STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN ONLINE HIGHER EDUCATION: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

Dr. Susan Moisey and Djenana Jalovcic
Athabasca University
Education Innovation and Research Symposium
June 11-13, 2015
Edmonton, Canada
Overview

- Issue
- Purpose of the literature review
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusions

http://pixabay.com/en/keyboard-enter-key-enter-key-notebook-453795/
Issue

- Growing number of students with disabilities at the institutions of higher education due to
  - Enforcement of anti-discrimination and accessibility legislation
  - Diversification of the student population
  - Increase in online courses and programs with greater availability and access

- Studying online for post-secondary students with disabilities is an understudied area
  - Descriptive studies on the technology and types of support services
  - Little research on the actual experiences of students with disabilities in online courses
A literature review was conducted to critically analyze the available empirical articles that reported original research on students with disabilities in online higher education.
Methodology: Guiding Questions

- What is the main focus of empirical studies of students with disabilities in online higher education?
- What methods are used to investigate the phenomenon?
- What theories are used to provide a conceptual framework for studies involving online learners with disabilities?
Systematic Literature Search

- Search for original research articles in English, published in peer reviewed journals from 2004-2014
- Key words: (students with disabilities or disabled students and e-learning or online learning, and higher education, or post-secondary education)
- Over 1500 articles identified for abstract review
- Key words: (students with disabilities or disabled students and e-learning or online learning, and higher education, or post-secondary education)
- Over 1500 articles identified for abstract review
- Inclusion criteria:
  1. an empirical study;
  2. clear methodology;
  3. informs theory or practice
- 25 articles identified
- 123 articles identified for full review
- Search for omissions: Review of Table of Contents in 11 journals published from 2004-2014
- Two additional articles that met criteria identified.
- 27 articles included
Findings

- A small number of empirical articles published in a wide range of journals
- No theoretical or conceptual framework
- Theories of learning and disability absent
- Quantitative methods predominantly used
- The more supportive the online learning environment, the greater the benefits for students with disabilities
Findings

- Primary focus of studies:
  - Technologies in online learning environments
  - Accessibility
  - Needs for technologies and associated support services and their relationship to academic achievement

http://www.msktc.org/infoneeds/reach-your-audience/Creating-User-Friendly-Web-Sites/Accessibility
Conclusions

- The online environment offers new opportunities for students with disabilities, if barriers are minimized and/or removed.
- Improving accessibility and support for students with disabilities improves their academic achievement.

http://www.hastac.org/forums/disability-moving-beyond-access-academy/barrier-free
Conclusions

- Diversity of research makes it difficult to establish an evidence base in this field
- Meeting the diverse needs of students with disabilities is complex and multifaceted, requiring the engagement of multiple stakeholders and appropriate training
- Theory is largely absent from reviewed studies
Conclusions

- Quantitative methods dominate research so our current understanding of students’ experiences is based on inferences made from others’ perceptions and student record data.

- The actual voices of students with disabilities are absent from the research on online higher education.
Reviewed Articles


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reviewed Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Acknowledgements
This research was supported by Wayne Perry Ed.D. Student Research Award and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Doctoral Fellowship Program