Purpose: Over one tenth of students in postsecondary education have a documented disability as defined by the Americans with Disability Act. However, faculty and course designers often lack understanding of these students’ experiences, which leads to insufficient accommodations. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of postsecondary students with physical disabilities in online courses.

Methods: The basic qualitative research study was grounded in self-determination theory, which posits three basic needs for self-actualization: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This theory in combination with Universal Design for Learning provided a lens for exploring these experiences. Data collection included interviews with postsecondary students with a physical disability. The data were coded utilizing a combination of in vivo and value codes and organized thematically. Three rounds of coding revealed a number of benefits and barriers, which, when organized thematically, tell a story of how students who have disabilities experience their learning in the online environment.

Results: Major findings showed that students who have disabilities experience barriers in the areas of self-regulation, the minimizing of their disabilities, the pressure to overachieve, specific knowledge of available resources, isolation, and miscommunication. Students who have disabilities experience benefits in the areas of self-regulation, self-pacing, an increasing sense of confidence and pride, stamina, connection to peers, positive discussions, and advocacy for themselves and others.

Conclusion: The research has implications for social change as an evidentiary tool for advocacy when exploring the benefits of taking online courses for SWD, and as an awareness tool for teachers and other stakeholders in online education who wish to adapt to best practices. Teachers should strive to provide educational environments which allow students to interact with and advocate for each other. Teachers should approach students from a position of advocacy. Students who have disabilities can benefit in myriad ways from the availability of online courses.

Title: Experiences of Postsecondary Students With Physical Disabilities With Online Learning

Keywords: Online learning, Students with disabilities and Teaching techniques

Abstract Summary: Presenting original research on the experiences of students with disabilities in the online environment: actionable, applicable suggestions and demonstration of unique, innovative techniques to enhance the academic advancement of this population. Addresses: isolation, advocacy, and adaptation to specific needs. Solutions: apps, teaching techniques, LMS integrations, and free-to-use software.

References:

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