



# **Adult Education opportunities for disabled persons in Iceland**

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Bachelor of Arts Thesis

Faculty of Sport, Leisure Studies and Social Education



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**  
**MENNTAVÍSINDASVIÐ**



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BA-thesis in Social Education

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## Adult Education Opportunities for disabled persons in Iceland

This thesis is equivalent to 10 ECTS and it is my final dissertation/paper for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Education from the University of Iceland, School of Education, Faculty of Sport, Leisure Studies and Social Education.

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## **Abstract**

This purpose of this paper is to review the status of adult education opportunities for persons with disabilities in Iceland. Considering that adult education for disabled persons has evolved and some changes have taken place compared to twenty years ago, this thesis begins with a theoretical analysis of quality of life in general for disabled people and its importance. The paper addresses the roles of self-determination and empowerment as key aspects and their role in quality of life in order to enable disabled people to take full control of their lives and participate fully in society as equal citizens. With these aspects in mind, I consulted professionals working in institutions providing different forms of education to adults with disabilities in different adult education school settings to get clear picture of the current situation, with emphasis on evaluating and learning about the available options. Academic development, attitudes and education services have evolved in recent years for people with disabilities, in relation to required basic needs for disabled people to live normal and independent lives.

My conclusions gave a good picture of the actual situation of disabled people when it comes to adult education services and provided answers to my subject of study, showing that there are many adult education opportunities available, though accessibility and community attitudes can hinder participation of disabled adults in education programs if joint efforts by stakeholders are absent. In the other hand, education has great benefits as it contributes towards general quality of life.

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## Foreword

This report represents the final academic work required for the award of a Bachelor of Arts in Social Education at the University of Iceland, School of Education and is equivalent to 10 ECTS. When working on contents of this report, the author decided to analyze material that has been examined before relating to adult education opportunities for disabled persons in Iceland, with a view to gain knowledge and a valuable insight into the field being examined. My supervisor was Kristín Lilliendahl, Adjunct Professor at the School of Education, University of Iceland. I wish to thank her for the encouragement, guidance and support during the time I was writing this report. I also wish to thank my family for their support and tolerance during the period I was working on this report.

I, the undersigned have written this final project. I have read the rules and regulations of University of Iceland (2003, November 7, <http://www.hi.is/is/skolinn/sidareglu>) and followed them to the best of my knowledge. I refer to all the cited primary and secondary material retrieved from others or my own work, whether in form of photos, contents or wording. Lastly, I thank all those who teamed up and rendered their support to me during the completion of this project. This I confirm with my signature.

Reykjavík, \_\_\_\_\_.\_\_\_\_\_ 20\_\_

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*Sibeso Imbula Sveinsson*



# 1 Introduction

Adult education for people with disabilities has been researched and the concept has evolved for many decades, and institutions offering course in adult education have increased. Adult education is seen variously as a provision, an activity or an ideal, but one which is either placed alongside the progressive thread of primary, secondary and tertiary education, or is interwoven with education, work and social activities (Boshier, 2006). This paper aims to discuss available adult education opportunities for disabled people in Iceland. When discussing adult education, it will be done based on its theoretical concept for change and its positive impact on the lives of disabled persons in Iceland. To get a valuable insight into the adult education subject which this paper discusses, I was availed with vital data needed by the professionals I contacted and liased with. The data collected was critically analyzed, with emphasis put on evaluating reliability of the information and sources.

The paper analyzes two different forms of adult education offered by Fjölmennt Lifelong Learning centre and the University of Iceland, School of education. Fjölmennt offers vocational training courses to adults with intellectual disabilities, while the University of Iceland offers a Vocational diploma in inclusive settings to students with intellectual disabilities. The two institutions are among the early pioneers in the provision of education services to disabled persons above twenty (20) years of age. The idea to write this report arose in 2014 after my field trip to Fjölmmment, practicum in a vocational lifelong learning centre and past work experience and preparation of Individualized Education Plans for a students with disabilities during my placement in a leisure centre. The purpose of this project is to clarify the role of adult education in disabled peoples' lives, and the question I aim to answer is:

***“What opportunities are available in adult education for disabled persons and what significant role does adult education play in their lives“***

To answer this question, I would say, yes, there are many opportunities available and adult education plays various important roles in the lives of disabled persons, as it contributes towards promotion of personal, social and economic well-being; and, it is through education that, disabled people acquire knowledge, develop personal skills and develop positive attitudes that enable them to participate fully in all socio-economic activities in their communities.

## **1.1 Report structure**

This report is divided into six (6) chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the main subject in this paper, adult education for disabled persons is discussed in this paper, briefly pointing out key institutions that provide different forms of adult education to disabled persons.

The second chapter discusses the general Quality of Life (QOL) construct, outlines key factors which determine QOL, and these are independence, social participation and well-being. Disability theories are discussed while relating them to the concept of adult education. The independent living ideology is also discussed based on Adolf Ratzka's philosophy of people with disabilities working towards goals of self-determination, personal development, equal opportunities and self respect. Further, in this section, two important domains, i.e., self-determination and empowerment are drawn out as they are considered relevant in the fight for independent living, whereas, empowerment leads disabled persons to achieve greater control of their lives, which is in line with quality of life and human rights.

Chapter 3 discusses rights in light of adult education, laws and regulations relating to adult education. Relevant universal declarations, treaties and agreements are outlined, including many other laws adopted by Althing, the Icelandic parliament concerning adult education and rights to education for disabled persons.

Chapter 4 briefly describes the adult education concept, education opportunities available at Fjölmennt Lifelong Learning centre and the University of Iceland, School of Education. Other vocational institutions that collaborate with Fjölmennt are also discussed in this section. The roles and objectives of these institutions are further discussed in relation to adult education services for students with disabilities in relation to the normalisation theory.

Chapter 5 outlines my conclusions drawn from activities and training which Fjölmennt, University of Iceland and other vocational centres offers, supported by theoretical sources which are presented together with proposals for improvements towards implementation of adult education in Iceland.

Lastly, Chapter 6, gives a summary and reflections of what I learnt while analyzing adult education opportunities for disabled persons in Iceland.

## 2 Quality of life

Quality of life (QOL) is a broad multidimensional concept, which may include subjective evaluations that can be negative or positive aspects of life and measuring it can be challenging. QOL has different meanings for individuals, groups, academic fields and may be defined differently by all. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines QOL as, individuals' perceptions of their position in life in the context of culture and value systems in which they live, in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. QOL is a broad ranging concept, affected in a complex way by an individual's physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs and relationships to salient features of the environment (WHO, 1997). WHO considers health as one important domain of overall quality of life and the WHOQOL instruments place their primary importance on the perception of the individual, by focusing on individuals' own view of their well-being or provide a new perspective on disease (WHO, 1997). QOL in this report is discussed by relating it to adults with disabilities and the society they live in, which is, the Icelandic Society. QOL as a dynamic construct has various factors, domains and strong influence on the disability field, derived from practice, research and policy oriented perspectives.

The validated QOL model includes eight core domains structured in three main factors, and these are: *Independence*, which comprises personal development and self-determination; *Social participation*, which is composed of interpersonal relations, social inclusion, and rights; and *Well-being*, which is composed of emotional, physical, and material well-being. This model has been empirically validated across different cultures and countries (Schalock et al., 2008). The QOL model has explanatory power and thus, provides a firm foundation for measurement of QOL-related personal outcomes and use of QOL-related factors, domains and indicators as a focus of individualized supports, program policies and practices (Schalock et al., 2008). Generally, QOL is based on a variety of factors relating to personal and psychological conditions, social relationships, employment, leisure, daily activities and challenges, which have reciprocal effects individuals' personal experiences and their environment. Hence, the QOL construct is increasingly being used as a framework for planning interventions and evaluating outcomes for individuals with intellectual disability (ID), and for improving services and supports provided to persons with ID (Schalock et al., 2013).

## 2.1 Factors that determine quality of life

To evaluate factors that determine quality of life, a theoretical framework of QOL by Schalock and other scholars was used in this report. This framework supports equality of individuals as reflected in factors, domains and indicators shown in table 1 below. These concepts can be related to an individual's daily life and can be translated into tangible actions. However, since professionals in the field of disability are confronted with challenges of applying these QOL principles in their daily work, it is important for them to take into consideration as to which domain receives more or less attention. Therefore, the three factors below, i.e., independence, social participation and well-being, including their domains and exemplary indicators are discussed in detail in relation to adults with intellectual disabilities.

Factor	Domain	Exemplary indicators
<b>1. Independence</b>	Personal development	Education status, personal skills adaptive behaviour (ADLs & IADs).
	Self-determination	Choices/decisions, autonomy, personal Control and personal goals.
<b>2. Social participation</b>	Interpersonal relations	Social networks, friendships, social activities, interactions & relationships
	Social inclusion	Community intergration/participation, community roles and supports
	Rights	Human (respect, family and equality)
		Legal (legal access, due process)
<b>3. Well-being</b>	Emotional well-being	Safety and security, positive experiences, contentment, self-concept & lack of stress.
	Physical well-being	Health and nutrition status, recreation, leisure
	Material well-being	Financial status, employment status, housing status and possessions

**Figure 1:** *Quality of life conceptual model showing factors, domains and indicators*  
(Schalock, et al., 2008, p.182).

### **2.1.1 Independent living and User-personal support**

Independent living is a philosophy and a movement of people with disabilities who work for self-determination, equal opportunities and self-respect (Ratzka, 2005). Quality of life in Independent living, a philosophy founded by Adolf Ratzka is based on the ideology that, people with disabilities have same and equal opportunities like others in society, by being able to make choices, have control in their everyday lives, regulate their own services and how there are provided, work in jobs that are in line with their education and interests and starts families of their own, etc (Ratzka, 2005).

In the article, “New Human Rights for people with disabilities” written in 2011, by Helga Baldvins-Bjargardóttir and Hanna Björg Sigurjónsdóttir, they state that, independence can be achieved when individuals are able to choose desired services suitable for their needs and interests. Ratzka states that, people with disabilities are best experts for their own needs as they can provide solutions to their needs or interests, and in order to do this, they have to participate in planning activities that affect their lives or be responsible for their own lives through thinking and speaking for themselves just like other citizens do. Hence, disabled persons should support and learn from each other, organize themselves and work for political changes that lead to legal protection of their human and civil rights (Ratzka, 2005).

Therefore, Independent living is a key factor in determining QOL, as it indicates that, by being independent, disabled adults can lead desirable lives and can gain autonomy. Personal autonomy is a right for all and self-determination abilities help disabled persons in self-directed decision making, to choose how they want to lead their lives. Research indicates that, disabled adults are less self-determined than their non-disabled peers due to fewer opportunities to choose and preferences across their daily lives. Additionally, many teachers working with disabled individuals believe that, skills and knowledge related to self-determination are often too complex for their students to learn (Univer De Vatland, et al., 2011).

The goal of self-determination is to assist adults with disabilities becoming aware of their strengths or challenges and planning realistic goals for their lives. As such, self-determination encompasses the abilities to understand oneself and life situations, to know current and long-term goals, to develop methods to achieve those goals, to self-reflect, and to make self-directed decisions (Wehmeyer, et al., 2004).

Promoting self-determination has become a best practice in the education of individuals with disabilities. Self-determination is a broad construct in which no single practice or package of practices applies. Based on work from Wehmeyer et al. (2011), self-determination comprises three (3) dimensions in which an individual needs to develop, and these are as follows: *causal agency* (an individual's control events); *proxy agency* (provision of supports and assistance allowing the individual to control events), and lastly, *opportunities to act upon the environment*.

However, in some societies, disabled adults are less self-determined than their non-disabled peers due to fewer opportunities to choose and preferences across their daily lives. Additionally, many teachers working with disabled individuals believe that, skills and knowledge related to self-determination are often too complex for their students to learn, but professionals in the field of adult education focus primarily on individuals' personal development, positive experiences of learning and personal learning lifestyles, and students contribute a lot towards the curriculum, especially if they have the personal freedom to choose how and what they desire to learn. Being able to make choices is a right that can help to improve personal skills and ability to attain adaptive behaviours in individuals, etc. All human beings have a desire for personal autonomy, i.e., by being able to choose how we live our lives and have the desires not to be controlled by others.

The concept of personal support/assistance, popularly known as NPA in Iceland, is based on the ideology of independent living. It is a good example of the independent living ideology. The fight for human rights of disabled people in the United States and Britain around 1970 prompted this ideology, and User-personal support or NPA philosophy is based on the idea that, everyone in the community, disabled or non-disabled should have the right to control their own lives and have an impact on the daily life activities (NPA, e.d., 2015). NPA operates in order to secure equal opportunities for disabled people and it is empowering. Through NPA, disabled people are able to take proper places in society, start families, work and lead normal lives, including all rights and duties that non-disabled persons take for granted. With personal support, disabled people are no longer dependant on their families, parents and partners to provide the needed assistance. Hence, this enables disabled persons to participate in sharing household chores, study, work and be able to fall in love, etc. (NPA, e.d., 2015).

In the transitional provisions of Act No. IV. 59/1992 on disability matters relating to personal support or assistance, it is stated that, there must be ongoing collaboration between the state, municipalities and other stakeholders involved in providing the NPA service option. The main objective of doing so, is to find meaningful and effective ways in which user-personal supports for disabled people can be implemented, meaning users shall organize own services provided in different service systems, e.g. in housing, education and social participation, etc. NPA project activities and implementation are overseen by a seven member board appointed by the Minister of Welfare, while service delivery and implementation policies are set up by a special committee, and the government through municipalities is vested with the responsibility to deliver the services to disabled people in the right designated periods of time.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of municipalities to appraise the services and arrange with disabled individuals who seek to take advantage of personal assistance or User-personal support services. The service agreements set out according to the type of service a person needs in their daily life and service prices are often evaluated (Disability Law nr. 152/2010).

### **2.1.2 Social participation**

Social participation can refer to individual social involvement and interaction with others in activities such as, sports, recreation activities, volunteering, education activities and charity work, etc. The two important domains of social participation *are interpersonal relations* (social networks, friendships, social activities, interactions and relationships) and *social inclusion* (community intergration or participation, community roles, supports and human rights), which are interwoven with respect, dignity, equality and legal rights (Schalock, et al., 2008).

The Social participation factor in QOL have been studied broadly by various scholars and researchers, and in this report, it is discussed in the context of its importance for adults with disabilities and some known common barriers for social participation are pointed out. In 2009, a qualitative research study was conducted by Kristin Björnsdóttir and Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson with a purpose to develop an approach where struggles over the meaning of social participation of people with intellectual disabilities are seen and used as social strategies in the emerging field of self-advocacy for the purpose of improving their social position, with a view to analyze how opportunities for disabled

persons could be increased in order to increase social participation and increase their power in society. Considering that, there are emerging conflicts between the rights of people with disabilities and their personal experiences, findings reflected that, participants talked about lack of opportunities to participate fully in society due to limitations in the available support they could receive and all who participated in the study talked about lack of having the ability to make own decisions concerning their lives (Kristin Björnsdóttir and Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson, 2009).

In 2013, another study was conducted by Guðný Jónsdóttir and Dr. Snæfríður Þ. Egilson entitled, *“We do as well as we can”: the experiences of staff assisting disabled people in community residential homes*“, involving twelve (12) employees rendering support to young people and adults with complex and severe neurological impairments. In this study, employees were considered a key to communication, quality of life and social participation of residents. The results from the study revealed that, services provided at the residence were not in conformity and compliance with basic human rights, including the right to health, needs and expectations of individuals, as services rendered did not mirror the social approach of disability and its policy framework. In this study, lack of knowledge, information, training, support and resources contributed to reduced ability of staff to support social inclusion of service users (Guðný Jónsdóttir og Dr. Snæfríður Þ. Egilson, 2013).

In another study, entitled *“Participation and desire: leisure activities among Canadian adults*“ conducted in 2012, which examined participation of 22,000 people with disabilities in leisure activities. Participants were asked whether they wanted to engage in many different leisure and recreation activities, participate in the transport role activities or if they preferred to participate more in leisure and recreation activities during their spare time. The last given option for participation can be associated to experience of exclusion, and results showed that, people with diverse disabilities used the transport, but chose to stay at home in their spare time (Paez, A., Farber, S., 2012).



Another example is that, the Social Security in the United States of America established a research project in 2003, where a group of professionals were engaged in preparation and planning of projects to encourage young people to participate in society. Results from this study showed that, well planned projects performed by professionals can enable disabled people to increase social inclusion (Mathematica Policy Research. Inc., 2010).

A British study from 2010 shows that despite the positive changes in disability issues, disabled persons still experience discrimination and violence in some areas; and due to financial savings which were directed badly on those who most needed help and support, some homes were closed and in others manpower was reduced. The savings was directed badly on the people who had to move back to their parents or caregivers. In some cases, people had no place to go (Simpson and Price, 2010). The conclusion of this study showed that professionals who work with people with disabilities are ready to explore ways to promote social inclusion, but such efforts easily fail due to financial cuts.

However, with reference to examples from previous studies, social participation needs joint effort by all stakeholders in society if disabled people need to participate in social activities. For example, Iceland as a member of the United Nations, she signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities signed in 2007. The agreement mainly comprises of rights of disabled people to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, sport and educational activities on equal basis like everyone else in society. The convention further states that, people with disabilities should be encouraged to participate in sports and leisure activities with easy access.

In conformity with guidelines of the Association of Social Educators in Iceland, the work of social educators is based on the ideology of equality, respect for self-determination and human dignity. Each person is unique, and everyone is entitled to full participation in society on their own terms (Þroskaþjálfafélag Íslands, e.d., 2015). Hence, educators take part in shaping services, removing barriers and contribute towards improving living conditions of people.

### 2.1.3 Well-being

Well-being, wellness or welfare is a general term for a condition of individuals and groups in relation to their social, economic, psychological, spiritual and medical state. The three (3) main domains in well-being are: *emotional well-being* (safety and security, positive experiences, contentment, self-concept and lack of stress), *physical well-being* (health and nutrition, status, recreation and leisure); and *material well-being* (financial status, employment status, and possessions). Well-being levels vary between individuals, groups and societies, as they can range from high to low, with high level of well-being meaning in some sense that, the group or individual's experiences are positive, while low well-being is often associated with negative happenings (Rath, 2010).

In economics, well-being is used for one or more quantitative measures intended to assess QOL of a group, in terms of the capabilities approach and economics of happiness. In a research study conducted by gallup scientists to explore demands of a life well-lived since the mid 20th century, with participants comprising of leading economists, psychologists and acclaimed scientists, they explored common elements of wellbeing that transcend countries and cultures. The findings showed that, well-being is about a combination of our love for what we do each day, quality of our relationships, the security of our finances, the vibrancy of our physical health and the pride we take in what we have contributed to communities, and most importantly, it is about how the five (5) essential elements of well being interact, i.e., the social, physical, financial, community and career well-being (Rath, 2010).

Therefore, at a fundamental level, with career well-being, we all need something to do and ideally something to look forward to when we wake up everyday. What we spend our time doing each day shapes our identity, whether one is a student, parent, volunteer, retiree or has a more conventional job. Our well-being actually recovers more rapidly from the death of a spouse than it does from a sustained period of unemployment (Rath 2010). The three recommendations for boosting career well-being are daily use of our strengths and being able to identify someone with a shared mission who encourages our growth. Hence, it is important for every human being to spend more time with people that encourage each other's personal growth and opt into more social time with the people and teams we enjoy working around with (Rath, 2010).

### **3 Rights in light of adult education**

This section focuses on rights that relate to provision of adult education for disabled persons. In Iceland, rights of disabled people are guaranteed in the constitution, general laws, treaties, international conventions and declarations such as, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) and the European Convention (Council of Europe, e.d., 2015). In addition, there are specific provisions for certain rights provided in special legislation to strengthen their positions, especially rights to services for people with disabilities. In this section, these rights are discussed while relating them to legal changes and new ideologies in implementation of adult educational services in Iceland. This section also highlights the fact that, laws must evolve in line with increased rights, as stagnation in legislative laws means stagnation in rights, and these rights are as follows:-

#### **3.1 Human Rights and the UN Convention on rights of Persons with disabilities**

Human rights are classified differently by individuals, groups and societies. These rights may also be intended for specific target groups, e.g. the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) covers specific rights for disabled persons. Human rights campaigns are about protecting individuals against any form of abuse, discrimination and inequalities, as disabled persons often deal with societal problems such as isolation, exclusion and are often looked down as a minority group. The UNCRPD is an important international agreement with optional protocols. It was approved by the UN General Assembly on December 13, 2006, was signed and ratified on March 30, 2007. Despite that, many countries have ratified this agreement, Iceland has not done so yet. The aim of the UNCRPD is to promote human rights, personal freedoms, and respect for human dignity of disabled people, and it is important to note that rights of disabled people are widely secured especially in cases where people with disabilities are marginalized and discriminated in various fields (United Nations, e.d., 2015).

Depending how different individuals, groups and societies understand human rights, there are rights as they exist in shared norms of actual human moralities, justified moral norms supported by strong reasons, there are a legal right at the national level where there can be referred to as civil or constitutional and legal rights within international law. The UNCRPD as the first human rights treaty, it reaffirms disabled peoples' human rights and signals major steps in their journey to become equal citizens.

Security is an important aspect for all citizens, with or without disabilities, disabled persons are often dependant on public services provided through legal and administrative rules, and traditions applied in the public sector. For example, adult education is provided by public institutions. Therefore, legal administration is intended to ensure that interpretation and application of the acquis designed to provide the individual with the right that he or she has (Brynhildur G. Florenz, 2004).

The UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, article 5 focuses on equality and non-discrimination. It is stated that, state parties recognize that all persons are equal before and under the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection and equal benefits of the law. In light of the UNCRPD, a broad approach has been taken in considering adult education in the field of intellectual and developmental disabilities, for the range and variability in performance amongst people with such disabilities is very wide.

However, in some societies, these human rights are often violated despite that, adult education providers by law, are required to operate based on policies and practices vested in disability issues, human rights and fundamental rights of persons with disabilities that promote equality in all areas of social inclusion. Iceland, as a nation considers and respects the United Nations basic principles despite that they lack legal obligations. Nonetheless, what is vital is the moral and political statements of nations for their willingness to work towards their goal of equal opportunities for disabled persons.

### **3.2 Right to education**

It is important for institutions of learning and society to realize and accept that everyone should have equal opportunities in education, work and social life, which is in conformity with article nr 24 on education by the United Nations, which states that, “states recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education“. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, state parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and adult education provided in lifelong learning is directed to full development of human potential and sense of dignity, the development of disabled individuals and enabling disabled persons to participate effectively in a free society. Therefore, disabled persons have the right to education at all levels, be it in vocational training centres or adult education, is stipulated in chapter 3 of the Icelandic Disability law nr. 59/1992 and the UN article 24 on education.

In the book, in defence of the the lifeworld, Welton attempts to reconstruct the critical theoretical tradition of adult education as a social learning theory and he anchors that, critical adult education is now deeply threatened by cultural, political and economic developments. He chose to use the Habermasian role theory as a way of trying critical adult education practice concretely to the constraints and possibilities of contemporary social organization. He also believes that, human individualization requires structures that permit human beings to act autonomously with other towards the creation of a just, equal and free society (Welton, 1995).

Therefore, education plays an important role in every person's life as it transforms people to live better lives, promotes social well-being, helps persons to show their best by mind, spirit, it imparts knowledge in whatever aspect and education plays an important role in personal growth. Education is one of the pillars to democracy and it is a basis for cultural and general welfare. Hence, the right to education is an important prerequisite that people get to enjoy other human rights as they are guaranteed (Brynhildur G. Flóvenz, 2004).

### **3.3 Laws and Regulations**

#### **3.3.1 Article 24 of the UN Convention for Persons with Disabilities**

Article 24 of the UNCRPD of 2007 focuses on the right to education, recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to education at all levels, including adult education without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunities. The purpose of this article is to:

*"..... Increase full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity; that disabled people can fully develop their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities and enable persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society" (United Nations, 2007).*

### **3.3.2 Disability Act on the affairs of disabled persons in Iceland**

All services for disabled adults in Iceland are contained in the Disability Act No. 59/1992. The goal of Act nr. 59/1992 is to ensure that, disabled peoples' rights and living standards are comparable to those of other citizens by creating living conditions to live a normal life. The Ministry of Welfare oversees aspects of this law and its implementation. The objectives of this act are to ensure the people with disabilities and other stakeholders have an impact on all policies and decisions made relating to disability issues.

According to article 2 of chapter 1 of Act Nr. 59/1992, disabled persons are entitled to services and support under this act, whether with mental and physical disability, and this refers to psychiatric illnesses, visual impairments, mental retardation or physical disabilities, and this Act specifically states that, people with disabilities are entitled to all services provided by municipalities under general laws in the fields of education, health and social services (Ministry of Welfare, e.d., 2015).

This Act further elaborates that, students with disabilities have same rights in terms of education, but if the disabled person needs extra services due to the nature of their disability beyond those guaranteed under general laws on education, then extra services are added under the disability act.

### **3.4 The UNESCO Salamanca Statement**

The Salamanca statement is an important international policy document about inclusion. This statement was formulated at a UNESCO international conference held in Salamanca, Spain, attended by 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organizations. The Salamanca Statement reaffirms the right to education of every person, as enshrined in the 1948 universal declaration of human rights and it renews the pledge made by the World Conference on Education for all to ensure rights for all regardless of individual differences in 1990. The statement recalls several UN declarations culminating in the 1993 UN standard rules on equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities, urging countries to ensure that education of disabled persons is an integral part of the education system. Hence, the Salamanca declaration ideology presents an important point that, all students have the right to education (UNESCO, e.d., 1994).

In the year 1994, conference participants deliberated on how to meet needs of students with special needs in schools and how education could be strengthened through inclusion, integrated education and adaptive systems or adaptive education. The Salamanca framework for action states that, “*inclusion and participation*” are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights. Whereas, in the field of education, this is reflected in bringing about a genuine equalization of opportunity (Salamanca, 1994). The Salamanca declaration does take into account education and preparation for adulthood to employment and further education.

In article 57 of the Salamanca statement, the declaration provides for adult and continuing education and it reads:

*“.....the planning and operation of the programs on the ground Adult and continuing education should be especially retrospect to disabled people. It should have access to education beyond the others, are also organized special courses to suit the needs and situation of different groups of disabled adults“* (Salamanca, 1994: 29).

In conformity with the Salamanca statement, all adult education activities in Iceland are provided in line with inclusive practices and provision of all educational services are based on equality. The overall goal of inclusive education is for all people to enjoy all teachings in mainstream classes, vocational training centres and adult education centres while receiving the necessary support.

The Salamanca statement can be well utilized with increased involvement of governments, advocacy groups, communities, parent groups, organizations of persons with disabilities, in seeking to improve access to education for the majority of those with special needs who are still unreached. In order to recognize involvement, active participation of governments and non-governmental organizations is required and to fulfil this statement, Fjölmennt lifelong learning centre has been the only provider of adult education for many years to disabled persons.

### **3.5 The Adult Education Act**

This Act was adopted by the Icelandic Parliament, Althingi, on March 22, 2010 and its main scope covers organization of adult education by training and education providers receive accreditation based on the act and public funding allocation for its implementation. The act focuses on competences for the labour market and the main objectives of adult education according to Adult Education act nr. 27/2010 are as follows:-

- ❖ To provide increased opportunities for active participation in society to individuals with short formal education;
- ❖ To provide suitable education and training opportunities to individuals on the labour market with short formal education and enable them to recommence their studies;
- ❖ To provide individuals with a way to increase their vocational skills and enhance their responsibilities in that respect;
- ❖ To create the necessary scope and solutions to meet industry's increased knowledge and competences of employees;
- ❖ To provide adult education to individuals with reduced educational and professional opportunities, taking into account their competences and unequal situation;
- ❖ To support the recognition of the value of education and training that is acquired outside of the formal education; and
- ❖ To increase the general educational level and strengthen the Icelandic education system (Min.of Education and Culture, 2015).

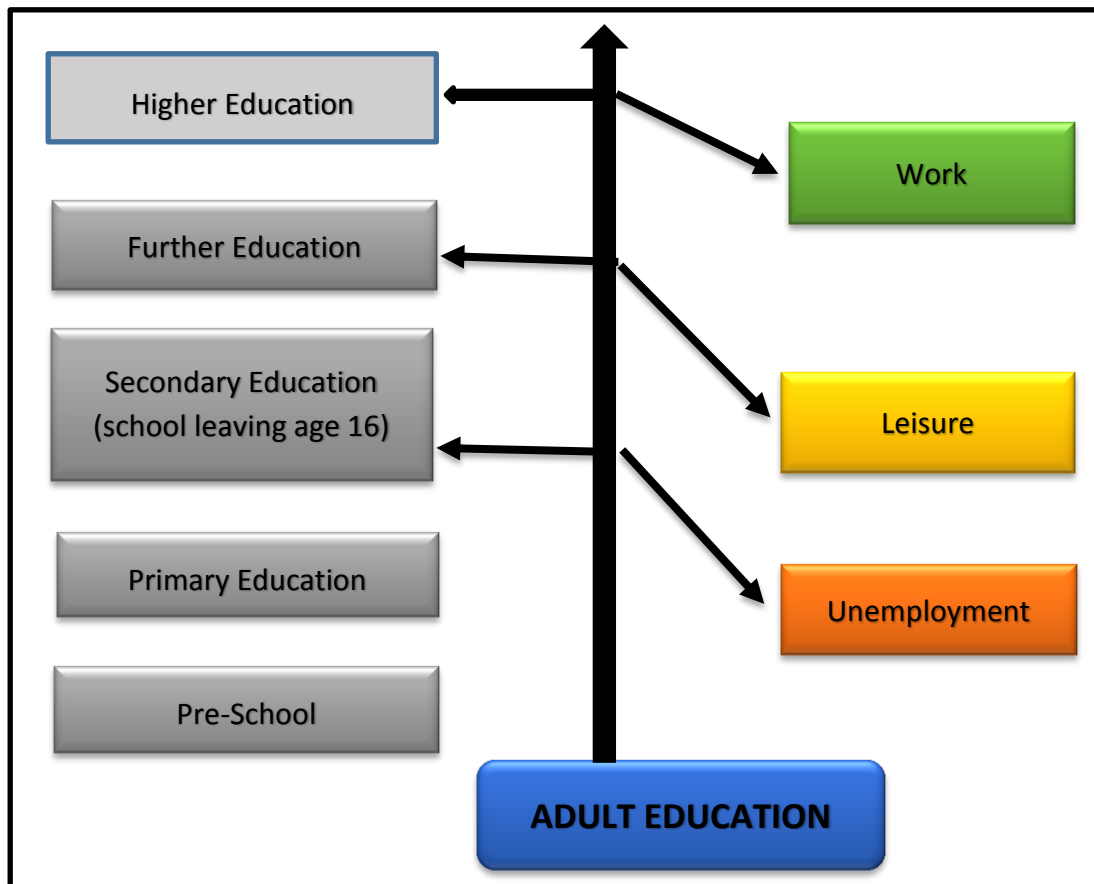
Under this act, all adult education activities are governed through the Ministry of Education and Culture, which entails responsibility for general policy making for adult education in consultation with stakeholders, general administration for implementation of the act, affairs of the Education and Training fund, support for development and innovation in the field of education, supervision and evaluation (Min. of Education and Culture, e.d. 2015). It also categorizes that, adult education provisions must raise achievement of basis, recognized qualifications in adulthood, transition to labour markets, provide liberal education and other subsidized provisions for adults learners.



The target groups are individuals with reduced educational and professional opportunities, with a view to increase employability and opportunities for active participation in society (Min. of Education and Culture., 2015). The Act includes articles of certification, accreditation, quality control, funding, information dissemination and this Act does not apply to education that is based on legislation for upper secondary and higher education.

#### 4. Adult Education

This section focuses on adult education and available adult education opportunities. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for implementing education legislation at all levels including adult education. It regulates the sector, plans improvements to the system and bears final responsibility for all official developments and experiment work in schools, vocational training centres and adult education centres. The Icelandic parliament is politically and legally responsible for the education system, as it determines basic objectives and the administrative framework. All adult education activities are conducted based on Adult Education Act Nr. 27/2010, as it is the most important act concerning adult education and training. As earlier described in this report, adult education is seen variously as a provision, an activity or an ideal, but one which is either placed alongside the progress thread of primary, secondary and tertiary education, or is interwoven with education, work and social activities (Boshier, 2006). Adult education can be related to learning and life experiences are shown in figure 2 below:



*Figure 1: Adult education and its relation to other learning and life experiences (Boshier, 2006)*

The visual representation in Figure 1 shows that, adult education as a separate provision or activity which is available alongside whatever other education individuals maybe involved in or, for example at the same time as working, being unemployed or enjoying social activities (Boshier, 2006).

#### **4.1. Options available and key adult education providers**

It is vital to be well informed about adult education options available for disabled people, key providers of adult education and how society can make use of different knowledge of professionals in adult educational settings who provide education to people with disabilities. This section discusses in detail general activities of the two different forms of adult education in Iceland, provided by Fjölmennt Lifelong Learning Centre and the University of Iceland, School of Education, which offers a vocational diploma to students with intellectual disabilities. Other institutions that collaborate or work with Fjölmennt in the provision of adult education will also be discussed. The main objectives, course offered and how training is organized are also provided, citing examples of what is available in relation to adult education for disabled persons.

However, just like everyone else in society, upon completion of elementary and secondary education, students with disabilities also transition from one program to another, by either enrolling for the Diploma course for persons with disabilities at either the university of Iceland, Fjölmennt Lifelong learning centre or at other partner institutions that collaborate with Fjölmennt. The two centres thrive to offer adult education while at the same time implementing the inclusion policy in practice (Ministry of Welfare, e.d., 2015). The institutions offering adult education are as follows:

##### **4.1.1. Fjölmennt lifelong learning centre**

Fjölmennt, a continuing education and knowledge center (Símenntunar- og Þekkingarmiðstöð is a privately owned learning institution. It was founded on August 1, 2002 by the Organization of Disabled people in Iceland (Öryrkjabandalags Íslands) and the National Association of Intellectual Disabilities (Landsamtaka Þroskahjálþ). Fjölmennt was governed by the state upto 1980, but later became an independent organization in 2002. The institution operates and functions by complying to act 33/1999 of privately owned organizations that conduct business operations.

Fjölmennt took over all adult education operations for disabled persons that were previously operated by the state and its management reported directly to the Ministry of Education. Fjölmennt is centre for lifelong learning, provides education services to people aged 20 years and older who are not able to apply for rehabilitation and lifelong learning in other education institutions. The institution offers diverse lifelong learning with a view to enhance quality of life and general life skills. Students have opportunities to apply for the limited number of educational courses offered by Fjölmennt, and other continuing education centers that have partnership agreements with Fjölmennt (Helga Gísladóttir, 2014).

The centre's educational policy aims to provide people with disabilities options to increase participation in their lives, be able to work in the community on equal basis like other citizens and this policy is enforced through diverse and holistic services which are offered in form of training, consulting and social activities. The main role of Fjölmennt is to offer diverse education and advice with a view to enhance quality of life and general skills (Fjölmennt, e.d., 2015). All activities are centred around the education of disabled persons through provision of advice and support considered comparable to that taken for granted and essential to people in general; and all activities are organized such that, there are in close relationship and cooperation with others activities at the level of adult education.

Fjölmennt also offers a range of continuing education in form of courses after formal education in the school system, and all activities are conducted in line with international agreements, addressing the education and training of disabled people such as, the UN Convention of 2007 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Salamanca Declaration, in particular articles 56 and 57, and article 2 of the Act on Disability no. 59/1992. Fjölmennt puts emphasis on encouraging and facilitating participation of disabled persons in lifelong learning activities with other able-bodied persons as much as possible; advise individuals and educational institutions or facilitators of adult education for disabled persons; cooperates and supports other centres offering adult education, and it offers self-empowerment courses to individuals who need higher levels of specialization in education, etc (Fjölmennt, e.d., 2015).

Fjölmennt fully recognizes the Salamanca statement, whose framework states that, “The guiding principle that forms this framework is that, schools should accommodate all children, youths and adults regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic capabilities or other conditions. This must include disabled and gifted children, working children, street children, children from nomadic populations or other marginalized/disadvantages areas or groups. Therefore, the center strives to provide service users with personalized, comprehensive and flexible services, based on strategic partnerships with individuals according to their best known attitudes, needs and interests. It is stated on Fjölmennt’s website that, efforts are often made to organize services that will be useful in strengthening user relations with peoples’ immediate environment and daily life, that is, in both leisure and work. (Fjölmennt, e.d., 2015). Hence, all objectives, challenges, practices and service structures are organized in a manner that they strengthen the users’ connection with their environments.

### ❖ **Training at Fjölmennt**

There are various courses offered at Fjölmennt, such as sports, swimming, dancing and development courses. Projects, such as those aired on television were initiated by Proskahjálþ and are often expedited in collaboration with the Icelandic Film School (Kvikmyndaskóli Íslands). The center provides education to individuals with severe communication difficulties and various other serious disabilities. For these students, teaching is based on communication, interaction, self-determination and potential to influence what is going in the present or current situation. Fjölmennt creates opportunities for student participation on individual basis and the opportunities for people with severe disabilities lead to empowerment. Empowerment is interwoven in all training as this influences what goes on and controls the current, and participation is about interaction on personal terms. Studentss and teachers meet each other on equal basis, as persons that make a difference in what the group does, and to experience personal or individual values in communication or relationships with others; and self-determination is about having options to choose (Anna Soffía Óskarsdóttir, 2012).

For students with communication difficults, learning is about the processes used together with the student, positive strengths of communication and how the student interacts with others, the methods used to communicate with others, experiences and

feelings related to the subjects, in this case music, and the experiences, skills or knowledge related to the subject. Therefore, this is how it is not possible to see how studies go for each and every student, but appreciation, pleasure signal and other emotional expressions equivalent to other factors can be measured. In studies of people with severe communication difficulties or multiple disabilities, it is necessary to define what is new knowledge or skills and students' academic performance. Hence, the reflections of adult learners with severe disabilities and their study and attempt to define what is in learning. Empowerment and quality of life, multiple intelligence, social and cultural impact of identity are among the new concepts that are important in learning. Attitudes, social status, the impact of previous experiences, reflective attitudes, changes and emotional awareness are among key factors contributing to new definitions of learning (Anna Sóffía Óskarsdóttir, 2012).

Fjölmennt collaborates with other organizations and disability associations like Örykjabandalag Íslands, Þroskahjálp, Greiningar- og rágjafarstöð ríkisins, sjalfbjörg, Ás Styrkatafélag, Tölvumiðstöð fatlaðra, Félag áhugfólks um Downs heilkenni, Sjónstöð Íslands, Einhverfusamtökin, Blindrafélag, Íþróttasamband fatlaða and other international organizations like Vikom Videnscenter in Denmark, Torshov Kompetansesenter in Norway, etc, that are interested in the education of disabled persons (Helga Gísladóttir, 2014).

In recent years, individuals with disabilities have been able to extend their applications for courses to other lifelong learning centers and educators with support from Fjölmennt. Fjölmennt has subsidized courses for study groups, by offering courses through other providers of adult education. Fjölmennt has bilateral agreements with other educational and adult education centres in Reykjavik, Akureyri and Selfoss, etc, hence during spring 2010, students from Fjölmennt started attending courses in other education institutions in the capital area and these institutions are: Mimir Lifelong learning Centre, Sýni Cooking School, Gunnars Waage Drumming School, the Icelandic Chess Federation, Námsflokkar Reykjavíkur, School of Education, University of Iceland, Reykjavik Visual Art Academy, Mjódd diving school, Ísoft Knowledge and Computer school, Iceland Guitar School, Framvegis miðstöð um símenntun í Reykjavík, Heimilisiðnaðarskólinn í Reykjavík and Miðstöð símenntunar – Námsflokkar Hafnarfjarðar. All the above mentioned learning centres are located in the capital area and surrounding neighbourhoods.

Fjölment signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Iceland, School of Education to render additional support to adults with intellectual disabilities in the vocational diploma programme. Fjölmennt lifelong learning and knowledge centre has continued to work for many years through collaboration, knowledge sharing, social networks while promoting gender equality. Besides Fjölmennt's collaboration with centres in Reykjavík, like Mímir, the institution also signed an agreement with SÍMEY Lifelong learning centre in the Akureyri region and the North East of Iceland. Fjölmennt also collaborates with Símeý in Akureyri and Communication courses for late parents on raising children are conducted in cooperation with the University of Iceland, studies in disability, lifestyle of children and young people (Fjölmennt e.d., 2015).

#### **4.1.2. Mímir Lifelong learning Centre**

Mímir is a private institution owned by the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ) and was founded in 2003. The centre offers courses in the field of adult education, lifelong learning and training is conducted in three different areas, with focus on multiculturalism and leisure; learning for employment, educational purposes and career programmes. The main purpose of Mímir lifelong learning is to provide various types of courses to adults, develop educational opportunities and to encourage people in the labour market to practice continuous education. The centre targets individuals who have not completed upper secondary level of education, immigrants and disabled individuals, with an objective to enable individuals from the target groups to obtain an education and improve their position in the labour market. The centre also offers diverse language courses and orientation programmes to immigrants (Mímir e.d., 2015).

The course curricula at Mímir is designed and developed by the Education and Training Services Centre (ETSC), career counselling and educational guidance. The ETSC was established in 2002 by the Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ) and the Confederation of Icelandic Employers (SA) and since 2010, ETSC had been owned by the Federation of State and Municipal Employees, the Association of Local Authorities in Iceland and Ministry of Finance. The role of ETSC is to collaborative with founding parties for adult education and vocational training in cooperation with other educational bodies operating under the auspices of member associations; and operations are in accordance with articles of association and agreements with the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Career guidance offered at Mímir includes the possibility to get validation, analyzation of interests, assistance and organization of job searching, guidance to be able to deal with barriers to learning and assistance to students to make curriculum vitae (Mímir, e.d., 2015).

Self-empowerment courses for disabled persons are also offered at Mímir on behalf of Fjölmennt lifelong learning and knowledge centre. Many different courses are offered on behalf and in collaboration with Fjölmennt in three locations in Iceland, which are, in Akureyri, Reykjavik and Selfoss. The empowerment courses are mainly tailor made for individuals with intellectual disabilities and Fjölmennt does support disabled adults to study various things. Empowerment courses at Mímir place emphasis on both disabled and non-disabled people as they are taught together in the same learning environment, which gives both disabled and non-disabled students an opportunity to study and learn with others. Since, disabled people are often socially seperated, Mímir does its best to avoid this, as there is so much interaction between students and teachers.

The aim of this self-empowerment course is to increase self-knowledge for different students, as the course focuses on how to strengthen individual identity, promotion of self-confidence, and this further helps participants to gain a clearer sense of their abilities and opportunities, and participants learn to perceive, understand and express their feelings and opinions. Students are often brought together in dialogue and conversations with others in in small groups or pairs which is vital towards emotional and artistic expression.

The centre derives its income from service contracts, government grants and student course fees. Additionally, the centre frequently applies for grants from the Education and Training Fund which allocates funds for innovation and development projects in the field of adult education (Mímir, e.d.,2015).



#### **4.1.3. SÍMEY in Akureyri**

SÍMEY (Símenntunarmiðstöð Eyjafjarðar) is a lifelong learning centre and umbrella organization promoting adult education and lifelong learning in the Akureyri region and the North East of Iceland. SÍMEY a nonprofit organization, established in 2000 by ten (10) different organizations in Akureyri, Sauðarkróki, Dálvik, Egilsstaðir, etc.

The main aim of SÍMEY is to increase the level of education in the region, is to foster cooperation between industry and schools, and thus strengthening the competitiveness of enterprises and institutions in the North and East of Iceland. The centre contributes alot to society in terms of offering education serves to different individuals in the North and East through dissemination of practical knowledge at all levels. Símeý works in partnership with many other lifelong learning centres, within and outside traditional education as the centre puts emphasis on communication, information processing and dissemination, which creates possibilities of more effective and efficient development of education (Símeý, e.d., 2015).

The centre offers different types of courses, such as general courses, tailored courses which are developed in cooperation with the clients so that the course contents are in accordance with client needs. Some of the courses are offered in collaboration with other schools and homes for disabled persons. Símeý offers adult education to disabled and non-disabled individuals in many different education and home settings in Akureyri.

However, since SÍMEY collaborates with Fjölmennt, most of the courses offered to adults with disabilities are same as those offered by Fjölmennt, e.g., Ipad courses, self-empowerment, cooking, music, etc. (Símeý, e.d., 2015).

#### **4.1.4. Símmenntunarmiðstöðinar Vesturlandi**

Símmenntunarmiðstöðinar Vesturlandi is one of the nine lifelong learning centres located in the rural areas of Iceland. It is a private owned foundation and was established on February 19, 1999. It is a Lifelong learning centre and operates under the Ministry of Education and Culture, as it receives an annual grant to cover part of the labour and operation of schools. The lifelong learning services are conducted in form of distance learning. The organization was founded through collaboration of municipalities in Borgarfjörður, Akranes and Hvalfjörður, Grundfjörður, Reykólar-Dalur, Snællsbær and Stykkishólmur.

The main objectives and goals of adult education activities in the West is to promote and strengthen the Icelandic economy and community through education and lifelong learning based on the needs of businesses and individuals, especially residents of residing in the West. The role of lifelong learning is to increase knowledge and promote enhanced living conditions in the West of Iceland by analyzing and responding to educational needs and encouraging learning in cooperation with industry and local inhabitants. Learning centres in the West collaborate in the development and dissemination of knowledge in the area of adult education. However, adult learning in the West connects those working to transfer acquisition of knowledge to adults in the region, that is both non-disabled and disabled persons. Various adult education courses, as well as career advice and training needs are catered for (Símmentunarmiðstöðinar Vesturlandi, e.d., 2015)

#### **4.1.5. University of Iceland – Vocational Diploma for Students with Intellectual disabilities**

The vocational diploma in inclusive settings for students with intellectual disabilities is a program offered by the School of Education at University of Iceland. All academic activities relating to this diploma are conducted by the Department of Social Education, with emphasis put on individualized learning of vocational courses that are offered in a full-time study for two (2) years. In this study, students receive diverse academic support throughout their studies. The program is organized in accordance and conformity with international policy and interest groups for people with intellectual disabilities, with interest in human rights stipulated by the United Nations and University of Iceland. This means that, all disabled persons have the right to education at all educational levels, i.e., in college, vocational centre, adult education centre or university.

The study program was launched in 2007 as a joint project between the University of Iceland, Þroskahjálp and Fjölmennt Lifelong Learning Centre. The admission criteria or requirements in order for students to be enrolled for this program include completion of four (4) years of secondary education for people with disabilities and individual interest to act on grounds that the program is based upon and covers. Personal interviews are conducted every two years with prospective students, who are asked questions relating to their interests, aspirations, work experience and goals. There is high demand for this program, but so far various groups have completed their studies since its inception in 2007.

For example, in 2013, forty (40) students applied to the program, but only fourteen (14) were selected (Jóhanna Margrét Eiríksdóttir, 2014).

This is an undergraduate program, equivalent to sixty (60) ECTs, comprised of two basic courses as well as other courses that students choose in consultation with the program coordinator. The program itself is done in collaboration with mentors, who are also students within the department of social education that assist students with disabilities with writing of projects, writing lecture notes and involvement in class discussions, as well as participation in school social activities. The main purpose of the program is to offer people with intellectual disabilities opportunities to educate themselves, so that they can have possibilities to participate fully in society. Upon completion of the diploma, this assists to increase their chances of being employable after they graduate. Therefore, this opens a lot of opportunities in the future for these students with disabilities. During the study tenure, students are often prepared for specific jobs, offered in preschools, leisure centers, libraries and other places where disabled people can work. In this study program, emphasis is placed on enabling students to gain economic knowledge, develop skills and competencies in learning environments while assessing their positions in order to promote social skills and enhance full participation in society. However, in a qualitative study conducted by Guðrún V. Stefánsdóttir and Kristín Björnsdóttir, where research was conducted between 2009 and 2013, they state that, 39 students with intellectual disabilities have so far graduated from the studies at University of Iceland and 14 lecturers have taught in the inclusive college courses. The findings further suggest that, inclusive education initiative is an important part of improving access of disabled people both to education and society. The courses are inclusive, as there are offered to both disabled and non-disabled students at the School of Education studying at the undergraduate level. The graduated students described increased social participation, knowledge and self-esteem. The lecturers described the inclusive courses as being positive for non-disabled and disabled students. The employment outcomes for graduated students have in general been positive (Guðrún V. Stefánsdóttir and Kristín Björnsdóttir, 2015).

In conformity with Article 24, on Education, which says, “States recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. The University of Iceland offers this Vocational Diploma in inclusive settings for students with intellectual disabilities and students are most of the time involved in teamwork, team research, group work, socialize with peers, go

on study tours and most of them are active members of the student association TUMI popularly known as, “*Félag stúdenta í tómstunda- og félagsmálafræði, þroskaþjálfarafræði og diplómanámi*” (Jóhanna Margrét Eiríksdóttir, 2014).

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, I wish to state that, adult education opportunities are readily available for disabled persons all around the country. Adult education services are often disseminated in continuing education centres, business houses, organizations and many stakeholders participate in adult education activities. I also wish to state that due to increasingly knowledge-based societies with ageing populations and competitive global economies, it is important for older disabled adults to continue learning, in order to keep up and adapt to ongoing changes so that there are not excluded from society.

In line with that aim to discuss adult education in this paper, with an intention to shed light on available adult education opportunities for disabled persons, it has been reflected in this report that, Fjölmennt and University of Iceland are key providers of adult education, as there education activities are inclusive. Through Fjölmennt's collaboration with other centres in Akureyri, West Iceland and around the capital area, many disabled students are trained to acquire new skills, which raise employment competences and this is often executed within the framework of lifelong learning programs and post-secondary education, with a goal to provide integrated support, tailored for most disadvantaged groups or those unemployed in the context of global economic crisis. When adults with disabilities develop new skills or acquire new competences, they become motivated as their job searching competences improve and this promotes reintegration of those unemployed into the labour market. Education is important to people of all ages, as it holds an array of benefits for them and society, as it promotes full economic and societal participation, and this enables individuals to be better informed and become more active citizens. Education contributes to their personal well-being, fulfilment, supports creativity and innovation, and it increases their efficiency as workers.

Although learning is intrinsic, individuals are engaged in learning throughout their lives. The age of a person has a clear impact on one's propensity to take up or have access to available opportunities for training and learning. Whereas, participation rates do decline in relation to a person's age and level of initial education. This is an important challenge for policy makers, as training and educational efforts need to reach people of all ages. In general, the benefits of education include enhanced employability, reduced expenditure for governments in unemployment benefits, welfare or social payments, early retirement pensions, higher tax revenues, increased social returns, e.g. in terms of civic participation

and community involvement, and better health with a subsequent reduction in health care costs. For example, the concept of lifelong learning in relation to courses offered at Fjölmennt, stresses that learning and education are related to life as a whole, not just to work and that, learning throughout life is a continuum that should return from cradle to grave. This learning does not need to be linked to attainment of formal qualifications. Instead User-friendly technologies in learning can assist older people to carry out daily activities such as those that involve, living independently, managing personal assets, monitoring individual health, creating and maintain social networks, facilitating access to goods and services, participating in work or voluntary activities and better ensuring their safety.

## **6. Summary and reflection in light of theory**

To summarize, as has been stated in this paper, the aim of this project was to shed light on available adult education opportunities for disabled people in Iceland. Interviews were conducted with professionals working in school settings to get their views and experiences relating to adult education services for disabled people. These professionals availed me with information I needed and they gave me a clear picture of the current adult education situation. While bearing the purpose of the study in mind, I learnt that there are many adult education opportunities available, but combined efforts of professionals and other stakeholders in disability and adult education are needed to collaborate on encouraging participation of disabled persons in adult education activities. Full participation and widening of democracy in respect of a minority that are oppressed in social systems can be difficult due to the various barriers and hindrances they encounter. For example, people who are intellectually disabled may fall in this category elsewhere, though this has changed in Iceland, and the marginal status of intellectually disabled persons has been described by scholars like Wolfensberger as powerlessness attributed to a combination of impairments causing difficulties in learning, dealing with languages, working with abstract concepts, and disadvantages imposed by societies, which are both structural and ideological. Historically and intellectually disabled people have been seen as childish, threatening and have been segregated from others and often congregated together, and have been poorly supported socially.

I also learnt that professionals in the institutions discussed in this report somehow collaborate well with others to enable capacity for adult learning through professional learning communities and constant collaboration with professionals in other institutions to improve teaching skills and performance of disabled students. These professionals, most of them with different specializations provide diverse and unique strategies that facilitate collaboration with others in order to promote trust and mutual support to develop learning communities. For example, developing effective learning communities is part of the management team at Fjölmennt as professionals at Fjölmennt work in group settings. This is important when working with youths and adults who have diverse challenging behaviours, as teachers and social educators at Fjölmennt can rely on their colleagues.

When work involves aims and goals for youths and adults' development, it is important to reflect with colleagues. However, considering that most societies assume disabled people cannot or have no desire to go to school like able bodied persons, I learnt that education in general, and especially post secondary education is important in their lives as it is a predictor of employment in desired occupations, opens opportunities for career development, hence quality of life. This can be significant for individuals with sensory and physical disabilities with limited employment opportunities that need fewer physical abilities and skills. Hence, accessibility to education is important for individuals with disabilities. Besides employment, attendance to education activities promotes self-esteem, self-confidence as well as social development and full in society.

In my view, upon examining options available in adult education, I noted that there are positive aspects for my social pedagogic practice which provides holistic approaches in working with youths and adults, while focusing on the individual and support their overall development. The inclusive education in institutions discussed in this paper reflected emphasis on relationship building of adult students with their peers and with professionals and this contributes towards students' development of practical skills, emotional health and well-being. Professionals promote disabled adults' rights, participation and empowerment and this reflects the importance of team working and valuing contributions of other stakeholders which includes families, communities and other professionals.



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