IJEDE International Journal of E-Learning & Distance Education
La Revue internationale de l'apprentissage en ligne et de l'enseignement à distance

ISSN: 2292-8588 **Volume 40, No. 2, 2025**

Exploring Asynchronous Open Learning Programs at a British Columbia University: A Case Study of Ten Students with Disabilities

Warren Haydock and Dr. Manu Sharma

Abstract: Using a critical disability studies theoretical lens, this qualitative study, conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, examines the open learning experiences of ten students with disabilities at a mid-sized university in British Columbia through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The research explored the following question: How, if at all, does online open learning support students with disabilities? Four key themes emerged from participants' accounts: (1) flexibility in open learning was perceived as beneficial; (2) positive interactions with instructors were highly valued; (3) negative interactions with faculty and staff hindered the learning experience; and (4) the independent study model, including online exam invigilation, posed barriers for students with disabilities. This study addresses a gap in the literature by directly centring the lived experiences of students with disabilities—voices that are often underrepresented in research on open learning. The findings reveal the complexity of addressing the diverse needs of students with disabilities, which vary according to each individual's unique circumstances and

https://doi.org/10.55667/10.55667/ijede.2024.v40.i2.1367

intersecting identities. Furthermore, the study underscores the need for educators to critically examine and challenge ableist structures that persist in post-secondary education. While participants identified certain benefits of open learning, they also reported encountering significant and inequitable barriers that affected their academic success. These experiences highlight the importance of designing more inclusive open learning environments and call for greater attention from educators and course designers to the realities faced by students with disabilities.

Keywords: students with learning disabilities, open learning, higher education, equitable access, critical disability studies, student experience.

Explorer les programmes d'apprentissage ouvert asynchrones dans une université de la Colombie-Britannique : une étude de cas auprès de dix étudiants en situation de handicap

Résumé :. En adoptant un cadre théorique issu des études critiques du handicap, cette étude qualitative, menée avant la pandémie de COVID-19, examine les expériences d'apprentissage ouvert et à distance de dix étudiants en situation de handicap inscrits dans une université de taille moyenne en Colombie-Britannique, à partir d'entretiens semi-dirigés individuels. La recherche visait à répondre à la question suivante : dans quelle mesure et de quelle façon l'apprentissage ouvert et en ligne soutient-il les étudiants en situation de handicap ? Quatre thèmes principaux ont émergé des propos des participants : (1) la flexibilité offerte par l'apprentissage ouvert était perçue comme bénéfique ; (2) les interactions positives avec les enseignants étaient fortement valorisées ; (3) les interactions négatives avec les membres du corps professoral et du personnel nuisaient à l'expérience d'apprentissage ; (4) le modèle d'étude autonome, incluant la surveillance des examens en ligne, constituait un obstacle pour les étudiants en situation de handicap. Cette étude comble une lacune dans la littérature en plaçant au centre les expériences vécues par des étudiants en situation de handicap — des voix souvent sous-représentées dans la recherche sur l'apprentissage ouvert. Les résultats révèlent la complexité de la prise en compte des besoins variés de ces étudiants, lesquels diffèrent selon leurs circonstances particulières et leurs identités intersectionnelles. Par ailleurs, l'étude souligne la nécessité, pour les enseignants, d'examiner de façon critique et de remettre en question les structures capacitistes qui persistent dans l'enseignement postsecondaire. Bien que les participants aient identifié certains avantages de l'apprentissage ouvert, ils ont

également fait état d'obstacles importants et inéquitables ayant affecté leur réussite académique. Ces expériences mettent en évidence l'importance de concevoir des environnements d'apprentissage ouvert plus inclusifs et appellent à une plus grande attention de la part des enseignants et des concepteurs de cours aux réalités vécues par les étudiants en situation de handicap.

Mots-clés : étudiants en situation de handicap, apprentissage ouvert, enseignement supérieur, accès équitable, études critiques du handicap, expérience étudiante.

Introduction

Post-secondary institutions, which can be known to be bureaucratic and slow to evolve, may create unpleasant and damaging learning experiences for students who do not fit the *traditional* student mould (Bessant, 2012). One particular group of learners who regularly grapple with these harsh realities are students with disabilities (Bessant, 2012; Borland & James, 1999). In 2015, the United Nations developed a number of global goals, and one was to make establishing quality education for everyone a priority and to "achieve universal access to a quality higher education" including for individuals with disabilities (United Nations Development Programme, 2022).

The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) defines *disability* as, "a functional limitation or restriction of an individual's ability to perform an activity" (National Educational Association of Disabled Students, 2021, para. 2). Disabilities, as outlined by NEADS, can take the form of physical, intellectual, learning, psychiatric, visual, hearing, and neurological.

Based on a 2019 survey, 6.6% of a large sample of Canadian post-secondary students reported having a learning disability (LD) (American College Health Association National College Health Assessment, 2019 as cited by McKenzie & Southey, 2024, p. 294). Many definitions of LD are founded in the medical model of disability, and all acknowledge that an LD is a neurologically-based information-processing disability.

A widely-used Canadian definition of LDs states that they are due to a specific impairment in one or more cognitive processes that "include, but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g., planning and decision-making)" (Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, 2015, par. 2 as cited in McKenzie & Southey, 2024, p. 294).

Thus, LDs are part of the identity of many post-graduate students, and governments have created legal requirements to ensure that the learning experience is not inhibited in any way for this population. In particular to British Columbia, the *Accessible British Columbia Act* was passed on June 17, 2021 (Government of British Columbia, 2021) in addition to the *Accessible Canada Act* passed in 2019 (Government of Canada, 2019); both pieces of legislation create an expectation that post-secondary students with LDs or any disability encounter barrier-free environments (Groulx et al., 2024). Furthermore, under the duty to accommodate:

> *Post-Secondary educational institutions are required to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities in order to offer equitable access to learning opportunities in the academic environment . . . Accommodations must be provided unless the post-secondary institution can prove undue hardship. The bar for undue hardship is very high.* (Academic Community Equity British Columbia, 2020)

Given the legal requirements of supporting students with LDs in post-secondary spaces, we employ a critical disability studies (CDS) theoretical lens. This qualitative study that occurred prior to COVID-19 examines the open learning experiences that ten students with LDs encountered at a mid-sized British Columbia university.

Theoretical Framework

According to Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009), "the growing presence of disabled people in society, in particular their presence in the community following centuries of institutionalisation, has further contributed to an awareness of the responsibilities of educational institutions to disabled citizens" (p. 48). Our research question follows the context of this thought as it speaks to institutional responsibility indirectly, namely, by asking: *How, if at all, does online open learning support students with disabilities*? This invites a critical lens to discover how well open learning education programs support students with LDs. Given the curiosity and investigation of open learning illustrated in the research question, we think a CDS theoretical framework is appropriate. This study zooms in on an understanding of whether the support in open learning spaces is meaningful, equitable, or performative according to the post-secondary students with LDs we interviewed. CDS also allows us to consider if the online learning environment is reproducing or dismantling structural ableism when considering the lived experiences of the participants in this study. Lastly, this theoretical

framework, provides an opportunity for all of us to hear and reflect upon the voices and agency of disabled students by centring them at the core of data collection and this study. In other words, CDS helps shift the focus from disability being a personal limitation to acknowledging how educational structures support our marginalized disabled learners in broader systems of power and exclusion like higher-education spaces.

According to Bundon et al. (2018), "working from a CDS approach means being attentive to the processes and structures that contribute to the ongoing marginalization and exclusion of disabled people from everyday life" (p. 297). To demonstrate possible exclusion of disabled people in some ways from programming in open learning spaces for post-secondary students with LDs and other registered disabilities, we have shared in this study direct quotes from the participants so that our readers can reflect upon and interpret the data directly for their own understandings. As Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) remind us, as foundational scholars in CDS, "[w]hat unites CDS theorists is an agreement that disabled people are undervalued and discriminated against and this cannot be changed simply through liberal or neo-liberal legislation and policy" (p. 65). Thus, we must learn directly from the experiences of students with LDs and other registered disabilities. However, before exploring the study findings, it is important to have an understanding of open learning approaches.

Open Learning Approaches

Research conducted by Li and Carroll (2017) uncovered that students with disabilities are more likely to drop out of higher education, in comparison to students without disabilities, because of increased stress and challenges with maintaining a healthy lifestyle. This research by Li and Carroll (2017) points to the need for universities to provide supportive and flexible learning environments that are equipped to allow this group of students every opportunity to reach their full academic potential (Pyle & Wexler, 2012). While traditional academic settings may not be equipped to fully support students with disabilities, alternative teaching methods currently exist that provide students with flexible learning environments, which has been documented as a notable advantage for this group of learners (Kotera et al., 2019).

Many types of flexible learning environments currently exist, but one mode that is becoming more prevalent is open learning. Open learning, similar to open education, utilizes a variety of methods and tools to provide a learning experience that is flexible and designed to meet students' needs (Enríquez-Vázquez & Hernández-Gutiérrez, 2023). One way to achieve a flexible learning environment is to implement the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Establishing flexibility within learning environments helps students incorporate learning into their unique and complex lives (Butcher & Rose-Adams, 2015). Over the decades, the term *open learning* has lacked a consistent

definition across the field of education. Typically, open learning is used to only describe teaching activities and objects (such as open educational resources), and not to describe both activities and pedagogical practices (Nascimbeni & Burgos, 2016). In light of this, moving forward, we define open learning as "academic studies where students learn online, or at a distance, where courses are designed to incorporate Universal Design for Learning principles aimed at providing students with flexible learning approaches." We contend that the above definition shares roots with Caliskan's (2012) definition of open learning, and thus we use this understanding of open learning.

In this qualitative study, we examine the experiences of students with LDs and other registered disabilities who are pursuing academic studies where they learn online or at a distance, and where courses are *often* designed to incorporate UDL principles aimed at providing students with a flexible learning environment. The three principles of UDL are multiple means of action and expression, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of engagement (Houston, 2018). This will be explained in greater detail later in this article.

Author #1's Positionality

The first author of this study has lived experiences as a student with an LD. This prompted his curiosity to explore the experiences of other students with disabilities within open learning modalities. He acknowledges that he

embodies an insider's positionality in this research both as a previous student from the university he interviewed participants from, and as an individual with a disability. He is aware of the unique lived experiences he has in relation to the research and has been mindful of the inherent bias. Despite his lived experiences, he has been careful to ensure the research presented is based on direct findings from participants' interviews. He has accomplished this by using direct quotes from participants and by using Author #2 as a critical colleague to analyze the findings.

Author #2's Positionality

The second author of this study is a faculty member in a university located in Western Canada. She is an experienced scholar in social justice pedagogy and brings her critical perspective lens to this article. As a critical colleague, she has supported the first author in bringing forth the pressing inequities faced by students with LDs and other registered disabilities in open learning environments.

Literature Review

The following literature review focuses on thirteen relevant articles published between the years 1997 and 2020 that are relevant and demonstrate insights on the experiences of students with disabilities in courses that use open learning approaches. We originally aimed to gather articles from the past ten

years, but in terms of relevancy, there was a lack of them at the time of this research. Due to this, we expanded our review to include articles from 1997. Our studies are based on the most relevant literature. The literature review has been organized into the three central themes that emerged:

- Positive experiences with open learning approaches;
- Challenging experiences in open learning approaches; and
- Universal Design for Learning to support students with disabilities in open learning.

The articles we reviewed focus mainly on post-secondary institutions across the United States and are predominantly written from the researcher's perspective.

Positive Experiences with Open Learning Approaches

In the literature reviewed, students with disabilities shared that open learning provided them with flexibility and control, which was viewed as a positive by-product of this approach (Graves et al., 2011; Kotera et al., 2019; Terras et al., 2020; Terras et al., 2015). Participants in previous research felt that having unlimited access to course content contributed to enhanced note-taking, while also allowing them to learn the material more quickly and independently, free from time constraints (Graves et al., 2011; Madaus et al., 2012).

The flexibility in open learning approaches also provided students with the ability to self-accommodate their needs and complete assignments, which

positively impacted their lives beyond academia (Kotera et al., 2019; Madaus et al., 2012; Terras et al., 2015; Terras et al., 2020). Participants in the research conducted by Kotera et al. (2019), reported that they appreciated online learning because it helped them fit their academic commitments into their social and work obligations. Flexibility around when participants could choose to study, and the ability to pursue education without geographical restrictions, was reported as an advantage by every participant (Kotera et al., 2019).

From the literature, increased flexibility led to a newfound sense of control, which was a notable advantage for this student population. The result of increased flexibility in the learning environment meant that students with disabilities had the ability to study, "while managing other duties in their lives" (Kotera et al., 2019, p. 175). This was possible due to technological tools such as the internet and being able to study on various devices (Kotera et al., 2019).

Challenging Experiences in Open Learning Approaches

Learning, while utilizing open learning approaches, requires that students take initiative for their own academic success and arrange for necessary accommodations as needed. While many institutions now have services in place to assist students with registered disabilities throughout their studies, the responsibility still falls to the students themselves to actualize their needed accommodations (Terras et al., 2015). Participants from two studies conducted by Terras et al. (2015, 2020) acknowledged that it was their obligation to

understand and communicate their needs to others, illustrating the importance for students to arrive prepared to advocate for themselves. Navigating and managing these responsibilities were a challenge for many students with disabilities because this required knowledge of their individual needs, academic policies, and their ability to effectively communicate their needs when necessary.

Students with disabilities sometimes experience difficulties with these competencies, as this group of learners has been known to struggle with organizational and time management skills, both of which are required to achieve academic success (DaDeppo, 2009). In order to navigate the challenges that can present themselves within open learning, it is imperative for students with disabilities to take ownership of their own educational needs since this responsibility cannot rest solely with any outside party (Hollins & Foley, 2013). This includes being vigilant of individual strengths and weaknesses, and taking ownership of educational choices (Graves et al., 2011).

When it comes to elements of open learning course design, course designers need to be mindful of the range of disabilities students live with because this will affect students' experiences when learning in open learning courses. Whereas courses that contain uncaptioned videos are not accessible for students with hearing impairments, students who rely on screen readers may struggle with content that relies on graphic images without a text-based description (Burgstahler, 2015). In light of the diverse learning needs that exist within classrooms**,** implementing an inclusive learning framework such as UDL,

proactively establishes an environment that is usable for all individuals (Burgstahler, 2015).

Discussion Boards

Virtual discussion boards are a popular learning tool that many professors use to encourage students to reflect on course content and engage with peers. The premise of a discussion board is to have students publicly post reflections and questions about course content and engage with similar posts made by their peers. For some students, this learning tool invoked feelings of fear and anxiety (Catalano, 2014). In research conducted by Lambert and Dryer (2018), "many of the participants reported feeling anxious and/or worried about how they would be perceived by staff and other students if their postings had spelling mistakes or grammatical errors" (p. 399). For some, this fear prevented them from contributing to the online discussions, ultimately negatively impacting their overall self-esteem (Lambert & Dryer, 2018).

Time Invested

An additional challenge that surfaced for this demographic was the amount of time some students were required to invest into their studies in order to overcome their disability (Lambert & Dryer, 2018). This increase in invested time significantly impacted individuals in areas such as the time they had available to spend on family, friends, and leisure activities (Lambert & Dryer, 2018). Connected to this issue were significant financial consequences for some.

Investing more time into studying resulted in one student sharing that they were unable to work, leaving them frustrated and feeling that their quality of life was being negatively impacted (Lambert & Dryer, 2018).

UDL for Learning to Support Students with Disabilities in Open Learning

Relevant literature critiques UDL and concludes that this framework is one possible solution that course designers can utilize to build equitable learning environments for students with disabilities. At its core, UDL is incorporated into pedagogical frameworks to ensure students have access to multiple means of action and expression, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of engagement (Houston, 2018). Multiple means of action and expression focus on the *how* of learning. This can look like offering students multiple ways to navigate and express their mastery of the content through a variety of means such as verbal or written expression. Multiple means of representation address the *what* of learning. In practice, this means offering students multiple ways of accessing content. Some examples include a textbook, recorded lecture, or various learning software. Finally, multiple means of engagement target the *why* of learning. This principle is focused on utilizing multiple ways to maintain a student's interests. This can be through reflection and sharing exercises or even peer collaboration (Houston, 2018). In light of the diverse learning needs that exist within a classroom, incorporating UDL principles and designing a flexible

course layout are proactive ways of supporting the diverse student population that often exists within open learning approaches (Catalano, 2014; Graves et al., 2011; Hollins & Foley, 2013; Radovan & Perdih, 2016). As shown in the relevant literature, this suggests that open learning approaches have the potential to provide a suitable alternative to traditional face-to-face learning for students with disabilities (Fraser & Deane, 1997; Kotera et al., 2019).

While open learning approaches appear to be a promising alternative learning environment, students with disabilities are vocalizing that they are still experiencing challenges with this modality and how it intersects with their disabilities. Further research is required, considering the limited literature available on this subject. Due to a lack of universal language for describing this particular approach, limited literature exists that focuses on the intersection of open learning approaches and students with disabilities. This lack of relevant and reliable research prompted us to conduct this qualitative research study. It's important to note that this study is based on studies prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, between the years 1997 and 2020. Research beyond 2020 has been excluded.

Research Methodology and Methods

To guide this qualitative research, we used the following research question: *How, if at all, does online open learning support students with disabilities*? We explore the experience of ten students studying at a mid-sized

Canadian university in British Columbia who were enrolled in graduate or undergraduate open learning courses. We acknowledge the limitations of a small sample size but find this research provides an important case study to lay the foundation for a study with a larger sample size.

A qualitative method was employed for its ability to understand the narratives that participants shared and develop a detailed understanding around an open learning experience (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Considering the lack of prevalent discourse on this topic at the time of this research, we sought to capture the lived experiences of students studying in open learning by utilizing semi-structured one-on-one interviews for the ten participants. This approach to data collection allowed the participants' lived experiences to be central in the findings where the focus is on the experience of the students, not the resources.

Participants and Recruitment

Ten participants were recruited from the university to take part in this research study. Four of the participants were in undergraduate programs, three were in master's programs, and the remaining three did not disclose which program they were in. This sample size was selected to give space to personal narratives that were used to gather in-depth information which would lead to emergent themes in the research. Participation was open to students who were

enrolled in any type of academic program, but they had to meet the following requirements:

- Enrolment in at least one asynchronous continuous enrolment open learning course within the past year; and
- Being registered with the Accessibility Services department at the university while studying.

This was implemented to ensure the selected participants had recent and relevant lived experiences with open learning courses and that they had a documented disability. Filtering the recruitment process through Accessibility Services could have introduced sample bias by missing students who did not use Accessibility Services although they identify as having a disability. All students who might utilize disability services do not and this in itself is a reason that the issue is worth exploring in future research.

Homogenous sampling was utilized for participant recruitment since students would have lived experiences with a learning approach that contained shared and similar characteristics (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This ensured the results were reflective of current experiences with open learning courses at the university. Upon receiving approval from the university's Research and Ethic's board, file #102781, the participant recruitment began.

The Accessibility Services department assisted with participant recruitment where filters were used to target students who met the research criteria. Over the span of forty-four days, two emails were circulated to this targeted student

body. The emails circulated contained details about the project, including a recruitment poster. Interested participants were required to reach out to the researcher and express their interest in participating before moving forward with an interview. Participants were also required to sign and submit a consent form to the researcher before their scheduled interview date. Every participant signed an informed consent form and was made aware of any potential risks with participating in the research.

It is important to note that there were subsections within open learning for paced and self-paced courses. The difference between these two approaches is that whereas paced courses have asynchronous and synchronous components, self-paced courses are entirely asynchronous and offer flexible enrolment. Nevertheless, both paced and self-paced courses use an open learning approach.

During the recruitment phase of the project, the recruitment poster called for participants with past or present experience within asynchronous continuous enrolment open learning courses. However, two of the selected participants only had exposure to paced open learning courses, and due to the lived experiences of these participants with open learning approaches, they were included in the findings of this research. It was concluded that the experiences of the two participants were valid for the study given that their experiences fit under open learning courses and they self-identified as students with disabilities. In total, all ten participants with disabilities shared their open learning-based experiences,

as shown in Table 1. Details about the individual disabilities of participants will not be included because the intent of this research is to focus on their experiences. This table depicts the participants' experience with various open learning courses.

Table 1. *Participants' Experience with Open Learning Courses*

Paced	Self-Paced	Paced and Self-Paced
Sophia	Rex	Elijah
Kennedy	Kelsie	Ava
	Karli	Riley
	Khloe	
	Tiffany	

(Please note all names are pseudonyms for participants.)

Interviews

Data was collected through one-on-one semi-structed interviews that ranged from 15 to 60 minutes. Interviews were employed with the use of four open-ended questions to allow participants to, "voice their experiences unconstrained by any perspectives of the researcher or past research findings" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 218). Interviews were held virtually using the Zoom platform to reduce any potential barriers for participation in this research. This platform was the most convenient and accessible means to interview and connect with participants.

At the onset of each interview, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the research, and that all information gathered and shared would remain confidential through the assignment of a pseudonym to replace their original first-name identifiers. Before transitioning to the four open-ended interview questions, participants were asked two screening questions to ensure they met the research criteria. Every participant was required to respond "Yes" to both questions before proceeding:

1. Are you registered with Accessibility Services?
2. Are you, or were you, enrolled in an asynchronous continuous enrolment open learning course within the past twelve months?

To explore the lived experiences with open learning courses, participants were asked the following four open-ended questions:

1. What attracted you to open learning asynchronous courses?
2. Can you please describe any major challenges or barriers, if at all, you faced with your open learning asynchronous course(s)?
3. Can you please describe any major benefits, if at all, you experienced with your open learning asynchronous course(s)?
4. Can you please describe what instructional modality best supports your needs while learning in your current courses, if you have a preference (such as self-paced or paced open learning, face-to-face learning, or blended learning)?

Prompting questions were used throughout the interviews, to better understand participants' responses, and to "elicit more information" (Creswell &

Guetterman, 2019). Examples of prompts used were, "Can you expand on that?" or "Can you provide an example?" All collected data and information was stored in a password protected file and was backed up on a secured university OneDrive.

Data Analysis

The audio and video for each interview was recorded, and the audio portion of the interview was transcribed for analysis. To ensure authenticity and accuracy, member checking was used to validate the findings as suggested by Creswell and Guetterman (2019). The researcher contacted all the participants and requested that each of them review their transcribed interview and confirm or clarify accuracy of the transcription. All ten participants completed the member-checking process via email.

Next, interviews were carefully reviewed and coded for prominent words and phrases where text segment codes were used to label a segment of transcript text, as suggested by Creswell and Guetterman (2019). Key words from transcripts were grouped together based on connections or commonalities with similar coded data. Examples of prominent words or phrases that participants shared in the interviews were: "flexible", "at own pace", "self-paced", "lots of reading", "course offerings", "exams", and "Accessibility Services". This resulted in a total of 183 individual codes.

From here, common themes that emerged in each individual interview were grouped together in response to the four interview questions, to formulate an organized and logical metasynthesis of the collected data, which in turn formed the second cycle of coding, for a total of twenty-three themes (Saldana, 2013). Common themes from the participants included "interactions with faculty", "the flexible learning environment", and "previous experience with learning modalities". The use of inductive reasoning in conjunction with grounded theory design with a constructivist approach led to the development of four broad themes that emerged from the collected data after three phases of coding. The themes that surfaced are a direct result of either communal feelings or important stand-alone experiences that participants shared in their interview.

Findings

This qualitative study set out to explore this question: *How, if at all, does online open learning support students with disabilities*? The experiences shared by participants indicate that online open learning approaches possess a mix of both supportive and unsupportive undertones and does not always contribute to supporting the academic success of students with disabilities. Details of these experiences are shared below.

From the interviews, four thematic findings emerged that contextualize the mixed experiences' participants encountered throughout their open learning courses:

- Flexibility in open learning was perceived as beneficial.
- Positive interactions with instructors were highly valued.
- Negative interactions with faculty and staff impaired the learning experience.
- The independent study model, including online exam invigilation, acted as a barrier for students with disabilities.

Each of these findings will be discussed below.

Flexibility in Open Learning as Beneficial

All ten of the participants mentioned or alluded to the fact that their open learning experience afforded them a flexible learning environment which was seen as a major benefit. This provided participants with the ability to enrol in classes and engage with the content when it suited their needs. For participants Kennedy and Riley, each of them addressed how the flexibility of open learning allowed them to attend to their health needs while still studying. Possessing the ability to prioritize health needs and work around academics was highlighted as a major benefit for both Kennedy and Riley. Kennedy shared the following experience:

> *If I'm having an off day, usually, my plan of attack is to optimize my good days, so get as much done on my course on my good days and then that gives me the freedom on my bad days to not have to work on things where if something [was] scheduled in a class, and I have to be there, that really can create problems.*

Asynchronous open learning courses provide students with flexible assignment deadlines, which was a reported benefit for some of the participants. Kelsie said this flexibility allowed them to complete their work as it suited their own timeline and needs, which they reported was "super helpful" for their learning experience. In Riley's case, flexible deadlines contributed to a "less stressful learning experience" for them. Riley said:

> *You're not worried about deadlines or having to give in something, or having an exam at a certain date, or quiz that has to be done at a certain date. You can change things around to fit your own needs.*

Attending to academics as it suits the ebb and flow of life was both an attraction to the open learning program for many, but also a reported benefit from all ten participants.

Positive Interactions with Instructors as Valued

Positive interactions with faculty contributed to an enjoyable learning experience for four of the participants interviewed. These positive interactions led to an increase in course comprehension and contributed to feelings of faculty approachability and a sense of faculty understanding the student's needs. Riley shared that when one professor found out that they needed accommodations, that professor would call Riley every two weeks to ensure they understood what was being covered in the course. Additionally, that

particular professor adjusted assignment requirements in order to accommodate Riley's individual needs.

Accessible and helpful professors contribute towards course satisfaction and content comprehension. Karli said that when they phoned their professor to ask questions and gain clarification on concepts being covered in their course, the help they received from their professor contributed towards making the subject matter more memorable. This experience was particularly impactful because Karli shared that when it came time for them to write their exam, they not only remembered the course content, but they also remembered talking to their professor about the content.

Faculty who are approachable and helpful positively impact a student's ability to both enjoy their course and retain information. This translates to higher rates of overall student success.

Negative Interactions with Faculty and Staff Impaired the Learning Experience

From the interviews, half of the participants spoke about challenging and inequitable interactions they had experienced with faculty and staff within their open learning courses. These experiences left students feeling frustrated and confused, and the experiences negatively impacted their academic success in future courses. Ava disclosed that due to a professor's lack of knowledge and understanding around their specific academic accommodations, Ava was blamed

for something that was connected to their disability. This experience led Ava to "shut down", and for the year following, Ava avoided asking for extensions but instead elected to not hand in their work to avoid further negative interactions with faculty.

Unapproachable faculty was a theme Tiffany shared during their interview. Tiffany said that, "when you do reach out to them, a lot of them are very, I guess, cold, like, it doesn't seem like they have any passion or care for their students or their student's success." Because of inequitable interpersonal encounters with a professor, Tiffany was prompted to request to be transferred to a different instructor entirely. Experiences shared from participants highlight the high number of inequitable interpersonal interactions students have had with their professors.

Independent Study Model Acted as a Barrier for Students with Disabilities

While flexibility, which is associated with asynchronous open learning courses, was viewed as a benefit, half of the participants commented on various elements of the course design that they viewed as either a challenge or barrier to their learning experience. Participants shared concerns around an absence of support and oversight from the university as a whole, lack of proper instructional guidance, and flexible deadlines. Ava's concern resided in a lack of safety nets to flag struggling students. Ava shared the following experience:

> *If someone's struggling in person, like, you can see that maybe in the way that they stop handing work in, or, they just seem different, you know? . . . Whereas I found in the asynchronous courses, you just kind of coast, and if things happen, nobody notices.*

Some participants voiced concerns around the high volume of reading required for their open learning courses. Kelsie shared that due to extensive amounts of course readings, this challenged them to remain engaged with the course content, which made the course become more inaccessible.

Despite participants sharing that they appreciated the flexible learning environment associated with open learning, too much flexibility was viewed as a structural inequity in the course design. Tiffany and Karli presented the challenges of managing their own deadlines as they shared that it's easy to fixate on certain parts of a course for too long in the absence of regular assignment deadlines. This resulted in challenges with time management.

Virtual exam invigilation is used in some asynchronous open learning courses as a way to catch and dissuade students from cheating. From the interviews, close to half of the participants expressed that they had experienced interpersonal inequities with writing exams through online invigilation. Rex experienced discrimination from their exam invigilator while trying to write an exam. Rex said:

> *So, I'm typing to the invigilator through [the proctoring services] and he comes on to talk to me . . . I said "yes, I use a headset*

it's written in my letter, I'm sorry I can't understand what you're saying. I don't mean to be rude; I have a severe hearing impairment, and I can't understand accents if I can't see you talking". He starts to mock my disability at that point.

In addition to feeling like they were being mocked, Rex shared that there were issues with frozen software extensions during their exam, even though they were originally granted permission to use support software.

The need for alternative forms of examinations were also expressed by Riley, who shared that writing an exam in one sitting had negative impacts on their physical health. Riley said, "after the exam ends, because you have to be sitting upright and there's all these specific conditions you're supposed to follow, I've ended up completely bed-bound for up to three days afterwards." The narratives shared from participants shed light on the inequitable barriers associated with current online exam invigilation services in asynchronous open learning courses.

Discussion

Every participant shared that they appreciated the flexibility that open learning courses provided them. The ability to study at convenient times in the day was seen as a major benefit by everyone, but unfortunately, this positive attribute was overshadowed by a handful of barriers which surfaced throughout interviews with participants. As it stands, there are many avenues within open learning for students to experience discrimination and barriers on a regular

basis. This includes unfair and rude treatment from faculty and staff, methods of assessment that lack flexibility and cause unintended harm, and the absence of university support systems that proactively reach out and aid struggling students. These issues that surfaced were both shocking and unanticipated because there were no similar experiences or identified issues in the literature used in this study.

This research sought to uncover an answer to the following: *How, if at all, does online open learning support students with disabilities*? From the interviews, it became apparent that participants appreciated flexibility in their learning environment as well as the positive support they received from some faculty. With respect to the last two findings that discuss the lack of support and understanding shown by instructors and staff towards students with disabilities, and the structural challenges with the independent model of open learning, we wish to focus the discussion section on these to help create opportunities to improve these situations.

Inequitable Interactions with Faculty and Staff

Inequitable interactions with faculty and staff surfaced as a barrier for half of the participants. For the students who did share that they had positive interactions with professors, participants clarified that these great professors were a rarity. This differs from a majority of the corresponding literature because, in most cases, participants from previous research and relevant articles

shared that they had positive encounters with their faculty members. In articles by Athens (2018), Madaus et al. (2012), and Catalano (2014), participants shared that they had encountered communication issues with their course instructor. In Catalano's (2014) research, participants stated that they felt the tone of the professor's email to be rude, "at one time or another" (p. 26). This research correlates with similar experiences that surfaced from the interviews with participants conducted as part of this study. However, unfortunately additional serious inequitable concerns were raised. Some of the inequitable issues that participants in this study shared included the following: delayed communication from their professors, professors refusing to provide help or answer questions, participants receiving vague feedback on assignments, and one situation where a participant was blamed by their professor for something that was connected to their disability and accommodation needs. These types of inequitable interactions between students and their professors have the ability to produce a learning environment where there is an absence of trust, which was what happened for some of the participants interviewed for this study.

In the case of Rex's unfortunate encounter with his exam invigilator, no articles reviewed for this research contained similar student experiences. Very few articles spoke about discrimination-based encounters between students and their professors, and there was no mention of any students being discriminated against by university staff members or third-party groups. Rex's unfortunate lived experience highlights the cultural value that exists within our society and

educational frameworks. This cultural value labels which groups are considered "full members of society," compared to those who are considered less than (Fraser, 2000, p. 114). Fraser's (2000) status model seeks to address and, "de-institutionalize patterns of culture value that impede parity of participation" (p. 114). Our study also seeks for the previously viewed "less than" individuals to be recognized as full partners in society and viewed as equal. Considering half the participants in our study experienced inequitable experiences with faculty and staff, the need to de-institutionalize current patterns of cultural value are of utmost importance.

Barriers within the Course Design

Structural inequity in course design surfaced for some participants in the form of heavy amounts of reading. In their interview, one participant shared that it felt like they weren't being taught anything, but instead were learning only by reading from a book. Participants in research conducted by Athens (2018) shared similar concerns saying, "there is no teaching being done by any professors yet in this program, all learning must be done by reading the text" (p. 41). Participants from Athens (2018) research shared that having, "multiple types of course materials" (p. 47) was important for academic success as it allowed students to engage with the course content in a variety of formats. Implementing multiple types of course materials make the course more

accessible to all learners, which is congruent with Houston's (2018) firm belief in the importance of incorporating UDL principles into the online classroom.

Excess course flexibility was another structural inequity in course design that was raised by two participants. Tiffany and Karli shared that they found it challenging to manage their time, considering their open learning courses were both flexible and highly independent. The topic of challenges pertaining to time management emerged in Catalano's (2014) research, where they shared that distance learning can pose a challenge for students who struggle with time management skills. To mitigate this issue, Houston (2018) suggests that course checkpoints should be implemented into open learning courses. Checkpoints act as a way to advise students on how far along they should be in their course and to signal to the professor when it's time for them to reach out and check in on their students, thereby making the process more equitable to meet individual student's needs.

Barriers within the course design illustrate the lack of recognition of the diverse student learning needs that exist. This corresponds to Fraser's (2000) perspective on the need for the status of individuals to be viewed as full partners in social interaction (p. 113). Developing courses that incorporate UDL principles could be one way to reduce the inequalities that presently exist within open learning course design.

Lack of University Supports for Open Learning Students

A lack of proactive support and safety nets for open learning students was an inequity-based issue that Ava experienced throughout their open learning journey. Ava had enrolled in a total of nineteen courses, yet Ava had only completed four of those courses. Despite a transcript littered with 'Withdrawals" and "D" grades, Ava only received support from the university when they began reaching out and asking for assistance, not prior. In addition to the absence of proactive university support systems, several participants voiced concerns around barriers they experienced with the university's Accessibility Services department. Specifically, they had concerns around departmental communication, documentation policies, and course registration. It is inequitable when the needs of students with disabilities are not met or addressed by policies, guidelines, and Accessibility Services departments on campus.

In her research, Catalano (2014) discusses the importance of providing outreach to students with disabilities, as some individuals may be uncomfortable with disclosing their needs. One potential solution is through the implementation of an Early Alert System. Athens (2018) suggests that universities should look at incorporating "prior GPA with Early Alert" (p. 47), in particular for students who withdraw from classes due to academic challenges. Considering Academic Advisors typically fulfil this role for students studying in-person, open learning students should be assigned Academic Advisors who uphold similar responsibilities.

Universities with Student Services that create inequitable barriers are ineffective and have the potential to push students out (Tait, 2000). To better understand and address the needs of the student body, universities "need to incorporate elements of client- or customer-centredness" when building out support services including those for students with disabilities (Tait, 2000, p. 290). The experiences shared by the participants in our study demonstrate an institutional pattern of cultural value in which a maldistribution of resources contributes to feelings of helplessness and exclusion for some, which is a strong critique made by CDS. Students with LDs and registered disabilities should not be an after-thought, or given reactive accommodations with technical barriers. Changing the regulating values that exist within the university and how they engage with students who have LDs and registered disabilities will help to address the maldistribution of resources, ultimately, shifting the learning experience for students with disabilities for the better (Fraser, 2000).

The Brewer et al. (2025) study also used a CDS theoretical framework to examine the concerns of students with LDs and registered disabilities on a public discussion forum. Several themes in Brewer et al. (2025) resonated with challenges we found in our study: "(i) impact on education, (ii) isolation from peers, (iii) seeking advice and support, (iv) barriers to assistance and accommodations, (v) impact of accommodations, and (vi) providing guidance and support" (p. 108). Thus, this study done by Brewer and their team helps to also bring forward the nuances and complexities present in the experiences of

post-secondary students with LDs and registered disabilities. Although that study is limited in capturing the direct voice of students enrolled in an open learning course, it speaks to the prevalence of these consistent challenges that arise for students with LDs and registered disabilities, which must be considered in future discussions of course design, course facilitation, course assessment, and overall course delivery.

It is important to note that post-secondary students who do not wish to formalize or state their LD and registered disabilities with Accessibility Services for fear of stigmatization or being othered, require further consideration when developing course design and the course experience. McKenzie and Southey (2024) highlight that students with LDs and registered disabilities are often expected to demonstrate strong self-advocacy and are required to access and facilitate their access to accommodations. Moreover, McKenzie and Southey (2024) state:

> *The onus is on the student to be confident and able to clearly articulate their disability-related needs, and to repeatedly confront and overcome ongoing barriers to participation.*
>
> *For many students with LD, potential barriers to accommodation may be compounded by other aspects of their identity and social location such as race, class, and gender identity. It is important to understand how to better engage students of diverse intersectional backgrounds, including socioeconomic status, in accessing institutional supports and services. (p. 307)*

The nuance of acknowledging intersectional identity and the challenges multiple facets of our identity bring forward is worthy of further research and consideration when thinking about students with LDs and other registered disabilities and how they are expected to flourish in environments that have not been originally set up with the nuances of their intersectional identities in mind. Another way to acknowledge this challenge is to see it from the following perspective:

> *[S]tudents with LD are obligated to seek accommodations because of the failure of the ableist post-secondary environment to include them in the first place. Inaccessibility also reduces the responsibility on post-secondary institutions to proactively address barriers to equity for students with LD. (Brown et al., 2020 as cited by McKenzie and Southey, 2024, p. 309)*

When acknowledging this perspective, it is imperative to connect intersectional identity for students with LDs and other registered disabilities back to CDS. CDS invites us to question ableist models of education in which students with disabilities are required to adhere to accommodations to reach the norm of curriculum practices and content. Indirectly, CDS asks post-secondary institutions to proactively address barriers to equity with respect to the complex and layered needs of students with LDs and registered disabilities by examining the structures of programming that they deliver from. Thus, although, the complexity of issues such as the specific disabilities, course design, role of faculty, and accessibility through open learning are multi-

pronged, the structural inequity that CDS describes is one that holds true for all students with LDs and registered disabilities in all post-secondary programs, not just open learning.

Recommendations

The lived experiences from participants in our study highlight an educational environment that is cookie-cutter in its approach, lacking anything resembling a personal and supportive environment or one that acknowledges students with LDs and registered disabilities as part of the fabric of learners. The challenges highlighted in the discussion and findings show that we persistently leave open conditions that seed inequitable open learning experiences for students with LDs and other registered disabilities. In light of this, recommendations for how to address these inequitable barriers and experiences are included below.

Training Faculty and Staff in UDL Principles, Empathy, and Social Skills

All faculty and staff who have the potential to be in contact with students with disabilities, should receive equity-focused training. Training should cover the following content: types and characteristics of various disabilities, the challenges these students can encounter when learning with this approach, tools available to assist these students, the importance of being responsive and

approachable, and the need for being flexible to accommodate students in a variety of ways (Dell et al., 2015; Madaus et al., 2012; Massengale & Vasquez, 2016). This equity driven training should be mandated for every faculty and staff member, including anyone who will be invigilating exams. Providing training is a critical step towards creating awareness, so that faculty and staff can move towards developing remedies for the institutional harms that currently exist. This is a key piece in embracing Fraser's (2000) take on the neoliberal status model which moves towards a new way to address misrecognition, while avoiding displacement and reification.

Consistently Implementing UDL Principles into Course Design

The structural inequities that participants shared about elements of the course design indicate that there is a lack of consistent UDL principles being implemented in the open learning courses. Specifically, multiple means of action and expression, multiple means of representation, and multiple means of engagement are not consistently being implemented (Houston, 2018). If applied correctly, courses that follow UDL principles provide students with the ability to engage in an accessible manner with the content, and showcase their knowledge in a variety of ways (Massengale & Vasquez, 2016). Examples of addressing the pillar of action and expression within open learning can be providing students with various ways to display their mastery of the content. This can range from students submitting recorded presentations to students

taking tests and quizzes. Multiple means of representation can be provided by allowing students to engage with the content through multiple formats such as course readings, recorded lectures, and discussion boards. Finally, multiple means of engagement can be implemented through group work, solo exercises, and virtual discussion boards. Providing students with opportunities to connect synchronously with faculty to ask questions and seek clarification is an important piece of the student experience that also falls within the pillar of engagement. This approach to course design has the potential to improve the learning experience for all students, including those with disabilities (Catalano, 2014).

Implement Early Alert Systems and Check-Ins for Struggling Students

To ensure that every student receives equitable support when they are academically struggling, universities need to implement an Early Alert System for students enrolled in open learning courses. Doing so would contribute towards student retention because it would flag students who are experiencing academic difficulty and are withdrawing from their courses (Athens, 2018). In addition to implementing an Early Alert System, students who come across as struggling academically should receive proactive check-ins from either Accessibility Services or Academic Advisors. As it stands, there is currently no one doing this, and based on the participant interview data, this is an area that requires immediate attention.

Another overall recommendation comes from (Kocdar & Bozkurt, 2022) who recommend work on open learning education programs that asks course designers and facilitators to pay attention to social support through building community online in a way that learners acknowledge each other and create a community of trust as best as possible. They offer the following suggestion:

> *[O]rganizing concerts . . . giving tips concerning learners' wellbeing, providing free online resources, preparing brochures on staying mentally healthy and coping with anxiety, and encouraging learner–learner interaction through social media groups, forums, e-mails, phone, and face to-face communication are some of the social support activities. (p. 17)*

This idea of creating a social community and social support around all students would be something that would be beneficial for open learning programs. CDS would contend that social community building for all students is a way of celebrating the diversity and inclusion of everyone without anyone having to fit into preconceived ableist models of education.

Limitations

The first limitation with the research is the sample size. To gain a better understanding on this subject, the sample size should be expanded, which may lead to important discoveries. A second limitation is that this research focuses on one Canadian university within British Columbia. Further research into this topic may compare and contrast the learning experiences of students with

disabilities who are studying in open learning courses at different universities in the same geographical region or multiple regions across Canada. Additionally, it would be valuable to take a closer look into the level of support and available services that students received while studying, compared across the country.

Conclusion

This qualitative study captures the experience of ten students with disabilities enrolled in open learning courses at a mid-sized British Columbia university. We examined how, if at all, open learning supports this group of marginalized learners. Based on the thematic findings that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with each participant, there was room for improvement alongside the benefits open learning provides. Due to the severity of the inequities and their implications on individual student experiences, these findings require the attention of faculty members, deans, heads of Accessibility and Services departments, and open learning course designers. Collectively, institutions which offer open learning programs need to recognize that students with disabilities are experiencing challenging and inequitable barriers in order to pursue a quality education. Thus, we urge all educators and students to continue to advocate not from an ableist approach but rather from a CDS framework that aspires to equitable educational experiences for all students, including our students with LDs and other registered disabilities.

Disclosure Statement

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

References

Academic Community Equity British Columbia (ACE BC). (2020). *The legal responsibilities of post-secondary educational institutions*. https://ace-bc.ca/resources/the-legal-responsibilities-of-post-secondary-educational-institutions/

American College Health Association National College Health Assessment. (2019). *Canadian Reference Group: Executive summary*. https://campusmentalhealth.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/NCHA-II_SPRING_2019_CANADIAN_REFERENCE_GROUP_EXECUTIVE_SUMMARY.pdf

Athens, W. (2018). Perceptions of the persistent: Engagement and learning community in underrepresented populations. *Online Learning Journal, 22*(2), 27–57. https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v22i2.1368

Bessant, J. (2012). 'Measuring up'? Assessment and students with disabilities in the modern university. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *(16)*3, 265–281. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2010.489119

Borland, J., & James, S. (1999). The learning experience of students with disabilities in higher education. A case study of a UK university. *Disability & Society*, *14*(1), 85–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599926398

Brewer, G., Urwin, E., & Witham, B. (2025). Disabled student experiences of Higher Education. *Disability & Society, 40*(1), 108–127. https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2023.2263633

Brown, J., McDonald, M., Besse, C., Manson, P., McDonald, R., Rohatinsky, N., & Singh, M. (2020). Anxiety, mental illness, learning disabilities, and learning accommodation use: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 36, 579–586. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2020.08.007

Bundon, A., Ashfield, A., Smith, B., & Goosey-Tolfrey, V. L. (2018). Struggling to stay and struggling to leave: The experiences of elite para-athletes at the end of their sport careers. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *37*, 296–305. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.04.007

Burgstahler, S. (2015). Opening doors or slamming them shut? Online learning practices and students with disabilities. *Social Inclusion, 3*(6), 69–79. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v3i6.420

Butcher, J., & Rose-Adams, J. (2015). Part-time learners in open and distance learning: Revisiting the critical importance of choice, flexibility and employability. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, *30*(2), 127–137. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2015.1055719

Caliskan, H. (2012). Open learning. In: N. M. Seel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of the sciences of learning* (pp. 2516–2518). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1428-6_52

Catalano, A. (2014). Improving distance education for students with special needs: A qualitative study of students' experiences with an online library research course. *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning*, *8*(1–2), 17–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/1533290X.2014.902416

Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). Pearson.

DaDeppo, L. M. (2009). Integration factors related to the academic success and intent to persist of college students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *24*(3), 122–131. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5826.2009.00286.x

Dell, C. A., Dell, T. F., & Blackwell, T. L. (2015). Applying universal design for learning in online courses: Pedagogical and practical considerations. *Journal of Educators Online*, *12*(2), 166–192. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1068401.pdf

Enríquez-Vázquez, L., & Hernández-Gutiérrez, M. (2023). From open education to open learning: The experience at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. *Distance Education*, *44*(4), 712–730. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2023.2267490

Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review, 3*(3), 107–120.

Fraser, S., & Deane, E. (1997). Why open learning? *Australian Universities' Review*, *40*(1), 25–31. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ557068.pdf

Government of British Columbia. (2021). Accessible British Columbia Act, SBC 2021. https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/21019

Government of British Columbia. (2023, September 5). *Inclusive education*. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/inclusive-education

Government of Canada. (2019). Accessible Canada Act, SC 2019, c 10. https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/A-0.6.pdf

Graves, L., Asunda, P. A., Plant, S. J., & Goad, C. (2011). Asynchronous online access as an accommodation on students with learning disabilities and/or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorders in postsecondary STEM courses. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, *24*(4), 317–330. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ966132.pdf

Groulx, M., Wigglesworth, J., DeLorey, R., Harris, N., Harris, P., Lamb, H., & McBride, C. (2024). Not for all: Barriers to universal accessibility in nature-based tourism and recreation spaces across British Columbia, Canada. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, *47*, 100772. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1016/j.jort.2024.100772

Hollins, N., & Foley, A. R. (2013). The experiences of students with learning disabilities in a higher education virtual campus. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, *61*(4), 607–624. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-013-9302-9

Houston, L. (2018). Efficient strategies for integrating universal design for learning in the online classroom. *Journal of Educators Online*, *15*(3). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1199215.pdf

Kocdar, S., & Bozkurt, A. (2022). Supporting learners with special needs in open, distance, and digital education. In *Handbook of open, distance and digital education*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-0351-9_49-1

Kotera, Y., Cockerill, V., Green, P., Hutchinson, L., Shaw, P., & Bowskill, N. (2019). Towards another kind of borderlessness: Online students with disabilities. *Distance Education*, *40*(2), 170–186. https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2019.1600369

Lambert, D. C., & Dryer, R. (2018). Quality of life of higher education students with learning disability studying online. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, *65*(4), 393–407. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2017.1410876

Li, I. W., & Carroll, D. (2017). *Factors influencing university student satisfaction, dropout and academic performance*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Perth: Curtin University. https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/03LiUWA_Formatted_FINAL.pdf

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario. (2015). *Official definition of LDs*.

Madaus, J. W., McKeown, K., Gelbar, N., & Banerjee, M. (2012). The online and blended learning experience: Differences for students with and without learning disabilities and Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. *International Journal for Research in Learning Disabilities*, *1*(1), 21–36.

Massengale, L. R., & Vasquez, E.. (2016). Assessing accessibility: Are online courses better than face-to-face instructions at providing access to course content for students with disabilities? *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, *16*(1), 69–79. https://doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v16i1.19101

McKenzie, C., & Southey, S. (2024). Barriers and facilitators to access to post-secondary education for students with learning disabilities: A narrative literature review. *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*, *13*(3), 293–319. https://doi.org/10.15353/cjds.v13i3.1172

Meekosha, H., & Shuttleworth, R. (2009). What's so critical about critical disability studies? *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, *15*(1), 47–75. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1323238X.2009.11910861

Nascimbeni, F., & Burgos, D. (2016). In search for the open educator: Proposal of a definition and a framework to increase openness adoption among university educators. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *17*(6), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v17i6.2736

National Educational Association of Disabled Students. (2021). *Making extra-curricular activities inclusive*. NEADS. https://www.neads.ca/en/about/projects/inclusion/guide/pwd_01.php

Pyle, N., & Wexler, J. (2012). Preventing students with disabilities from dropping out. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 47*(5) 283–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451211430118

Radovan, M., & Perdih, M. (2016). Developing guidelines for evaluating the adaptation of accessible web-based learning materials. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, *17*(4), 166–181. https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v17i4.2463

Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications. https://emotrab.ufba.br/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Saldana-2013-TheCodingManualforQualitativeResearchers.pdf

Tait, A. (2000). Planning student support for open and distance learning. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 15*(3), 287–299. https://doi.org/10.1080/713688410

Terras, K., Leggio, J., & Phillips, A. (2015). Disability accommodations in online courses: The graduate student experience. *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, *28*(3), 329–340. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1083812.pdf

Terras, K., Anderson, S., & Grave, S. (2020). Comparing disability accommodations in online courses: A cross-classification. *Journal of Educators Online*, *17*(2), 317–330. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1268737.pdf

United Nations Development Programme. (2022). *The Sustainable Development Goals in action*. https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals

Authors

Warren Haydock is a graduate of the Thompson Rivers University Master of Education Program, currently working as an Academic Advisor in Atlantic Canada. With over fifteen years of experience working within post-secondary in student support roles across the country, his focus is on establishing inclusive and welcoming communities where diverse students and staff can foster and grow. His research interests centralize around critical disability studies within education and the experience of students in various instructional modalities.

Dr. Manu Sharma is an Associate Professor at Thompson Rivers University in the Faculty of Education and Social Work, where she teaches in the Master of Education program. She brings a critical social justice lens to her teaching, research, and service and is committed to empowering marginalized communities through capacity-building. She is the Founder and President of the Canadian Association for Social Justice Education (CASJE), a national association with over 240 members and an executive of 14 members that she has supported and mentored since 2023. Her research interests and publications in the field of education are based on equity initiatives, social justice pedagogy, deficit thinking, and international teaching experiences. For more information, please visit her website, https://professormanusharma.com.