Post-secondary students with disabilities and digital learning

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What do we know about their lived experiences?
17% of graduating students who self-identify as having a disability, according to Canadian University Consortium Survey, 2015.
Digital technologies = new opportunities

Educational and assistive technologies
Equal access to postsecondary students with disabilities

It’s the law!
Despite these trends, legal obligations and opportunities, students with disabilities still face barriers, and their overall participation and attainment rates lag behind those of their peers without disabilities.
“The virtual and digital world has replaced the physical world as the locus for discrimination and barriers.”

L. J. Davis, University of Illinois at Chicago

Students with disabilities and digital learning

What we know...

Skilfull and agile users of technologies

Inaccessible materials and spaces, incompatible technologies are barriers

Need to learn at the beginning about assistive technologies

Have less time to study because of disability-related issue

Wald et al., 2009
Students with disabilities and digital learning

What we know...

Facilitators:

Flexibility of online learning

Ability to set own pace

More time to process information

No need to commute

Students with learning disabilities & ADHD

What we know is that the asynchronous learning environment improved their learning experience in six areas:

1. Clarity
2. Organization
3. Asynchronous access
4. Convenience
5. Achievement
6. Disability coping mechanisms

Graves, Asunda, Plant, & Goad, 2011
Students’ voices are absent from discussions on educational issues that affect them.

Paucity of literature on online educational experiences of students with and without disabilities.

Existing evidence shows that their experiences do not differ greatly.

Lichtman, 2011; Wald et al., 2009
What do we know about lived experience of digital learning for students with disabilities?
Six themes

Heindel (2014)

Students with disabilities...

1. Liked flexibility of schedule
2. Had privacy concerns
3. Perceived a lack of interaction in online classes
4. Felt that instructors lack understanding of students with disabilities
5. Students with Disabilities Services did not fully inform them about accommodation options
6. Liked that online context afforded them more time to process information to gain understanding
Heindel (2014) concluded that more research is needed that would bring the individual perspectives of students with disabilities to the issue of how to improve online learning.
How does their experience differ from lived experiences of students with disabilities who study face to face?
Barriers for students with learning disabilities (Denhart, 2008)

1. Being misunderstood by faculty
2. Being reluctant to request accommodation for fear of invoking stigma
3. Having to work considerably longer hours than their non-disabled peers
The study suggested that barriers could be removed by improving the understanding of faculty about learning disability, engaging the assistance of the college learning disability specialists, and increasing the empowerment of students with learning disabilities.
How is it different from lived experiences of students without disabilities?
Essence of the experience
Bambara, Harbour, Davies, & Athey (2009)

Delicate engagement has
for structural themes:

Delicate engagement:
1. isolation
2. academic challenge
3. ownership
4. acquiescence
Bambara et al. (2009) recommended to remove barriers by providing orientation for students about course expectations, level of effort, time, and focus; examining institutional policies and practices to ensure that student support and academic support services are available; and providing mentoring and required participation of instructors in professional development on best practices in online education.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students with disabilities in f2f environment</th>
<th>Students with disabilities in digital environment</th>
<th>Students without disabilities in digital environment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working longer hours than non-disabled peers</td>
<td>Lack of interaction</td>
<td>Isolation</td>
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<td>Misunderstood by faculty</td>
<td>Lack of understanding of SWD by faculty</td>
<td>Academic challenge</td>
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<td>Reluctant to request accommodation (stigma)</td>
<td>Privacy concerns</td>
<td>Ownership</td>
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<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>Acquiescence</td>
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<td>Having more time to process information</td>
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<td>SWD Services did not provide all info about accommodation</td>
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Challenges that students with disabilities face in digital learning environments are not necessarily linked to technology and accessibility only, two most common areas of research and intervention. A paradigm shift is required that is both theoretical and pedagogical to move the locus of the problem from a student with a disability to the learning environment with attitudinal, physical, technological and systemic barriers. More qualitative research on students’ experiences is needed to fully understand the complexity of studying online with a disability.

**Conclusion**
Where is @STU_VOICE?
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References
Thank you.

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