

# Chapter 15

## Exploring Online Education and Students With Disabilities in Higher Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The chapter examines online self-efficacy among students with disabilities, their preferences for studying online, and their challenges, as well as accessible online courses (universal design for learning). Online learning environments require self-efficacy, which varies according to disability type. Online formats must provide enhanced flexibility and accessibility. Instructors may overlook accessibility issues due to a lack of training. Loneliness has also been associated with negative online learning experiences. UDL ensures equitable access to learning materials. This review can inform policy and practice to ensure online learning is accessible to students with disabilities. Finally, for online learning to succeed, it is equally essential to obtain feedback from students with disabilities. Hence, more research is needed to expand and explore the impact of online learning environments on students with disabilities in higher education. The research should also focus on the types of accommodations and disability services most required for online learning.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

There has recently been an increasing interest in online education due to the Covid-19 pandemic and other logistical problems such as more accessibility to distance education requirements. Those with disabilities are entitled to enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). They must also be respected for their inherent dignity (United Nations, 2006). There is legislation in every UN signatory country that recognises the needs and rights of students with disabilities (SWD) in education. Many have adopted laws regarding the integration of SWD into education at all levels. In Australia, the education rights of SWD are safeguarded by The Disability Standards for Education 2005 under the Disability Discrimina-

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tion Act 1992 (Australian Government, 2022). It is the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that reasonable accommodations are provided to SWD (Lee et al., 2021). Reasonable accommodations refer to adjustments and modifications for SWD that facilitates one to participate in higher education successfully.

Students with disabilities are accounted for in tens of thousands in higher education equity studies, but not enough attention has been paid to them (Pitman, 2022). Even though online learning prospects and the number of SWD have elevated in the higher education sector, these students still report a dearth of inclusion and accessibility measures (Barnard-Brak & Sulak, 2010). According to Lee et al. (2021), online learning has increased tremendously in the past two decades. There is a growing need for federal accessibility standards for online courses among educators, students, and legislators. Currently, nearly all college students have experienced some form of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led to an increased reliance on technology for education. This may have both positive and negative impacts on students, such as increased access to resources and difficulties staying organized and motivated.

The following section of this review chapter reports on the online self-efficacy of SWD in higher education, their preferences for online learning, challenges in online learning, and strategies to promote equitable accessibility of course content to SWD. This review chapter will offer insights into the online education of SWD in higher education and how to foster effective strategies to bridge the gap. It will also help inform educational policies and practices that can further improve online education quality for SWD. This review will examine the current state of online education of SWD and identify areas that need improvement.

## **SELF EFFICACY IN ONLINE LEARNING**

Researchers consider students' thoughts and beliefs about their educational needs. Self-efficacy (SE) is one of the key elements of social cognitive theory, motivating students and improving their success. SE was extensively researched under Bandura's social cognitive theory, which is defined as an individual's belief in their ability to produce a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura, there are four sources of SE: mastery experiences (prior success and failures impacting SE); vicarious experiences (SE is influenced by success and failures - relying on comparison); verbal persuasion (interpersonal support through suggestions, feedback, encouraging and motivational discussion) and physiological/affective state affective states (physical or emotional status may impact SE. All these factors interact with and influence students' online SE.

Understanding SE in an educational setting is crucial as it influences students' aims, efforts, and achievements. The importance of participants' SE in online education has been extensively studied in the past, strongly suggesting the importance of participants' SE in online education (Corry & Stella, 2018; Sun & Chen, 2016). According to Bradley et al. (2017) academic achievement and SE are positively correlated in online courses. Notably, there is limited empirical research conducted about the online SE of students with disabilities as well as the opportunities and challenges that students with disabilities encounter on the online platform (Lee et al., 2021). Hence, further research is needed to examine the experiences of SWDs in the online learning setting.

Self-efficacy on an online learning platform is crucial for student success. Saracoglu et al. (1989) found relatively low SE in students with learning disabilities. However, in Kelly et al. (1994) study, no

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