IDENTIFYING BARRIERS IN ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AMONG STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES.

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Abstract

Despite many countries being signatories to human rights treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which emphasises equity, diversity, inclusion, and access for all individuals, there remains an underrepresentation of students with disabilities in higher education. This Master of Research aims to identify barriers in access to postsecondary education among students with disabilities. To achieve this, I undertook a systematic literature review of evidence in the field.

Forty-six studies were included in the review. The majority of the studies (33) were carried out in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom (5) and Ireland (3). Single studies were conducted in Canada, Belgium, Sweden, Australia, and Spain. Of the total number of studies analysed, it was found that 37 utilised a qualitative design, followed by seven that used a mixed-method approach and two studies employed a quantitative methodology.
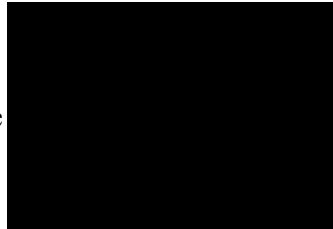
Thematic analysis revealed seven recurring themes of barriers encountered by students with disabilities during their transition from secondary to postsecondary education. These themes comprised Personal and Psychological Barriers, Family Influence and Background, Financial Challenges, Educational and Institutional Barriers, Social Stigma and Discrimination, Institutional and Policy Barriers, and Accessibility and Accommodation Challenges. The findings have significant implications for both policy and practice, particularly for education policy. Additionally, it contributes to wider discussions on how to effectively empower and assist students with disabilities in their academic pursuits.

STUDENT DECLARATION

I, Geoffrey Nornor, declare that the Master by Research thesis entitled ''Identifying barriers in access to postsecondary education among students with disabilities'' is no more than 50,000 words in length, including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

"I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.

Signature   Date 13/12/2023

Acknowledgements

Keywords

1. Ableism: Discriminatory beliefs, attitudes, or practices that devalue or limit the potential of students with disabilities in higher education.

2. Accessibility: The quality of being accessible to all students, including those with disabilities, through appropriate design, resources, and support.

3. Accommodation: Adjustments or supports provided to students with disabilities to enable equal participation in educational activities.

4. Barriers: Obstacles that prevent or hinder access to education or resources, especially for students with disabilities.

5. Biopsychosocial Model of Disability: A complex model that recognises disability as a phenomenon that reflects the interaction between features of the person's body and the societal context in which they live.

6. Cohen's Inter-Rater Reliability: A statistical measure used to determine the level of agreement between different raters during the categorisation process.

7. Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) Tool: A tool used for evaluating the quality of qualitative studies. It provides a structured framework for assessing key elements such as research questions, methodology, ethics, and conclusions.

8. Critical Disability Theory (CDT): A theoretical framework that critiques mainstream portrayals of disability, arguing that disability is a societal issue linked to structural inequities rather than a personal problem.

9. Discrimination: Unfair treatment based on a person's disability, leading to inequality in opportunities and resources.

10. Equity: Ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, have equal opportunities to succeed in higher education.

11. ICF (International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health): A classification system by the World Health Organization that provides a standard language for describing health and health-related states, including disabilities.

12. Inclusivity: The practice of including students with diverse needs and abilities in mainstream educational settings, providing appropriate support and modifications as needed.

13. Integration: Ensuring students with disabilities can fully participate in all aspects of higher education, including academic and social activities.

14. Kmet Tool: An assessment tool for evaluating quantitative studies' quality and relevance. It offers a systematic assessment of research design, data collection, statistical analysis, and overall validity.

15. Mixed Methods: A research approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods.

16. Postsecondary Education: Education that occurs after high school, including vocational training, college, and university education.

17. PRISMA Framework (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses): A set of guidelines and checklists for reporting systematic reviews and meta-analyses, ensuring transparency and completeness in reporting.

18. Qualitative Methods: Research focused on understanding human behaviour and culture by examining subjective experiences, emotions, and social contexts.

19. Quantitative Methods: Research methods focusing on numerical data and statistical analysis to understand patterns and relationships.

20. Secondary Education: The stage of education following primary education and preceding postsecondary education, typically including high school.

21. Social Model of Disability: A perspective that sees disability as a socially created problem and emphasises societal changes to remove barriers rather than focusing on an individual's impairment or difference.

22. Social Stigma: Negative stereotypes or prejudices that lead to discrimination and exclusion, often faced by individuals with disabilities.

23. Systematic Review: A research method that synthesises the findings from multiple studies on a particular subject, using predefined criteria and systematic approaches to reduce bias.

24. Thematic Classification: The process of categorising research findings into specific themes or topics, allowing for structured analysis.

25. Transition: Moving from one phase of education to another, such as secondary to postsecondary education, can be particularly challenging for students with disabilities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Postsecondary education inequality has been a long-standing concern for scholars, researchers, and practitioners (Alqazlan et al., 2019; Bell et al., 2017; Carroll et al., 2022, p. 20; Marquis et al., 2016). Educational research has thoroughly explored the intricacies and complexities of this issue, which is greatly influenced by societal changes. This thesis investigates the barriers students face during their transition to postsecondary educatoin. By studying the barriers to postsecondary education, we can better comprehend their impact on individuals, communities, and society.

To achieve this, the thesis carefully draws upon ideas, frameworks, and methods from social sciences and education. It incorporates various viewpoints and employs rigorous research methodologies to scrutinise the barriers that students with disabilities encounter while pursuing postsecondary education. This chapter of the thesis provides background context about the inequality experienced by students with disabilities as they transition into postsecondary education despite the current systems in place to support them.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Education is crucial for individuals to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to function effectively, achieve personal fulfilment, and contribute positively to society (de Beer et al., 2018). Higher education can lead to positive outcomes, including higher employment rates and income (Wagner & Newman, 2015), which are significant for economic security independence andquality of life (AIHW, 2020). According to Salmi & D'Addio, (2021), individuals with disabilities still face significant challenges when accessing postsecondary education despite legal protections and national efforts to promote inclusion. In Australia, for example, only 18% of people with disabilities hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 32% of those without disabilities (Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training, 2022). Furthermore, in 2019, just 6.6% of students with disabilities were enrolled in vocational education programs, highlighting ongoing disparities in access to higher education for this population. In recent decades, countries such as

Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have recognised the need to develop policies and practical standards that enhance the access, retention, and graduation of students with disabilities from tertiary education (Leake & Stodden, 2014).

In Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act of 1992, which led to the creation of the Disability Standard for Education in 2005 (Department of Education, 2023), explains how education and training should be accessible to students with disabilities in various areas, such as enrolment, participation, student support, curriculum development, and prevention of harassment (Department of Education, Skills, and Employment, 2020). In 2020, the 2005 Disability Standards for Education were reviewed by the Department of Education. The review identified four areas that needed improvement with three related to higher education: empowering students and their families, enhancing educators' and providers' knowledge, and strengthening accountability (Department of Education, Skills, and Employment, 2020; Kent et al., 2018). The Australian Federal Government has also introduced "The National Higher Education Initiative," a program that supports higher education providers and professionals in delivering equitable outcomes to diverse groups (Department of Education, Skills, and Employment, 2020). This program includes the Higher Education Disability Support Programme (DSP), which provides funding to education providers to assist students with disabilities in accessing, participating in, and succeeding in higher fields (Department of Education, Skills, and Employment, 2020).

The United Kingdom has a code of practice called the Special Education Needs and Disability Code of Practice (SEND), similar to that of the United States (Department for Education & Department of Health and Social Care, 2020). This code of conduct cites the Children and Families Act of 2014 and applies to individuals from birth to 25 years of age (Department for Education & Department of Health and Social Care, 2020). It contains essential requirements to improve outcomes for students with special educational needs and disabilities.

In the United States, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (2015), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (amended in 1988), is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in federally funded institutions (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2015). This

also applies to education, meaning that any institution receiving federal funding must provide necessary support and opportunities for persons with disabilities to fully integrate during their education. Additionally, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) further promotes access and participation in higher education for students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Act promotes access and participation in higher education for these students (IDEA, 2015).

Completing higher education is a significant marker in this transition (Leiter, 2012). For people with disabilities, this transition is important as it allows them to gain knowledge and skills that will contribute to their independence. Unfortunately, according to sources such as Lindsay et al. (2019), students with disabilities face more barriers when transitioning to postsecondary education than their non-disabled peers.

1.2   PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Equal opportunity and access to education are fundamental human rights for persons with disabilities, as stated by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2006 (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2006). Providing equal access to higher education for people with disabilities is crucial to upholding their rights. It is important to note that the definition of disability is constantly evolving and can vary. Therefore, the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning (ICF) definition is adopted for this research (World Health Organization., 2001). According to the ICF, disability encompasses impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions that result from the negative interaction between an individual with a health condition and their contextual factors (personal or environmental) (World Health Organization., 2001). Therefore, it is the collective responsibility of society to address and remove barriers that restrict the participation of people with disabilities.

To develop effective interventions for a more inclusive higher education system, it is essential to first understand the challenges of the transition process faced by students with disabilities. The proposed research aims to identify barriers that affect students with disabilities during the transition process. The findings will help institutions develop better strategies to support these students and influence policy development around the education transition process for students with disabilities.

1.3   AIM

This research aims to identify the barriers students with disabilities experience when transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education.

The knowledge generated from this Master of Research will inform strategies that aim to facilitate the transition from secondary to higher education for students with disabilities.

1.4   RESEARCH QUESTION

What disabling barriers do students experience, across a variety of geographic locations, when transitioning from secondary (both inclusive and segregated settings) to postsecondary education?

1.5   RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

Maintaining intellectual honesty in academic research is essential by acknowledging one's positionality, which refers to personal, experiential, and situational factors shaping how we perceive, interpret, and engage with the world (Holmes, 2020). As a researcher, my positionality is heavily influenced by my professional experiences and personal commitments. Currently, I work as a teacher at Victoria University, where I teach a Certificate IV in Disability program. My role has given me a deep understanding of the institutional, educational, and personal dynamics surrounding individuals with disabilities. I have witnessed firsthand the barriers these students face and the resilience and determination needed to overcome them. This experience has shaped my perception of the disability landscape and directed my research towards exploring the disabling barriers students face when transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education.

Over the past decade, I have worked closely with people with disabilities and seen the daily barriers they encounter. Witnessing their extraordinary ways of navigating the world has given me a deep appreciation of their lived experiences and honed my commitment to the principles of access, inclusion, and equity. As a disability educator and advocate, I am uniquely positioned to delve into this research. However, it also requires reflexivity to ensure that I critically examine any personal biases that may emerge from my experiences. In this context, reflexivity involves

continually reassessing my role and the influence of my experiences on the interpretation and presentation of my research findings.

As a teacher, my interactions with students, fellow educators, and institutional decision-makers give me a nuanced understanding of the disabling barriers in the educational transition process. My ability to empathise with students and my direct experience navigating institutional systems offer a unique dual perspective that benefits this research. My advocacy focus on social justice and equity principles motivates me to explore students' disabling barriers, seeking out systemic issues and individual experiences that contribute to these barriers. I plan to use this research to inform policy and practice, promoting inclusive, equitable education environments.

However, my experiences and commitments also present challenges. My direct involvement in this field may bias my perspectives or assumptions. Therefore, I am committed to rigorous reflexivity, continually questioning my interpretations and ensuring that my findings emerge from the data rather than predetermined notions. In conclusion, my position as a disability educator and advocate has significantly impacted my research perspective. This personal stake in the matter is a powerful motivator, driving my commitment to rigorous, impactful research. By maintaining reflexivity, I can ensure my research's integrity, allowing my participants' voices and experiences to guide my findings and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, the reader is introduced to the history of disability, legislations, policies and initiatives for people with disabilities, the importance of postsecondary education, barriers to postsecondary education for people with disabilities and the intersectionality of barriers and their implications to the transition process.

2.1 THE HISTORY OF DISABILITY: A JOURNEY TOWARDS INCLUSION

Disability is a complex and multifaceted part of human diversity that has existed throughout human history. Reflecting societal attitudes, cultural norms, and scientific developments of various epochs, the perception and treatment of disabled individuals have changed significantly over time (Shakespeare, 2013). When the origins of disability are traced from ancient civilisations to the present day, a progressive shift towards the inclusion and empowerment of disabled individuals can be observed. Evidence from ancient civilisations reveals differing perspectives on disability (Hansen, 2017). As attested by the presence of prosthetics in mummies, ancient Egyptians with disabilities were frequently assimilated into society and provided with support systems (Hansen, 2017). Similarly, ancient Indian religious texts such as the Vedas emphasised compassion for people with disabilities and acknowledged their inherent value (Hansen, 2017; Wang, 2022). In contrast, ancient Greece and Rome exhibited a more fragmented approach, with a disability sometimes associated with divine retribution or punishment (Hansen, 2017).

During the Middle Ages, disability became increasingly intertwined with religious and societal beliefs and attitudes. For example, Christianity viewed disability as the result of sin and the devil's influence (Metzler, 2006). People with disabilities were frequently shunned and viewed as objects of pity or divine punishment (Metzler, 2006). The concept of the "leper colony" emerged, isolating from society people with leprosy or other visible disabilities (Rembis et al., 2018). Monastic orders frequently established hospitals and shelters (Clapton, 1997). The Renaissance and Enlightenment periods marked a significant transition towards the medical paradigm of disability, which viewed disabilities as medical conditions requiring treatment and cure. Medical practitioners increasingly pathologised

disabilities, emphasising the treatment of impairments rather than the capabilities and requirements of disabled individuals. This view perpetuated a sense of otherness, reinforced negative stereotypes, and fostered institutionalisation and segregation (Hansen, 2017).

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, people with disabilities began to organise and advocate for their rights (Malhotra, 2001). This movement challenged commonly held beliefs and pushed for equal treatment. One notable pioneer was Helen Keller, who, despite being blind and mute, fought for women's suffrage and disability rights (Chander, 2013). The passage of laws like the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 in the United States marked a significant shift towards recognising disability as a social issue that requires accommodation and equal opportunities (Neufeldt & Enns, 2003). In the latter half of the 20th century, there was a major shift in how disability was viewed, and instead of focusing solely on individual impairments, disabled activists and scholars argued that societal obstacles and discrimination played a major role in disabling people (Barnes, 2019; Oliver, 1990). This led to the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990, which aimed to eliminate discrimination and ensure equal access (Samaha, 2007).

The next major shift in the history of the disability rights movement is the biopsychosocial recognition promoted by the World Health Organisation and its ICF framework. In 1977, Engel developed the Biopsychosocial Model of Disability, which presented a more comprehensive view of disability (Engel, 1977). It recognised the issue's complexity, looking beyond biomedical factors to consider the interplay of biological, psychological, and social elements (Engel, 1977). Biologically, disabilities can arise from genetic, developmental, or acquired conditions, impairing physical or cognitive abilities (World Health Organization., 2001). Disability can also have psychological impacts, affecting self-perception, emotional well-being, and coping skills, further influencing a person's functional status (Livneh, 2001, 2022). Socially, disability is influenced by societal attitudes, environmental barriers, and cultural beliefs, which can facilitate or hinder social participation (Shakespeare, 2006)). As a result, the Biopsychosocial Model emphasises the need for multidisciplinary interventions that address all these dimensions.

The Biopsychosocial Model challenged traditional medical models of disability, which focused mainly on individual pathology. Instead, it advocates for a more comprehensive approach considering the individual's lived experience within their socio-cultural context. This model remains a guiding force in disability research, policy, and interventions, promoting holistic well-being and societal inclusion for people with disabilities (Albrecht et al., 2001).

Today, there is a growing focus on inclusion, empowerment, and recognition of the rights of disabled individuals. Some governments and organisations worldwide are creating accessible infrastructure, implementing inclusive educational policies, and promoting equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities (United Nations, 2006). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has also helped to accelerate global recognition and preservation of disabled people's rights (United Nations, 2006). As society moves towards inclusiveness and empowerment, it is essential to address the overlapping dimensions of a person's identity, which interacts with disability. People with disabilities who belong to additional marginalised communities, such as racial or ethnic minorities, the LGBTQIA+ community, or those with low socioeconomic status, face more significant challenges and barriers (Goethals et al., 2015). To achieve genuine equality and social justice for all disabled people, it has been recognised that these intersecting forms of discrimination must be addressed (Goethals et al., 2015). Furthermore, raising awareness about disability rights, challenging stereotypes, and promoting positive depictions of disabled individuals in media and popular culture can help eliminate societal prejudices and promote greater acceptance and inclusion.

Additionally, education and awareness play a crucial role in shaping attitudes towards disability. By promoting inclusive education systems that meet the diverse learning requirements of disabled students, educational environments can be produced that value diversity and provide equal educational opportunities (Runswick-Cole, 2011).

Throughout history, disabled individuals have advocated for their rights. From ancient times to the present, how society perceives and treats disabilities has changed as societal values and scientific advancements have evolved. Although significant progress has been made towards inclusion and empowerment, much work must be done to remove barriers and ensure that disabled individuals have equal rights and

full participation in all areas of life. To create a more inclusive and equitable educational future for all, there is a need to learn from the past, advocate for change, and adopt a human rights perspective.

2.2 DEFINING DISABILITY

2.2.1 Person-First and Identity-First Language

The way disability is discussed has a significant impact on both societal perceptions and how people with disabilities view themselves. Many people prefer person-first language, such as "people with disabilities" or "individuals with disabilities" (Best et al., 2022). This language emphasises that a person's disability is not the most important thing about them and should not be the primary way they are described. By putting the person first, we respect their individuality and humanity (People With Disability Australia, 2022; Wehmeyer et al., 2000).

However, only some people prefer person-first language. Some individuals and groups prefer identity-first language, such as "disabled person" or "autistic person" (Best et al., 2022). They argue that their disability is essential to their identity and should not be ignored or marginalised. This language acknowledges and respects disability as a part of a person's identity rather than something negative that should be hidden (Best et al., 2022). The fact that different people have different preferences shows that disability language is complex and individualised. While some find power and identity in their disability, others prefer to separate themselves from it. It's important to respect each person's preferences and not make assumptions about what language they prefer (Kenny et al., 2016). Language is a powerful tool that can either stigmatise people with disabilities or promote their inclusion in society. The goal is to use language that respects each person's perspective and identity.

2.2.2 Justification for Using Both Person-First and Identity-First Language.

Disability is a complex topic that encompasses various dimensions and holds personal significance for many individuals and groups. There exist varied preferences regarding how people want to be addressed, with some advocating for person-first language and others for identity-first language. This thesis aims to acknowledge and honour the diverse perspectives on this matter while striving to be inclusive and respectful.

Both person-first and identity-first languages are present in the current discourse on disability. Both in this thesis acknowledge the ongoing debate and discussion in the field. Focusing solely on one and disregarding the other would neglect an essential aspect of the conversation and potentially misrepresent the broader discourse. Secondly, it would be an oversimplification to assume that all individuals with disabilities prefer one form of language over the other. By incorporating both terminologies, this thesis recognises and respects the diversity of preferences within the disability community. Thirdly, it presents different viewpoints. While person-first language acknowledges the person's individuality, identity-first language recognises disability as an integral part of one's identity. Using both forms of language in this thesis allows for a comprehensive examination of how people perceive and understand disability. Lastly, it is to foster reflective participation. Using person-first and identity-first language encourages readers to engage with the text thoughtfully and contemplate the implications and subtleties of language choices. This approach aims to educate and promote a deeper comprehension of the subject matter.

Using both person-first and identity-first language throughout this thesis is a purposeful decision. The intention is to demonstrate consideration and recognition for the wide range of viewpoints within the disability community, to mirror the depth of the current conversation, and to encourage a more inclusive and detailed comprehension of the topic. This decision promotes a more diverse and thorough understanding of the subject matter.

2.2.3 Defining Disability

Defining disability is a complex task that requires careful consideration. The current approach emphasises the importance of viewing individuals as people first rather than focusing solely on their medical diagnosis or condition (Shakespeare, 2013). The term "impairment" describes the limitations imposed by an individual's condition. This thesis will examine disability through the biopsychosocial model lens, emphasising socially erected barriers that disable a person from equal and equitable social participation. According to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an

equal basis with others." (i.e. which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others) (United Nations, 2006). The United Nations defines *disability* as the result of societal barriers interacting with a person with an impairment (United Nations, 2006).

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF, 2001) is a framework instrument used by the World Health Organisation to describe and measure health and disability in line with a biopsychosocial model understanding (World Health Organization., 2001). The ICF defines *disability* as an umbrella term encompassing impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions resulting from interacting with a person with a health condition and their environmental and personal context (Boersema et al., 2018; World Health Organization., 2001).

2.3 LEGISLATION, POLICIES, INITIATIVES, AND HUMAN RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Governments and international organisations have prioritised protecting the rights and well-being of individuals with disabilities through legislation, policies, and initiatives. These measures aim to promote inclusivity, accessibility, and the preservation of human rights. In this section, I will examine the frameworks, policies, and initiatives implemented to support people with disabilities, including both the progress that has been made and the challenges that remain.

Legislation plays a crucial role in protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities. The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted in 2006 and ratified by several countries, is a significant international document in this regard (United Nations, 2006). It emphasises the equal enjoyment of human rights for people with disabilities and calls for eliminating discrimination and promoting social inclusion. Many nations, such as Australia, have passed national laws that align with the principles of the UNCRPD, providing a legal foundation for disability rights (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2008; United Nations, 2006). International organisations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Labor Organization (ILO), have also taken initiatives to promote the rights of people with disabilities. The WHO's World Report on Disability provides a comprehensive analysis of disability globally and recommends policies and interventions for disability-inclusive development (World Health

Organization, 2011). The ILO promotes the rights of disabled individuals in the workplace and advocates for decent work opportunities and inclusive employment practices. These initiatives help raise awareness, facilitate knowledge exchange, and guide member states in implementing inclusive policies.

In the following section, I detail legislation implemented across select countries. This is not intended to be exhaustive but rather to provide a sample of existing legislation.

Ireland

Ireland has implemented various policies, initiatives, and laws promoting inclusion and equality. The Disability Act of 2005 provides legal support for these policies and requires public entities, including educational institutions, to provide accessible services and resources for disabled students (National Disability Authority, 2005). The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act of 2004 is another legislation that imposes a duty on educational bodies to ensure that students with special educational needs have equal access to and participation in education (Department of Education, 2007). These laws have inspired policies that directly address the requirements of disabled students in postsecondary institutions. The Higher Education Authority's (HEA) National Access Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015–2019 represented a further step in this direction (Sweeney & Christie, 2019). It aimed to improve access to higher education for underrepresented groups. Over the past two decades, the number of disabled students has increased from 1 to 6 percent (Sweeney & Christie, 2019). The higher education system in Ireland continues to make progress in promoting access and equity by addressing system-wide reforms and extending the initiative to 2030 as part of the National Strategy for Higher Education (Higher Education Authority, 2023).

Other initiatives towards access and equity are The "Ability" programme, backed by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the European Social Fund (Thinking Disabilities, 2020), the Fund for Students with Disabilities (FSD), administered by the HEA, offers funding to full-time students with disabilities in further and higher education institutions (Higher Education Authority, 2023).

Australia

Australia has taken steps towards promoting equal access to postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities (Miller et al., 2019). Through legislation, policies, and initiatives, the country aims to eliminate barriers, promote inclusiveness, and provide equal opportunities for disabled individuals. For example, the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) is fundamental legislation prohibiting discrimination based on disability in various areas, including education (Australian Government, 1992). Additionally, the DDA's Disability Standards for Education 2005 mandates that educational institutions make reasonable accommodations to meet the needs of pupils with disabilities (Department of Education, 2014).

Alongside legal protections, Australia has implemented several initiatives to improve disabled individuals' access to education. The National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 is a unified national strategy that aims to enhance the lives of persons with disabilities, including in the education (Davy et al., 2018; Department of Social Services, 2012). According to a review of the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020, it was found to be a helpful complement to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) (Davy et al., 2018). This was particularly true for individuals who faced additional challenges accessing mainstream services due to factors such as culture and language, age and socio-economic circumstances, and Indigeneity (Davy et al., 2018). Other initiatives and support systems include The Higher Education Disability Support Programme (DSP) and the National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program, which assists disabled individuals in postsecondary education. DSP provides funding to institutions of higher education that provide educational support services for students with disabilities (Department of Education, 2023). The NDCO Programme seeks to improve the coordination and delivery of support services and facilitate smooth transitions from school to tertiary education and ensuing employment. As part of the 2023-24 Budget, an additional $17.7 million was provided under the DSP (from 2023-24 to 2026-27) to increase support for students with disabilities in higher education (Department of Education, 2023).

The NDIS is another initiative that provides funding and assistance to people with disabilities to access necessary services and support based on their needs (Whitburn et al., 2017). Alongside this is financial assistance and support to students with disabilities through the Youth Allowance, Austudy, and ABSTUDY programmes. This financial aid assists in covering the costs of tuition, housing, books, and instruments, thus reducing financial barriers to postsecondary education.

United States of America

The United States has measures to promote equal access to postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities through legislation, policies, and initiatives. These mechanisms aim to eliminate barriers, encourage inclusiveness, and guarantee educational equality for all citizens. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 fundamentally prohibits discrimination based on disability in various areas, including education (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2008). Similarly, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 mandates that schools and universities receiving federal funding must not discriminate against disabled students and provide reasonable accommodations (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration & Management, 2023).

Effective transition for students with disabilities has been a priority for American policymakers (West, 2009). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) contains provisions that promote transition services and postsecondary planning. IDEA mandates that children with disabilities have access to free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2015). Additionally, affirmative action policies and anti-discrimination laws seek to guarantee disabled individuals equal employment opportunities and reasonable accommodations. Accessibility regulations and standards have also been implemented to increase the accessibility of public spaces, transportation, and digital platforms (IDEA, 2015).

The Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 has made the transition to higher education more accessible and viable for students with disabilities Education(U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This Act expanded federal financial aid, improved college access and completion assistance, and allowed certain students with intellectual disabilities to access federal Pell Grants, Federal Work-Study, and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (West, 2009). The Federal TRIO Programmes also offers financial assistance to students with disabilities, including individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (Cowan Pitre & Pitre, 2009). It provides academic instruction, guidance, help selecting postsecondary courses, and information on financial aid programmes. Other systems in place include the National Council on Disability and the U.S. Department of Education's Office for

Civil Rights, which are independent federal agencies instrumental in advocating for policies to ensure that educational institutions comply with federal disability statutes.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has tried to promote equal access to postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities. This commitment is evidenced by comprehensive legislation, initiatives, and policies to remove barriers and promote inclusivity in education. The Equality Act 2010 serves as a cornerstone of disability legislation, prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of disability, including within the education system (Equity and Human Rights Commission, 2010). In particular, the Act requires educational institutions to make reasonable adjustments to ensure disabled students are not disadvantaged (Equity and Human Rights Commission, 2010). Furthermore, the UK government has implemented the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) code of practice (Middleton & Kay, 2023). This statutory code, applicable to England, offers guidance to educational institutions on duties, policies, and procedures relating to Part 3 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated regulations, which include provisions on further and higher education (Middleton & Kay, 2023). SEND plays a significant role in shaping everyday inclusive practice and training teachers to better students with disabilities (Middleton & Kay, 2023).

Various government-led initiatives support students with disabilities in postsecondary education, including the Disabled Students' Allowances (DSAs), which provide financial support for students in higher education with a disability, long-term health condition, mental health condition, or specific learning difficulty (Department of Education, 2019). Recent reports, however, have shown that DSA has had limited impact due to low awareness amongst students, and its influence on decisions to transition into higher education has fallen over time (Department of Education, 2019).

Other present bodies include the Office for Students (OfS), an independent regulator of higher education in England that promotes equality of opportunity in connection to access and participation in higher education (Office for Students, 2023). The UK also encourages collaboration between different sectors to support disabled students. The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) and the Association of Colleges (AoC) are two examples of organisations

that work alongside the government to advocate for students with disabilities in postsecondary education.

Belgium

Belgium has made strides towards promoting access to postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities. The Anti-Discrimination Act 2003 and the Federal Equal Opportunities Act 2007 are two critical legislations in Belgium that prohibit discrimination on the grounds of disability, including within the educational sector. These laws mandate that reasonable accommodations must be provided to disabled individuals, ensuring equal opportunities for participation in all sectors of society, including postsecondary education. The Belgian Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities, known as Unia, works to combat discrimination and promote equal opportunities (Unia, 2016). Unia oversees the implementation of anti-discrimination laws, ensuring educational institutions uphold the rights of disabled students and offer the necessary accommodations (Unia, 2016).

One notable initiative is the Flemish Education Inclusion Policy (European Commission, 2023). This policy aims to include students with disabilities in mainstream education, enhancing their learning experience and providing equal educational opportunities. It promotes a shift from special needs schools to inclusive classrooms in mainstream schools and extends to higher education (European Commission, 2023). Financial support for students with disabilities also plays a part in promoting access to postsecondary education. Disabled students are eligible for various grants and financial benefits, including increased family allowance and reduced tuition fees.

In the French community, the Walloon Agency for Integration of People with Disabilities (AWIPH) and the Service for People with Disabilities (SPF) work together to ensure disabled individuals have access to higher education (Agency for the Integration of People with Disabilities, Belgium, 2009). These organisations guide higher education institutions, helping them accommodate students with disabilities and create an inclusive learning environment. In the German-speaking community, the Department for People with Disabilities offers services and guidance to support disabled individuals accessing higher education. This includes providing necessary adaptations and promoting equal opportunities.

2.4 COMPARING DISABILITY POLICIES IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION ACROSS COUNTRIES

While progress has been made in various countries to increase the accessibility of postsecondary education for students with disabilities, several barriers still need to be addressed (Davy et al., 2018; Sweeney & Christie, 2019). Evidence shows that attitudes in society, limited resources, and structural limitations prevent the successful implementation of policies (Department of Education, 2019; West, 2009). Evidence shows that not all educational institutions fully comply with the laws enacted for people with disabilities, resulting in inconsistent implementation of necessary modifications (Equity and Human Rights Commission, 2010; Unia, 2016). Most of these initiatives and interventions focus on assisting individuals rather than creating an overall transition towards a fully inclusive educational system (European Commission, 2023). The concept of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is the creation of inclusive educational environments and instruments, remains mostly undeveloped (West, 2009). To establish strong, inclusive practices in postsecondary education, there is a need for continuous monitoring and innovation and a shift towards designing more universally inclusive education systems (Davy et al., 2018). The exchange of effective practical strategies and practises between countries can accelerate progress towards greater accessibility for students with disabilities internationally (Equity and Human Rights Commission, 2010; European Commission, 2023; Unia, 2016).

2.4.1 Legislation and Policy Implementation

Despite significant progress, challenges and gaps persist in ensuring full and effective inclusion for people with disabilities. One key challenge is the gap between legislation and implementation. While legislation may exist, its effective enforcement and implementation can vary across countries and regions (Lang et al., 2011). Limited resources, lack of awareness, and attitudinal barriers can hinder the translation of rights into practical changes on the ground. Additionally, intersectional discrimination, such as discrimination based on disability and gender, race, or socioeconomic status, poses additional barriers and challenges that must be addressed (Goethals et al., 2015). Promoting the human rights of people with disabilities requires a comprehensive approach encompassing legal frameworks,

policy initiatives, and societal attitudes (Pinto, 2010). Human rights-based approaches emphasise the empowerment and participation of disabled individuals in decision-making processes, ensuring their voices are heard and their rights are respected. It also involves promoting inclusive education, healthcare, and social services responsive to the diverse needs of disabled individuals (Pinto, 2010). Challenges remain in translating legal protections into meaningful change. By continuing to prioritise disability rights, promoting awareness, and fostering inclusive practices, societies can create an environment where people with disabilities can fully participate, contribute, and thrive.

2.5   IMPORTANCE OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals, society, and economies, as stated by Välimaa and Hoffman, (2008) and Task Force on Higher Education and Society, (2000). It provides a platform for intellectual development, critical thinking, skill-building, and personal transformation. Across the world, the impact of higher education on people, society, and the economy is significant and diverse, highlighting its worth and importance. Pursuing higher education opens doors for individuals to grow intellectually and personally. They can participate in programs that enhance their ability to interact with society, think critically, gain specialised knowledge, and foster creativity, curiosity, and a lifelong pursuit of learning. According to Winberg et al. (2019), higher education can enhance personal growth by promoting self-confidence, leadership abilities, and a sense of social responsibility. Research by Alqazlan et al. (2019) suggests that individuals with impairments may find it difficult to secure jobs after higher education due to a lower level of required skills. Conversely, those without disabilities who complete postsecondary education have a better chance of finding employment and earning higher pay (Alqazlan et al., 2019; Baum et al., 2013; Grigal & Hart, 2010).

This has important implications for societal outcomes, with findings showing that higher levels of education are linked to economic growth and competitiveness for nations (Hu, 2010; McMahon, 2018; Newman et al., 2011). Access to postsecondary education is also a key driver of social mobility, as noted by Hout (2012) and Chetty et al. (2017) further demonstrate that providing access to high-quality postsecondary education for economically disadvantaged individuals can significantly increase upward mobility rates. However, persistent access barriers such

as high tuition fees and institutional injustices may exacerbate socioeconomic disparities, highlighting the need for inclusive policies and financial assistance solutions (Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2016; Dynarski et al., 2022).

Postsecondary education benefits the economy and helps cultivate a more informed and engaged citizenry, as noted by Dee (2003). This is achieved through developing critical thinking skills and encouraging civic involvement, ultimately resulting in a more democratic society (Milligan et al., 2003). Aghion et al. (2009) further highlight the critical role that postsecondary institutions play in fostering innovation and societal growth, contributing to breakthroughs in various sectors that can have significant societal benefits. Finally, completing postsecondary education provides individuals with the skills necessary to tackle complex global challenges, as noted by Marginson (2011).

Research by Lombardi et al. (2011) demonstrates that postsecondary education is a crucial foundation for personal growth, promoting independence and self-advocacy. Students with disabilities enrolled in higher education programs show improvements in their self-concept and confidence, which are essential for a smooth transition into adulthood (Getzel & Thoma, 2008; Test et al., 2005). Inclusive education environments also encourage the development of positive social attitudes, promoting social inclusion and equality (Konur, 2006; Wilson, 2005).

As already identified, access to higher education is critical for individuals with disabilities to participate in the economy (Hu, 2010; McMahon, 2018; Newman et al., 2011). Furthermore, greater economic engagement reduces societal expenditures on disability support services while expanding the economy (Houtenville & Conway, 2008). While the current body of academic research supports the vital role of postsecondary education in promoting economic growth, social mobility, and informed citizenship, access hurdles still exist. Coordinated policy initiatives supported by evidence are needed to expand access to postsecondary education equitably and inclusively (L. C. Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). Investigation into these obstacles and possible responses is necessary to guide the steps that can be taken to promote access to postsecondary education.

Recent years have seen an increased emphasis on the need for improved preparation and transition services for postsecondary education (O'Neill & Cumming, 2018; Wagner & Newman, 2015). However, research by Wagner & Newman (2015) has shown that young people with disabilities are less likely to enrol in and complete higher education programs than those without impairments. The research conducted by Kutscher and Tuckwiller (2020) indicates that postsecondary transition predictors have a moderate to low impact on the likelihood of successful transfer for people with disabilities. For this reason, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of the experiences and requirements of individuals with disabilities to provide appropriate transitional assistance tailored to their needs since the transition is not a "one-size-fits-all" solution.

Despite postsecondary education being of utmost importance, individuals with disabilities still face persistent challenges to access, such as physical inaccessibility, inadequate support services, and stigma (Madaus, 2011). Comprehensive policies and efforts accessible to individuals with disabilities are required to address these obstacles (Moriña & Biagiotti, 2022).

Beyond this, another area that gets overlooked in the literature is intersectionality and its applicability when discussing barriers students with disabilities face when transitioning to postsecondary education. Critical disability theory emphasises the importance of intersectional analysis to understand better the challenges these students face, including overlapping forms of oppression based on race, gender, class, or other identities (Liasidou, 2014).

2.6 INTERSECTIONALITY AND ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Contrary to conventional belief, identity is not a singular concept but a multifaceted one. In the past two decades, new theories on identity have emerged that introduce the concept of intersectionality (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). The intersectionality of disability refers to the relationship between disability and other social identities, including race, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. This section examines the intersectionality of disability in the context of postsecondary education barriers. Access, participation, and success in pursuing higher education are hampered for individuals with disabilities who belong to multiple marginalised groups. Understanding the intersectionality of disability is

essential for developing inclusive policies and practices that address diverse student populations' unique needs and experiences.

Regarding access to postsecondary education, individuals with disabilities encounter several obstacles. Nonetheless, when disability intersects with other marginalised identities, the barriers are frequently exacerbated. For instance, students with disabilities from low-income families may face financial constraints that limit their ability to pay for tuition, assistive technologies, and specialised support services (C. A. Grant & Zwier, 2011). This intersection of disability and socio-economic status creates substantial barriers to accessing opportunities for higher education. In Australia, people with disabilities are a minority demographic. In addition, individuals with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse contexts, such as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, face unique barriers to higher education access, such as the lack of campus representation and lower socio-economic status (Shaffner et al., 2019). Another example is how students with a mobility impairment who are also members of a racial or ethnic minority may face additional obstacles when navigating campus environments that lack adequate accessibility infrastructure and have to deal with racism and lack of social acceptance (Bešić, 2020).

In postsecondary education, support services ensure equal opportunities for students with disabilities. However, the intersectionality of disability can exacerbate the difficulty of accessing these supports. For example, students with disabilities who are members of the LGBTQIA+ community may face barriers due to the lack of culturally competent and inclusive support services that address the specific needs and experiences of individuals with intersecting identities (N. D. Thomas, 2019). Significant barriers to postsecondary education can be created by discrimination based on the intersectionality of disability. Students with disabilities who belong to marginalised racial or ethnic groups may be subjected to systemic discrimination, stereotypes, and bias that negatively affect their educational experience. This can manifest as lower expectations from faculty and peers, limited access to academic and career opportunities, and unequal treatment within the educational environment (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Understanding intersectionality is valuable for combating overcommunicated marginalisation and discrimination against people with disabilities.

The influence of gender on career choices and occupational experiences remains an ongoing area of investigation and debate. Despite gender equality advancements, certain professions are still perceived as gendered domains due to societal beliefs (Blackmore et al., 2015). Women who opt for male-dominated fields like engineering or trades are often confronted with several challenges due to their gender, and these complexities intensify when other identity facets, such as disability, are included. For example, disabled women pursuing engineering may face a dual challenge, dealing with gendered biases and ableist stereotypes (Cheryan et al., 2015). Conversely, men who choose careers in traditionally feminine domains like nursing or early childhood education encounter unique barriers. Their experiences are influenced not only by deviations from traditional gender roles but also by the potential prejudices related to other intersecting identities, such as disability (Eliason et al., 2011). The interplay of multiple identities highlights the intricate dynamics of intersectionality in non-traditional occupations, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive workplaces that recognise and mitigate these multiple challenges.

The intersectionality of disability illuminates the multiple obstacles individuals with disabilities face when pursuing postsecondary education. It emphasises the need for an all-encompassing strategy to address these challenges. Recognising the intersectionality of disability necessitates the development of policies and practices that consider the varied experiences and needs of students with other intersecting marginalised identities. Higher education institutions can create environments that promote equal access, participation, and success for all students, regardless of their intersecting identities, by comprehending and addressing the intersectionality of disability.

2.7   BARRIERS TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION TRANSITION

For students with disabilities, transitioning from secondary school to postsecondary education is an essential phase in their lives. Although higher education provides opportunities for personal growth, academic advancement, and career preparation, students with disabilities frequently face unique barriers during this transition (Kruse & Oswal, 2018). In this chapter, the International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) Framework is used to explore the unique barriers faced by students with disabilities during the transition to

postsecondary education (World Health Organization., 2001). The ICF Framework is a comprehensive framework that concentrates on the interaction between health conditions and contextual factors and categorises the barriers that students face. It recognises that disability includes impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions, as well as the influence of environmental and personal factors on an individual's functioning (World Health Organization., 2001). The barriers discussed include lack of preparation, inaccessible instructional materials, negative attitudes, barriers to accessibility, social inclusion and peer support, self-advocacy and empowerment, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and access to adequate support services and accommodations. Understanding these barriers provides the basis for developing effective strategies and support systems to ensure that students with disabilities successfully transition to higher education and an inclusive experience.

2.7.1 Activities and Participation

Unpreparedness: Secondary school students, particularly those with disabilities, confront realities distinct from those of their peers without disabilities. Typically, they do not have the necessary skills to satisfy the requirements of higher education institutions, particularly in mathematics and science (Kruse & Oswal, 2018; Megivern et al., 2003)**.** According to Goethals et al. (2015), these students are typically unprepared and lack the skills necessary to self-advocate for their own needs because of issues regarding the systems surrounding their individualised educational plans and the absence of full engagement in the construction of the plans. A study in Australia revealed that transitioning students did not receive support from their school representatives that facilitated their self-determination and independence while developing their individualised transition plans (Strnadová & Cumming, 2014). A recent study in Ireland revealed that self-awareness, self-determination, and self-advocacy are crucial and necessary skills, particularly for facilitating a positive transition process (Scanlon & Doyle, 2021). In addition, one of the realities of their situation is that they are typically discouraged from seeking higher education. According to Kochhar-Bryant, (2009), this discouragement often comes from members of the family as well as educators in schools. Because the transition process is fraught with uncertainty, it has been determined that effective transitions demand the active participation of parents in encouraging, advocating for, and providing

support for the educational aspirations of the people they care about (Scanlon & Doyle, 2021). Typically, parents struggle because they lack the support to navigate the process and the strategies to assist their family members (Scanlon & Doyle, 2021).

Social inclusion and peer support: This plays a critical role in the higher education experience, but students with disabilities often face social integration challenges (Goudreau & Knight, 2018). Peer support is essential for social inclusion, and a lack of information about disabilities, stigma, and mental roadblocks may result in exclusion and prejudice (Goudreau & Knight, 2018). Almotiri (2017) notes that students with impairments may experience difficulty forming meaningful connections, participating in extracurricular activities, and engaging in collaborative projects, which may lead to feelings of isolation. This lack of peer support may also impact general well-being and academic achievement.

Self-Advocacy and Empowerment: Successfully transitioning to higher education necessitates developing self-advocacy skills and effectively advocating for one's rights and needs. However, Getzel and Thoma, (2008) report that many students need more knowledge and confidence to navigate the complex higher education system and exercise their rights. Students may experience challenges communicating their requirements, gaining access to support services, and making essential adjustments without the capacity to advocate for themselves (Getzel & Thoma, 2008). The authors propose that empowering students with disabilities to manage the hurdles they face in pursuing higher education can be achieved through promoting self-advocacy, providing resources, and offering training (Getzel & Thoma, 2008).

2.7.2 Environmental Factors

Inaccessible Instructional Materials: The inaccessibility of instructional materials presents a significant academic barrier for students with disabilities. This problem arises when printed textbooks, online resources, and course materials are not designed to accommodate individuals with visual or hearing impairments (Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020). As a result, students with disabilities may struggle to access the same information as their peers, which limits their ability to participate fully in coursework, complete assignments, and engage with course content (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008). The absence of accessible materials can lead to frustration, isolation,

and exclusion, ultimately reducing academic opportunities for students with disabilities (Edyburn, 2021).

Attitudinal Barriers: Perceptions of ability are a significant attitudinal barrier for students with disabilities. Negative stereotypes and low expectations from educators, peers, and family members can restrict opportunities and erode students' self-confidence (Hutzler & Levi, 2008). Such attitudes can negatively impact their academic performance and overall educational experience (Ainscow, 2005). Peer attitudes substantially influence the social integration of students with disabilities. Negative attitudes can result in social exclusion and isolation, negatively impacting these students' sense of belonging and mental health (Purcal et al., 2014). These attitudes can also affect group work and collaborative learning experiences, common in postsecondary education settings (Hindes & Mather, 2007). The attitudes of faculty towards students with disabilities have a significant impact on the accessibility and inclusiveness of postsecondary education. Some faculty members hold misconceptions regarding the abilities of students with disabilities and the viability of accommodations, often due to a lack of awareness or training (Vogel et al., 2008). Self-perceptions of students with disabilities are also a significant barrier regarding attitudes. Students who internalise negative societal attitudes may dispute their abilities and underutilise support services, hindering their academic success (Marshak et al., 2010).

Barriers to Accessibility: The existence of accessibility barriers is one of the most significant obstacles that students with disabilities must overcome while transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education. According to Smith (2012), the physical surroundings that people interact with, such as buildings, classrooms, and other facilities, may not be constructed to suit the requirements of those with mobility impairments or sensory disorders. In addition, problems with digital accessibility frequently prevent users from gaining access to online educational platforms, electronic resources, and communication tools (Bouck et al., 2016). Students with impairments may have more difficulty participating in school activities and achieving academic success because of a lack of access to both real and virtual environments.

Access to adequate support services and accommodations: In higher education, Alverson et al. (2019) stressed the importance of providing adequate support and accommodations for students with disabilities. However, the quality and availability of these services differ between institutions, making it challenging for some students to receive timely and appropriate accommodations, such as assistive technology, note-taking assistance, and extended testing time. According to Kochhar-Bryant (2009), insufficient support services and accommodations may hinder students' academic engagement and cause frustration, alienation, and disengagement. Financial obstacles are prevalent for students with disabilities in the United States (Chambers et al., 2009). Even when financial support is available, students with disabilities are less likely to utilise it, placing them at a disadvantage compared to their non-disabled peers (Chambers et al., 2009).

2.7.3 Personal Factors

Linguistic and cultural background: Transitioning to higher education can be difficult, especially for students with disabilities from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This can be even more challenging for students who have impairments and come from families with low socioeconomic status. Research suggests these students may be more vulnerable to adverse outcomes during their academic journey (Banks, 2014; Kochhar-Bryant, 2009).

2.8 RATIONALE FOR THESIS

Transitioning to post-secondary education is critical for students with disabilities, as it sets the foundation for their future academic and professional endeavours. However, despite the growing body of literature on this topic, our understanding of the specific barriers these students face is limited, and the literature is challenging to navigate for researchers and end users such as institutions, government policymakers, and advocacy groups. To this end, a summary or synthesis of available evidence does not exist. In the remainder of this section, I detail the detail the key issues in the current body of evidence, which form the rationale for an evidence synthesis.

Diversity of countries

Existing research is saturated primarily on the American context, resulting in a lack of diversity in geographical scope and sociocultural contexts. This one-sided perspective may impede our comprehension of how these transitions are managed in various education systems and social structures around the globe (Peña, 2014). For example, studies on inclusive education in the United States may not be generalisable to nations where disability rights are less recognised or education systems are structured differently. Similarly, the overemphasis on the United States disregards the unique challenges faced by students with disabilities in developing nations or nations with distinct cultural norms and societal expectations.

In addition, the existing literature frequently focuses on particular types of disabilities, excluding a broader understanding of the diverse requirements of students with a variety of disabilities in various countries. This restriction makes it difficult to develop globally effective inclusive educational practices. While research on the transition of students with disabilities from secondary to postsecondary education is extensive, its limited geographical and cultural scope represents a significant lacuna in the literature. Research investigating the experiences of these transitions in a wider variety of countries and sociocultural contexts would benefit the discipline.

Diversity of legislation across countries

Access to higher education for students with disabilities varies significantly across different nations, as evidenced by literature on legal frameworks. While some Western countries have made significant progress, there remains a disparity in legislation. For example, the United States Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provide strong protections and accommodations, while the United Kingdom's Equality Act of 2010 guarantees equal access to disabled students (Madaus, 2005).

However, developing nations often lack comprehensive and enforceable legislation to protect the rights of disabled students in higher education, as noted by studies (Opertti & Brady, 2011; Salmi & D'Addio, 2021). Moreover, the existing legislation often lacks proper implementation mechanisms, rendering it ineffective in practice (Riddell & Weedon, 2014). The literature also highlights a lack of international legislation promoting uniform standards for including disabled students in higher education. This disparity impedes global understanding and cooperation,

emphasising the need for further comparative international studies and efforts towards a unified legislative approach.

Diversity of impairments

The current literature has tended to use homogenous samples of participants, which limits the generalizability of findings. Many studies primarily focus on specific disability types or certain demographic characteristics, neglecting the diverse experiences and perspectives of students with disabilities.

Approaches to understanding barriers

The current literature highlights a diversity of methodological approaches to investigating the barriers faced by students with disabilities during the transition to post-secondary education. Many studies employ qualitative methods to facilitate depth of understanding, while other studies employ quantitative approaches which help identify the magnitude of the problem being addressed. However, the quality of the work being undertaken in this field varies greatly. This highlights the need for a quality appraisal of studies examining the problem in order to identify methodological gaps to be addressed in future research.

Diversity of study samples and lack of intersectional analysis

There is a lack of literature that explores the intersectionality of people with disabilities, considering their unique characteristics and how they influence the barriers faced in accessing post-secondary education. Intersectionality acknowledges that the interaction of multiple social identities, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and disability shapes individuals' experiences. It is necessary to adopt an intersectional lens to examine how these intersecting factors contribute to the barriers encountered by students with disabilities, as it may reveal additional dimensions of inequality and exclusion.

2.9   SUMMARY AND PROPOSED RESARCH

While the literature on transition for students with disabilities has significantly contributed to our understanding of their barriers, there is a clear need to systematically gather data on barriers documented in existing studies and synthesise their findings. The proposed research aims to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the disabling barriers students encounter during transition. The study will

extend its investigation beyond a single country. Furthermore, focusing on countries with similar educational structures and policies regarding access. Furthermore, the study will allow comparisons across countries, educational structures, and policies regarding access. This comparative approach aims to gain insights into disabling barriers experienced by students in different contexts while considering the broader similarities and differences in their educational systems. The research will adopt an ICF perspective, acknowledging that disabling barriers can manifest across various impairment types. By avoiding a narrow focus on specific impairment categories, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers faced by students with disabilities. Furthermore, the study will allow comparisons across countries, educational structures, and policies regarding access.

In conclusion, the proposed research aims to fill gaps in the current literature by examining specific barriers faced by students with disabilities during the transition process. By adopting a comparative, holistic, and contextual approach, the study seeks to enhance our understanding of the disabling barriers experienced by students with disabilities, contributing to the knowledge base in this area of research.

Chapter 3: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is underpinned by Critical Disability Theory, which critiques mainstream portrayals of disability and promotes a more nuanced understanding of the lives of people with disabilities (Gillies, 2014). Critical Disability Theory is significant in disability studies and beyond because it challenges mainstream narratives and preconceptions about disability. It argues that disability is a societal issue linked to structural inequities rather than a personal one.

3.1   CRITICAL DISABILITY THEORY

Critical disability theory, which originated in the 1970s, holds that disability is a lived reality and that understanding and supporting individuals with disabilities requires a primary emphasis on personal experiences. According to this theory, society and attitudes contribute to the difficulties that persons with disabilities have while attempting to access services (Reaume, 2014). According to Gillies (2014), critical disability theory seeks to understand the dynamics surrounding the constraints that oppress individuals with disabilities and influence their human rights. This theory is gaining traction in the academic world, and scholars in the social sciences are using it as a lens through which to examine and make sense of social justice issues. Critical disability theory is essential to transformational research and enables activism for individuals with disabilities (Gillies, 2014; Reaume, 2014).

Critical Disability Theory is a theoretical framework that examines the topic of disability from a critical and social justice perspective (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). It calls into question the conventional interpretations of disability and brings attention to the intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination that people with impairments face daily (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). This investigates the key ideas and guiding principles of Critical Disability Theory, examines the implications of this theory for access to higher education, and evaluates the possibility of transformational change in establishing inclusive and equitable educational settings (Brown et al., 2019; Liasidou, 2014).

The focus of Critical Disability Theory is the study of disability as a social construct moulded by power dynamics, social norms, and oppressive regimes (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). It goes beyond impairments and highlights the social, cultural, and political elements that lead to the exclusion and marginalisation of those with disabilities (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). This theory recognises that disability intersects with other forms of oppression, such as racial, economic, gender, and sexual oppression (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). It emphasises the importance of understanding disability in connection to these overlapping identities and the unique experiences and challenges faced by those with multiple marginalised identities. According to Abes & Wallace (2018), Critical disability theory is founded on a commitment to advancing social justice and fairness for people with disabilities. It confronts ableism, prejudice, and unequal power relations and aims to reform societal structures and processes perpetuating inequality (Abes & Wallace, 2018; Patton et al., 2016). The theory emphasises the autonomy and unique voices of people with impairments. Engaging people with disabilities in decision-making processes and giving them the authority to advocate for their rights and needs is crucial (Abes & Wallace, 2018; Patton et al., 2016). The Critical Disability Theory critically examines ableism, a belief system glorifying able-bodiedness and stigmatising disability. It critiques social conventions that marginalise and exclude people with disabilities and challenges the notions of normalcy that underpin these assumptions (Abes & Wallace, 2018; Patton et al., 2016).

Critical Disability Theory fosters inclusive policies and practices in higher education institutions (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008). Critical disability theory advocates for reasonable accommodations, accessible physical settings, and curriculums designed to be inclusive, all aimed at providing equal access and participation for students with disabilities (Brown et al., 2019; Burgstahler & Cory, 2008).

Coomer (2019) demonstrates that Critical disability theory challenges conventional methods of instruction that may perpetuate ableism in higher education. It advocates for developing inclusive and accessible teaching techniques that consider multiple approaches to learning and provide various ways for students with disabilities to participate in activities and express themselves. Critical disability theory also emphasises the importance of giving students with disabilities the tools

necessary to participate actively in the educational process (Coomer, 2019). Gillies (2014) underscores the need for including students with disabilities in policy-making procedures and developing forums where their opinions can be considered and weighed. The application of Critical Disability Theory principles has the potential to bring about a revolutionary change in higher education by establishing accessible educational settings that recognise the experiences and contributions of people with impairments.

In conclusion, Critical Disability Theory provides a transformational paradigm for understanding disability and promoting social justice and fairness. Its application in higher education combats ableism, acknowledges intersectionality, and fosters inclusive policies and practices. Using this framework, my study aims to explore the human rights violations experienced by students with disabilities and explain the inequities they face.

This study is grounded in critical disability theory and employs the social and biopsychosocial models of disability as the foundational pillars. These models are the backbone of this study, guiding the synthesis of the experiences of people with disabilities and the barriers they face when transitioning to postsecondary education. This research aims to use these models as lenses to present and discuss the results, thus offering a thorough understanding of disabilities that goes beyond basic categorisations to promote inclusivity and equality.

3.2   THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

The Social Model of disability has transformed the discipline of disability studies (Barnes, 2019). This transformative perspective challenges the reductionist and pathological approach of the traditional medical paradigm by viewing disability as a construct influenced by societal attitudes, structures, and obstacles. In contrast to the conventional view of disability as a fundamental individual diagnosis, the social model emphasises socio-environmental barriers and the need for accessible environments (Barnes, 2019). According to Brabazon (2015), the central argument of the social model is that a person's disability is not necessarily a result of their physiological or psychological impairment but rather a manifestation of barriers present within their environment. The model emphasises cultural, societal, and

environmental barriers' role in preventing inclusive participation rather than the individual's impairment (Oliver, 2013).

Unique to the social model is its emphasis on autonomy and choice for individuals with impairments (D'Alessio, 2013). It also accords due recognition of their lived experiences and perspectives of people with disabilities (D'Alessio, 2013). Shakespeare (2006) notes the paradigm acknowledges the expertise of people with disabilities in their own lives, shifting the balance of power towards people with disabilities who have historically been marginalised. Overall, the social model of disability provides a more empowering and integrated perspective on disability that emphasises the significance of accessible environments and the recognition of the agency of people with disabilities. The social model of disability assists in understanding disability as a socially constructed issue, especially in educational contexts (Goodley, 2014). According to Armstrong et al., 2011), inclusive education cannot be achieved without identifying and eliminating disabling barriers within educational systems.

The social model acknowledges societal barriers and their negative impact and advocates for accessible environments, resulting in a more comprehensive, empowering, and inclusive solution for people with disabilities (Armstrong et al., 2011; Barnes, 2019; C. Thomas, 2017). This paradigm offers a human rights perspective that calls for social justice, accessibility, and full participation of people with disabilities in all sectors of society (Armstrong et al., 2011; Barnes, 2019; C. Thomas, 2017). A thorough examination of the social model's many dimensions and applicability in disability studies and beyond clarifies its seminal contributions.

This realisation motivates a critical examination of the social fabric, revealing ingrained disabling conditions such as prejudiced attitudes, inaccessible public infrastructures, and discriminatory policies (Goodley, 2014). In contrast to the medical model, which pathologises the individual, the social model focuses on societal barriers and employs a critical analysis of society (Oliver, 2013). The social model addresses systemic defects head-on, emphasising their role in fostering exclusion and marginalisation (Oliver, 2013). This emphasis broadens the lens of enquiry and solution generation, advocating for systemic changes resulting in a more inclusive and equitable society (Oliver, 2013). The emphasis of the social model on inclusive environments demonstrates its commitment to participation and social

inclusion (Dirth & Branscombe, 2017). This strategy promotes not only the success of people with disabilities but also a society that is more diverse and inclusive (Dirth & Branscombe, 2017).

It recognises people with disabilities as complete, equal members of society entitled to fundamental human rights (Quinn et al., 2002). This model was instrumental in the development of international human rights conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), demonstrating its influence and relevance in contemporary society.

Despite its potential for transformation, the social paradigm has been criticised. Some argue that it oversimplifies the complex experience of disability by concentrating solely on societal barriers and disregarding individual impairment experiences and health-related issues (Shakespeare, 2006; C. Thomas, 2017). Critics also argue that while the model has increased awareness of societal barriers, its impact on tangible societal change, especially regarding policy implementation, has been limited (Barnes, 2019). Shakespeare (2013) argues for a more nuanced interpretation of disability considering individual and social factors. He asserts that the social model risks overlooking personal experiences of impairment and the intricate interaction between the personal and social. Such critical insights continue to shape the discourse in disability studies, reinforcing the relevance and importance of the social model in current literature (Shakespeare, 2006, 2013). To respond to these criticisms, a refined understanding of the social model is required, one that combines the model's strengths in highlighting societal barriers with recognition of individual-level experiences and structural constraints. Despite its limitations, the social model remains a cornerstone of disability studies. It has significantly contributed to reframing disability, advancing rights and equality, and has impacted the literature. The ongoing discussion regarding the social model reaffirms its importance in pursuing an inclusive and equitable society.

When considering disability, it is essential to consider social, biological and psychological factors. The biopsychosocial model considers all three of these factors, which can give a more complete understanding of how disability affects people. This model addresses the limitations of the social model alone, as pointed out by Shakespeare (Shakespeare, 2006). This study uses the biopsychosocial model to

understand how different barriers interact and impact the experience of students with a disability during the transition to higher education.

3.3   THE BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY

The Biopsychosocial paradigm was created by Engel in 1977 and provides a comprehensive approach to understanding disability (Engel, 1977). It considers biological, psychological, and social factors, going beyond the traditional biomedical and social model. This results in a more complete understanding of the complex nature of disability (Engel, 1977). Incorporating the medical perspective on disability, the Biopsychosocial model recognises the physiological and functional consequences of health conditions and physical impairments, directly impacting an individual's abilities (Engel, 1977; Petasis, 2019; Wade & Halligan, 2017). The Biopsychosocial model acknowledges that psychological factors, such as disability perceptions, coping mechanisms, and mental health status, can significantly impact a person's experience (Wade & Halligan, 2017). Self-efficacy, resiliency, anxiety, and depression affect a person's ability to adapt and manage their disability. This emphasises the significance of considering psychological factors in the disability management (Hogan, 2019; Petasis, 2019; Wade & Halligan, 2017).

The Biopsychosocial approach highlights the importance of social and environmental contexts in managing disabilities (Wade & Halligan, 2017). This means considering societal attitudes, the accessibility of the environment, and the existence of social support networks. It is essential to recognise that stigma, discrimination, supportive relationships, and accessibility can all significantly impact the lives of individuals with disabilities (Engel, 1977; Wade & Halligan, 2017).

The Biopsychosocial model emphasises the vital role of social and environmental contexts (Engel, 1977; Petasis, 2019). This means that societal attitudes, environmental accessibility, and social support networks must be considered. It is crucial to acknowledge that stigma, discrimination, supportive relationships, and accessibility can significantly affect the lives of individuals with disabilities. The Biopsychosocial model offers a comprehensive and flexible framework for understanding the numerous factors that shape the disability experience. Rather than solely focusing on deficits, this holistic approach recognises

the impact of social and environmental factors on the lives of people with disabilities (Engel, 1977; Hogan, 2019; Petasis, 2019; Wade & Halligan, 2017).

The Biopsychosocial paradigm provides a multifaceted understanding that allows for proactive, individualised, and integrated interventions (Suls & Rothman, 2004). It recognises the complexity of disability and promotes interdisciplinary collaboration, resulting in a more unified approach to disability support. The model considers not only the physical aspects of disability but also the psychological and socio-environmental factors (Suls & Rothman, 2004). Furthermore, the Biopsychosocial model aims to empower individuals with disabilities by acknowledging their lived experiences. It moves beyond pathologising disability to recognise and affirm their resilience and capacity for adaptation. This shift in perspective can help reduce stigma, promote autonomy, and foster a more inclusive society.

The Biopsychosocial model serves as a crucial link between the medical and social models of disability by acknowledging the biological aspects of disability highlighted by the medical model and the social and environmental barriers that individuals with disabilities often encounter, as emphasised by the social model (Petasis, 2019; Shakespeare, 2006). Although it recognises the significance of psychological and social factors, it is essential to avoid giving excessive importance to individual factors while neglecting the systemic and structural barriers that individuals with disabilities regularly face (Shakespeare, 2006)

In 2001, the World Health Organization proposed the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), which is heavily influenced by the Biopsychosocial model of the health and disability (World Health Organization., 2001). The Biopsychosocial model suggests that health and disability outcomes are determined by the complex interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors (Engel, 1977; Wade & Halligan, 2017). The ICF uses a biopsychosocial approach to understand and categorise functioning and disability. It considers disability a dynamic interplay between a person's health condition and the surrounding context, including personal and environmental factors (Stucki et al., 2007). As a result, the ICF provides an internationally recognised, detailed, and structured framework for comprehending and measuring health and disability, operationalising the principles of the Biopsychosocial model.

The ICF is made up of two main parts. The first part includes body functions and structures, activities, and participation, similar to the biological and psychological components of the Biopsychosocial model (Engel, 1977; World Health Organization., 2001). The second part includes environmental and personal factors, similar to the Biopsychosocial model's social components (Engel, 1977; World Health Organization., 2001). These two dimensions demonstrate the integrated approach of the Biopsychosocial model and highlight the complex interplay of factors that impact health and disability. When we refer to "body functions and structures," we are talking about the physiological and anatomical aspects of the body, similar to the biological component of the Biopsychosocial model.

On the other hand, "activities and participation" refer to the execution of tasks and involvement in life situations involving biological and psychological components. The "environmental factors" encompass physical, social, and attitudinal aspects of an individual's surroundings, reflecting the social element of the Biopsychosocial model, as stated by the World Health Organization in 2001 (Engel, 1977; World Health Organization., 2001). The ICF utilises the Biopsychosocial model's principles to create a holistic comprehension of health and disability. This facilitates healthcare providers, researchers, and policymakers to evaluate health and disability, assess interventions, and create health policies that consider the intricate interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. The ICF is a practical tool that offers a comprehensive understanding of health and disability.

Chapter 4: Research Design

This chapter describes the methodological approach utilised in this study, which consisted of conducting a systematic literature review to identify the barriers experienced by students with disabilities transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education. This chapter describes the methodology used for the literature search, including the database searched, search terms used, inclusion and exclusion criteria, study selection, data extraction, quality assessment, and the strategy for synthesising the results.

4.1 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1.1 Methodology

Systematic literature reviews play a vital role in disability research by providing an exhaustive and objective synthesis of extant knowledge (Pati & Lorusso, 2018). This section discusses the use of a systematic literature review as the method for this thesis and the rationale behind its selection to address the research questions.

This thesis aims to expand on our current knowledge regarding the barriers that students with disabilities experience as they transition from secondary education to postsecondary education. This particular area has yet to be extensively studied in modern literature, making it an area that requires further research. To achieve this, a methodical examination of the literature was conducted to gather and evaluate evidence on the barriers students with disabilities face. The methodology section provides additional information on this process.

There are no systematic literature reviews in the academic landscape addressing this research question. This highlighted the necessity for a comprehensive analysis to identify, evaluate, and synthesise existing research (M. J. Grant & Booth, 2009). Systematically reviewing literature is essential to advancing knowledge in a particular field. This method involves gathering all empirical evidence that meets specific eligibility criteria, leading to a thorough and replicable means of identifying, evaluating, and interpreting all relevant research regarding a specific research question (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Consequently, this approach presented an

opportunity to shed light on the current state of research regarding the barriers that students with disabilities face in their transition to postsecondary education. The barriers faced by students with disabilities are varied, as the disability itself is diverse (Shakespeare, 2006). A systematic review of the literature was an essential step in filling the gaps in knowledge, thereby guiding future research, policy-making, and practice in this area.

To address gaps in the existing literature regarding barriers faced by students with disabilities during their transition to post-secondary education, a systematic literature review was conducted. Established systematic review methodologies were followed, such as those outlined by Petticrew & Roberts (2006) and Field Moher et al. (2009). First, the review prioritised inclusivity to address the issue of homogeneity in participants and low sample sizes in many studies. Drawing from Noyes et al. (2019) work, the review focused on capturing studies that included participants with diverse characteristics, such as disability types, ages, genders, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses. This comprehensive approach allowed for a more generalisable understanding of the varied experiences of students with disabilities during their transition to post-secondary education.

Second, to address the need for a holistic methodological approach in existing research, the review synthesised studies using different research methods, including qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method designs, as Gough et al. (2017) suggested. This enabled a multi-faceted examination of barriers faced by students with disabilities. Furthermore, the review aimed to address the need for more exploration into the intersectionality of these barriers. To do this, the review was designed to capture all relevant studies. This aimed to capture studies with participants with different identities (race, gender, and socioeconomic status) (Lim et al., 2021). This was to highlight how intersectional identities influence the disabling barriers in post-secondary education transitions.

4.1.2 Research Design – Systematic Literature Review

A systematic literature review is a rigorous and systematic method for collecting, analysing, and synthesising extant research on a particular topic (Pati & Lorusso, 2018). This section provides an overview of the significant stages of conducting a systematic literature review, including the formulation of the research

question, the search strategy, the selection of the studies, the extraction of the data, and the synthesis (Pati & Lorusso, 2018).

Defining the Research Question: The first stage in conducting a Systematic literature review is formulating a distinct and specific research question (Liberati et al., 2009; Moher et al., 2009). The research question should be concentrated, well-defined, and pertinent to the research topic. It guides the complete review procedure, including selecting search terms, criteria for study inclusion, which data to extract and what analysis to undertake and data analysis.

Search Strategy: To ensure the incorporation of relevant studies, it is essential to develop a comprehensive search strategy (Liberati et al., 2009; Moher et al., 2009). This requires identifying relevant databases and employing appropriate search terms. The search strategy should be designed to capture as many relevant studies as feasible and minimise the possibility of overlooking crucial literature.

Selection of Studies: The selection of studies includes filtering and evaluating the relevance of each study identified in the search. To guide the selection process, it is essential to establish precise inclusion and exclusion criteria (Liberati et al., 2009; Moher et al., 2009). Two or more reviewers should evaluate each study independently to assure consistency and reduce bias. Disagreements must be resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer.

Data Extraction: This entails systematically extracting data relevant to the research question from each included study. This may consist of study characteristics, demographics of participants, research methods, and critical findings (Liberati et al., 2009; Moher et al., 2009). A standardised data extraction form should be used to ensure data extraction consistency and completeness. The extracted data will form the basis for synthesising and analysing findings (Tricco et al., 2018).

Synthesis of Data: The synthesis of data involves analysing and summarising the results of the included studies.

Methodological Rigour: It is essential to ensure methodological rigour when conducting a systematic literature review. This involves following established guidelines, such as the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) or the Joanna Briggs Institute guidelines (Page et al.,

2021). Rigour minimises bias by documenting each stage of the review process and providing explicit justifications for methodological decisions.

Transparency and Reproducibility: Transparency and reproducibility are essential components of systematic literature review. This includes the search strategy, study selection, data extraction, and data synthesis (Liberati et al., 2009; Moher et al., 2009). This allows others to assess the review procedure and replicate or update the study if necessary. Additionally, detailed documentation and reporting contribute to the credibility and reliability of the review.

My supervisors, a screener, and I collaborated on the proposed research design to ensure the research question was effectively addressed. While individuals with lived experience of disabilities were not involved in designing this protocol, I plan to incorporate this approach in future studies. This study will use a systematic literature review methodology that adheres to the PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2020). The review will encompass qualitative and quantitative sources, and a bioecological approach will be used to synthesise the data.

4.2   RESEARCH QUESTION – PICO FRAMEWORK

The research question was formulated using a Population, Interest, Context (PICo) framework, adhering to the standards of a systematic literature review. The PICo framework is widely recognised for its ability to establish specific and well-defined research questions (Higgins et al., 2019). In this study, the framework was applied as follows.

Population: The population of focus for this research is students with disabilities. This component ensured that the research question was tailored to the specific population of interest, enabling a targeted investigation into their experiences and challenges.

Interest: The research question was centred on the transition from secondary to postsecondary education. By narrowing the scope to this particular aspect, the study sought to explore the unique issues and barriers encountered by students with disabilities during this critical educational transition period.

Context: The research was situated within the educational context, specifically focusing on secondary and postsecondary education. This context acknowledged the

significance of the education system in shaping the experiences and opportunities available to students with disabilities during their transition to postsecondary education.

4.3   SEARCH STRATEGY

Utilising specific search terms, the systematic literature review employed a targeted search strategy to retrieve relevant studies from selected databases. A comprehensive list of search terms and their synonyms was used to conduct an exhaustive literature search. These search terms were derived from keywords identified in studies on the subject of this study (Woodgate et al., 2020). To initiate the search process, a generalised search was conducted across multiple databases to identify existing literature on the topic of interest (Woodgate et al., 2020). A more targeted search was then performed using the specified keywords in the following databases: ERIC, Scopus, Pubmed, CINAHL, and PsycINFO. The objective was to identify additional relevant keywords that would broaden the search scope and acquire a wider variety of relevant studies.

The final search terms generated through this iterative process were combined using Boolean operators (i.e. AND and OR) and other search formats, depending on the specific requirements of each database (Woodgate et al., 2020). These modifications optimised the retrieval of essential literature by ensuring the search terms correspond to the database's search capabilities. This exhaustive search strategy allowed for retrieving a broad array of relevant studies, enhancing the literature review's depth and breadth.

4.3.1 Search Terms

S1: Disability

Disab* OR impair*

S2: Barriers

Barrier* OR obstacle* OR challeng* OR imped* OR limit* OR restrict

S3: Education settings

"Secondary-level education" OR "secondary school" OR "secondary education" OR "high school" OR "secondary studies" OR School* OR university OR "tertiary education" OR "tertiary institution" OR college OR "higher education" OR

"postsecondary education" OR "vocational education" OR "vocational school" OR "vocational college" OR "vocational institution" OR "VET" OR "vocational education and training"

S4: Transition

Transition* OR mov* OR advanc* OR articulat*

The search terms included variations and truncations for comprehensive coverage. While most existing research focuses on individuals with disabilities from a medical perspective, this research takes a biopsychosocial model approach and, therefore, includes non-medical perspectives in the search terms. To conduct a comprehensive literature search in the social sciences, five relevant and suitable databases were selected: ERIC, Scopus, PubMed, CINAHL, and PsycINFO.

4.4 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

The recommendations of Petticrew and Roberts (2006) were followed by setting explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure the study was focused and comprehensive. Here are the criteria established for this systematic literature review:

The following are the inclusion criteria for this study:

Date: Literature published between January 1, 2001, and 2023 was considered. This period was chosen because it corresponds with the establishment of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (World Health Organization., 2001).

Language: Only studies published in English.

Participants: The study must involve at least some participants with disabilities.

Studies: Only studies focusing on the transition from secondary to postsecondary education were included.

Study types: Peer reviewed academic journals, dissertations, and electronic collections.

The exclusion criteria are:

Study types: Editorials, reviews, comments, letters to the editor, books, book chapters, conference reviews, notes, short surveys, and errata were not reviewed.

4.5   PILOT SEARCH RESULTS: 2001 – 2022

To ensure comprehensive coverage of the literature, five databases were utilised. As databases differ in their resources, search functionalities, and indexing subjects, it was imperative to tailor the search strategy for each database for effective and efficient research. It was adjusted to fit the various database's unique features, such as using specific search filters or subject headings. Appendix 1 provides the specific search strategies utilised using the Scopus database as an example. For instance, I used PubMed Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) for PubMed and APA Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms for PsycINFO. While the primary keywords remained the same, I adjusted the use of synonyms, related terms, and Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) according to each database. I also adjusted search filters to refine the search results, including language, publication date, and study type. Moreover, I used truncation and phrase-searching techniques. All these adjustments were made to optimise the research process and increase the likelihood of retrieving relevant and comprehensive results.

Table 4.1

Pilot search: 2001 – 2022

Databases	ERIC	Scopus	Pubmed	CINAHL	PsycINFO
Hits	1615	545	317	523	4889

Hits generated from a pilot search undertaken in September 2022 (pre-confirmation) to test the search strategy developed.

Table 4.2

Actual search: 2001 -2023

Databases	ERIC	Scopus	Pubmed	CINAHL	PsycINFO
Hits	956	1996	414	454	530

Hits generated from the actual search from the different databases conducted on February 2023

4.6   INITIAL REVIEW

The systematic literature review followed the PRISMA protocol and established guidelines (M. J. Page et al., 2021). Two independent reviewers conducted a rigorous screening process to ensure that only studies meeting predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria were included. The reference management tool Covidence was used to manage the screening process (Macdonald et al., 2016). First, duplicate studies were identified and removed; Second, GN and GB reviewed the titles and abstracts of identified studies and evaluated them against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. This determined whether a full-text review was necessary (Cavenaugh & Giesen, 2012). Studies were categorised as "include," "exclude," or "maybe." Full articles within the "include" and "maybe" categories were subjected to a comprehensive full-text review (Woodgate et al., 2020). In cases where there was uncertainty regarding the categorisation of a study, discussions were held between GN and GB until a consensus was reached. A third reviewer (JNR) was consulted if an agreement could not be reached. The use of established protocols and guidelines and the involvement of multiple reviewers contributed to the rigour and transparency of the systematic literature review.

4.7   QUALITY ASSESSMENT

The Kmet (Kmet et al., 2004) and Critical Appraisal Skills Program (CASP) (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, n.d.) tools were used to evaluate the literature selected from the study (Lindsay et al., 2019). Quantitative studies were appraised using Kmet, qualitative studies with CASP, and mixed methods studies with both the Kmet and CASP. The tools provided a structured framework for assessing key aspects such as the appropriateness of the research design, data collection and analysis methods, and the credibility of the study findings. The use of CASP and Kmet tools together enhanced the rigour and trustworthiness of the literature review. This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough evaluation of the selected studies, resulting in a more reliable synthesis of research evidence.

4.7.1 Quality Assessment Process

To evaluate the quality of qualitative studies, the CASP-10 criteria checklist was used. This is consistent with other studies in the field. The CASP checklist was developed as an educational pedagogic tool and does not use a scoring system. It also

uses the responses of 'Yes' for studies that meet the criteria, 'No' for studies that do not meet the criteria and 'Can't tell' if information that meets that criteria cannot be found in the study. For comparability to the other studies in this systematic literature review (i.e. quantitative and mixed method studies), the CASP tool was modified. The first modification was to change how the studies were scored. The response 'Yes' received a score of 2 points, 'No' received a score of 0 and partially satisfactory studies received 1 point. This ended up being ("yes" = 2, "partial" = 1, "no" = 0) (Flegenheimer & Scherf, 2022; Nevala et al., 2019; Stack et al., 2021). The modified CASP checklist is provided in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

CASP Quality assessment tool

Criteria	Yes (2)	Partial (1)	No (0)
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?			
2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?			
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?			
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?			
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?			
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?			
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?			
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?			
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?			
10. How valuable is the research?			

GN and GB independently assessed and scored each study, adding scores and translating them into percentages. A summary score was calculated for each paper by

summing the total score obtained across the ten items and dividing by the total score of twenty. This method was used to generate a percentage for each study. Studies with 80-100% were considered high quality, 60-79% moderate quality, 50-59% fair quality, and below 50% low quality. These are summarised in Table 4. Any discrepancies in scores were discussed between reviewers, and contentious articles were re-evaluated (Lindsay et al., 2019). Any discrepancies that resulted from the analysis were discussed among the two reviewers and re-examined to arrive at a resolution and further reviewed by JNR if needed (Alverson et al., 2019; Anderson et al., 2017; Nevala et al., 2019; M. Scott, 2011; Stack et al., 2021; Strnadová et al., 2023; Taylor-Baptie, 2021).

Table 4.4

Rating qualitative studies

Percentage (%)	Quality of study
80-100	High
60-79	Moderate
50-59	Fair
Less than 50	Low

4.7.2 Quantitative Studies

The Kmet-14 criteria checklist was used to assess the quantitative studies. Studies that fully met each respective criterion were assigned 2 points, those that partially met each criterion received 1 point, and studies that did not meet the requirements were given 0 points. In cases where specific criteria did not apply to the studies, they were marked as n/a. Items not applicable to a particular study design were marked "n/a" and excluded from the summary score calculation. The Kmet-14 tool is provided in Table 5.

The two reviewers independently reviewed and assigned scores to each study based on the criteria. The scores were then added and converted to percentages. A percentage falling within 80-100% was deemed high quality, 60-79% as moderate quality, 50-60% as fair quality, and 50% below as low quality (Table 4).

Table 4.5

Kmet quality assessment tool

Criteria	Yes (2)	Partial (1)	No (0)	N/A
1. Questions / Objectives are sufficiently described				
2. Study design evident and appropriate				
3. Methods of subject/comparison group selection or source of information/input variables described and appropriate				
4. Subject (and comparison group, if applicable) characteristics sufficiently described.				
5. If interventional and random allocation was possible, was it described				
6. if interventional and blinding of investigators was possible, was it reported				
7. If interventional and blinding of subjects was possible, was it reported				
8. Outcomes and (if applicable) exposure measure well defined and robust to measurement/ misclassification bias? means of assessment reported				
9. Sample size appropriate				
10. Analytic methods described/ justified and appropriate				
11. Some estimates of variance is reported for the main results				
12. Controlled for confounding				
13. Results reported in sufficient detail				
14. Conclusions supported by the results				

4.7.3 Mixed-Method Studies

The CASP-10 and Kmet-14 criteria checklists were used to assess the relevant components of mixed-method studies. Studies that fully met each respective criterion were assigned 2 points, those that partially met each criterion received 1 point, and studies that did not meet the requirements were given 0 points. In cases where specific criteria did not apply to the studies, they were marked as n/a. Refer to Tables 3 and 5.

Items not applicable to a particular study design were marked "n/a" and excluded from the summary score calculation. The two reviewers independently reviewed and assigned scores to each study based on the criteria during the quality assessment process. The scores were then added and converted to percentages. A percentage falling within 80-100% was deemed high quality, 60-79% as moderate quality, 50-60% as fair quality, and 50% below as low quality (Table 4.4).

4.8   DATA EXTRACTION

The data extraction procedure required gathering various essential elements from each study. This included Author information and publication year, country of origin, study setting (e.g., school, higher education, non-education, TAFE), study design (e.g., qualitative, or quantitative or mixed method), recruitment strategy (e.g., simple random, convenience, snowball), sample size, response rate, sample characteristics, population (impairment type) (e.g., physical, sensory, intellectual, psychosocial, cognitive, neurodivergent), and types of barriers identified. Before beginning the actual research, a pilot test was conducted to ensure the efficiency of the data extraction procedure. This pilot test intended to refine and validate the data extraction forms, ensuring it captured the needed data from the chosen articles. During the data extraction phase, GN extracted the essential data from each article that met the inclusion criteria. Subsequently, GB validated the extracted data to ensure their accuracy and consistency (Lindsay, Duncanson, et al., 2018; Lindsay et al., 2019). This dual-reviewer strategy provided an additional layer of quality control, thereby reducing the chance of errors and increasing the dependability of the extracted data. The data extraction tool is provided in Table 6.

Table 4.6

Data extraction

Auth or,ye ar	Count ry	Study setting s	Stud y desig n	Recruitme nt strategy	Sampl e size	Respons e rate	Sample characteristi cs	Impairme nt type	Barrier type

4.9   ETHICS

As this research consisted purely of analysing secondary data from previously published studies, no ethical concerns were identified. The use of published data sources mitigates participant privacy, confidentiality, and informed consent concerns, as the data is already anonymised and publicly accessible. Communication was established with the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee Chair to ensure ethical integrity. Through this correspondence, it was determined that the nature of this study, which focused solely on secondary data analysis, did not pose any ethical concerns requiring additional review or approval.

4.10 INTER-RATER RELIABILITY

In the systematic literature review process, inter-rater reliability is a critical aspect that measures the level of agreement between independent reviewers assessing the included studies. Cohen's Kappa statistic was used in this review to quantify inter-rater reliability.

4.11 THAMATIC ANALYSIS

The focus of this section is to delve into the significant findings that arose from the detailed thematic analysis carried out using ATLAS.ti (Smit & Scherman, 2021). ATLAS.ti is a software for qualitative research that helps researchers analyse textual, graphical, and multimedia data. It assists with coding transcripts, constructing literature reviews, creating network diagrams to visualise relationships and presenting data insights. The tool simplifies the process of extracting meaningful patterns and themes from complex datasets (Smit & Scherman, 2021). The study aimed to gain insight into the challenges that students with disabilities face during their transition to postsecondary education. The analysis was based on a

comprehensive literature review and aimed to classify the identified barriers following the ICF framework. To start the analysis, the extracted data was carefully read to comprehend its content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Understanding the data was crucial to recognising initial patterns, which later became the basis for the coding process.

After examining the data, themes were developed based on recurring patterns. These themes corresponded to the specific codes above and provided a layer of interpretation for understanding the barriers faced by students with disabilities (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smit & Scherman, 2021). To ensure accuracy in capturing the breadth and depth of the data, the emergent themes were reviewed and refined through an iterative process involving a re-examination of the original data set (Guest et al., 2012). The themes were validated by repeatedly cross-checking them with the extracted data, thereby maintaining the credibility and reliability of the thematic analysis process. This analysis generated a comprehensive understanding of the barrier's students with disabilities experience during their transition to postsecondary education.

This section discusses the significant findings that emerged from the detailed thematic analysis conducted using ATLAS.ti (Smit & Scherman, 2021). ATLAS.ti is a software for qualitative research that helps researchers analyse textual, graphical, and multimedia data. It assists with coding transcripts, constructing literature reviews, creating network diagrams to visualise relationships and presenting data insights. The tool simplifies the process of extracting meaningful patterns and themes from complex datasets (Smit & Scherman, 2021).

The study aimed to gain insight into the barriers that students with disabilities face during their transition to postsecondary education. To achieve this, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative studies. The data sources included case studies, interviews, and focus group discussions that provided in-depth narratives and personal experiences of students with disabilities, as well as surveys and statistical reports that offered numerical data and broader trends related to the barriers faced by these students. The data from these sources were systematically reviewed and extracted into an extraction table, which served as a repository of key information, including study

characteristics, methodologies, and findings. Both qualitative and quantitative data were coded to ensure a holistic analysis.

The thematic analysis process commenced with a reading of the extracted data to comprehend its content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This initial step was to recognise patterns and themes within the data. The analysis followed several key steps. First, the data was read multiple times to gain a clear understanding of its content. This involved both the original articles and the descriptions in the extraction table. Next, the data was systematically coded using ATLAS.ti, with codes assigned to segments of text that appeared significant or relevant to the research questions. This included coding data from both qualitative sources, such as narratives and interviews, and quantitative sources, such as survey results.

Following the coding process, codes were examined for recurring patterns and grouped into potential themes (Guest et al., 2012). These themes represented broader categories that encapsulated the essence of the coded data. The initial themes were then reviewed and refined through an iterative process, which involved re-examining the original data to ensure that the themes accurately represented the data. Each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its content, providing a layer of interpretation for understanding the barriers faced by students with disabilities (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Smit & Scherman, 2021). The final themes were documented, and their relevance to the research questions was explicated in detail (Guest et al., 2012). The themes were validated by repeatedly cross-checking them with the extracted data, thereby maintaining the credibility and reliability of the thematic analysis process.

The thematic analysis revealed several key barriers that students with disabilities face during their transition to postsecondary education. These barriers were categorised following the ICF framework. It included environmental barriers, such as physical accessibility, availability of assistive technologies, and institutional support. Personal barriers, including self-efficacy, coping strategies, and personal motivation; and social barriers, encompassing peer support, societal attitudes, and family involvement. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, the analysis provided a comprehensive understanding of these barriers. The mixed-methods approach ensured that both the depth of personal experiences and the breadth of statistical trends were captured.

Chapter 5: Results

The results section provides a comprehensive summary of the systematic review and analysis, offering valuable insights into various aspects of the research. It begins by presenting a concise PRISMA table that outlines the rigorous literature search and selection process, ensuring transparency and clarity in the methodology. In addition, the inter-rater reliability is assessed to confirm the consistency of the data extraction and article inclusion criteria.

After that, the analysis examines the geographic representation of the articles, identifying the countries from which the selected research is derived. This information provides essential context to the findings. The chapter then explores the distribution of study designs used in the chosen articles, providing insight into the methodological diversity within the field.

The data extraction process is presented, sharing noteworthy findings, recurring themes, and trends uncovered in the literature. The articles were evaluated to ensure high quality, and a thematic analysis was conducted to identify common themes and novel concepts. To further enhance our understanding of the factors influencing the transition to postsecondary education, the ICF framework is employed to categorise the data. These outcomes provide a comprehensive and structured perspective on the research landscape, enabling us to achieve our research objectives.

This research aims to identify the barriers students with disabilities experience when transitioning to postsecondary education. The research question is:

What disabling barriers do students experience when transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education?

5.1 PRISMA TABLE

Overall, 4375 potential articles were identified for inclusion in this review. After removing duplicates and screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, 45 articles were completed. One study was represented across two dissemination avenues (i.e. a dissertation and a journal article), leaving 45 articles in the final review. The

PRISMA table showing the summary of the screening process is presented in Figure 5.1.
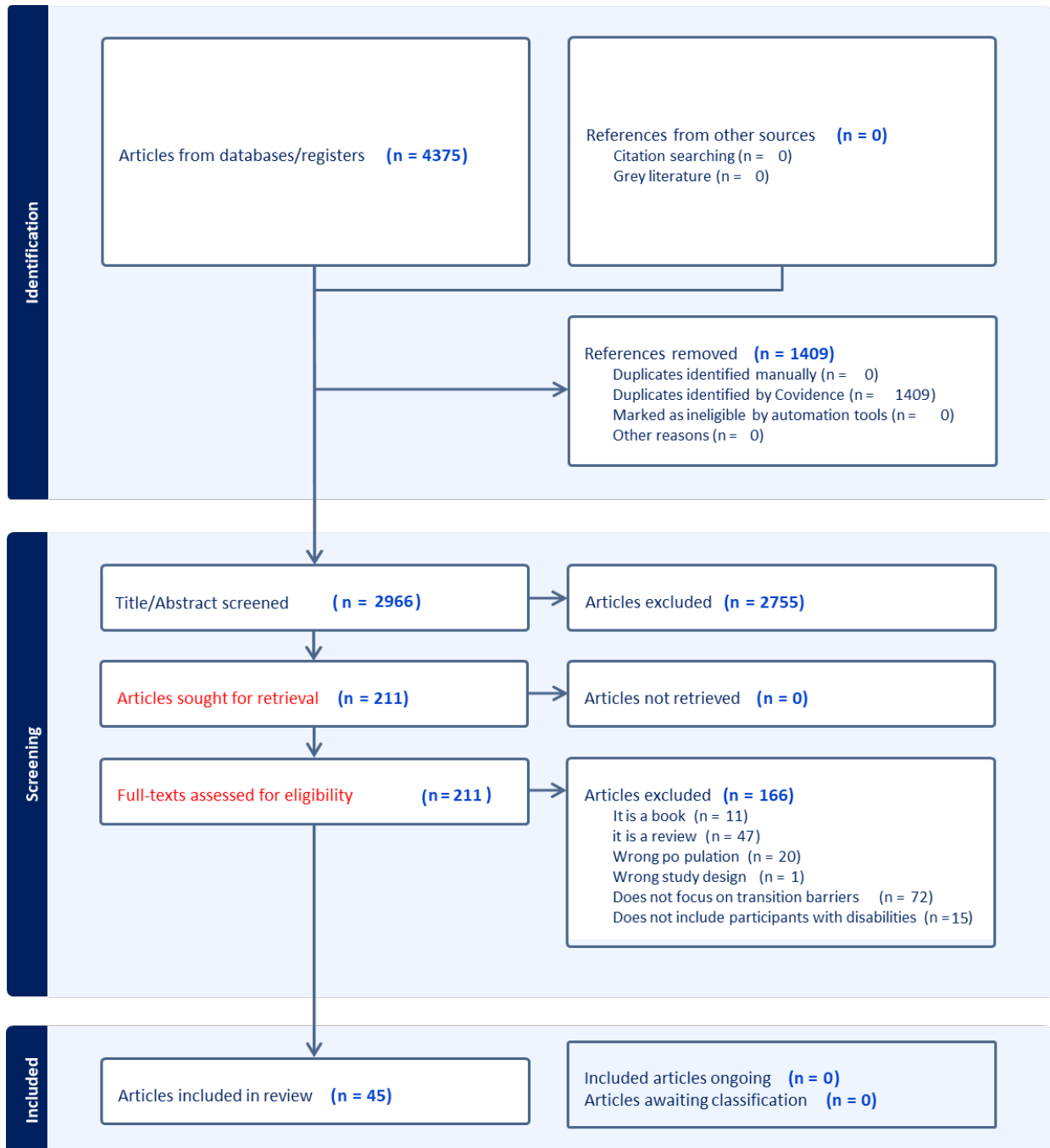
Figure 5.1. PRISMA table

5.2 INTER-RATER RELIABILITY

Inter-rater reliability between GN and GB. Cohens Kappa produced a value of 0.472, indicating a moderate agreement level between the reviewers. The inter-rater reliability score is shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Inter-rater reliability

Reviewer A & B	Results
A No, B No	2443
A No, B Yes	327
A Yes, B Yes	186
A Yes, B No	10
sProportionate Agreement	0.886
Random Agreement Probability	0.783
Cohen's Kappa	0.885

5.3 REPRESENTATION OF COUNTRIES

Most studies (n=32) were undertaken in the United States, followed by the United Kingdom (n=5) and Ireland (n=3). Single studies were undertaken in Canada, Belgium, Sweden, Australia and Spain. The results are presented in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

Responses by Country

Responses Country	Count of Responses Country
USA	32
UK	5
Ireland	3

Canada	1
Belgium	1
Sweden	1
Australia	1
Spain	1
Total	45

5.4 STUDY DESIGN DISTRIBUTION

Most studies were qualitative in design (n=37), followed by mixed-method studies (n=7) and quantitative studies (n=2). These results are presented in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3

Distribution of study design across the review

Responses Study design	Count of Responses Study design
Qualitative	37
Mixed method	6
Quantitative	2
Total	45

5.5   DATA EXTRACTION RESULTS

The characteristics of the included articles are presented in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4

Extracted data from included articles

Author, Year	Country	Study setting	Study design	Recruitment strategy	Sample size	Response rate	Sample characteristics	Population (Impairment type)	Barrier type
(Alverson et al., 2019)	USA	High school and College	Qualitative	Purposeful selection	5	N/a	5 men aged between 19 - 22 with 4 being Caucasian and 1 as multiple race	Autism spectrum	Barriers in the following areas: 1. Social skills and socialization 2. Communication skills 3. Executive functioning skills. Participants described several areas related to executive functioning, independence, organization, and establishing routines. 4. Self-awareness/disability awareness. 5. Source of motivation. 6. Family support/involvement. 7. Coordinated transition services.

								8. Clear postschool goals.
(Banks, 2014)	USA	4-year historically Black uni-versity in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States	Qualitative	Recruited from dis-ability support services at a 4-year historically Black uni-versity in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States	3	N/a	Self identified as African American. They each accessed disability support services during their college enrollment. Each had success-fully matriculated beyond their second year of college. Involvement in student government, university band, and campus athletics	1. Hearing impairment 2. Specific language learning disabilities	1. Limited meaningful Disability Knowledge and Awareness. 2. Cultural and social and linguistic capital. 3. Teachers underestimation of academic skills. 4. Disability stereotyping causing anxiety around accessing accommodations and supportive social networks.
(Berg et al., 2017)	USA	Transition and postsecondary education program (Triumph)	Qualitative	Purposive homogeneous and snowball sampling	32	Unavailable	students, parents or guardians of students, college instructors(who also served in the roles of	Intellectual and/or developmental disabilities	1. Adaptive behaviour skills challenges. 2. Challenges with navigating Adult based support and service system. 3. Disability awareness and Disclosure issues.

							adviser, educational aide, or peer navigator) and administrators, and occupational therapists working in adult transition programs		
(Carroll & Dockrell, 2012)	UK	Residential special school	Qualitative	A purposive sampling strategy	19	31.60%	Four female and 15 male) with a history of SLI and who had all attended the same residential special school for SLI were interviewed face to face. Ages ranged from 19 to 23 years	Specific language impairment (SL)	1. Key professional advice making transition process difficult. 2. The experience of SLI and its impact on the individual.
(Cawthon & Cole, 2010)	USA	Public University	Mixed method	Purposive sampling	110	8.50%	Participants were undergraduate SLD enrolled at an undergradu-	Specific learning disability	1. Assistive technology, tutoring, alternate format tests, and physical therapy decrease over the transition process 2. Professors unwilling to accommodate.

							ate Educational Psychology Subject Pool (SP) at the University. The SP was composed of students from four undergraduate classes: Individual Learning Skills, Human Sexuality, Adolescent Develop-ment, and Introduction to Statistics.		3. Professors were hard to schedule with. 4. University refused to provide specific accommodation. 5. Hard to get counseling center appointment. 6. Difficulty in getting/paying for an evaluation. 7. Difficulty setting up extended tests. 8. Not aware services were available. 9. Difficulty getting to doctor's office. 10. General school difficulties (i.e. work was hard).
(Chambers et al., 2009)	USA	Public school system. Secondary school	Qualitative	Post-School Transition Survey	19 students with disabilities and 202 students without disabilities	25% for students with disabilities and 26% for students without disabilities.	former students with and without disabilities attending Alabama school that served as demonstration sites for the Alabama Transition	Not specified	1. Financial challenges 2. Transportation issues

						Initiative (ATI). Of the students with disabilities, 63% (n = 122) were male, 36% (n = 69) were female, and < 1% (n = 1) were of unknown sex. Forty-seven percent (n = 95) of the students without disabilities were male, 51% (n = 104) were female, and 2% (n = 3) were of unknown sex. With regard to race, 49% (n = 95) of the students with disabilities were Caucasian, 49% (n = 94)		

							were African American, and 2% (n = 3) were of other or unknown race. Of the students without disabilities, 71% (n = 144) were Caucasian, 25% (n = 50) were African American, and 4% (n = 8). Both groups completed schools exiting with (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma or Graduation Certificate,). a percentage of the participants dropped out		

						before school completion.			
(Chaudhry et al., 2020)	USA	University campus and clinics	Qualitative	Purposive sampling	8	16%	4 male and 3 females. 6 Caucasian and 2 Hispanic. 6 undergraduate and 2 graduate	Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD	1. Difficulty adjusting to college life. 2. college faculty not empathic of their disease-related need. 3. Challenges with balancing disease needs and educational deadlines.
(Crews & Keil, 2005)	UK	Secondary education. Students in year 11/ Sixth form/ college	Qualitative	N/a	Five case study participants, their parents, their specialist support teachers, school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCOs), the disability co-ordinator of an FE	n/a	Visually impaired students in mainstream secondary education in Wales	Visual impairment	1. Delays in obtaining items of equipment necessary for their studies. Delays due to poor response from administration (disability coordinator). 2. Communication failures within college meaning staff were unaware of needs. 3. Students failed in self advocacy. 4 .Difficulty adapting to new environment.

					college, college tutors and Careers Wales, specialist careers advisers				
(Dangoisse et al., 2020)	Belgium	French speaking Belgian university.	Qualitative	The students with disabilities were approached through the disability service of the university. Recruitment from Bachelor programmes in the Human Science sector	10	20%	Participants aged from 20 to 24. Five students with disabilities from Bachelor programmes in the Human Science sector with special needs. 5 students with no special needs	Motor or sensorial impairment including: hearing, mobility, learning and visual	1. Poor administrative services (information not well understood, administrative staff not well equipped). 2. Self-advocacy and learning to ask for help (difficulty disclosing their special needs) 3. Adaption to Higher education. balancing work and leisure.
(Dowrick et al., 2005)	USA	Universities and community colleges	Qualitative research design (focus group research)	Purposeful sampling. Participants were Recruited through	10 university sites. Focus groups of 3-19	n/a	Universities and community colleges were selected to include	Participants had a range of disabilities including physical,	1. Understaffed student disability services. 2. Students not aware of available services.

				postsecondary disability service providers, professional connections, student contacts, and flyers on campus bulletin boards.	per each site.		participants with a broad range of disabilities and ethnic background. hey came from ethnicities and cultures that included African American, Native American, Asian, Latino, and Pacific regional backgrounds.	sensory, cognitive, emotional, and learning disabilities.	3. Support services not individualised but general. 4. Gap between policy and practice regarding postsecondary environment. 5. Students need to advocate for accommodations. 6. Confusing administrative process to receive support. 7. Difficulty accessing assistive technology. 8. Negative attitudes toward and low expectations of people with disabilities.
(E. Carroll et al., 2022)	Ireland	Primary and secondary school	Mixed method	Fixed panel design	4729	55%	nine-year-old children (representing one in seven 9-year-old children) who were randomly selected through 910 primary schools. The selected children were sub-	Intellectual/general learning Specific learning SEM and behavioural Physical/visual/speech	1. Economic vulnerability or Parents with lower levels of education. 2. Low parent expectation on students. 3. Student difficulty with key academic subjects.

							sequently followed up at age 13 (wave 2), 17/18 (wave 3) and 20 (wave 4) in 2018/ 2019	Other	
(Eastman et al., 2021)	USA	High school	Qualitativ e	n/a	4	12%	Students from core mathematics class	Autism spectrum disorder, specific learning disability, emotional-behavioral disorder (EBD), health disabilities /impairme nts.	No barriers identified or discussed
(Eichhorn, 2016)	USA	High school and university	Qualitativ e	n/a	51	n/a	The students in this study are from predominately middle and upper-middle class areas of Mumbai. One male in 8th standard, two females and one male in 9th	Learning Disabilitie s	1. Difficulty meeting postsecondary mathematics demands. 2. Current special education policies negatively affecting students' preparedness for higher education.

							standard, and one 10th standard female. Six adults (five male and one female) with learning disabilities with a Bachelor's degree. College lecturers and administrators (n = 18). Additional lecturers (n = 28)		
(Francis et al., 2022)	USA	Public university	Qualitativ e	Convenien ce sampling procedure s,	9	43%	3 males, 3 non binary and 3 females. Consisted of Black Americans, Latina, Hispanic, Caucasian, Asian, Native American. All participants were aged between 18 and 30.	Mental health disorders Autism Physical impairmen t Visual impairmen t Hearing impairmen t Specific learning	1. Feeling guilty for needing and requesting support. 2. Isolation from family due to negative attitudes. 3. Isolation from peers and difficulty integrating into social life

								disability Traumatic brain injury Emotional disturbance Intellectual disability Other health impairment	
(Frazier-Watson, 2018)	USA	Community College	Qualitative	Purposeful Sampling	11	N/A	Seven participants were females, and four were males. The ethnicities of the seven participants were African American, and White participants numbered four. African American students comprised 63% of the 119 participants, of which two were males	Specific learning disability	1. Difficulty adjusting to college. 2. Course overload- failing courses. 3. Lack of Awareness of Transition Plans, Transition Goals, and Comprehensive Transition Planning. 4. Lack of comprehensive Services in College. Not receiving DSS. 5. Late registration

| | | | | | | | between ages 18-20 years. In total, eight participants‚Äô ages ranged from 18-20 years; one participant‚Äôs age was between 21-24 years, and: two of the participants‚Äô ages ranged from 25-29 years. Five first-year community college students were in this study. three participants were in their second year, and three participants were in their fifth year. | | |
| (Gibbons et al., 2016) | USA | High school | Qualitative | N/A | 12 | N/A | The participants varied demographically; seven were | Intellectual disability | 1. Limited knowledge of Individualised Education Program and transition planning.

2. Limited College knowledge and |

| | | | | | | | male and five were female, and seven were Caucasian and five were African American. All but three were over age 18 but still enrolled in a public secondary school. Participants came from three different high schools in one southeastern U.S. school district, and all received special educational services in the special education classrooms referred to as comprehensive development classrooms (CDCs)second | | planning. |

								ary school.	
(Gillis, 2011)	USA	Post school transition program	Mixed method	Purposeful sampling	9	N/a	5 students ranged in age from 18 to 24 years. 3 parents and 1 guardian ranged in age from 46-65 years	Mild cognitive disability	**Personal challenges** 1. lack of one-on-one support in high school 2. Difficulty in completing high school courses. 3. Difficulty in effective communication. 4. No self-autonomy. Parents making decision on their behalf.
(Hadley, 2007)	USA	Private, selective, coeducation al, four-year col lege campus	Qualitativ e	Purposeful sampling	10	n/a	Eight females and two males. Students represented all four of the academic units on campus: Arts and Sciences, Business, Education, and Engineering.	Learning disability	1. Challenges with college writing expectations. 2. Challenge to meet the academic expectations with limited services. 3. Lack of proper staff at disability service centre. 4. Inaccessible learning resources.
(Harwick et al., 2020)	USA	Foster care alumni	Qualitativ e	Purposeful sampling	7	N/A	Seven foster care alumni aged 19‚Äì23; five self-identified as female and two as male; two participants self-	Attention Deficit and Hyperacti vity Disorder (ADHD), Emotional Disturban ce (ED),	1. Unstable or negative housing experiences during high school. 2. Lack of consistent, positive relationships. 3. Lack of highly skilled professionals.ex: social workers and special education teachers.

							identified as African American, three as Native American and Caucasian, and two as Caucasian. All participants reside in the United States pacific northwest.	Mental Health (MH), Specific Learning Disability (SLD), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Bipolar Disorder (BP),	4. Inappropriate disability or mental health diagnoses. 5. Inconsistent high school and graduation requirements. 6. Frequent placement changes. 7. Inconsistent access to Independent Living Program (ILP) services and activities and services to support successful postsecondary transitions. 8, Inadequate service delivery model. lack of services after ,Aging out of foster care.
(Hewett et al., 2014)	UK	Secondary Education (GCSE)	Qualitative	Recruited through 21 visual impairment ,Äòservices,Äô which included 18 local authority visiting teacher services, 2 resource bases and	78	30%	47 recruited in school Year 11, and 31 recruited in school Year 9. 38 males and 40 female. Ethnicity included, Black British, Asian British, Mixed and Caucasian	Visual impairments	1. Barriers with transportation to college. 2. Less informed on transition plans.

				1 special school (all located within the English West and East Midlands and Wales)					
(Hewett et al., 2020)	UK	University	Qualitativ e	Local authority sensory support services across England Midlands regions and Wales	80 total 32 in higher educatio n	N/a	participants were in school years 9 to 11 at time of recruit-ment (aged 14,Äì16), that they were supported in education in relation to their VI. 18 males ad 14 females from both mainstream and special schools.	Vision impairmen t	1. Course design - was not inclusive and does not consider students needs due to their VI. 2. Accessible course notes. Notes were not provided in accessible format. 3. Delivery of teaching sessions. students fell left out as sessions are not adjusted to suit students with VI 4. Challenges in facilitation to attend teaching sessions. 5. difficulty accessing reading material and assessment. 6. Assessment challenges including examinations and feedback
(Hill-Shavers, 2013)	USA	Public Midwestern university.	Qualitativ e	Purposive sample - An email explaining	5	n/a	Ages of 20 - 24 years old, received an educational	Emotional disturbanc e	Barriers around: 1. Financial aid, anxiety, access to documents, meeting enrolment requirements and deadlines.

				the study and request for participants was sent to the director /coordinator of the university's Disability Access Office.			diagnosis of ED/EBD/SED prior to high school graduation, had an IEP, and received special education services in a public high schoo		2. Lack of integration. 3. lack of the knowledge, ability, and skills necessary to navigate in the postsecondary education.
(Joseph, 2018)	USA	University	Qualitative	Purposeful sampling	5	n/a	1. Kobe is young man from the Navajo Nation majoring in Political Science and American Indian Studies. 2. Elaine is a young woman from the Navajo Nation majoring in Art Education. 3. Turquoise Rose is a Pueblo	Specific learning disability Learning disability Cerebral palsy Stargardt‚Äôs disease - Vision impairment	1. Barriers in special education in developing academic abilities. 2. Barrier due to non-disclosure of disability. 3. Low socioeconomic background of family and college cost. 4. Limited opportunity to develop college knowledge/ Misinformation. 5. Being a minority in a predominantly white institution. 6. Absence of self-advocacy and dependence on others for voice. 7. Negative attitudes from peers and academic community.

							woman from one of the 19 Pueblos of New Mexico and is pursuing her Ph.D. in Higher Education 4. Navajo Joe is a Navajo woman and is a first-generation, non-traditional student pursuing her bachelor‚Äôs degree in Human Services and Planning 5. Xavier is a young man from the Navajo Nation who is a first-generation college student majoring in Business		8. Physical accessibility in academic settings. 9. Oppressive circumstance informed by intersectional identities. 10. Poor self-perceptions.
(Kernohan	USA	Secondary	Mixed	n/a	44	n/a	Participants	n/a	1. Self-advocacy challenges

		school University	method				included community college and university direct student support programs, K-12 and post-secondary school-level administrators, state-level public instruction administrators, high school counselors, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, K-12 teachers, transition specialists, colleges of education, postsecondary instructors, students, and parents.		2. Coordination and collaboration between secondary and postsecondary settings
et al., 2017)									
(Kramer, 2012)	USA	Regional public community college	Qualitative	Purposeful sampling	3	60%	Students were homeschooled for at least four years	ADHD Tourette Syndrome	1. Challenge adjusting to community college including the pace of learning.

									2. Challenge meeting learning requirements.
									3. Time management issues
(Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020)	USA	High school and University	Mixed methods	Snowball sampling	13	N/a	Most participants (61%) were age 20 or 21 (see Table 4). They identified as white (69%), Black or African American (15%), Asian (8%), and multiple races or ethnicities (8%). About half of the participants reported attending public schools and receiving varying types of services and supports in their public schools, including general education only	1. Learning disabilities 2. ADHD (46%), 3. Physical impairment 4. Executive function disorder 5. Autism 6. Emotional disability	**Challenges in k-12** **Resource barriers** 1. Receiving nonspecific resources 2. Resource gaps in accommodations or instruction. 3. Limited parent knowledge or resources 4. Poor teacher training **Environmental barriers** 1. Feeling misplaced. 2. Judgmental and discouraging teachers. 3. Bullying and stigmatisation. 4. Tensions at home. **Personal challenges** 1. Feeling different and wanting to fit in 2. Struggling and resisting. **Challenges in Postsecondary education** **Resources**

							(i.e., no disability-related support; 8%), accommodations or resource room support (31%), or special education services in a special class (15%). Thirty-one percent of participants attended a private high school that was specialized in serving students with disabilities, 8% attended a charter school, and 8% a private, college-prep high school.		1. Poor quality of disability focused resources. 2. Resource gaps Environmental challenges 1. Inflexible professors 3. Courses being demanding. 3. Isolating social environment. 4. Discriminatory attitudes towards disability. 5. Overprotective parents. 6. ill fitted environment. **Personal challenges** 1. Self doubt. 2. Struggle with personal growth.
(Lightner et al., 2012)	USA	State university	Qualitative	Students were recruited through three procedure	42	n/a	There were 23 men and 19 women in the sample, including 15 second year	Learning disability	1. Lack of time to seek services. 2. Lack of knowledge about services. (a) lack of information about procedures that needed to be followed, (b) lack of information

				s: an e-mail soliciting participation from those registered with the ODS (N = 14), recruitment of students taking an Introduction to Psychology course (N = 11), and from those volunteering in a peer mentoring program (N = 17).			students, 14 third year students, and 13 fourth year students		about services provided by ODS, and (c) lack of information about one's disability. 3.ODS assistance seen as cheating. 4. Shame, and scheduling conflicts.
(Lindsay et al., 2018)	Canada	Postsecondary transition services	Qualitative	Purposive sampling-Survey	30	n/a	12 Females and 8 Males from diverse backgrounds. A proportion are in school, some dropped out and others	1. Congenital muscular dystrophy 2. Cerebral palsy 3. Spina	**Mesosystem** 1. Loosing social network. 2. Low family support. Family expectations not matching students abilities. Family being overprotective.

								completed.	Bifida 4. Centronuclear myopathy 5. Acquired brain injury 6. Spinal cord atrophy/scoliosis 7. Dyslexia 8. Physical disability 9. Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy 10. Congenital myopathy 11. Peripheral neuropathy 12. Low vision 13. Autism 14.	3. Coping with disability whiles transitioning. 4. lack of career and disability-specific supports in high school. **Exosystem** 1. physical accessibility of campuses **Macrosystem** 1. Negative attitudes and stigma **Chronosystem** 1. Policy issues. cutoff age for most health and social services in the pediatric system is 18 years of age; whereas students with special needs may choose to remain in high school up until the age of 21 if necessary.

								Mobieus syndrome 15. Spastic quadripleg ic cerebral palsy	
(Marshall et al., 2012)	USA	Kentucky‚Äôs A6 schools	Mixed-method	Purposive sampling - Survey	71	100%	Ethnic make-up of the student population was 70.5% Caucasian, 23.5% African-American, 1.5 % Hispanic, and .5% Asian, Native American, and others. students who participated in the study ranged from 14 to 17 years old, and were 31% female and 69% male. The most com-mon characteristics in the student	(Marshall et al., 2012)	USA

							sample were low academic achieve-ment, poor attendance,two or more grades below expected academic level at entry, a below-poverty lifestyle, a history of abuse and neg-lect, little or no involvement from their families, and identified dis-abilities, including emotional and behavioral disorders, learning disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and mild mental retardation		

(Mask & DePountis, 2018)	USA	University	Qualitative	Purposeful sampling	2	n/a	Participant one was a Hispanic male student that is functionally blind. Participant two was a White female student that is functionally blind.	Visual impairment	1. Academic and attitudinal barriers when requesting accommodations. 2. Struggles in securing basic accommodations, such as providing electronic texts or accessible notifications for students who are visually impaired. 3. Course instructors not knowledgeable in delivering accessible course. 4. Transportation issues 5 Difficulty with daily task on campus. 6. Low social interaction on campus.
(McConnell, 2019)	USA	High school	Qualitative	Snowball sampling	5	N/a	Students with multiple disabilities who have graduated from secondary school. Two of the five individuals with special needs have been	1.Intellectual and 2. Developmental Delays 3. Physical disabilities	1. Challenges due to impairment in having a social life and independence. 2. Challenges with accessibility to transportation.

							employed since leaving high school, one out of the individuals has been involved in some sort of postsecondary formal education, and three live at home with their parents		
(Ortiz, 2010)	USA	High school graduates	Qualitativ e	Purposeful sampling	3	60%	Salvadoran-American women with learning disabilities (LD) living in the District of Columbia in the 3 years since graduating from high school. All three participants earned high school diploma . Two are attending college full time and one	Learning disability	1. Lack of information on college and what to expect. Lack of preparation for college 2. Lack of information from university on expectations 3. Limited access to disability support services at university. 4. Personal challenges at home. 5. Challenging coursework and load at university 6. Challenges due to disability. lacking basic skills 7. Assuming responsibility in Self advocacy in accessing accommodations

							part time		8. Teachers not being accommodating to students learning needs. 9. Limited information on support services at university by staff. 10. Lack of disclosure of disability to teachers.
(O,Byrne et al., 2019)	Ireland	University	Qualitative	An email to the disability service of the university.	5	28%	Four undergraduate and one graduate. All were attending university in Dublin, Ireland. 3 females and 2 males aged between 20 and 30. These students received various supports from the university including permission to record lectures, and additional time for examinations and	Dyslexia	1. Low confidence 2. Lack of awareness of dyslexia by others. Discouragement and lack o support in school. 3. Inadequate support resources in secondary school. 4. Challenges with their diagnosis. 5. limited knowledge around expectation of higher education

							assignments		
(Pallisera et al., 2016)	Spain	Transition training course at a post-school service	Qualitative	Purposive sampling	8	N/A	8 young people with intellectual disabilities aged 17 to 23.	Learning disability	1. Negative attitude of peers. 2. Challenge of obtaining the secondary school leaving certificate 3. Parents negative view of the guidance received from the school on postsecondary options. 2. Limited expectations on participants being independent.
(Punch & Duncan, 2022)	Australia	University	Qualitative	Convenience sampling	10	N/a	Aged 18,23 years, and used spoken English as their primary mode of communication	Bilateral permanent hearing loss of mild-moderate or higher level or unilateral profound hearing loss.	1. Reluctance in disclosing disability/ being different. 2. Self-limiting attitudes
(Romano et al., 2023)	USA	Secondary school	Mixed method	Mixed purposeful sampling	9	89%	All students attended one of the district's public high schools serving majority students of color. Age	Diverse disabilities	1. Lack of support from teachers on future goals. 2. Divergence in expectations on participants. expectations from teachers and parents

							range between 16 and 18 years and between grade 9 and 12.		
(Scanlon & Doyle, 2021)	Ireland	Special schools	Qualitative	Purposive sampling	31	n/a	Group 1 (G1: Pre-transition) students in the penultimate year of formal education (16,Äì17 years), Group 2 (G2: Transitioning) students in the final year of formal education (18,Äì19 years) and Group 3 (G3: Post-transition) having left school two years previously (19,ì21 years).	Intellectual disabilities	1. Limited information and knowledge on post school pathways and options
(Scott, 2009)	USA	University	Qualitative	Purposeful sampling	15	n/a	Students with Students with blindness and visual impairments were selected	Blindness and visual impairments	1. Having to move far from home to pursue undergraduate school. 2. Dealing with institutional discrimination based on disability.

							and were registered with DSS at four public universities to participate in the qualitative study. The participants in this study were undergraduate students who attended the university in the fall semester of 2004		3. Learning to master institutional politics. 4. Lacking financial opportunities. 5. Having discriminatory professors. 6. Experiencing a sense of isolation in campus environments. 7. Handling classroom experiences that are biased. 8. Coping with an unwelcoming physical campus environment. 9. Dealing with unsupportive peers.
(Stein, 2012)	USA	Community college, university	Qualitative	Purposeful sampling	5	N/a	Aged 18 to 25. The participants included one African American and four Caucasian females, ranging in ages from 18 to 24. One participant was	Emotional or behavioral difficulties (EBDs)	1.Academic challenges due to disability. 2.Not disclosing their EBD to the school. 3. Negative family attitude towards diagnosis. 4. Stereotypes and stigma. 5. Access to services and information

							diagnosed with bipolar disorder, one with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), and three were dually diagnosed as having depression and GAD. 1 was a freshman, 2 were juniors and 2 were seniors.		6. The complex nature of EBDs. 7. Institutional barriers.
(Taneja-Johansson, 2021)	Sweden	University	Qualitative	Purposive sampling	3	60	Aged between 18 to 31. From three different pathways to university	ADHD	1. Adjusting to higher education environment including to moving to a new city, social life and workload. 2. Limited educational options and low academic expectations 3. Inadequate preparation for the transition to HE.
(Thatcher & Rosenblum, 2021)	USA	Harvard Extension School (HES), a division of Harvard University	Qualitative	Purposeful sampling	8	n/a	The eight students were from the following U.S. states: Florida, Massachusetts	Visual impairment ADHD Autism	1. Limited experience with assistive technology such as laptops.

							, Minnesota, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Four students (Beth, Danielle, Ellen, and Frances) were first-generation college students Aged between 17 and 19 with 6 females and 2 males		
(Trainor et al., 2019)	USA	Secondary school	Qualitative	Two-stage sampling process. 1. stratified national probability sampling 2. Random selection	432	76%	Students were in Grades 7 through 12 (or ungraded) and were 13 to 21 years old. Students with an IEP and a 504 plan	n/a	1. Low expectation of parents in students transitioning to postsecondary education. 2. Students not participating in IEP meetings. 3. parents having limited post high school knowledge. 4. Staff not providing adequate information about career planning.
(Vickerman & Blundell,	UK	University	Qualitative	Purposeful sampling Random	Phase 1 - 504 Phase 2	84%	Respondents from phase one were	Learning difficulty, dyslexia	1. Institution not following up on students with disabilities during enrolment.

2010)				sampling	- 4		predominantly white European and all were under 30 years of age. Phase two had two male and two female students	and physical disability.	2. Institution support to students during enrolment not helpful. 3. Learning and assessment resource restrictive for students. 4. Staff not committed to making changes to resources to make them more accessible.
(Waale, 2017)	USA	Community college	Mixed method	Purposeful sampling	24	n/a	The sample from CC1 included two administrators and twelve students. The sample from CC2 included two administrators and eight students. Eight male and twelve female. Ethnicity included four Hispanics, one Asian, four Blacks and eleven whites	Bipolar TBI Specific learning disability ADHD Spastic Quadriple gic Dyslexia,	**Administrator challenges** 1. Difficulties in planning for and funding needed services **Students challenges** 1. Financial restraints 2. Self-advocacy for required services. 3. Balancing the competing demands for time spent. at work versus time spent studying 4. Complete remedial courses prior to earning college credits
								Emotional /behaviora	**Administrators** 1. Timely access to student records

								l disorders, Non-identified disorders, multiple or severe disabilities, Mild mental retardation, and specific learning disability.	2. Difficulties in successfully transferring student records to the next school. 3. Lack of consistency between districts and schools in academic requirements and curriculum programming . **Students** 1.Limited or restricted Internet access to Individual learning plan (ILP). 2. Cultures of receiving home schools. 3. Negative attitudes amongst peers
(Yamamoto & Black, 2015)	USA	Secondary school University	Qualitative	Purposeful sampling	5	N/A	Aged between 14-16. Four males and one female. Recruited from the Hawaiian-focused charter schools in the State of Hawaii.	Specific learning disability	1. Academic challenges 2. Uninformed staff at secondary school assisting with transition planning. 3. Students lack awareness of their disability and the academic accommodations they needed.

Only reports on the sample and findings related to our objective to understand the disabling barriers students face when transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education.

5.6 QUALITY ASSESSMENT

The Quality Assessment Results section examines the rigorous evaluation of included studies across three distinct categories: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies. This assessment is essential to gauge the robustness and reliability of the research within each category, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the overall quality of the included literature.

5.6.1 Quality assessment of Qualitative articles

In this analysis, 37 studies were assessed using the CASP tool. A high-quality average score indicates that these studies employed a sounder methodology, appropriate study design, accurate data collection and analysis, and adequate reporting of findings. These results are presented in Table 5.6.

Table 5.5

Qualitative studies

Study ID	Rating criteria										Percentage of criteria met	Rating
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Alverson 2019	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	85	High
Banks 2014	2	2	2	1	2	2	0	2	2	2	85	High
Berg 2017	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	1	85	High
Carroll 2012	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	95	High
Chambers 2009	2	2	2	2	2	1	0	2	2	2	85	High
Chaudhry	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	95	High

2020												
Crews 2005	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	75	Moderate
Dangoisse 2020	2	2	2	1	1	0	2	1	2	2	75	Moderate
Dowrick 2005	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2	2	2	80	High
Eastman 2021	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	55	Fair
Eichhorn 2016	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	85	High
Francis 2022	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	95	High
Frazier-Watson 2018	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	90	High
Gibbons 2016	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	85	High
Hadley 2007	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	80	High
Harwick 2020	2	2	2	1	2	0	1	2	2	2	80	High
Hewett 2014	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	95	High
Hewett 2020	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	95	High
Hill-Shavers 2013	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	95	High
Joseph 2018	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	100	High
Kramer 2012	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	100	High
Lightner 2012	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	85	High

Lindsay 2018	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	95	High
Mask 2018	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	85	High
McConnell 2019	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	100	High
O'Byrne 2019	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	90	High
Ortiz 2010	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	100	High
Pallisera 2016	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	80	High
Punch 2022	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	90	High
Romano 2023	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	90	High
Scanlon 2021	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	85	High
Scott 2009	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	2	90	High
Stein 2012	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	95	High
Taneja-Johansson 2021	2	2	2	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	65	Moderate
Thatcher 2021	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	75	Moderate
Vickerman 2010	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	80	High
Yamamoto 2015	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	85	High

5.6.2 Quality assessment of Mixed-method articles

Results of the quality appraisal of mixed method studies are presented in Table 5.6. Most mixed method studies scored a 'Moderate' rating

Table 5.6

Mixed methods quality analysis

Study ID	Rating criteria																								Total	Rating
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24		
Cawthon & Cole, 2010	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	1	0	0	1	1	73	Moderate
Gillis, 2011	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	1	0	0	1	2	75	Moderate
Kutscher 2020 + Kutscher 2019	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	2	2	0	0	2	2	86	High
Marshall 2012	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	0	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	1	1	0	1	1	63	Moderate
Waale 2017	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	1	0	0	1	2	83	High
Williams 2020	1	2	2	1	1	0	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	1	2	2	2	0	1	2	71	Moderate

5.6.3 Quality assessment of Quantitative articles

The quality appraisal of quantitative studies is presented in Table 5.7. Most quantitative studies, scored a 'High' rating

Table 5.7

Quantitative quality analysis

Study ID	Rating criteria														Percentage of criteria met	Rating
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14		
Carroll 2022	2	2	2	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	91	High
Trainor et al., 2019	2	2	2	2	n/a	n/a	n/a	2	2	1	1	0	2	2	82	High

5.6.4 Summary of quality assessment

A summary of the quality assessment is available in Table 5.8. Among qualitative studies assessed by the CASP tool, studies generally exhibited high compliance in "clear statement of aims" and "appropriateness of qualitative methodology," with scores of 90.9% and 100%, respectively. However, they showed lower adherence in "consideration of researcher-participant relationship" and "ethical issues," indicated by scores of 29.5% and 36.4%.

The Kmet assessment for the quantitative studies revealed that 77.8% of studies sufficiently described their questions or objectives, and 55.6% had an evident and appropriate study design. However, the areas of "estimates of variance for main results" and "control for confounding" received lower scores, both at 33.3%.

Table 5.8

Quality assessment of included studies, including the proportion of scores where clear evidence exists for each criteria

Quality Assessment Item	Percentage
CASP Quality assessment tool	
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	90.9

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	100.0
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	95.5
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	72.7
5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	90.9
6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	29.5
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	36.4
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	56.8
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	86.4
10. How valuable is the research?	86.4
Kmet quality assessment tool	
1. Questions / Objectives are sufficiently described	77.8
2. Study design evident and appropriate	55.6
3. Methods of subject/comparison group selection or source of information/input variables described and appropriate	66.7
4. Subject (and comparison group, if applicable) characteristics sufficiently described.	NA
5. If interventional and random allocation was possible, was it described	NA
6. if interventional and blinding of investigators was possible, was it reported	NA
7. If interventional and blinding of subjects was possible, was it reported	75.0
8. Outcomes and (if applicable) exposure measure well defined and robust to measurement/ misclassification bias? means of assessment reported	77.8
9. Sample size appropriate	33.3
10. Analytic methods described/ justified and appropriate	11.1
11. Some estimates of variance is reported for the main results	11.1
12. Controlled for confounding	33.3
13. Results reported in sufficient detail	77.8
14. Conclusions supported by the results	77.8

5.7   THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND ICF CLASSIFICATION

This chapter used the ICF framework to organise these findings. The ICF framework allows for examining the complex interactions among individuals' health conditions, the environmental factors they encounter, and the personal factors that are intrinsic to them. By using the ICF framework in this chapter, we gain a deeper

understanding of the identified barriers. We can explore how personal, societal, institutional, and policy contexts intersect and affect the experiences of students with disabilities.

In this chapter, the barriers that have been identified are categorised according to the three main components of the ICF: "Body Functions and Structures," "Activities and Participation," and "Environmental Factors." The "Body Functions and Structures" component pertains to the physical and anatomical features of the body. The "Activities and Participation" component deals with an individual's functional abilities, such as their capacity to perform tasks and engage in everyday activities. The "Environmental Factors" component encompasses the social, physical, and attitudinal environment in which people exist and go about their lives.

After conducting a thorough thematic analysis, I identified eight key themes using the ICF framework. Six of these themes were categorised as "Environmental Factors," while one fell under "Activities and Participation," and one was classified under both "Body Structure and Function" and "Environmental Factors."

The codes used in the analysis were derived directly from the data rather than predetermined by any existing framework or theory, a process known as inductive coding (D. R. Thomas, 2006). Through this process, eight codes emerged: (1) Educational and institutional barriers, (2) Family influence and background, (3) Financial barriers, (4) Accessibility and accommodation challenges, (5) Social stigma and discrimination, (6) Institutional and policy barriers, (7) Lack of awareness, knowledge, and skills, and (8) Personal and psychological barriers. Each code was assigned to specific data segments that shared similarities.

In line with the objective of utilising the ICF classification for structuring the identified themes, the emergent themes were placed into the appropriate categories within the ICF framework. Of the eight themes, seven were determined to be most fittingly categorised under "Environmental Factors," while one theme was categorised under "Activities and Participation." Below is a thorough categorisation of each theme:

- Educational and Institutional Barriers: Aligning with "Environmental Factors", this theme fell under the code "e585 Education and training services, systems and policies". The barriers rooted in institutional

practices and educational services significantly impact the experiences of students with disabilities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2003; REHADAT, 2023; World Health Organization., 2001).

- Family Influence and Background: This theme was classified under "Environmental Factors", related to the code "e310 Immediate family". It highlights the impact of familial background on the educational transition of students with disabilities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2003; REHADAT, 2023; World Health Organization., 2001).

- Financial Barriers: The ICF does not discuss Financial barriers directly. However, this theme was classified under the "Environmental Factors" category, mainly related to the codes "e165 Assets" or "e570 Social security, social services, and other social benefits" (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2003; REHADAT, 2023; World Health Organization., 2001).

- Accessibility and Accommodation Challenges: The theme of Accessibility and Accommodation challenges falls within the category of "Environmental Factors", specifically "e150 Design, construction, and building products and technology of buildings for public use", "e155 Design, construction, and building products and technology of buildings for private use", "e120 Products and technology for personal indoor and outdoor mobility and transportation", "125 Products and technology for communication", "e130 Products and technology for education" "e135 Products and technology for employment Iteme135 as classified by the World Health Organization in 2001 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2003; REHADAT, 2023; World Health Organization., 2001).

- Social stigma and discrimination: This was classified under "Environmental Factors" using codes like "e410 Individual attitudes of immediate family members", "e420 Individual attitudes of friends", and "e430 Individual attitudes of people in positions of authority". This theme underscores the attitudinal barriers posed by society (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2003; REHADAT, 2023; World Health Organization., 2001).

- Institutional and Policy Barriers: This theme was categorised under "Environmental Factors", specifically "e580 Health services, systems, and policies", emphasising the role of institutional policies in shaping the experiences of students with disabilities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2003; REHADAT, 2023; World Health Organization., 2001).

- Lack of Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills: This theme was classified under "Body Functions and Structures" for mental functions such as "b117 Intellectual functions", "b144 Memory functions", and "b164 Higher-level cognitive functions" for the barriers that related to the students themselves. The theme was also deemed appropriate under "Environmental Factors" in sections like "e355 Health professionals" and "e580 Health services, systems, and policies" for barriers that related to others' lack of awareness or knowledge (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2003; REHADAT, 2023; World Health Organization., 2001).

- Personal and Psychological Barriers: A small proportion of the barriers under the theme meant the theme could be classified under "Body Functions and Structures" for mental functions like "b130 Energy and drive functions", "b140 Attention functions", "b152 Emotional functions", and "b160 Thought functions". However, it was deemed appropriate to classify it under "Activities and Participation" as the barriers identified under the theme mainly limited daily activities or societal participation, for instance, "d240 Handling stress and other psychological demands" (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2003; REHADAT, 2023; World Health Organization., 2001).

Through this structured classification, the analysis presented a comprehensive understanding of the multi-dimensional barriers students with disabilities face during their transition to postsecondary education.

Bar graph showing the frequency of different barriers across studies is presented in Figure 5.2.
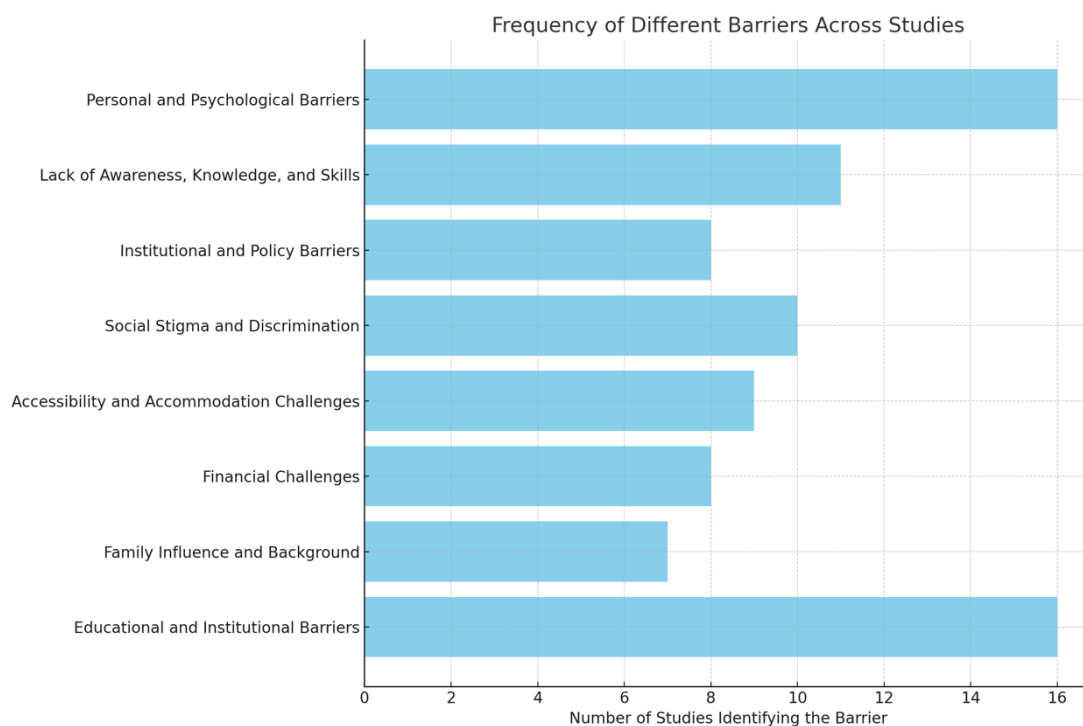

Figure 5.2. Bar chart of barrier themes against studies.

5.7.1 Theme: Educational and Institutional Barriers

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

- Lack of information on college and what to expect. Lack of preparation for college

- Lack of information from university on expectations

- Limited access to disability support services at university

- Challenging coursework and load at university

- Challenges due to disability, lacking basic skills

- Teachers not being accommodating to students learning needs

- Limited information on support services at university by staff

- Lack of disclosure of disability to teachers

- Challenge adjusting to community college. Pace of learning too demanding

- Challenge meeting learning requirement

- Time management issues

- Institutional discrimination based on disability

- Learning to master institutional politics

- Discriminatory professors

- Absence of self-advocacy and dependence on others for voice

- Negative attitudes from peers and academic community

- Limited knowledge of Individualised Education Program and transition planning

- Limited College knowledge and planning

- Professors unwilling to accommodate

- Professors were hard to schedule with

- University refusal to provide specific accommodation

- Hard to get counselling centre appointment.

- Lack of awareness of dyslexia by others. Discouragement and lack of support in school

- Academic challenges due to disability

- Challenges due to impairment

- Challenges with accessibility to transportation

- Struggles in securing basic accommodations, such as providing electronic texts or accessible notifications for students who are visually impaired

- Staff not committed to making changes to resources to make them more accessible.

- Course design - was not inclusive and did not consider students' needs due to their VI.

- Accessible course notes. Notes were not provided in accessible format.

- Delivery of teaching sessions. students fell left out as sessions are not adjusted to suit students with VI

- Difficulty accessing reading material and assessment.

As students transitioned from secondary to postsecondary education, they encountered a range of educational and institutional barriers. These obstacles were diverse and included issues with accessibility to information (Dangoisse et al., 2020; Joseph, 2018; Lightner et al., 2012; Ortiz, 2010; Scanlon & Doyle, 2021; Stein, 2012), academic struggles (Carroll et al., 2022; Ortiz, 2010; Yamamoto & Black, 2015), discrimination (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; R. Scott, 2009), and accommodation challenges (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Mask & DePountis, 2018). One of the main challenges was the lack of information provided by universities about college life and expectations, which left students feeling unprepared for their new environment (Ortiz, 2010). Students also faced institutional hurdles, such as limited access to disability support services, which exposed the systemic issues within postsecondary education (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Ortiz, 2010). Additionally, the fast-paced learning environment of community colleges made it difficult for students to keep up with the intensity of coursework, particularly those with disabilities who often lacked the necessary skills (Berg et al., 2017; Hadley, 2007; McConnell, 2019; Ortiz, 2010; Stein, 2012; Taneja-Johansson, 2021; Waale, 2017).

Institutional barriers also extended to teaching staff, with some professors unwilling or unable to provide accommodations for students with disabilities (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Harwick et al., 2020; Romano et al., 2023). This lack of support and information made it difficult for students to schedule appointments with professors or secure necessary accommodations (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). Negative attitudes and discrimination from peers and the academic community also posed significant barriers (Dowrick et al., 2005; Joseph, 2018; Lindsay, Cagliostro, et al., 2018; Marshall et al., 2012; O' Byrne et al., 2019). Some students reported institutional discrimination based on disability, while others struggled to navigate institutional politics (R. Scott, 2009). Some students also felt that their voices were not being heard or valued, which made self-advocacy challenging (Dangoisse et al., 2020; Joseph, 2018). Students also reported struggles in understanding and planning around the Individualised Education Program,

indicating a lack of institutional support in this aspect (Gibbons et al., 2016; Trainor et al., 2019). Similarly, limited knowledge of college and poor planning were prevalent issues (Dangoisse et al., 2020; Gibbons et al., 2016; Joseph, 2018; Lightner et al., 2012; O' Byrne et al., 2019; Ortiz, 2010; Scanlon & Doyle, 2021; Trainor et al., 2019).

For students with disabilities like dyslexia, the lack of awareness and understanding from others led to discouragement and lack of support (Waale, 2017). Basic accommodations, like providing electronic texts or accessible notifications for visually impaired students, were challenging to secure (Mask & DePountis, 2018). These barriers created a challenging environment, hampering students' academic performance and overall college experience.

5.7.2 Theme: Family Influence and Background

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

- Personal challenges at home

- Tensions at home

- Low socioeconomic background of family

- Low family support. Family expectations not matching students abilities. Family being overprotective

- Overprotective parents

- Negative family attitude towards diagnosis

- Isolation from family due to negative attitudes

- Low expectation of parents in students transitioning to postsecondary education

- Parents having limited post high school knowledge

- Low expectations from parents

- Parents negative view of the guidance received from the school on postsecondary options.

As students moved from secondary to postsecondary education, their family and home background significantly shaped their experiences. Many students faced personal and domestic challenges that made it difficult to focus on their educational

transition (Francis et al., 2022; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Ortiz, 2010). Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were particularly impacted by financial instability or stress within the family, which created additional barriers to accessing resources and increased financial stress (Joseph, 2018). One common issue was the lack of family support, which limited students' opportunities to develop essential skills for independence in a postsecondary setting (Alverson et al., 2019; Romano et al., 2023). Some families struggled to understand or accommodate their child's abilities, setting unrealistic expectations or being overly protective (Lindsay, Cagliostro, et al., 2018; Trainor et al., 2019). Negative attitudes towards diagnosis within the family also emerged as a significant barrier, leading to a sense of isolation and estrangement (Carroll et al., 2022; Francis et al., 2022; Gillis, 2011; Stein, 2012; Trainor et al., 2019).

Parents' lack of knowledge about post-high school education also presented a significant hurdle (Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Pallisera et al., 2016). Without a deep understanding of the postsecondary environment, parents struggled to provide adequate guidance and support during their child's transition.

5.7.3 Theme: Financial Challenges

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

- Having to move far from home to pursue undergraduate school.

- Lacking financial opportunities

- Financial struggles

- Financial aid, anxiety, access to documents, meeting enrolment requirements and deadlines

- College cost

- Limited opportunity to develop college knowledge and Misinformation.

- Financial challenges

- Barriers to transportation to college

From the analysis, students faced significant financial challenges while transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education. These challenges presented themselves in various forms. Many students faced financial burdens due to the need

to relocate to attend undergraduate programs far from home (R. Scott, 2009). The expenses related to moving, setting up a new residence, and ongoing living costs were often underestimated, leading to unexpected financial stress (R. Scott, 2009). Limited access to scholarships, grants, or work-study programs further compounded financial difficulties (Hill-Shavers, 2013). Students struggled not only with the direct costs of tuition but also with ancillary costs such as books, supplies, and transportation (Chambers et al., 2009, 2009; Hewett et al., 2014; Hill-Shavers, 2013; Mask & DePountis, 2018; McConnell, 2019; R. Scott, 2009; Waale, 2017).

Although financial aid provided assistance, it also posed its own set of challenges (Hill-Shavers, 2013). Students faced anxiety about accessing required documents, meeting enrolment prerequisites, and adhering to deadlines (Hill-Shavers, 2013). The complexity of financial aid systems often proved overwhelming, adding to financial pressure. The high cost of college, including costs for housing, food, transportation, and other necessities, emerged as a fundamental issue. Such costs could substantially impact a student's ability to continue their education (Joseph, 2018). Limited opportunities to develop college knowledge and misinformation further contributed to the challenges. Poor planning and unexpected financial hardships resulted from a lack of accurate and comprehensive financial information, extending to understanding the total cost of college education and the processes for securing financial aid (Hill-Shavers, 2013; Joseph, 2018; Waale, 2017). Transportation barriers to college, especially for those commuting from home, added to the financial strain. Students often overlooked the costs associated with vehicle ownership, maintenance, fuel, or public transit during planning, but these posed notable challenges (Chambers et al., 2009; Hewett et al., 2014; Mask & DePountis, 2018; McConnell, 2019).

5.7.4 Theme: Accessibility and Accommodation Challenges

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

- Challenges in facilitation to attend teaching sessions.

- Difficulty accessing reading material and assessment

- Academic and attitudinal barriers when requesting accommodations

- Course instructors not knowledgeable in delivering accessible course

- Transportation issues

- Physical accessibility in academic settings

- Course design - was not inclusive and does not consider students needs due to their Visual impairment

- Accessible course notes. Notes were not provided in an accessible format

- Delivery of teaching sessions. students fell left out as sessions are not adjusted to suit students with Visual impairment

- Difficulty accessing reading material and assessment

- Assessment challenges including examinations and feedback

- Physical accessibility of campuses

- Poor administrative services (information not well understood, administrative staff not well equipped)

- Limited information and knowledge on post school pathways and options

- Loosing social network

Transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education was often hindered by accessibility and accommodation challenges. These challenges were commonly related to academic and physical accessibility. Academic accessibility issues included difficulty attending teaching sessions (Hewett et al., 2014), accessing reading materials and assessments (Hewett et al., 2014), and dealing with course instructors who lacked knowledge on delivering accessible courses (Mask & DePountis, 2018). Students with visual impairment often felt excluded as courses were not designed with their needs in mind (Mask & DePountis, 2018) . Additionally, course notes were frequently not provided in accessible formats, further worsening the academic barriers for these students (Mask & DePountis, 2018). Physical accessibility issues were also prevalent, particularly regarding transportation and the accessibility of campuses (Chambers et al., 2009; Hewett et al., 2014; Mask & DePountis, 2018). Some students faced challenges in reaching their educational institutions, while others reported that the physical infrastructure of campuses was not designed with accessibility in mind (Mask & DePountis, 2018; R. Scott, 2009).

The request for accommodations was often met with academic and attitudinal barriers, reflecting a systemic issue within the institutions. Administrative services tasked with facilitating these accommodations were frequently reported as inadequate, with staff lacking the necessary information or training to assist students adequately (Dangoisse et al., 2020; Dowrick et al., 2005). The transition to postsecondary education often resulted in losing social networks, which further complicated the transition (Lindsay, Cagliostro, et al., 2018).

5.7.5 Theme: Social Stigma and Discrimination

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

- Dealing with unsupportive peers

- Experiencing a sense of isolation in campus environments

- Handling classroom experiences that are biased

- Coping with an unwelcoming physical campus environment

- Negative attitudes among peers

- Bullying and stigmatisation

- Isolating social environment

- Discriminatory attitudes towards people with disability

- Negative view of the guidance received from the school on postsecondary options

- Limited expectations from parents on participants becoming independent

- Negative attitude of peers

- Challenge of obtaining the secondary school leaving certificate

- Negative attitudes and stigma

- Stereotypes and stigma

- Negative family attitude towards diagnosis

- Disability Stereotyping causing anxiety around accessing accommodations and supportive social networks.

Many students, specifically those with disabilities, faced social stigma and discrimination during their transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Their educational and social experiences were affected in various ways. Numerous students encountered unsupportive peers, leading to bullying, stigmatisation, and negative attitudes within the student body (Francis et al., 2022; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Marshall et al., 2012; Pallisera et al., 2016; R. Scott, 2009). These discriminatory behaviours intensified feelings of isolation within the campus environment (Francis et al., 2022). Additionally, biased classroom experiences and an unwelcoming physical environment made some students feel marginalised (R. Scott, 2009).

Students with disabilities faced negative attitudes and stigmatisation, leading to anxiety around accessing accommodations and forming supportive social networks (Banks, 2014). This stigma created a significant obstacle to their successful transition to postsecondary education. Many students viewed the guidance received from schools regarding postsecondary options as inadequate or lacking (Pallisera et al., 2016). This, along with limited expectations from parents, increased uncertainties and feelings of isolation (Pallisera et al., 2016; Stein, 2012). For many postsecondary programs, obtaining the secondary school leaving certificate was a prerequisite. However, this presented a significant challenge to students with disabilities, who were stigmatized due to their condition (Pallisera et al., 2016). Family attitudes towards diagnosis further complicated their journey (Stein, 2012). The presence of social stigma and discrimination had far-reaching implications for the student's mental health, access to accommodations, and overall college experience.

5.7.6 Theme: Institutional and Policy Barriers

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

- Assuming responsibility in Self-advocacy in accessing accommodations

- Institutional barriers

- Policies negatively affecting students preparedness for higher education

- Lack of consistency between districts and schools in academic requirements and curriculum programming

- Lack of comprehensive Services in College. Not receiving support services

- Assistive technology, tutoring, alternate format tests, and physical therapy decrease over the transition process

- Difficulty accessing assistive technology

- Difficulties in successfully transferring student records to the next school

- Cultures of receiving home schools

- The experience of SLI and its impact on the student

- Policy issues. cutoff age for most health and social services in the pediatric system is 18 years of age; whereas students with special needs may choose to remain in high school up until the age of 21 if necessary

- Staff not providing adequate information about career planning

- Limited or restricted Internet access to Individual learning plan (ILP)

- Unstable or negative housing experiences during high school

- Frequent placement changes

- Inadequate service delivery model. lack of services after leaving foster care

- Difficulty adjusting to college life

- Institution not following up on students with disabilities during enrolment.

- Institution support to students during enrolment not helpful

- College faculty not empathic of their disease-related need

Various institutional and policy barriers notably impacted the transition from secondary to postsecondary education for students. Students were burdened with the responsibility of self-advocacy to access accommodations, which proved challenging for many (Crews & Keil, 2005; Dangoisse et al., 2020; Kernohan et al., 2017; Ortiz, 2010). This shift towards self-advocacy is an essential aspect of transitioning into adulthood, but it posed significant hurdles for students, especially those with special needs who may not have been adequately prepared for such responsibilities. Policy disparities had a significant impact on students' preparedness for higher education (Lindsay, Cagliostro, et al., 2018). Inconsistent academic requirements and curriculum programming across districts and schools led to knowledge and skills

gaps (Marshall et al., 2012) Such disparities hindered students' ability to meet postsecondary academic expectations and standards.

Institutional obstacles were widespread, with many students reporting a lack of comprehensive services in colleges (Frazier-Watson, 2018; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). The decrease in the provision of assistive technology, tutoring, alternate format tests, and physical therapy during the transition process was a significant concern (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Dowrick et al., 2005). The difficulty in accessing assistive technology was particularly alarming, as it is crucial in enabling students with disabilities to engage effectively with academic content. Transferring student records to the next school was a bureaucratic hurdle compounding transitional challenges (Marshall et al., 2012). Furthermore, the prevailing cultures of receiving home schools could deter smooth transitions (Marshall et al., 2012). Policy issues were also highlighted, such as the cutoff age for most health and social services in the pediatric system, which is 18 years, whereas students with special needs could choose to remain in high school until 21, if necessary (Lindsay, Cagliostro, et al., 2018). This disparity highlighted the gap in service provision for students who might require extended support beyond the typical high school graduation age.

Staff inadequacies, such as not providing sufficient information about career planning (Trainor et al., 2019), limited internet access to Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) (Marshall et al., 2012), and unstable or negative housing experiences during high school (Harwick et al., 2020), added to the systemic challenges. The service delivery model was considered inadequate, particularly regarding the lack of services after leaving foster care (Harwick et al., 2020). These multiple systemic obstacles made the transition to college life even more challenging.

5.7.7 Theme: Lack of Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills

ICF Classification (Body Functions and Structures/Environmental Factors)

- Lack of the knowledge, ability, and skills necessary to navigate postsecondary education

- Challenges with college writing expectations

- Low parental knowledge

- Low teacher training skills

- Limited experience with assistive technology such as laptops

- Limited Meaningful Disability Knowledge and Awareness

- Limited Cultural social and linguistic capital

- Teachers' underestimation of academic skills

- Uninformed staff at secondary school assisting with transition planning

- Student difficulty with key academic subjects

- Students lack of awareness of their disability and academic accommodations needed

During the transition from secondary school to postsecondary education, a major barrier that students faced was a lack of awareness, knowledge, and skills (Hill-Shavers, 2013). Many students were not equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the postsecondary education landscape, which had a negative impact on their success. This lack of preparation was evident not only in academic subjects (Ortiz, 2010), such as meeting college writing expectations and struggling with key academic subjects (Hadley, 2007), but also in areas related to self-advocacy and using assistive technology.

The student's inability to self-advocate was largely due to their limited understanding of their disabilities, which was a result of their limited cultural, social, and linguistic capital (Banks, 2014). This made it challenging for them to transition to a postsecondary setting. Teachers' underestimation of students' academic skills also served as an obstacle, suggesting a potential mismatch between teachers' perceptions and students' actual capabilities (Banks, 2014). This underestimation prevented students from getting opportunities to challenge and enhance their academic skills. The importance of secondary school staff in assisting students with transition planning was emphasised in this theme. However, some staff members were not equipped to handle this task effectively. Furthermore, parental knowledge and teacher training skills were also inadequate (Carroll et al., 2022; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Trainor et al., 2019; Yamamoto & Black, 2015).

Another significant barrier was students' limited experience with assistive technology such as laptops (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Dowrick et al., 2005; Thatcher & Rosenblum, 2021). Since technology is central to postsecondary education, the

lack of experience disadvantages students. This highlights the importance of equipping students with the necessary technological skills before transitioning to postsecondary education.

5.7.8 Theme: Personal and Psychological Barriers

ICF Classification (Activities and Participation)

- Lack of one-on-one support in high school

- Difficulty in completing high school courses

- Difficulty in effective communication

- No self-autonomy. Parents making decisions on their behalf

- Self-advocacy for required services

- Self-doubt

- Struggle with personal growth

- Feeling different and wanting to fit in

- Struggling and resisting support

- Feeling misplaced

- Low confidence

- Difficulty adjusting to college life

- Difficulty adapting to new environment

- Loosing social network

- Difficulty meeting postsecondary mathematics demands

- Difficulty in getting/paying for an evaluation

- Difficulty setting up extended tests

- Difficulty with daily task on campus

- Difficulty in planning for and funding needed services

- Difficulty in access to services and information

- Challenges with balancing disease needs and educational deadlines

The existing literature indicates that students encountered various personal and psychological obstacles during the shift from secondary to postsecondary education. These hindrances encompassed a broad spectrum of personal struggles (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Crews & Keil, 2005; Gillis, 2011; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Lindsay, Duncanson, et al., 2018; Mask & DePountis, 2018; Ortiz, 2010; Stein, 2012; Taneja-Johansson, 2021; Waale, 2017), emotional difficulties (Chaudhry et al., 2020; Dowrick et al., 2005; Francis et al., 2022; Harwick et al., 2020; Hill-Shavers, 2013; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Marshall et al., 2012; Stein, 2012), and academic challenges (Carroll et al., 2022, 2022; Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Eichhorn, 2016; Gillis, 2011; Hadley, 2007; Joseph, 2018; Marshall et al., 2012; Mask & DePountis, 2018; Stein, 2012; Taneja-Johansson, 2021; Yamamoto & Black, 2015). One major difficulty was the absence of personalised support in high schools (Gillis, 2011; Harwick et al., 2020; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Pallisera et al., 2016; Yamamoto & Black, 2015). Many students faced significant stress and were unprepared for college-level academics due to lacking individualised guidance to complete high school coursework. Effective communication was another common obstacle (Gillis, 2011), with students encountering difficulties in expressing their needs or concerns, mainly when their autonomy was restricted by parental decision-making ((Gillis, 2011; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Pallisera et al., 2016; Romano et al., 2023; Trainor et al., 2019). This lack of self-autonomy also impeded the development of self-advocacy skills (Ortiz, 2010), which are crucial for accessing necessary college services.

Personal growth struggles, self-doubt, and feelings of being different were prevalent and often accompanied by a reluctance to seek assistance (Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Lightner et al., 2012; Punch & Duncan, 2022). These feelings of displacement negatively impacted students' confidence levels, making adjusting to college life and a new environment more challenging (Chaudhry et al., 2020; Frazier-Watson, 2018; Taneja-Johansson, 2021). The transition also involved losing familiar social networks, which further contributed to feelings of isolation and difficulty in fitting into the new college environment (Lindsay, Cagliostro, et al., 2018; M. Scott, 2011). This loss was particularly pronounced when students faced academic challenges, such as meeting postsecondary mathematics demands, setting up

extended tests, or dealing with daily tasks on campus (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Eichhorn, 2016; Mask & DePountis, 2018).

Planning and funding for necessary services, including evaluations required for accommodations, were also challenging (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Access to services and information was often limited, making it even more difficult for students to overcome the emotional and academic obstacles they faced (Scanlon & Doyle, 2021; Stein, 2012). Overall, these personal and psychological barriers significantly affected the transition process. They made it more difficult for students to adapt to their new environment, manage their academic responsibilities, and fully engage in the college experience. These challenges often led to increased stress, lower academic performance, and even attrition.

Chapter 6: Discussion

Transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education is important in students' academic journey. However, this transition is even more critical for students with disabilities, who face societal, institutional, and personal barriers, amongst other barriers. This study aimed to understand these barriers through a thorough research process. This systematic approach allowed for a comprehensive selection and examination of studies, ensuring the inclusion and exclusion of relevant literature and enhancing the credibility of the findings (Moher et al., 2009).

This review included studies conducted in multiple countries, which provided a diverse perspective. This included countries from North America (USA and Canada), Europe (UK, Ireland, Belgium, Sweden, and Spain), and Australia/Oceania (Australia). These countries have varied cultural, legal, and educational contexts, which helped in understanding the extensive nature of certain barriers and the contextual specificity of others. The studies included in the review used different methodological designs. Some applied qualitative methods, exploring personal stories and experiences, whereas some used mixed methods, and others used quantitative methods, presenting a statistical overview of student barriers. Including publications with diverse study designs enriched the findings, offering a well-rounded understanding of the barriers students with disabilities faced (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

The quality assessment was crucial to the methodological approach. A rigorous criterion was employed to assess the strength of each study. This quality assessment provided insights and an overview of the current state of the field of study. Using the ICF by the World Health Organization, the findings were categorised into eight themes. The ICF's approach to assessing disabilities based on impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions provided a structured framework for classification (World Health Organization., 2001). The themes that emerged were as follows:

- **Educational and Institutional barriers**: Quality and inclusiveness of education varied across countries.

- **Family Influence and Background:** Personal and familial factors significantly influenced the transitional process.

- **Financial Barriers:** Financial obstacles were identified as significant barriers to pursuing higher education.

- **Accessibility and Accommodation Challenges:** Physical accessibility and tailored accommodations were deemed essential but often lacking.

- **Social stigma and Discrimination:** Social biases were found often to impact access to education for students with disabilities.

- **Institutional and Policy Barriers:** The review uncovered institutional shortcomings, highlighting the need for more inclusive policies.

- **Lack of Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills:** The need for better training and awareness among educators and students was highlighted.

- **Personal and Psychological Barriers:** Personal barriers played a significant role in students' transition experiences. It was identified that addressing these barriers required a multifaceted and sometimes personalised approach that considers each student's unique experiences.

6.1   INTER-RATER RELIABILITY – COHEN KAPPA

The evaluation of the studies included in the systematic review demonstrated a high level of inter-rater reliability, as evidenced by a Cohen's Kappa score of 0.88. This high score indicates a strong level of agreement between the raters and underscores the methodological rigour of the review process. The consistency in assessment suggests that the findings were not based on the subjective judgment of one reviewer. Consequently, potential biases are minimised, which adds to the credibility and dependability of the systematic literature review (Neuendorf, 2017).

This study had a high level of agreement between screeners. Having multiple screeners is important as it encourages open dialogue and consensus-building among reviewers. It also prompts proactive discussions and promotes a more precise and mutual understanding of the assessment criteria and tools used. These factors are critical to ensuring the reliability of systematic reviews (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007; McHugh, 2012).

6.2　COUNTRIES REPRESENTED

The studies from this review were from various countries. The highest number of responses came from the United States (33), followed by the United Kingdom (5) and Ireland (3). Canada, Belgium, Sweden, Australia, and Spain with (1) study each. The over-representation of the U.S. in the research area could be attributed to federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. These laws are part of a legal and policy system that aims to protect the rights of people with disabilities (Heyer, 2015). The ADA, introduced in 1990, has been used by many European countries and other countries worldwide as a model for their legislation. It has set a high standard for accessibility and equal rights for individuals with disabilities. These measures, along with the continuous strive of the United States to promote accessibility and equality, likely have created a research-driven environment for research in this field, thus leading to higher representation as observed.

However, this skewed representation of American studies introduces some degree of geographical bias in this review and affects the generalisability of this review's findings. Likely because the experiences and challenges faced by students with disabilities vary based on the specific contexts of different countries, these differences can be attributed to varying educational systems, cultural attitudes towards disabilities, and disability-related policies and legislation within each country (Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011).

The findings from this study offer vital insights and reflection on the situation in the United States and other countries. However, the applicability of these findings in different geographical contexts is open to interpretation. The narrow geographical focus of the current study limits its capacity to capture the global diversity of experiences and barriers of students with disabilities and their access to higher education. Consequently, insights from underrepresented nations can go unnoticed, resulting in a potentially narrow perspective of the issue.

It is essential to consider the geographical bias when interpreting the findings of this review. This emphasises the need for more diverse research that can provide a global perspective and improve the generalisability of the results. Although there are limitations, the review offers valuable insights into the experiences of students with

disabilities. This could serve as a starting point for future research that is more inclusive and representative on a global level (Harpur, 2012).

6.3 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DIFFERENT METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

This section examines the different research methodologies included in the study, including quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies. By scrutinising their strengths, limitations, and contributions, this section aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how each approach contributes to the overall comprehension of the research topic.

6.3.1 Review of the Qualitative Studies

This section examines the qualitative studies presented from the review, provides an overview of the strengths and weaknesses identified and the implications for this study and future research. The information obtained from Table 7 illustrated the distribution of the different study designs from the review. During the review, 45 studies were analysed, with the majority (approximately 80% (n=37) presenting a qualitative study design. About 15% (n=6) of the studies employed a mixed-methods design, making it the second most frequently used study design. The lowest was the quantitative studies, making up only 4.3% (n=2).

The review found that qualitative studies were the most prevalent study examining the barriers students with disabilities experience when transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education. The qualitative studies emphasised individual experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors, allowing for a nuanced comprehension of this intricate and multifaceted issue. Given that the barriers faced by students with disabilities often are personalised, this research approach was appropriate. It allowed for the nuances and subjective realities these students encounter to be explored (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The qualitative studies in this study delved into the challenges faced by students with disabilities from their perspectives, which provided significant insights into their experiences. This approach revealed barriers that were not easily quantifiable but are crucial to understanding the personal, psychological, and socio-cultural aspects of these students' lives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The collected data highlighted the emotional struggles, self-perception, experiences with discrimination,

and interactions with educators and peers. It also identified the influence of structural factors, such as institutional policies and societal attitudes, in shaping these barriers.

In light of the strengths observed with the qualitative studies examined in this study, it is also important to explore its limitations. The qualitative studies carried potential limitations, particularly in sample size. As a result, the studies lacked the statistical power to make broad generalisations (Clark et al., 2021).

Qualitative research recognises the importance of subjectivity and how the researcher's perspective can impact the study. Upon analysis, it was found that while most qualitative studies had an overall high score, they scored low on the researcher-participant relationship criteria. This highlights the fact that researchers' beliefs and viewpoints can provide a better understanding of the barriers faced by students with disabilities during their transition to postsecondary education. However, it is essential to examine these potential biases when interpreting the research findings. (Maxwell, 2012).

Future research may benefit from incorporating more quantitative or mixed-method studies to address these limitations. Quantitative research can provide a broader understanding of the magnitude of barriers faced by students with disabilities and identifying trends and patterns. Meanwhile, mixed-method studies can offer a more comprehensive understanding by combining the contextual insights of qualitative research with the generalizability of quantitative research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

In summary, though the qualitative studies included in this review have yielded valuable insights into the barriers encountered by students with disabilities, a greater range of research methods may be more necessary to gain a more complete and representative understanding of the subject matter.

6.4   REVIEW OF THE QUANTITATIVE STUDIES

This section examines the quantitative studies produced from the review, provides an overview of the strengths and weaknesses identified and the implications for this study and future research. There was a limited number of quantitative studies in the systematic literature review. This limited scope may significantly affect our knowledge of the research question's overall breadth, depth, and generalisability.

Research that involves quantitative analysis typically utilises larger sample sizes and statistical analysis. This allows for broader generalisations and identifying patterns, trends, or causal relationships. Capturing quantitative studies in this review aimed to address the issue of small sample sizes, a current gap in the literature. The review captured two quantitative studies, one with a sample size of 432 (Trainor et al., 2019) and the other with a sample size of 4729 (E. Carroll et al., 2022). It also captured seven mixed-method studies. As a result, the conclusions of this study were strengthened, and the generalisability of our findings was improved. The high average ratings of these studies further supported their credibility. However, the current literature gap of low quantitative studies suggests that our understanding of transition barriers for students with disabilities may be somewhat limited in scope (Creswell, 2014).

Further quantitative and mixed-method research is needed due to their low representation. A focus on exploring the prevalence of various barriers among the broader population of students with disabilities would be valuable in identifying patterns in the types of barriers associated with different disability types and educational contexts. Additionally, this would reveal association between specific barriers and outcomes, such as dropout rates or academic performance (LaVenia, 2021).

In addition, qualitative research can be supplemented by quantitative research to test hypotheses or assumptions that arise from the qualitative findings on a larger scale. For example, the findings in this study identified seven themes of barriers under ''Environmental factors''. A quantitative study could survey a large number of students to determine the prevalence of these barriers. It could also be used to examine the outcomes of students who receive varying levels of support to investigate the impact of institutional support on successful transitions to higher education.

The review indicates a low number of quantitative and mixed-method studies, implying a necessity for more diverse and balanced methodological approaches in future research. By conducting more quantitative and mixed-method research, a more extensive and applicable comprehension of the barriers that students with disabilities encounter when transitioning to post-secondary education could be attained.

6.5 BARRIERS EXPERIENCED ACROSS ICF CLASSIFICATION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

6.5.1 Theme 1 - Educational and Institutional Barriers

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

Students face significant barriers due to universities' limited information sharing about college life and support systems. This information gap included general college expectations and extended to crucial support services. For instance, the lack of accessibility to disability support services exposed institutional shortcomings in meeting diverse student needs. These barriers, combined with challenging coursework and fast-paced learning environments, especially in community colleges, made things more difficult for students, especially those with disabilities. This has been highlighted by various studies conducted by Berg et al. (2017), Hadley (2007), McConnell (2019), Stein (2012), Taneja-Johansson (2021), and Waale (2017).

Teaching staff also posed as institutional barriers that complicated the situation. Some educators were either unwilling or unable to cater to the unique learning needs of students (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Harwick et al., 2020; Romano et al., 2023). This made students struggle to communicate with educators effectively and receive necessary academic accommodations (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). The unaccommodating behaviour and attitudes of some educators were often accompanied by discriminatory practices and negative perceptions from peers and faculty, further contributing to feelings of marginalisation (Dowrick et al., 2005; Joseph, 2018; Lindsay, Cagliostro et al., 2018; Marshall et al., 2012; O' Byrne et al., 2019). The implications of these barriers were multifaceted, impacting students in various ways. For example, due to a lack of understanding and awareness of students' disabilities in the academic community, students with dyslexia or visual impairments were often discouraged (Waale, 2017; Mask & DePountis, 2018). Such adverse experiences affected students' academic performance and hindered their socio-emotional development and self-esteem.

In conclusion, educational institutions must take a comprehensive approach to addressing institutional and educational barriers to create an inclusive, supportive, and equitable environment for all students. This is a vital commitment to unlocking all students' diverse talents and potential. Achieving this objective requires structural

changes within institutions and attitudinal shifts within the academic community. Only by making such concerted efforts can educational institutions fulfil their mission of inclusion and holistically developing students.

6.5.2 Theme 2 - Family Influence and Background

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

The inadequate understanding of postsecondary options among parents highlighted a broader issue of inconsistency between their expectations and the reality of higher education (Ortiz, 2010; Stein, 2012). Students were frequently in situations where the advice they received from schools contradicted their parents' beliefs or perceptions, causing confusion and potential conflict (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). These discrepancies worsened the barriers faced by students as they navigated the complexities of transitioning while also dealing with familial pressures and misunderstandings (Lindsay, Duncanson, et al., 2018; Yamamoto & Black, 2015).

Parental attitudes and expectations have a direct impact on the self-efficacy and motivation of students. When parents have low expectations, students' aspirations can be negatively affected, hindering their ability to succeed in postsecondary settings (Hadley, 2007; Lightner et al., 2012). On the other hand, overprotective families can impede students' independence and self-advocacy skills, which are critical for thriving in a postsecondary environment.

In order to ensure better outcomes for students, it is crucial to involve families in pre-transition planning and education. This is because there is often a significant gap between the perspectives of families and the realities of postsecondary transition, as highlighted by Madaus & Shaw (2006) and Carroll et al. (2022). We can improve transitions and enhance student success by bridging this knowledge gap and ensuring that families are well-informed, supportive, and aligned with their children's needs and aspirations.

Family backgrounds and attitudes significantly influence students' experiences during the transition period. A marked difference in knowledge and comprehension between families and educational institutions highlights the need for a more collaborative and integrated approach to promote shared understanding.

6.5.3 Theme 3 – Financial Challenges

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

Moving from secondary to postsecondary education marks a significant milestone in a student's life. This change brings chances for academic advancement and personal growth but also many financial difficulties that can act as significant barriers. The extent of these barriers is clear from several studies examining students' experiences.

Relocating for undergraduate programs located far from home was a significant financial burden for many students, according to R. Scott (2009). The costs associated with moving and living expenses often exceeded students' initial estimates, creating unexpected financial stress (R. Scott, 2009). Additionally, students faced further stress due to a lack of access to financial aid options such as scholarships, grants, or work-study programs (Hill-Shavers, 2013). In addition to tuition fees, students had to bear other expenses such as books, supplies, and transportation (Chambers et al., 2009; Hewett et al., 2014; Mask & DePountis, 2018; McConnell, 2019).

The area of financial assistance, while providing hope for relief, presented a dilemma. While it offered much-needed financial support, it also caused stress due to the difficulties in obtaining necessary documentation, meeting deadlines, and navigating the complexities of the system (Hill-Shavers, 2013). Another factor contributing to this problem was the issue of inadequate planning and unforeseen difficulties resulting from insufficient knowledge of college finances and misinformation on the end of students (Waale, 2017). These barriers extended beyond academic circles, with transportation to college becoming a significant concern, particularly for those travelling long distances (Mask & DePountis, 2018). Unpacking these barriers reveals significant consequences. The financial burden arising from various sources compromises students' academic engagement and poses a significant risk to students' mental health (Hewett et al., 2014; Joseph, 2018). The widespread prevalence of misinformation and insufficient knowledge regarding college, as highlighted by the findings, indicates a domino effect where one financial barrier could unintentionally trigger another.

A multi-faceted approach is necessary to tackle these challenges. Firstly, financial literacy programs can be implemented by institutions to equip students with

the necessary skills for responsible budgeting, a better understanding of college expenses and navigating financial aid procedures effectively (Joseph, 2018). Providing transparent cost estimates can significantly assist students in anticipating and preparing for future expenses (Waale, 2017). Additionally, support systems such as help desks or helplines can be highly beneficial to students, helping to clarify any uncertainties surrounding financial aid. Lastly, customised transportation solutions, including discounted transit passes or partnerships with local transit agencies, can help alleviate related stressors (Chambers et al., 2009).

It is crucial to comprehend and tackle students' economic difficulties while transitioning to postsecondary education. Educational institutions must create a fair and favourable atmosphere with all-inclusive approaches to address these barriers.

6.5.4 Theme 4 - Accessibility and Accommodation Challenges

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

One of the insights revealed is the lack of academic accessibility, highlighted by the difficulties encountered by students in attending classes (Hewett et al., 2014). Furthermore, it was discovered that essential reading materials and assessment tools, once considered standard, are mainly inaccessible to some students with disabilities (Hewett et al., 2014).

Deeper issues existed beyond the lack of resource accessibility. Courses designed to cater to a wide range of students were discovered to ignore the needs of visually impaired students, with educators often unprepared to address the situation (Mask & DePountis, 2018). These observations illustrate the requirement to reassess curriculum design and teacher training, focusing on inclusivity.

Additionally, physical barriers faced by students were brought to light. The challenges faced by many in reaching their educational institutions pointed towards problems with transportation and infrastructure on a larger scale (Chambers et al., 2009). The campuses themselves frequently presented barriers to accessibility (Mask & DePountis, 2018; R. Scott, 2009).

Another revelation was the institutional inadequate response to accommodation requests. Administrative services were established to bridge the gap between student needs and institutional offerings but were found to be inefficient and lacked informed personnel (Dangoisse et al., 2020; Dowrick et al., 2005).

Overall, this examination of students' challenges regarding accessibility and accommodation presents a serious situation. The effects of this experience extend beyond academic setbacks and highlight the need for comprehensive changes in institutional attitudes, curriculum development, and administrative effectiveness. These findings suggest the importance of developing inclusive educational ecosystems where all students can thrive regardless of their needs (Chambers et al., 2009; Dowrick et al., 2005; Mask & DePountis, 2018).

6.5.5 Theme 5 - Social Stigma and Discrimination

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

The findings highlight the complex barriers faced by students with disabilities beyond just academic barriers. The transition to higher education, which is expected to be an exciting and positive experience, can be overwhelming for many students. This is due to the feelings of being alone, discrimination, and stigmatisation that they may face (Francis et al., 2022; Pallisera et al., 2016).

An insight obtained from these findings is that these challenges are interconnected. Negative attitudes, stereotyping, and bullying among peers are not isolated events but constitute an overall environment of exclusion (Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; R. Scott, 2009). This environment, in turn, makes students with disabilities more hesitant to seek the accommodations they require or to reveal their impairment (Banks, 2014). One observation was that this stigma is not only perpetuated by peers but is also sometimes reinforced by the institutions supposed to provide support to students. This is evident in the inaccessible physical environments and biased classroom experiences.

Stein (2012) suggests that there is a broader societal problem where disability is associated with inability. This is evidenced by educational institution's negative guidance and parents' limited expectations. Obtaining a secondary school leaving certificate is a significant barrier to pursuing further education, but it also represents a narrow and rigid definition of achievement and capability within society. Given these discoveries, higher education institutions and society must recognise and address these barriers. Institutions should foster an environment that values inclusivity, awareness, and acceptance. Training programs for faculty, staff, and students can play a critical role in altering preconceived attitudes and biases (Smith,

2019). Additionally, students with disabilities should be actively included in all aspects of campus life, enabling them to become active contributors to the college community rather than passive recipients (Tillman, 2020). These initiatives have the potential to effectively address prejudices and negative perceptions.

The journey towards tertiary education is often difficult for most students, and it poses even more challenges for those with disabilities who must contend with societal prejudice and bias. It is not only the responsibility of educational institutions but society to acknowledge, question, and challenge these deeply rooted attitudes. Creating an inclusive society must begin with accepting and celebrating diversity in all forms (Johnston & Percy, 2017).

6.5.6 Theme 6 – Institution and Policy Barriers

ICF Classification (Environmental Factors)

Institutions often failed to follow up with students with disabilities during enrolment, and the support provided during this process was frequently deemed unhelpful (Kernohan et al., 2017). College faculty's lack of understanding of students' disability-related needs further compounded the feelings of exclusion and marginalisation (Crews & Keil, 2005). The implication is that even after successfully navigating the transition phase, students faced barriers in the environment meant to facilitate their learning and growth.

There is an apparent discrepancy between educational institutions and the needs of transitioning students. Despite policies emphasising inclusivity and accommodation, there is still a significant gap between policy and practice (Ortiz, 2010; Dangoisse et al., 2020). Students already managing their academic responsibilities and other needs face additional systemic barriers, sometimes presented as support. It is important to note that the findings highlight the necessity of a student-focused approach to the transition process. Institutions should not only offer services but also ensure that these services are readily accessible and effective for students (Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). There is a lack of coordination and connection between health services and higher educational institutions. This emphasises the requirement for a more unified and coordinated inter-departmental plan that considers the extended needs of students (Lindsay, Cagliostro, et al., 2018).

Addressing the barriers students face during their transition from secondary to postsecondary education is important for both postsecondary institutions and policymakers. To achieve this, it is necessary to have a collaborative approach that involves schools, colleges, health service providers, and the students themselves (Trainor et al., 2019; Harwick et al., 2020). This collaboration can address bureaucratic challenges, ensure service consistency, and foster a culture of empathy and support within institutions, facilitating a smoother transition.

The transition from secondary to postsecondary education is challenging for students due to institutional and policy barriers. It is evident that a more comprehensive and integrated approach, founded on empathy and effective communication, is necessary to overcome these barriers. (Dowrick et al., 2005; Frazier-Watson, 2018).

6.5.7 Theme 7 - Lack of Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills

ICF Classification (Body Structure and Function/Environmental factors)

During the transition of students from secondary to postsecondary environments, it was noticed that they faced significant barriers mainly caused by their lack of awareness, knowledge, and skills (Hill-Shavers, 2013). These issues went beyond the regular academic challenges, and many students struggled with the increased demands of college writing (Hadley, 2007), indicating that their preparatory training was inadequate (Ortiz, 2010).

Upon examination of the barriers, a significant factor that surfaced was the students' deficient skills in advocating for themselves. Their inability to express their concerns and requirements was not solely due to their lack of confidence or motivation. It was closely linked to their restricted cultural, social, and linguistic capital, as noted by Banks (2014). These limitations inevitably resulted in a lack of clarity regarding their disabilities, preventing them from seeking the necessary academic accommodations. This, in turn, made the transition to postsecondary education difficult. This was sometimes compounded by educators' undervaluation of their abilities (Banks, 2014). This disconnect, where teachers underestimated the students' capabilities, led to fewer opportunities for students to effectively engage, ultimately hindering their academic progress.

The results shed light on the inadequate preparedness of secondary school staff in helping students transition. Many were not adequately equipped to fulfil their responsibilities towards students. This lack of preparation was evident in their skill set and approach to understanding student needs. Similarly, both parents and teachers were found to have insufficient knowledge and training, which added to the difficulties faced by transitioning students (Carroll et al., 2022; Kutscher & Tuckwiller, 2020; Trainor et al., 2019; Yamamoto & Black, 2015).

A significant technological gap was identified, which put students at a disadvantage. They were disadvantaged due to their limited knowledge of assistive technologies while dealing with other challenges (Cawthon & Cole, 2010; Dowrick et al., 2005). In today's digital age, where technology plays a crucial role in academic pursuits, especially in postsecondary settings, this inadequacy further widened the gap between them and their peers (Thatcher & Rosenblum, 2021).

Improvement is required in the preparatory stages of secondary education. It is essential to address the gaps in teachers' understanding of their students' abilities. Additionally, providing better training modules for secondary school staff, increasing parental involvement, and introducing technology earlier in the educational process could be crucial in achieving this (Kohler & Field, 2003). A comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach is necessary to transition from secondary to postsecondary education. Such an approach should prioritise academic excellence and foster self-advocacy, proficiency in technology, and a thorough comprehension of individual challenges. The next session explores and discusses the themes that emerged from the review using the ICF classification.

6.5.8 Theme 7 - Personal and Psychological Barriers

ICF Classification (Activities and Participation)

When transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education, it is essential to consider the challenges students face. In addition to the more apparent barriers, there are less evident and personal barriers that can make this transition difficult. Research has identified various psychological and personal challenges students encounter, including difficulties with autonomy, identity, and academic readiness. Studies by Cawthon and Cole (2010), Crews and Keil (2005), and Gillis (2011) have all highlighted this collective barrier.

The absence of personalised support during high school years has been identified as a critical barrier by various sources, including Gillis (2011), Harwick et al. (2020), and Yamamoto & Black (2015). This resulted in students being unprepared for the academic demands of college and struggling to communicate effectively in new environments. Gillis (2011) argues that developing the ability to articulate needs is crucial for students' success in higher education, but overbearing parents often hinder this. This limits students' autonomy and impedes the development of vital self-advocacy skills essential for navigating the complex landscape of college.

A widespread sense of displacement was a common experience for those who faced barriers to cultural and social integration (Taneja-Johansson, 2021; Frazier-Watson, 2018). This struggle had many layers, including an inner conflict of self-doubt, an increased self-awareness of being 'different', and a strong desire for assimilation (Lightner et al., 2012; Punch & Duncan, 2022). The internal discord was exacerbated by losing existing social connections (Lindsay, Cagliostro, et al., 2018). As a result, even simple tasks like managing daily campus responsibilities or academic requirements became challenging (Eichhorn, 2016).

Planning and obtaining funds for essential services became challenging, especially when considering evaluations needed for accommodations (Cawthon & Cole, 2010). Multiple studies found a shared feeling of being lost, with limited access to services and essential information (Scanlon & Doyle, 2021; Stein, 2012). These personal or academic challenges contributed to a stressful environment, affecting academic performance and potentially leading to an increased rate of dropouts (Pallisera et al., 2016; Ortiz, 2010). In conclusion, the journey from secondary to post-secondary education was challenging.

The challenges that come with high school go beyond just academics. How we see ourselves, what society expects of us, and the fight for independence all significantly impact us. To make this transition more accessible, it is essential to have a more comprehensive approach to preparing students in high school. This approach should focus on teaching self-advocacy, building self-esteem, and providing them with the necessary tools to succeed.

6.6 INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BARRIERS ACROSS CLASSIFICATIONS

The transition from secondary to postsecondary education is a significant moment for students. However, for students with disabilities, this is a complex process that involves various barriers. These barriers are not separate but often intersect, amplifying their impact on students' educational journey.

At the core of many barriers is social stigma and discrimination. Students often reported feeling isolated, both emotionally and physically. Whether due to unsupportive peers engaging in bullying or classroom settings that marginalise them. These experiences have profound effects on students' psychological well-being. Students internalising these negative experiences can directly hinder their academic performance and discourage them from seeking help. Students who face social barriers also have to overcome institutional and policy barriers. These barriers are often difficult to overcome due to the lack of comprehensive policies to support their transition. Many institutions fail to provide sufficient accommodation and instead rely on students to advocate for themselves. This lack of support is not merely an oversight but a result of policy inconsistencies. For example, differences in academic requirements across various districts make students unprepared for postsecondary education (Marshall et al., 2012).

Layered onto these are accessibility and accommodation barriers. Academic barriers, such as difficulty accessing reading materials or attending sessions, are compounded by structural issues of physical accessibility. Transportation to educational institutions can also be challenging due to transportation issues. Even upon arrival, campuses might not be designed to be inclusive, further isolating students (Mask & DePountis, 2018; R. Scott, 2009).

Social stigma can be overwhelming, particularly when coupled with institutions' administrative processes. Consider a student already marginalised socially, trying to navigate a system that does not offer clear guidance on accessing accommodations. This combination is a significant barrier, discouraging the student from pursuing higher education. In addition, policy barriers and issues with accessibility are often linked and can overlap. If inclusive infrastructure is not a priority for policy, it can result in physically inaccessible campuses.

Furthermore, students may be left without essential resources if course instructors are not trained to deliver accessible courses. This problem is not only about accessibility but also institutional policy. This issue is not only about accessibility but also about institutional (Mask & DePountis, 2018).

The lack of inclusivity and adaptability is the most common and intersecting barrier across all these themes. This issue is present in resources and attitudes, course designs, and policy structures. These interrelated challenges portray an educational system struggling to adapt its practices and cultures to meet the diverse needs of students.

In synthesising these insights, a detailed comprehension of students' difficulties when transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education is obtained. It is not solely about dealing with individual barriers but also about understanding how they interconnect and reinforce one another. A comprehensive assessment that acknowledges these interrelationships is needed for meaningful reform to take place. Acknowledging the additional dimensions of identity intersecting with the layered barriers students face is essential. Factors such as socioeconomic status, cultural background, race and gender significantly impact the barriers that students with disabilities face. The concept of intersectionality suggests that the conventional classification of 'able' versus 'disabled' is insufficient in capturing the barriers students face. For instance, within educational settings, students of colour with disabilities might face discrimination not only due to their disability but also because of racial biases.

Furthermore, with globalisation, students from diverse backgrounds aspire to pursue higher education across borders. Such international students who have disabilities face unique challenges, from adapting to a new educational culture to navigating visa regulations and accessing accommodations in a foreign language (Lee & Rice, 2007). Their experiences are not only shaped by their disabilities but also by their international status. In terms of the institutional framework, it is evident that institutional lack of support often occurs due to a lack of understanding student needs. Instead of proactively seeking solutions, many institutions address issues only when confronted by them. This leads to further complications during the transition for students who must also push to receive accommodations (Madaus, 2005).

These compounded challenges have numerous implications, including a significant increase in drop-out rates among students with disabilities. Many students feel socially and institutionally isolated, making it hard to continue their education. This leads to reduced career opportunities and increased social isolation in the long run (Gilson, 2009). Understanding the barriers students with disabilities face provides opportunities to uncover strategies and interventions. By recognising the complex and diverse barriers that students face, educators, policymakers, and institutions can strive to create environments that are not only accommodating but also empowering. Collaborative learning approaches, mentorship initiatives, and enhanced training for faculty are examples of some strategies to reduce the social stigma and prejudice experienced by students (Korbel et al., 2011).

In addition, with the rapid advancements in technology, there are opportunities to utilise digital tools for enhanced accessibility. AI-powered transcription services and virtual reality-based classrooms are examples of technological interventions that can decrease academic barriers, making learning more inclusive (Zhang & Aslan, 2021).

It is necessary to highlight that students with disabilities possess their own agency. Despite facing barriers, they displayed resilience, adaptability, and creativity. Their stories, generally overlooked in larger discussions, can provide valuable perspectives. By incorporating their input into decision-making, institutions can ensure that proposed solutions are evidence-based and practically effective.

For many students, moving from secondary to postsecondary education can feel like navigating through a complex maze of barriers. However, it is the interconnectedness of these barriers that amplifies the impact. To address these challenges, it is crucial to have an understanding of this complex landscape and use this knowledge to shape future policies and practices. To address these barriers, it is important to recognise students' diverse and interconnected needs in the process.

6.7 TRANSITION AS A SHARED EXPERIENCE AMONG STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITY

The transition from secondary to postsecondary education is a transformative phase that all students go through, regardless of disability. Throughout this process, students with and without disabilities encounter similar barriers that affect their

transition experience. This section examines the common barriers faced by both groups of students during this shared experience.

6.7.1 Shared experiences and barriers

The transition from secondary to postsecondary education comes with a significant increase in academic expectations for all students. This transition requires students to develop advanced self-regulation, time management skills, and a deeper comprehension of complex course content (McDonough, 2005). Both students with and without disabilities face similar challenges in their pursuit of academic attainment.

As students leave the familiarity of secondary school and enter the diverse landscape of postsecondary institutions, they must adapt to a new social environment. Forming new friendships, adjusting to varying peer groups, and establishing a sense of belonging in a new social setting are challenges faced by students with and without disabilities (Vaccaro et al., 2015). The struggle to form social connections goes beyond disability boundaries, making it an experience shared by all students during this transition.

Pascarella & Terenzini, (2005) have argued that transitioning to postsecondary education requires students to become more independent and self-directed. This applies to all students, regardless of disability status, as they must learn to make autonomous decisions, manage their time efficiently, and advocate for their needs. This process of self-discovery and self-reliance is essential to their transition journey, promoting personal growth and self-determination.

When transitioning to postsecondary education, students with disabilities face similar challenges to their peers without disabilities regarding career aspirations and personal identity development (Gill, 2007; Skinner & Lindstrom, 2010). Both groups of students question their future paths, interests, and passions, and this period of self-exploration is significant for their transition experience. It influences their choice of majors and career trajectories and is a crucial aspect of their journey.

Financial challenges are a common barrier that affects students going through a transition, regardless of their disability status. The expenses associated with college education, such as tuition, textbooks, living expenses, and other related costs, impact students with and without disabilities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). During this

phase, students must develop skills such as managing budgets, seeking scholarships, and navigating other financial responsibilities.

Managing time and balancing academic responsibilities with extracurricular activities, part-time jobs, or other commitments are shared challenges that arise during the transition period. McDonough's research emphasises that students, regardless of their disability status, must refine their time management skills and adjust to a more demanding workload (McDonough, 2005) . Effective time management plays an essential role in academic success and overall well-being.

Access to various resources, such as academic advising, career counselling, and library services, is needed for all transitioning students to effectively support their academic journey. These resources are important in helping students with and without disabilities navigate the complexities of postsecondary education. All students face significant stress during their transition to postsecondary education, which can negatively impact their mental health. According to Eisenberg et al. (2013), coping with academic pressures, social adjustments, and the uncertainties of this phase can lead to heightened stress levels (Eisenberg et al., 2013). It underscores the importance of mental health support and resilience-building for all transitioning students, as this shared experience can be overwhelming. Students from various cultural backgrounds or transitioning to institutions in different cultural settings often face the challenge of cultural adjustment (Ward, 2022). Adapting to new cultural norms, values, and expectations is a rewarding but challenging part of the transition that goes beyond disability barriers.

Creating a sense of belonging within the postsecondary community is crucial for academic success and personal well-being. Strayhorn, (2018) highlights that students, regardless of their disabilities, strive to find their place in the new environment and connect with peers who share their interests and values (Strayhorn, 2018). The pursuit of belonging is a shared experience in their endeavour to create a supportive and all-inclusive educational community. Students with and without disabilities share certain barriers during the transition to postsecondary education. It is, however, essential to understand that this process is complex and influenced by each student's unique circumstances and needs. For students with disabilities, this journey may be particularly challenging due to difficulties with accessibility,

disclosure of their disabilities, and obtaining accommodations, amongst others, which require specialised support and attention (Leake & Stodden, 2014).

Other essential factors to consider when examining shared barriers are the magnitude, scope, and frequency of these barriers. These factors often reveal stark contrasts between the experiences of students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The magnitude of barriers for students with disabilities is typically greater due to the additional layers of complexity associated with various impairments. For example, while all students might struggle with the challenge of accessing course materials, students with visual impairments might need these materials in accessible formats such as Braille or audio. This requirement often involves navigating institutional processes for accommodations, which can be time-consuming and inconsistent (Amponsah & Bekele, 2022). Consequently, the effort and resources required to overcome these barriers are significantly higher, highlighting a disparity in the magnitude of challenges faced by students with disabilities compared to their non-disabled peers.

The scope of barriers for students with disabilities is broader, affecting multiple aspects of their educational experience. While non-disabled students primarily face academic and social barriers, students with disabilities often contend with additional physical and environmental challenges. For instance, inaccessible campus facilities can impede mobility for students with physical disabilities, while inadequate support services can hinder the academic progress of students with learning disabilities (Kuriakose & Amaresha, 2024; Fernández-Batanero, Montenegro-Rueda, & Fernández-Cerero, 2022). These broad-ranging barriers extend beyond the classroom, impacting transportation, housing, and participation in extracurricular activities, thereby encompassing a wider scope of challenges.

In terms of frequency, students with disabilities encounter barriers more regularly in their daily routines. Unlike their non-disabled peers, who may face barriers episodically such as during exams or specific projects. Students with disabilities often deal with continuous barriers. For example, a student with a hearing impairment might frequently encounter communication barriers in lectures, group work, and social interactions, necessitating constant use of assistive devices or interpreters (Kuriakose & Amaresha, 2024; Fernández-Batanero, Montenegro-Rueda,

& Fernández-Cerero, 2022). This perpetual nature of barriers highlights a higher frequency of challenges, necessitating ongoing support and adaptations.

In comparison, non-disabled students face barriers that are generally less severe in magnitude, narrower in scope, and less frequent. Their challenges are typically confined to academic pressures and social integration issues, without the added burden of navigating physical or sensory impairments. For example, while a non-disabled student might struggle with time management, they do not have to contend with the additional logistical and accessibility challenges that students with disabilities face (Kuriakose & Amaresha, 2024; Fernández-Batanero, Montenegro-Rueda, & Fernández-Cerero, 2022).

To summarise, the shift from secondary to postsecondary education presents common barriers that affect all students, regardless of their disability status. These barriers involve academic demands, social adjustments, autonomy, career exploration, financial constraints, time management, access to resources, stress, cultural adaptation, and the desire for community. Acknowledging these shared barriers is crucial for educators and institutions to provide adequate assistance and resources to successfully help students navigate this transition period.

It is essential to recognise the distinct viewpoints and obstacles faced by students with disabilities as part of the shared experience. These students encounter additional barriers underscoring the importance of personalised support and dedication to inclusivity in higher education. By targeting common and unique barriers, educational institutions can promote a fair and diverse environment that enables all students to excel in their academic pursuits and reach their full potential.

6.8 IDENTIFICATION OF DISABILITY IN HIGH SCHOOL AND DE-IDENTIFICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

One of the observations from the findings is the issue of disability identification during high school and the subsequent deidentification in higher education. Students are identified as having disabilities during their secondary education. However, many experience deidentification or a change in their disability status when they enrol in higher education institutions. This process has significant policy and practical implications in education.

6.8.1 Disability Identification in High School

The identification of disabilities in high school is an established process worldwide, which is governed by legal frameworks aimed at offering tailored accommodations and support services to students with disabilities. In Canada and the United States, this legal framework involves Individualised Education Plans (IEPs) that assist eligible students (Gillies & Pedlar, 2003). In the United Kingdom, the Equality Act provides statutory support to ensure that students with disabilities get reasonable adjustments that help them in their education (Cameron et al., 2019). Similarly, other countries such as, Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, and Belgium have their measures in place to identify and assist students with disabilities in high school.

6.8.2 The Transition to Higher Education

During the transition to higher education, students often face a completely different landscape, including legal framework changes, new eligibility criteria, and disclosure requirements. As a result, some students who previously received accommodations for disabilities in high school may struggle to obtain them in college (Burgstahler, 2015). This can be particularly difficult for students with invisible disabilities (Aquino & Bittinger, 2019), sensory disabilities (Roer-Strier et al., 2009), or conditions that may fluctuate over (Burgstahler, 2015). Aquino and Bittinger (2019) conducted a study that highlights the changing nature of disability identification among students who are transitioning from high school to higher education. The study found that during the first year of postsecondary education, more than 10% of students identified as having a disability. However, a significant percentage of these students (59%) were deidentified by the first follow-up. It was also discovered that only 38% of the students who identified as having a disability during the first follow-up had identified themselves as such during their first year of postsecondary education. These findings challenge the widely accepted notion that disability identification remains a constant over time.

6.8.3 Factors Contributing to Deidentification

Several factors influence disability identification in higher education. Firstly, different countries have varying eligibility criteria, making it more difficult for some students to receive accommodations (Lindsay, 2011). Secondly, stigma and

discrimination related to disabilities are a concern in many countries, leading some students to avoid disclosing their disabilities or not realise their rights (Burke et al., 2020). Thirdly, some higher education institutions lack the resources and infrastructure to correctly identify and support students with disabilities, an issue observed in many nations (Ainscow et al., 2013).

6.8.4 Implications for Educational Policy

Policy changes are needed to address the issue of disability deidentification in higher education. To ensure a smooth transition for students with disabilities from high school to higher education, educational policies must prioritise aligning eligibility criteria and definitions of disabilities. This alignment will ensure that students who require accommodations can receive them. Policymakers should also work to increase awareness among students of their rights and the importance of self-disclosure while addressing the stigma associated with disability (Monagle, 2015).Higher education institutions should invest resources and training to effectively identify and support students with disabilities. This includes training faculty and staff in inclusive teaching practices and creating physically accessible campus environments (Shpigelman et al., 2022). Policies should also focus on promoting a culture of inclusion and diversity to reduce the stigma associated with disability, a goal relevant to all countries (Dunn & Andrews, 2015).

6.8.5 Implications for Educational Practice

Regarding educational practice, it is essential to take a proactive approach to disability deidentification. Collaboration between high schools and higher education institutions can aid in transferring information about students with disabilities, including their support plans, to ensure a smooth transition. It is also crucial for high schools to encourage students with disabilities to self-advocate and understand their rights (Frielink et al., 2018). In higher education institutions, faculty and staff should receive training to identify and accommodate students with disabilities, even if they do not disclose their status. Creating an accessible learning environment that is universally accessible through technology and physical accommodations is also crucial. Educational practices need to prioritise flexibility and inclusivity, with the goal of educators supporting all students to reach their full potential (Izzo & Bauer, 2015).

Identifying disabilities during high school and the subsequent deidentification in higher education is a complicated issue with significant implications for policy and practice. To tackle this challenge effectively, it is crucial to establish a smoother transition process for students with disabilities worldwide, standardise eligibility requirements, increase awareness, reduce stigma, and invest in resources and training. By doing so, we can guarantee that every student, regardless of their disability, has equal opportunities to succeed in higher education worldwide.

Addressing disability identification requires a proactive approach that involves collaboration between high schools and higher education institutions to facilitate a streamlined transition for students with disabilities (Cobb & Alwell, 2009). This collaboration is essential for transferring crucial information about students' disabilities and support plans to ensure continuity of care and assistance (Cobb & Alwell, 2009). Moreover, it is imperative for high schools to empower students with disabilities to self-advocate and understand their rights, preparing them for the transition to higher education (Cobb & Alwell, 2009).

Another recommendation would be for faculty and staff to undergo training to effectively identify and accommodate students with disabilities, even if these students do not disclose their status (Hsiao et al., 2020; Moriña et al., 2020). Creating an inclusive learning environment that is universally accessible through technology and physical accommodations is paramount to support the diverse needs of students (Hsiao et al., 2020; Moriña et al., 2020). Prioritising flexibility and inclusivity in educational practices is crucial, with educators aiming to support all students in reaching their full potential (Hsiao et al., 2020; Moriña et al., 2020).

To further enhance inclusive educational contexts, ongoing professional development programs focusing on inclusivity and universal design for learning (UDL) should be implemented (Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2021; Luo & Li, 2024). These programs equip educators with the necessary skills to create lesson plans that cater to diverse learning needs and styles, ultimately benefiting students with disabilities (Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2021; Luo & Li, 2024). Research has shown that UDL significantly improves the learning experience by providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression for students with disabilities (Holmqvist & Lelinge, 2021; Luo & Li, 2024).

In addition to professional development, the establishment of peer mentoring programs can offer valuable support to students with disabilities by providing guidance and companionship from peers who understand their challenges (Hayman et al., 2022). These programs contribute to fostering a more inclusive community and reducing feelings of isolation among students with disabilities (Hayman et al., 2022). Evidence suggests that peer mentoring enhances academic performance, increases retention rates, and improves the overall college experience for students with disabilities (Hayman et al., 2022).

Integrating assistive technologies into the curriculum is another crucial step towards enhancing accessibility in educational settings (Fernández-Batanero, Montenegro-Rueda, Fernández-Cerero, et al., 2022; Zwarych, 2023). Institutions should invest in technologies such as screen readers, speech-to-text software, and adaptive devices to facilitate full participation for students with disabilities (Fernández-Batanero, Montenegro-Rueda, Fernández-Cerero, et al., 2022; Zwarych, 2023). Research indicates that the effective integration of assistive technology can improve academic outcomes and promote independence among students with disabilities (Fernández-Batanero, Montenegro-Rueda, Fernández-Cerero, et al., 2022; Zwarych, 2023).

Furthermore, promoting a culture of inclusivity and awareness through workshops, seminars, and campaigns can help reduce stigma and create a supportive environment for students with disabilities (Eden & Chisom, 2024; Freeman-Green et al., 2023). This cultural shift should target both students and staff to ensure a comprehensive understanding and acceptance of diversity within the educational context (Eden & Chisom, 2024; Freeman-Green et al., 2023). Studies have shown that awareness and sensitivity training lead to more positive attitudes towards students with disabilities and better support from faculty and peers (Eden & Chisom, 2024; Freeman-Green et al., 2023).

Establishing clear policies and procedures for addressing accessibility issues promptly and effectively is essential in educational institutions (Cobb & Alwell, 2009). Having dedicated disability services offices that provide resources, support, and advocacy for students with disabilities ensures that their needs are met in a timely and efficient manner (L. C. Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). These policies should be regularly reviewed and updated to align with best practices and legal

requirements, with input from students with disabilities to ensure their needs are adequately addressed (L. C. Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016).

Identifying disabilities during high school and facilitating the transition process in higher education is a complex issue with significant implications for policy and practice (L. C. Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). To address this challenge effectively, a smoother transition process for students with disabilities globally is essential, along with standardised eligibility requirements, increased awareness, reduced stigma, and investments in resources and training (L. C. Page & Scott-Clayton, 2016). By implementing these strategies, educational institutions can ensure that every student, regardless of their disability, has equal opportunities to succeed in higher education worldwide.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this concluding chapter, I offer a concise synthesis of the study's primary findings and their implications. This chapter serves to provide a comprehensive overview of the research outcomes and to highlight potential directions for future academic inquiries, thereby reinforcing the enduring relevance of my work within the scholarly domain.

7.1 STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

In any research project, there are strengths and limitations that need to be taken into account. This section highlights the factors that make this study robust while acknowledging the limits restricting its scope. It is essential to understand both dimensions to interpret these research findings and place this contribution in the broader academic discourse.

7.1.1 Strengths

To conduct a comprehensive quality assessment evaluation of the included studies, I utilised both Kmet-14 and CASP-10 criteria. This approach involved using multiple recognised tools, which provided a thorough understanding of the study's methodology. Additionally, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method designs were included ensuring that the findings encompassed a broad spectrum of perspectives. This combined approach enabled the findings to encompass a broad spectrum of perspectives, resulting in methodologically robust and valid findings.

The thematic analysis utilised the ICF framework, a recognised system for categorising health and disability-related functions endorsed by the WHO. This approach ensured conformity and consistency with prior research in the field of study. This approach enabled a comprehensive synthesis of the findings and allowed for comparisons across studies. Additionally, the ICF framework provided a universally recognised language and structure, which added credibility to the research.

To ensure the accuracy of the review process, I used a multi-reviewer strategy for screening the title and abstract, extracting data, and assessing quality. Assessing

inter-rater reliability through Cohen's Kappa statistic offered a consistent metric for agreement between reviewers, ultimately promoting scientific rigour. This method documented potential biases and subjective interpretations.

The research's broad perspective encompassed 45 studies conducted in diverse countries with varying methodologies. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the topic, taking into account different cultural, geographic, and methodological contexts. Through this approach, the study gained a multifaceted understanding of the obstacles that students with disabilities encounter, making it more relevant across various settings.

The review recognised the diversity of academic discourse by incorporating various forms of scholarly communications, including dissertations and journal articles. This inclusive approach expanded the scope of the review, revealing distinct insights and perspectives.

The PRISMA guidelines are an evidence-based tool for reporting in a systematic review. Following these guidelines demonstrated a dedication to transparency, improving the reproducibility and credibility of the study. This shows that the review has been conducted and reported according to international best practices.

The review demonstrates a thorough and well-considered approach to investigating the research question, with each strength contributing to its methodological robustness and depth. By combining these strengths, the study shows a commitment to excellence, transparency, and relevance, which supports its valuable contribution to the field.

7.1.2 Limitations

The categorisation of themes in the ICF framework might introduce bias, which could distort the findings and misrepresent the actual barriers encountered by students with disabilities. Despite its robustness, potential bias in theme classification should be considered.

The absence of engagement with external stakeholders in this study, such as people with disabilities, may have resulted in a lack of practical insights, thereby leading to less applicable or meaningful findings for those directly affected by the research topic. There is a potential for publication bias regarding the lack of attention

given to unpublished or grey literature. The study also only included articles published in English. All this have the potential to result in a distorted portrayal of the research landscape and potentially lead to biased conclusions.

It is crucial to consider the limitations that come with the study's findings to properly apply them in practical situations or policies. These limitations highlight areas where further research or improvements in methodology can aid in better comprehension of the subject and serve as a guide for future investigations.

7.2 FUTURE RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Exploring the barriers experienced by students with disabilities through a thorough review of relevant studies provided valuable insight into an essential area of educational research. The review revealed both the strengths and limitations of the field of research, offering a foundation for future investigations that can address identified gaps and expand our understanding of the subject. This section examines potential research priorities that can help bridge these gaps, enhance existing knowledge, and facilitate informed decision-making in education.

7.2.1 Enhancing Geographical Diversity

Research in the United States dominates the current landscape, which is a significant limitation. Future research must include a broader range of cultural, societal, and economic contexts to enhance the applicability and relevance of findings. By exploring the challenges faced by students with disabilities in diverse countries and cultures, a more global perspective can be achieved.

7.2.2 Research Methodologies

The current review showed more qualitative studies than quantitative or mixed-method studies, indicating a need for more quantitative and mixed method studies in the current research landscape. While qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding, incorporating more quantitative and mixed-method studies would increase our understanding of the magnitude of the issues investigated and study generalisability. Future research should concentrate on creating structured surveys, controlled experiments, or use of secondary data to measure barriers and assess the effectiveness of interventions.

7.2.3 Addressing Publication Bias

To ensure a comprehensive understanding of the field, researchers must include unpublished studies or grey literature in future research. Seeking out conference proceedings, institutional reports, and dissertations can help incorporate a broader range of perspectives and minimise the potential for publication bias. This approach would lead to more balanced results and a better understanding of the current topic.

7.2.4 Improving research methods

In qualitative research, future efforts should prioritise ethical transparency and critically examine researcher-participant interactions. Quantitative research should increase analytical rigour by utilising systematic data analysis techniques. For quantitative studies, a critical focus should be on the detailed justification of chosen analytical methods and the robust control of confounders. It should conduct power analyses to determine and justify sample sizes sufficient to detect significant effects.

7.2.5 Policy Implications

It is important for education research focused on students with disabilities to actively participate in the policy-making process by going beyond just identifying issues. Future research should endeavour to cooperate and collaborate with governmental bodies to help translate research into practical policies that bridge the gap between academia and implementation. Collaboration with educational institutions can also contribute to shaping guidelines that address barriers for students with disabilities. By engaging with policymakers, inclusive education can receive increased funding, legal protections, and societal support, ensuring that research findings result in meaningful improvements.

Future exploration of the barriers students with disabilities encounter presents opportunities and challenges in the research landscape. The current strengths and limitations provide a roadmap for future research priorities. Future research can expand its geographical coverage, research methodologies, address biases, and policy implications to enhance the current knowledge base. These priorities advocate for inclusivity, rigour, transparency, and relevance and can guide the way towards a more comprehensive and impactful understanding of the educational challenges that students with disabilities face. This approach can support effective and equitable

educational practices and policies. Aligning future research with these priorities promises not only academic advancement but also academic advancement and social progress in making education accessible and empowering for all.

7.2.6 Enablers and strategies to overcome identified barriers

To address the barriers faced by students with disabilities when transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education, a comprehensive approach involving various enablers and strategies is needed. One crucial aspect is effective collaboration and communication between secondary schools and post-secondary institutions (Jones & Goble, 2012). By establishing formal partnerships and communication channels, essential information about students' needs and support plans can be seamlessly transferred, allowing post-secondary institutions to prepare necessary accommodations in advance. This proactive approach can significantly mitigate challenges during the transition process.

Empowering students with disabilities to advocate for themselves is another critical enabler (Carter et al., 2015). Programs that teach self-advocacy skills in secondary school can enhance students' understanding of their rights and how to request necessary accommodations in higher education settings. By fostering self-advocacy, students can develop increased confidence and independence, which are vital for navigating post-secondary environments successfully.

Implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles across educational institutions would create more inclusive environments (Lindsay et al., 2017). UDL promotes flexible teaching methods that cater to diverse learning needs, benefiting all students, including those with disabilities. By offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression, UDL can help reduce barriers faced by students with disabilities and enhance their overall learning experiences.

Integrating assistive technologies into the curriculum is another effective strategy to support students with disabilities (Pinilla et al., 2015). Technologies such as screen readers, speech-to-text software, and adaptive devices enable students to access course materials and participate fully in their education. Providing training for both students and staff on the effective use of these technologies ensures their optimal utilisation, further enhancing the learning experience for students with disabilities.

Developing peer mentoring programs can also play a significant role in supporting students with disabilities during their transition to post-secondary education (Carter et al., 2001). Peer mentors can offer guidance, share experiences, and help new students navigate the academic and social aspects of higher education. These programs foster a sense of community and belonging, which are crucial for student success and wellbeing.

Ongoing professional development for educators on disability awareness and inclusive practices is essential (Jacobs, 2023). Training programs focusing on recognising and accommodating diverse learning needs can help faculty and staff create more inclusive classrooms. Educators equipped with these skills are better prepared to support students with disabilities effectively, even if students do not disclose their disability status.

Establishing clear policies and dedicated support services for students with disabilities is fundamental in ensuring equitable access to education (Giust & Valle-Riestra, 2017). Institutions should have well-defined procedures for requesting accommodations, and disability services offices should provide ongoing support and advocacy. Regularly reviewing and updating these policies is crucial to ensure they remain effective and responsive to students' evolving needs.

By implementing these enablers and strategies, educational institutions can significantly reduce the barriers faced by students with disabilities during their transition to post-secondary education. These efforts contribute to creating more inclusive and supportive educational environments, enabling all students to achieve their full potential.

7.3   CONCLUSION

Transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education is crucial in a student's academic journey. Students with disabilities face a range of barriers during this period, which were the main focus of this thesis. Utilising the comprehensive systematic literature review method, I thoroughly examined various sources to document the barriers encountered by these students.

The ICF classification was used to better understand the diverse nature of these barriers. By organising my findings within the ICF framework, barriers were

identified and grouped into categories, including physical and mental impairments to external factors such as societal attitudes and environmental barriers.

After analysing the data, I have come to the following conclusions:

- Although some barriers were directly related to the student's disability, how colleges and universities responded to these impairments often exacerbated their impact.

- Students missed out on critical developmental experiences as academic and extracurricular opportunities were not aligned with their abilities, resulting in limitations on their activities and participation.

- Broader societal and environmental influences contributed to the issue of accessibility. Common misconceptions about disabilities, inadequate physical infrastructure, and a lack of personalised resources contributed to a less inclusive environment.

It is crucial to note that students with disabilities face interconnected barriers and addressing them requires a comprehensive and integrated approach by policymakers, educational institutions, families, and students. The thesis presents an opportunity to address these gaps and emphasises the urgent need. No student should be left behind due to systemic barriers when transitioning from secondary to post-secondary education. Examining these barriers through the lens of the ICF classification aimed to facilitate the development of more comprehensive, accessible, and supportive educational environments that are inclusive for everyone.

The study aimed to analyse the complex transition phase from secondary to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. The purpose was to gain a deeper understanding of the barriers they experience. The systematic and thorough methodology used was instrumental in achieving this objective.

The study's main goal was accomplished through the rigorous methodology that successfully identified various barriers students with disabilities experience in the transition to postsecondary education. These findings present an opportunity for educational institutions, policymakers, and other stakeholders to acknowledge and address these barriers, leading to a more equitable educational environment for students with disabilities. This research serves as the foundation for thoroughly

exploring barriers students with disabilities experience in hopes of providing approaches that can enable smoother transitions for students with disabilities.

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