inclusion but operate within constrained institutional conditions that limit consistent implementation. In practice, they are often required to rely on a combination of institutional guidelines and external documentation, such as certification confirming a long-term disability or documentation from previous institutions confirming prior learning support (Lund University (2024).

4.4.2.4. Student support system

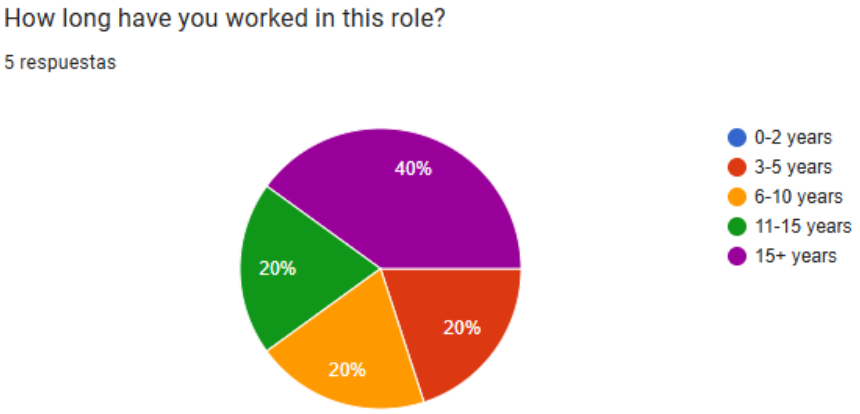
The fourth theme*,* ***Student support system,*** captures the formal support structures, procedures, and services designed to enable students with disabilities to access and succeed in HE.

When a student with a disability is admitted to LU, they are directed to Nais, where they can apply for learning support and special accommodations. In the section *Studying with a Disability*, LU states that a disability is considered long-term if it lasts or has lasted for at least six months and provides several examples (Lund University, 2026). After submitting an application, the student is contacted by an accessibility officer from the Disability Support Services, who communicates the decision and any recommended accommodations. The student advisors within the relevant departments are then informed and become responsible for guiding the student. If any issues arise, students are encouraged to contact their student advisor.

The questionnaire responses from the support staff at LU provide valuable insights into this process. One participant had worked at LU for more than 15 years, while the remaining participants had worked at LU for more than three years (see figure 8).

Figure 8

Support staff Questionnaire: How long have you worked in this role?

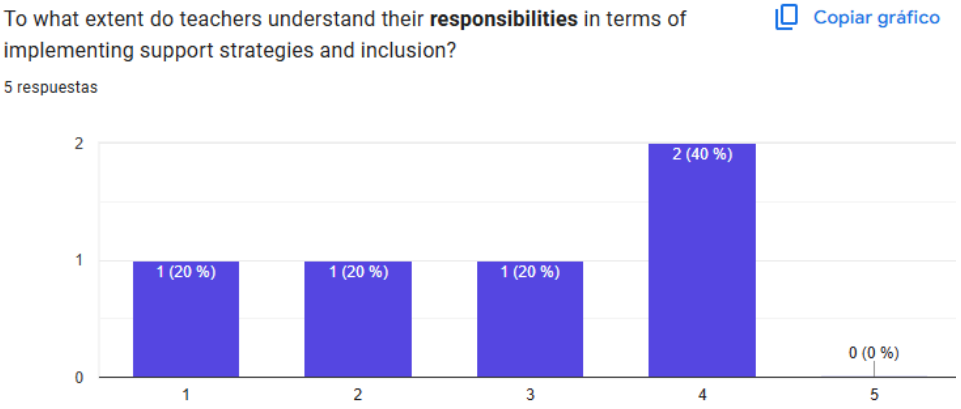


Most participants were student advisors whose main role is to support students in relation to their studies, whether due to disabilities or other circumstances, so that they can successfully complete their courses and credits. They also communicate and collaborate with different departments when necessary. Part of their role involves supporting teachers by providing guidance on how to assist students with pedagogical support needs according to the student's support decision and in line with the specific course syllabus.

Although they do not always provide individual support directly to teachers, they offer workshops, meetings, and documentation, such as the *Accessible Teaching Handbook*, to guide them. Despite this support system, participants' responses were not always consistent. One example concerns teachers' understanding of their responsibilities regarding the implementation of support measures and inclusive practices (see figure 9).

Figure 9

Support staff Questionnaire: To what extent do teachers understand their responsibilities in terms of implementing support strategies and inclusion?

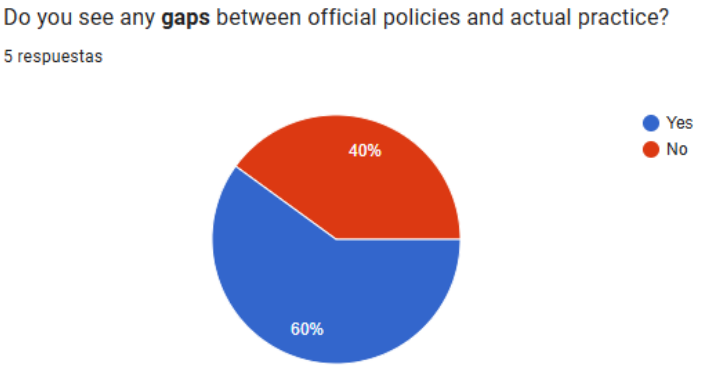


There appears to be some uncertainty and variation in opinions on this matter, which may be linked to gaps between the support system and policies on the one hand and their practical implementation on the other. Some participants highlighted a lack of economic resources and the growing number of students requiring support. They also stated that teachers face challenges such as limited knowledge about disabilities, lack of awareness of specific students' needs, insufficient time, inflexible syllabi, and limited resources.

From this perspective, the support system appears to be effective once it has been accessed. However, participants also acknowledged that the current system at LU is more reactive than proactive, as it is largely based on providing support to identified students with specific needs rather than adopting a universal model of inclusion (see figure 10).

Figure 10

Support staff Questionnaire: Do you think these supports help students prepare for employment or further studies?



On the other hand, participants explained that the support strategies are relatively successful in promoting students' academic success. Inclusive environments enhance academic success, confidence, and participation (Moriña & Biagiotti, 2022). At the same time, both students and teachers face challenges during university studies. Structural barriers, lack of support, and inaccessible teaching practices can limit student success (Pais, Moriña Díez, & Morgado, 2025).

The participants made several suggestions for improving inclusion at LU. These included creating a centralised set of practices that everyone should follow, such as always using a microphone during lectures, sharing lecture slides before class, clarifying what additional examination time means, and applying common strategies across the university. They also highlighted the need for increased funding to reflect the growing number of students with support needs, clearer policies at the departmental level, examples of inclusive Canvas layouts, examples of universally accessible assessments and learning activities, and improved communication between departmental staff and student advisors.

Many of these suggestions align with the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which promotes the proactive design of accessible and flexible learning environments that meet diverse student needs (CAST, 2024). Recommendations such as sharing lecture slides in advance, using microphones, creating inclusive Canvas templates, and establishing common university-wide practices reflect efforts to reduce barriers to learning from the outset.

These findings are also consistent with Inclusive Education Theory, which views inclusion as a shared institutional responsibility rather than the responsibility of individual students or teachers (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Furthermore, the participants' emphasis on clearer policies, increased resources, and better coordination across departments aligns with the Social Model of Disability, which locates barriers within educational systems and environments rather than within individuals (Oliver, 1990).

Together, these recommendations support a shift from individual accommodations towards a more systematic and inclusive approach to teaching and learning.

4.4.2.5. Broader outcomes of inclusion

The fifth theme, ***Broader outcomes of inclusion*****,** explores how inclusion affects academic success, participation, wellbeing, employability, and the transition beyond university. Research shows that graduates with disabilities continue to face systemic barriers when entering the labour market, where inequalities in employment opportunities remain persistent (Moriña & Biagiotti, 2022).

Part of the research question in this study was to analyse how teachers and support staff perceive the implementation and effectiveness of inclusive practices in promoting academic success and future opportunities for students with disabilities. The questionnaire responses revealed different perspectives on this issue. Some participants expressed that university studies provide students with knowledge and competencies that allow them to succeed academically and gain confidence within a particular field of study. At the same time, participants noted that some course syllabi are highly inflexible and difficult to modify or adapt to individual needs.

Participants also highlighted that university education contributes to the development of broader skills, such as academic writing, public speaking, communication, and critical thinking, which can facilitate students' transition into future employment or further studies. However, they expressed uncertainty regarding the accommodations that students may receive after graduation. While students are taught the core skills required within their disciplines, participants questioned whether some students would encounter difficulties meeting workplace expectations due to a lack of support and accommodations in employment settings. Skills such as communication, autonomy, and confidence were considered particularly important for future success.

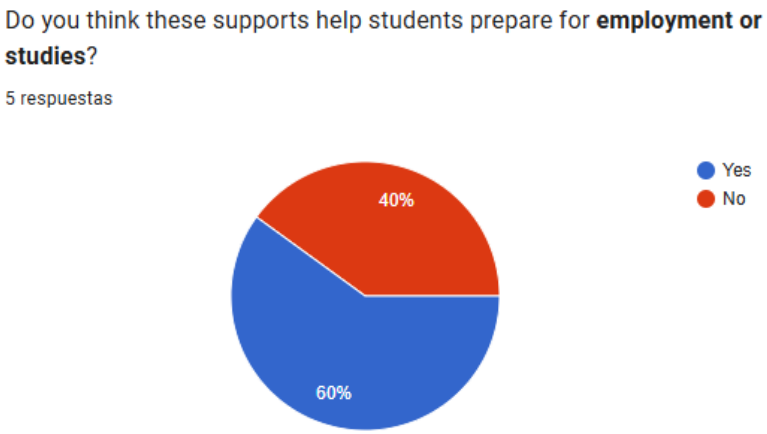
Inclusion affects opportunities beyond education and is closely linked to broader issues of social participation and equality (Moriña & Biagiotti, 2022). This finding is strongly connected to the Social Model of Disability, which argues that barriers are often created by society rather than by the individual's impairment. From this perspective, students may acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to perform a job successfully, yet still face disadvantages because workplaces, employers, and social systems are not always designed to accommodate diverse needs. The issue is therefore not necessarily whether students possess the required competencies, but whether society provides equitable opportunities for them to use those competencies.

For this reason, Moriña and Biagiotti (2022) argue that universities should strengthen the connection between inclusion and employability by integrating career services, internships, and employer engagement into their inclusion strategies. Such measures may help students with disabilities navigate the transition from university to employment more successfully.

The following graph presents the responses from the support staff questionnaire regarding the effectiveness of current support strategies in preparing students for future opportunities (see figure 11).

Figure 11

Support staff Questionnaire: Do you think these supports help students prepare for employment or further studies?



5. Results and discussion

This chapter presents the findings from the document analysis and questionnaire data collected at LU. The findings are further interpreted through the theoretical lenses of Inclusive Education Theory, the Social Model of Disability, and UDL. The results are structured around the three sub-questions guiding the study:

1. *What inclusion and learning support policies, strategies, and guidelines exist at Lund University (including teacher responsibilities)?*

The document analysis revealed that LU has a comprehensive framework of policies, support systems, and guidelines aimed at promoting inclusion and accessibility for students with disabilities. These are supported by both national legislation and institutional initiatives. These frameworks establish inclusion as a legal, institutional, and procedural responsibility rather than

an optional practice. This aligns strongly with Inclusive Education Theory, which emphasises participation, equity, and systemic responsibility (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). It also reflects the Social Model of Disability, which locates barriers within institutions rather than individuals, positioning universities as responsible for removing structural obstacles to participation (Donald & Frank, 2023).

At the national level, the Swedish Discrimination Act (2008:567) establishes disability as a protected characteristic and requires HE institutions to provide reasonable accessibility measures. Failure to provide such measures may constitute discrimination. Similarly, guidance from the Discrimination Ombudsman (DO) emphasises accessibility as a legal requirement and an essential condition for equal participation in education.

At the institutional level, Lund University's Equal Opportunities Plan (2022–2027) promotes equality, diversity, and systematic anti-discrimination work. The plan states that the university must actively identify and address barriers related to disability and ensure accessible learning and working environments. The List of Rights – Students' Rights and Responsibilities further supports inclusion by regulating fair examination procedures and ensuring access to support services.

Several institutional resources provide practical guidance on inclusion. The Pedagogiskt studentstöd webpage and the Study with Disabilities section describe available accommodations, including adapted examinations, mentoring support, note-taking assistance, assistive technology, and study guidance. These services are coordinated through the National Administration and Information System (NAIS), which manages applications for targeted learning support.
LU also provides pedagogical support for staff through the Division for Higher Education Development (AHU), workshops, seminars, and the Accessible Teaching Handbook. The handbook promotes flexible teaching, accessible learning environments, and strategies for supporting students with various disabilities. Furthermore, the course *Teaching and Learning in HE* includes inclusive teaching as one of its intended learning outcomes and forms part of the pedagogical training expected of academic staff.
Overall, the findings demonstrate that LU has established a broad policy and support framework that promotes accessibility, inclusion, and equal participation.

Inclusive teaching at LU is supported through institutional guidance, staff development, and pedagogical resources. The Accessible Teaching Handbook and Pedagogiskt studentstöd

webpages emphasise flexible teaching approaches, accessible course design, multiple ways of demonstrating learning, proactive removal of barriers and inclusive assessment strategies. These principles closely reflect UDL, although it is not consistently framed as an explicit institutional model. Staff development is primarily delivered through the Division for HE Development, including the mandatory pedagogical course *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* where one learning outcome refers to inclusion (Lund University, n.d.). However, questionnaire findings indicate limited engagement with formal training pathways. Only a small number of participants reported using institutional courses or official guidance documents. Instead, most teachers reported relying on experience or informal collegial learning. This suggests a partial alignment between institutional intentions and teaching practice. While UDL aligned principles are present in documentation, they are not yet systematically embedded in everyday teaching practice. This reflects a transition where inclusion is supported structurally but not fully operationalised as a design principle. From a theoretical perspective, this indicates that UDL is present as an emerging framework at LU, but it is not yet fully embedded in everyday teaching practice. Several institutional documents promote ideas linked to UDL, such as flexible teaching methods, accessible materials, and different ways for students to show their learning. However, questionnaire responses suggest that inclusion is still mainly achieved through individual accommodations provided after a student has disclosed a disability through the NAIS system.These policies and guidelines align strongly with Inclusive Education Theory, which views inclusion as a systemic responsibility that requires institutions to create equitable opportunities for all learners (Rydeman et al., 2018). They also reflect the Social Model of Disability, which emphasises that barriers arise from environments and systems rather than from an individual's impairment. The legal and institutional emphasis on accessibility, reasonable accommodations, and barrier removal illustrates this perspective (Donald & Frank, 2023).

Several of the documents also reflect principles associated with UDL. Guidance on flexible teaching, accessible materials, multiple forms of assessment, and inclusive learning environments demonstrates an awareness of the need to design learning experiences that accommodate diverse learners. However, UDL is not explicitly embedded as a university-wide framework, suggesting that inclusion is still largely operationalised through accommodations rather than universal design.

2. *How do teachers and support staff experience and implement these policies in daily teaching and assessment practices?*

The questionnaire findings indicate that teachers and support staff play a central role in implementing inclusion policies at LU. All participating teachers reported experience teaching students with disabilities or learning support needs, including ADHD, dyslexia, autism, visual impairments, hearing impairments, and mental health conditions.

Teachers described using various adaptations such as extended examination time, alternative assessment formats, flexibility in teaching methods, and adjustments based on recommendations from Disability Support Services. Most participants recognised the importance of inclusion and reported making efforts to support students' learning needs.

However, the findings also revealed differences in how prepared teachers felt to implement inclusive practices. Although 60% reported receiving some form of training or support related to inclusive teaching, many stated that they primarily learned through personal experience or discussions with colleagues rather than through formal training. Only a small number referred directly to institutional resources such as the Accessible Teaching Handbook, Pedagogiskt studentstöd webpage, or pedagogical courses.

The course *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* is an important component of pedagogical development for academic staff. Although it is not formally mandatory for all employees across every faculty and department, it is generally required for individuals holding or applying for teaching positions within higher education. In practice, completion of pedagogical training is expected for academic employment and is often a prerequisite for career progression, particularly for roles involving teaching responsibilities and student supervision. LU typically requires teaching staff to complete a minimum level of higher education pedagogical training, usually equivalent to several weeks of study (Lund University, n.d.). However, the implementation of this requirement may vary between faculties depending on institutional needs and internal policies. This makes pedagogical training a key element in understanding how universities prepare staff for teaching responsibilities, including the implementation of inclusive education practices. In the context of this study, it is therefore relevant to examine how such training contributes to staff awareness and application of inclusive teaching strategies across different departments.

Support staff described their role as facilitating communication between students, teachers, and departments, as well as providing guidance on accommodations and pedagogical support. They

generally viewed the support system as effective but highlighted increasing demand, limited resources, and variations in teachers' understanding of their responsibilities.

Both groups identified similar challenges, including, lack of time, limited training in disability and inclusive pedagogy, increasing numbers of students requiring support, administrative workload, inconsistent implementation across departments. Participants also suggested improvements such as clearer university-wide guidelines, more training opportunities, increased funding, better communication, and more examples of accessible teaching and assessment practices.

The findings suggest that there is a gap between policy intentions and implementation. While LU provides a range of resources and guidance, their use appears inconsistent across departments and individuals. This supports previous research suggesting that inclusive policies do not automatically translate into inclusive practice (Svendby, 2024). From an Inclusive Education Theory perspective, teachers are key actors in creating inclusive learning environments. However, effective inclusion requires ongoing institutional support rather than relying solely on individual initiative (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). The findings indicate that many teachers continue to depend on personal experience rather than systematic training. The results also reveal that inclusion at LU remains largely reactive. Support is often provided after a student has disclosed a disability and received accommodations through the NAIS system. This contrasts with UDL, which advocates designing courses from the outset to accommodate learner diversity and reduce the need for individual adaptations (CAST, n.d.). While UDL principles are visible in institutional documents, they are not yet consistently reflected in everyday teaching practices. From the perspective of the Social Model of Disability, many of the barriers identified by participants, such as lack of time, resources, training, and institutional consistency, are environmental and organisational barriers rather than characteristics of individual students. This highlights the need for further systemic support to strengthen implementation.

3. *What are teachers' and support staff's perceptions of the strengths, challenges, and impact of these supports on students' academic progress and preparation for employment or further studies?*

Participants generally viewed learning support and accommodations as beneficial for students' academic success. Teachers and support staff reported that support measures contribute to increased participation, confidence, engagement, and academic achievement. They believed that students benefit from receiving the necessary adjustments to demonstrate their knowledge and

complete their studies successfully. Support staff particularly emphasised that targeted support helps students navigate academic requirements and reduces barriers that might otherwise affect progression and completion. Participants also recognised that inclusive teaching practices can benefit all students, not only those with disabilities.

However, perceptions were more mixed regarding the long-term impact of support on employment and further study opportunities. Several participants noted that students develop valuable transferable skills during their studies, including communication, critical thinking, independence, and self-management. These skills were viewed as important for future careers and lifelong learning. At the same time, participants expressed concerns about what happens after graduation. They questioned whether students would receive similar accommodations in employment settings and whether workplaces would be equally prepared to support individuals with disabilities. Some participants also highlighted broader structural barriers in the labour market that may limit opportunities regardless of academic achievement.

The findings suggest that learning support at LU is perceived as contributing positively to students' academic outcomes. This aligns with previous research showing that supportive and inclusive environments improve participation, confidence, and academic success (Moriña & Biagiotti, 2022). From the perspective of Inclusive Education Theory, success should not be measured solely by academic performance but also by participation, belonging, personal development, and opportunities beyond education (Pais et al., 2025). Participants' responses reflected this broader understanding of inclusion. The findings also connect strongly to the Social Model of Disability. Participants recognised that barriers to future success often exist outside the university, particularly in employment contexts. This suggests that even when students acquire the necessary skills and qualifications, unequal opportunities may persist if workplaces are not designed to accommodate diverse needs (Moriña & Biagiotti, 2022). Finally, the results highlight the relevance of UDL beyond academic settings. By promoting flexibility, accessibility, and participation, UDL has the potential to support the development of transferable skills that benefit students throughout their educational and professional lives (Espada-Chavarria et al., 2023). However, participants' concerns suggest that inclusion within HE alone may not be sufficient to ensure equitable outcomes after graduation.

5.1. Further research

The present study has focused on how learning support policies and strategies at LU align with inclusive education principles, and how teachers and support staff perceive their implementation.

While the findings provide important insights into the policy-practice gap, several areas require further investigation in order to deepen understanding of institutional inclusion and its broader implications.

A relevant area for further research concerns professional development opportunities for teaching staff. The findings show that LU offers a wide range of pedagogical training through the Division for Higher Education Development, including the compulsory course *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. However, questionnaire responses indicate that many teachers either do not engage with these opportunities or do not perceive them as sufficiently useful for addressing the realities of inclusive teaching. Future research could therefore explore why these professional development initiatives are not consistently utilised or valued. This could include examining whether the training is not efficient or disconnected from everyday teaching challenges. It would also be important to investigate how factors such as workload, time constraints, and institutional culture influence participation in these courses, as well as how professional development could be redesigned to better support inclusive teaching practices.

A further area for investigation relates to the ongoing development of the Equal Opportunities Plan at LU. As the current plan covers the period 2022–2027, future research could examine how inclusion is redefined or strengthened in subsequent versions of the strategy. This includes exploring whether future policy updates introduce clearer mechanisms for implementation, stronger accountability structures, or more explicit links between inclusion policies and teaching practice. It would also be relevant to analyse how the university evaluates progress in relation to its inclusion goals and whether measurable outcomes are used to assess effectiveness over time.

In addition, future research should consider shifting the focus towards students' experiences of inclusion. The present study has primarily captured the perspectives of teachers and support staff, but a comprehensive understanding of inclusion in HE also requires the voices of students, particularly those with disabilities. Investigating how students experience learning support, accessibility, and teaching practices in practice would provide important insight into whether institutional policies are effective in lived reality (Pais et al., 2025). However, such research would require additional ethical considerations, as well as more time-intensive recruitment processes, particularly when involving students who may already rely on support services or experience barriers to participation. Despite these challenges, incorporating the student perspective would significantly strengthen the understanding of inclusion as a lived and embodied experience.

Finally, further research could take a broader societal perspective by critically examining whether current educational systems reinforce a standardised pathway that assumes higher education is the primary route to success. This raises important questions about whether all individuals are equally suited to HE structures and whether alternative educational or vocational pathways are equally valued. One of the participants in this study already questioned the assumption that everyone should pursue university education, highlighting a wider debate about the purpose and accessibility of HE. From a theoretical perspective, this connects to the Social Model of Disability, as it suggests that barriers may exist not only within universities but also within societal expectations and labour market structures (Moriña & Biagiotti, 2022). It also relates to Inclusive Education Theory, which emphasises participation and equity across diverse forms of learning and life trajectories (Pais et al., 2025). Further research in this area could therefore explore how definitions of success are constructed in society and whether current systems of education and employment adequately reflect diverse abilities, interests, and life paths.
In relation to employability, one participant stated:

> "One of the biggest problems is the belief that everyone should pursue a university education. The world also needs bus drivers, electricians, plumbers, cashiers, farmers etc. etc."

This comment opens a broader discussion about societal expectations regarding education and success. It raises questions about whether higher education is always presented as the preferred pathway and whether sufficient value is placed on alternative educational and career routes.

6. Conclusion

The findings indicate that LU's learning support policies and strategies align strongly with inclusive education principles at the policy level. The university provides a comprehensive framework of legislation, support services, pedagogical guidance, and staff development opportunities designed to promote accessibility and participation. However, implementation varies across departments and individual teachers, with inclusion often relying on accommodations and individual initiative rather than fully embedded universal design approaches. Teachers and support staff generally perceive these supports as beneficial for students' academic success, but they also identify challenges related to training, resources, consistency, and the transition to employment or further studies.

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In this assignment, I used ChatGPT as a supportive tool during the writing process. It served as a starting point to generate ideas and inspiration. Subsequently, I developed the essay independently, drawing on course literature and my own research. The following prompts were used:

● Create a list of relevant literature/ articles about inclusive education and special needs education in HE.

● Create a list of relevant literature/ articles about teachers/lectures/professors/teaching staff perspectives and experiences with inclusion and special needs students in HE

● Find Lund´s university inclusive/ support policy.

I have also used it to support me on rewording the research question and the assessment title using my original ideas. Lastly, I have used it to check grammar and punctuation mistakes that I have then compared with my original version to ensure accuracy and originality.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire to teachers

Inclusive Learning Support at Lund University – Teacher/ Lecturer Questionnaire

This study explores inclusive learning support practices at Lund University, focusing on teachers' experiences with policies, accommodations, and inclusive teaching.

The form takes 10 - 15 minutes. All responses are anonymous and used for academic purposes only.

Please provide detailed answers and examples where possible.

* Indica que la pregunta es obligatoria

1. I consent to participate in this study *

   Marca solo un óvalo.

   - ◯ Yes
   - ◯ No

Background

2. What is your role at Lund University?

   _____

3. How many **years** of teaching **experience** do you have in Higher Education?

   Marca solo un óvalo.

   - ◯ 0-5
   - ◯ 6-10
   - ◯ 10-15
   - ◯ 16+

4. Have you taught students with learning support needs or disabilities? *

   Marca solo un óvalo.

   - ◯ Yes
   - ◯ No

5. If yes, please briefly describe your experience.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

Policies & Institutional Framework

6. What is your **understanding** of Lund University's learning support policies or guidelines? Please also specify the name of the relevant documentation.

7. What do you see as your **responsibilities** as a teacher regarding students with disabilities?

8. How did you learn about these responsibilities? (e.g., through formal training, policies, colleagues, or experience)?

Teaching practices and training

9. How do you **adapt** your **teaching** to accommodate students with different needs?

10. How do you **adapt** your **assessments** to accommodate students with different needs?

11. Have you received **training or support** related to inclusive teaching from Lund University? *

Marca solo un óvalo.

- Yes
- No

12. If yes, please briefly describe your experience.

13. How well **prepared** do you feel to support students with disabilities? *

Marca solo un óvalo.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Con						Not at all prepare

14. To what extent are **inclusive teaching approaches** (e.g., Universal Design for Learning) integrated into the university's practices? *

Marca solo un óvalo.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Well						Not at all integrated

15. Do you see any **gaps** between official **policies** and actual **practice?**

Marca solo un óvalo.

- Yes
- No

16. If yes, please describe

Challenges and effectiveness

17. How **effective** do you think current **support strategies** are in helping students succeed academically at Lund University? *

Marca solo un óvalo.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Very	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Not at all effective

18. Do you think these supports help students prepare for future **employment** or further **studies**? How?

19. What **challenges** do you face when trying to implement inclusive practices?

20. Are there any **institutional or structural barriers** that make this difficult?

21. What **improvements** would you suggest to make teaching more inclusive?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

22. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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Appendix 2:Questionnaire to Inclusion department/ support staff

Inclusive Learning Support – Support Staff Questionnaire

This study explores inclusive learning support practices at Lund University,

focusing on how policies are implemented and supported institutionally.

The form takes 15 - 20 minutes. All responses are anonymous and used for academic purposes only.
Please provide detailed answers and examples where possible.

* Indica que la pregunta es obligatoria

1. I consent to participate in this study *

   Marca solo un óvalo.

   - ◯ Yes
   - ◯ No

Background

2. What is your role at Lund University? *

3. How long have you worked in this role?

   Marca solo un óvalo.

   - ◯ 0-2 years
   - ◯ 3-5 years
   - ◯ 6-10 years
   - ◯ 11-15 years
   - ◯ 15+ years

4. What are your main responsibilities related to student support or inclusion?

Policies and Institutional Framework

5. How would you describe the university's **approach** to **inclusive education (special needs- disabilities)?**

6. What learning support **policies, guidelines**, or **frameworks** guide your work?

Collaboration and implementation

7. What types of **training or professional development** are offered to teachers to help them support students with disabilities or learning difficulties?

8. How do you **support teachers** in implementing accommodations or inclusive practices?

9. What forms of **documentation, guidelines, or written resources** are shared with teachers to help them implement support measures and inclusive practices?

10. What **challenges** do teachers typically report to you?

11. To what extent do teachers understand their **responsibilities** in terms of implementing support strategies and inclusion? *

Marca solo un óvalo.

	1	2	3	4	5	
To a	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Not at all

12. How are learning support strategies **implemented** in teaching and assessment?

13. Are there **differences** in how policies are applied across departments or faculties?

Effectiveness and Impact

14. How effective do you think current support strategies are in promoting students' **academic success**? *

Marca solo un óvalo.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Highly effective

15. Do you think these supports help students prepare for **employment or further studies**? *

Marca solo un óvalo.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No

16. Please provide an explanation to your previous answer.

17. How does the university **evaluate** the effectiveness of its support services?

Policy and Practice

18. Do you see any **gaps** between official policies and actual practice? *

Marca solo un óvalo.

- Yes
- No

19. Please describe the differences.

20. To what extent are **inclusive teaching approaches** (e.g., Universal Design for Learning) integrated into the university's practices? *

Marca solo un óvalo.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	Fully integrated

21. Do you think current **strategies** are more **reactive** (individual accommodations) or **proactive** (inclusive design)? Please explain.

22. What **improvements** would you suggest?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

23. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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Appendix 3: Lund university ranking

#1	#72 | #95	#3	#1
Sustainability (QS)	In the world (QS | THE)	In the EU (QS)	Scandinavia (QS)

Overall rankings

Overall or general university rankings are influenced by a combination of factors such as academic reputation, teaching quality, research impact, global outlook and employer perception of graduates.

The table below shows the latest overall rankings and previous editions of the same rankings.

Latest edition | Previous editions (publication year)

Ranking	World rank	Europe rank	EU rank	Institutions
QS, 2026	72	20	9	1,500
QS Europe, 2026	–	12	3	1,000
THE, 2026	95	32	20	2,200
U.S. News, 2025–2026	122	43	25	2,500
ARWU/Shanghai, 2025	101–150	34	21	2,000

Lund University is the highest ranked comprehensive university in Sweden in the QS, U.S. News and THE rankings.

Thematic rankings

Thematic rankings focus on performance in specific areas, such as sustainability or reputation.

Thematic ranking	Edition	Global rank	Europe rank	EU rank
Sustainability, QS	2026	1	1	1
Most international, THE	2025	63	33	15
Reputation, THE	2025	74	24	13