

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS OF DISABLED
STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

Alanka Babb

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Education and Organizational Leadership

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was aimed to describe the experiences of twelve students with disabilities at a higher education institution in Maryland. The theory that guided this study was Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio's (1843) and John Rawls's social justice theory. The social justice theory addresses the importance of equality, access, liberty, and the fair distribution of resources in society to promote social and economic development for all. A qualitative methodology was used to execute the study. Data was collected using focus groups, interviews, and letters. The data was analyzed using Moustaka's (1994) modification of Van Kaam's method of phenomenological analysis. This technique allowed me to gather a complete textual description utilizing horizontilizing, reduction, and ultimately ascertaining a composite structural description or the essence of participants' experiences. The central question for this study was: what are the lived experiences of students with disabilities attending a four-year university? Three themes and several sub-themes were revealed during the data analysis process. These themes included socialization, the importance of accommodations, and university resources. Implications for findings suggest that university faculty members must be trained to support students with disabilities to ensure equitability. Future research recommends utilizing a more diverse sample and incorporating both students and faculty members to gather multiple perspectives while emphasizing students' experiences.

Keywords: Americans with Disability Act, Disability Services Office, Higher Education Institution, Individualized Education Plan, Students with Disabilities.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my grandmother, Sheila Luke, my high school teacher Reverend Walter Woolford, and my husband, Jeremy Babb. Though my grandmother died when I was ten years old, she was a praying woman who is instrumental to the person I am today. Likewise, Reverend Walter Woolford believed in me even when I did not believe in myself and encouraged me to strive for excellence throughout my life. Last but certainly not least; my husband has been a blessing to my life. His love and commitment to supporting my academic journey and overall growth continue to push me to do my best in every endeavor that I undertake. He has proven to be indeed the man God has created for me.

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I would like to acknowledge my older brother, Michael Jules. Thank you for always supporting and believing in your little sister. You, along with your wife, Oneaka Jules, have continued to be an instrumental force in my life.

Paula Cummings and Lynette Wright-House (Lolo), thank you both for your encouragement and belief in my abilities. Lolo, thank you for always helping me to feel grounded. You both would always tell me how smart I am, and I am forever grateful to have such wonderful and strong women in my life.

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List of Abbreviations

Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter will highlight peer review studies exploring students with disabilities' experiences in receiving accommodations at higher education institutions. Section one will begin by discussing the topic's background, including the theoretical perspectives. A historical review will be provided on disability in the United States and other countries in the world. This review will discuss how disability was viewed in the education arena and the laws used to ensure students with disabilities are served in secondary and tertiary education. Emphasis will be placed on tertiary education since the study was focused on these students' experiences. Furthermore, a social perspective will be provided on disability in the United States and other countries. This perspective will include statistics on the number of individuals that are disabled in the United States and a brief review of the challenges that these students experience socially in higher education. After that, a theoretical review will be provided regarding disability in higher education to understand the topic better. Moreover, the chapter will include the problem statement, purpose statement, the significance of the study, research questions, definitions, and summary.

Background

This section will include a historical background of disability in higher education. It will be discussed how students with disabilities were traditionally served. Emphasis will be placed on the laws established in the United States to ensure equity and accessibility. Furthermore, the topic will be reviewed from a social perspective. Citations and statistics will be used to garner a complete depiction of how disability is viewed socially and some of the struggles this sector of

society has experienced in higher education. Lastly, a theoretical perspective will be provided that illustrates how disability in higher education has been theoretically viewed over the years.

Historical Context

Historically, disabilities around the world, including in the United States, were somewhat of a problematic area where it was seen as a punishment and officials were unable to respond to the unique needs of these individuals (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2019; Moraña, 2019). Wilson (2017) conducted a brief review of Kim Nielsen's *A Disability History of the United States*. He highlighted that it was not until the nineteenth century that disabilities began to be understood in biological and medical terms. Institutions began to be established, focused on treating individuals with disabilities, and new professions to staff these institutions started to grow (Wilson, 2017).

Funding was considered an issue with serving students with disabilities, and the introduction of many progressive models helped address the lack of funding to serve these students (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2019). One such initiative was the Higher Education Act of 1965, which was first used as legislation to govern student aid programs and provide individuals access to postsecondary institutions regardless of their social and economic dispositions (Higher Education Act, 1965). This Act has been reauthorized several times, but it still is highly ineffective in ensuring access and equity (Gándara & Jones, 2020; Shermer, 2015). Gándara and Jones (2020) noted that although the premise of the Higher Education Act is to serve disenfranchised communities, diverging values exist in the policy.

Hillman (2018) and Shermer (2015) maintained that the Higher Education Act had not been a generous gesture as it has placed more low-income and middle-class individuals in modern-day indentured servitude. This servitude could be heightened for students with disabilities tend to have more difficulties ascertaining a job and gaining economic freedom

(Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Additionally, outside of the Higher Education Act, many institutions and companies started developing scholarships to allow these students to attend post-secondary institutions (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2019). Yet, studies continue to show that students with disabilities are still confronted with significant social and institutional related barriers (Couzens et al, 2015; Deuchert et al., 2017; Dunn, 2019; Frank et al., 2020; Goudreau & Knight, 2015; Hanhela, 2018; Hoben & Hesson, 2021; Jansen et al., 2018; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Moriña Díez et al., 2014; Moriña & Orozco, 2020; Mullins & Preyde, 2013; Mutanga & Walker, 2017; Smith et al., 2019).

In addition, in 1975, the United States Congress passed the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (“Enforcing the right to an “Appropriate” Education: The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975,” 1979). This ACT was established to respond to the deficit that supported children and youths in the education system with developmental disabilities. With the enactment of this legislation, public schools were required to provide educational services to students with disabilities ensuring that they had the necessary accommodations to thrive academically (Brock, 2018). EAHCA intended to support students with disabilities in all the activities that encompass a typical day in K-12 schools. Educators in public schools were required to work directly with parents, children, and other salient individuals to develop strategies and alternatives to ensure equity and access for students with disabilities (Blanck, 2019). However, despite the Act’s profoundness, it merely provided procedural safeguards for parents to challenge the educational placement decisions of their children (Brock, 2018). Educators in public institutions were essentially responsible for resolving any substantive questions and challenges from the implementation process (Brock, 2018).

EAHCA was amended in 1990, and the name of the Act was changed to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Through this Act, students with disabilities were given access to inclusive and individualized instruction (Blanck, 2019; Russo, 2019). A microcosm of accommodations and instructional information was provided to students and their parents. IDEA's six principles allowed for procedural safeguards, due process, and parental participation in educational meetings. Parents could liaise directly with educators to develop specific accommodations for their child's individual needs. Many individuals are involved in providing the services needed for the student. However, this Act focused on supporting students' needs only in K-12 institutions (Russo, 2019).

Thus, around the same time IDEA was amended, congress enacted the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 to support individuals with disabilities (Blanck, 2019). This Act became a civil right and focused on ensuring the universal design and prohibiting discrimination against individuals with a disability in employment and access to state and local governmental programs (Blanck, 2019; Clouse et al., 2019). This Act was more expansive than IDEA and addressed individuals' needs in post-secondary education. Clouse et al. (2019) stated that ADA stipulated that architects and designers develop physical spaces that cater to students with physical disabilities. Before ADA, individuals with a physical impairment that required wheelchair access could not access the various levels of floors in buildings, and they faced tremendous complications with buildings' physical environment (Clouse et al., 2019).

While ADA provides many procedural safeguards and policies to aid individuals with disabilities with upward mobility, many individuals still experience difficulties accessing requisite services. Students with disabilities having difficulties accessing services is especially true for students in higher education, who continue to experience tremendous challenges in these

settings due to their disabilities (Bishop & Noguera, 2019; Bunbury, 2018; Carroll et al., 2020; Couzens et al., 2015; Deuchert et al., 2017; Dunn, 2019; Kendall, 2016; Mutanga, 2017). Carroll et al. (2020) asserted that studies continue to show that students with disabilities experience specific issues related to transition, physical access, accessing the curriculum, negative attitudes from staff members, disclosure, stigmatization, and discrimination.

Presently, when disabled students transition to higher education, they are essentially responsible for self-identifying their status to ascertain their needed accommodations. Once their proof of disability is submitted, students must then await a response on their accommodations from disability services. This process contrasts with IDEA, where students are supported by their parents, teachers, and other salient individuals in developing their accommodations (Russo, 2019). Students can be actively involved in the accommodations developmental process before post-secondary education. The lack of involvement, among other issues, can affect the way students with disabilities access education. These students essentially have tremendous problems with inclusion. Bell and Swart (2018) noted that many researchers believe that inclusion should be the main factor that drives all education policy development since this ideology is an essential human right.

As a result of the present issues faced by students with disabilities, researchers have asserted that studies have shown that students with disabilities are reported to be less educated than their non-disabled peers (Cheatham & Randolph, 2020; Kendall, 2016; Sentenac et al., 2018). The fact that individuals with disabilities were being less educated than non-disabled individuals was spherically depicted in a report by the U.S. Department of Education National Center of Education Statistics (2017), which showed that students with disabilities are less likely to graduate from high school than their non-disabled peers. The lack of education can create

significant issues for these students since education continues to be a great equalizer for economic and social progression in the United States and the world (Cheatham & Randolph, 2020; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Kendall, 2016). Thus, it can be inferred that though historically legislations have paved the way for these students to enter post-secondary institutions, these policies require tremendous amendments to address the current issues that these students face while attending these institutions (Moriña & Orozco, 2020; Mutanga, 2017).

Social Context

The Center for Disease Control (2018) showed that over 61 million adults in the United States are diagnosed with a disability. These disabilities often tremendously affect the functionality of individuals. Students with disabilities are responsible for self-identifying and ascribing to disability services when students graduate from high school and are transitioning to higher education (Holzberg et al., 2018; Kreider et al., 2015; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019; Yusof et al., 2020). However, students might not be informed enough to seek the services that provide them with the most equitable opportunities (Holzberg et al., 2018; Kreider et al., 2015). Without having, the needed accommodations may prove to be a significant impediment to these students who may not be versed to advocate for their accommodations required in universities eloquently.

Moriña and Perera (2018) stated that universities meeting the needs of students with disabilities in higher education continue to be challenging. These challenges often go beyond architecture design and include curriculum, teaching, learning, and evaluation (Moriña & Perera, 2018). These issues are pertinent to address since multifaceted groups of students with disabilities are entering universities. However, studies continue to show that students with disabilities continue to face many higher education obstacles (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Biggeri et al., 2019; Bulk et al., 2017; Bunbury, 2018; Carroll et al., 2020; Couzens et al., 2015;

Dunn, 2019; Lovett et al., 2014). These obstacles include fear of discrimination, not having uniquely designed accommodations, and professors not responsive to their needs. Lovett et al. (2014) noted that self-reporting might be an issue for students with disabilities because of the fear of discrimination.

Additionally, a study conducted by Mutanga (2017) showed that though students may be provided with accommodations services, the services were not uniquely designed for their specific needs. According to Mosia and Phasha (2017), students with disabilities are asked to disclose their status on applying for admission to higher education institutions. Still, they are held to the exact expectations and forced to compete for the same admission space as their non-disabled peers. The data is often not used to develop the policies of these institutions in alignment with what is needed for these students, which makes the admission process unjust. (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). This unfair process becomes an issue of equity. Researchers have noted that equality is brought when compensations are made to combat social disadvantages faced by students with disabilities (Bell & Swart, 2018; Dworkin, 1981; Gilson et al., 2020; Moraña, 2019).

However, although equality is advertised for these students at these institutions, it is not always ensured. Subrayen and Dhunpath (2019) supported the statement above by noting a complex and problematic relationship between the policies enacted by institutions and how these students are served. These students continue to experience social and institutional barriers that impede equity and access. These barriers include physical access issues, stigmatization, and discrimination from staff and peers in higher education institutions (Bell & Swart, 2018; Berg et al., 2017; Clouse et al., 2019; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Gibson, 2012; Gilson et al., 2020; Griful-Freixenet et al., 2017; Langørgen & Magnus, 2020; Lim, 2019; Moraña, 2019; Moraña & Orozco,

2020; Shrewsbury, 2015; Strnadová et al., 2015). Barriers that these students encounter was demonstrated by García-González et al. (2020), who found that lectures lacked knowledge and awareness in serving students with disabilities and displayed a lack of involvement in the accommodations process. Participants in the study reported bureaucratic and architectural barriers that impeded their academic development. These issues can be detrimental to the educational progression of students with disabilities. Thus, Bell et al. (2016) and Gow et al. (2020) asserted that these students' experiences must be addressed to ensure more educational opportunities that enhance the participation of this population.

Theoretical Context

Injustice is defined as that which is not objective or correct (Watts & Hodgson, 2019). The presence of injustice and its many forms was a central factor in furthering the theory of social justice (Watts & Hodgson, 2019). Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio is credited with developing the concept of social justice. At the same time, John Stewart Mills and John Rawls are central scholars who furthered the social justice ideology. Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio developed the concept in the 1800s and believed that all men should be treated just and right, which he believed aligned with the philosophies of the Bible (Burke, 2014). However, since he was a Catholic thinker, his theory of social justice emanated from religious ideologies.

In contrast, John Stewart Mills, an English philosopher, provided a broader conceptualization of the theory. Mills noted in *Utilitarianism* that society should treat all fairly and equally. John Rawls (1999) provided a more modern concept of social justice in his book entitled *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls (1999) noted that justice was the first virtue that should be the impetus of any institution in society. He emphasized that justice is intricately linked to fairness and was essential for social cooperation in culture. He stressed that each person must

have an equal right to all civil liberties, and social and economic development must be open to all. Rawls (1999) stated that laws and institutions must be well arranged and reformed to reflect a just system that overrides injustices. He posited that social cooperation made for a better life for all, and thus, there should be strict principles developed to determine the distribution of resources in society. These principles were deemed by Rawls (1999) as the principles of social justice. He maintained that social justice helped provide a fair distribution of resources in society and helped to facilitate Social Corporation. Through Social Corporation, no one has advantages or disadvantages regarding resource attainment (Rawls, 1999). A fair agreement or bargain becomes apparent with social justice, which gives all individuals fair opportunities to achieve their goals in society (Rawls, 1999). More specially, Rawls (1999) asserted that social justice provides individuals with rights and liberties where they can achieve economic freedom.

Although the concept of social justice has expanded over the years, the principles of equality and access continue to be prominent tenants of social justice. Sisson and DeNicolo (2014) noted that the approach proposes a solid commitment to liberty and an individual's ability to determine the life structure they decide to lead. The social justice approach suggests that students with disabilities have a fundamental right to equitable educational opportunities. Evans et al. (2017) noted that the social justice approach's essential premise was that everyone should be treated equally and be allowed the same social, economic, and political opportunities. The authors stated that the social justice approach aligned with students with disabilities in higher education after noting that they should be provided with the necessary accommodations to thrive. These institutions are often seen as critical for developing students' academic and social competencies to contribute positively to society (Gilson et al., 2020).

Nonetheless, prominent studies such as Bunbury (2018), Carroll et al. (2020), and García-González et al. (2020), focused on exploring the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education, found that these students continue to experience unjust treatment while attending university. Studies show that students with disabilities experience issues such as stigmatization and discrimination, which may sometimes impede their ability to learn and, ultimately, thrive academically (Bunbury, 2018; Carroll et al., 2020; Couzens et al., 2015; Deuchert et al., 2017; Dunn, 2019; García-González et al., 2020). Since most of the studies reviewed on students with disabilities were conducted at predominantly white institutions or outside of the United States, this study provided new information by focusing on African American students with disabilities. The study was conducted at a historically black college. The duality of the participant's minority statuses helped extend and refine studies on the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education.

Problem Statement

The problem is that students with disabilities continue to encounter obstacles accessing equitable educational opportunities due to issues with accommodations provided by universities (Bunbury, 2018; Couzens et al., 2015; Dunn, 2019; Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; García-González et al., 2020; Langørgen & Magnus, 2020; Lovett et al., 2014; Mutanga: 2017). From issues such as physical access, social-cultural issues, discrimination, and stigmatization, students with disabilities can have immense difficulties navigating in the academic arena. These issues often reflect or correlate with the policies and practices established by these institutions, which inhibits inclusion and fosters a selfish connotation that eventually serves the institution's interest (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). Mosia and Phasha (2017) maintained that these institutions, including students with disabilities, have more to do with them receiving funding than facilitating the process of

inclusion. Students with disabilities continue to experience issues accessing professional degree programs such as law or medicine because they are advised of the level of difficulties and demands of the degree versus their impairment, and often face a tremendous lack of equitable practices, alimention, and inequalities matriculating through these programs (Ndlovu, 2019).

According to Clouse et al. (2019), when students with disabilities are in high school, they often have many legally responsible individuals advocating for them to receive accommodations through legal documentation such as 504 plans or Individualized Educational Plans. However, when students transition to universities, they are responsible for advocating for their accommodations. Self-advocacy can sometimes be problematic for many students who are unaware of how to execute this task effectively (Cheatham & Randolph, 2020). It can be more challenging when the university does not effectively implement adequate systems, policies, and procedures to accommodate students with disabilities despite legal requirements. Due to issues such as the before mentioned, studies have shown that students with disabilities tend to be less educated than their non-disabled peers (Deuchert, 2017; Haber et al., 2016; Kendall, 2016; Sentenac et al., 2018). These individuals start their adult life less educated, which is very problematic since education is considered the great equalizer and is often needed to ascertain economic independence. Therefore, these students not being afforded the requisite accommodations, under the law, by the university presents social justice issues. Thus, this study aimed to add to existing research by exploring the experiences of students with disabilities. It was different from other studies because it addressed the gaps in the literature by focusing only on those students who received special education services in their K-12 education and that received accommodations at the university. In addition, since the study was conducted at a predominately African American college, this study highlighted the experiences of minority

students, which made it adversely different from the other studies, which were done at predominantly white institutions. The study asked students to provide some of the factors they believed could help them thrive academically.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of students with disabilities in receiving accommodations at a higher education institution. In the research, disability was generally defined as a physical or mental impairment that impedes an individual from effectively executing a normal life function. The theory that guided this study was the social justice theory. The social justice theory promotes the importance of equity and access, and human beings being afforded their fundamental right to access all of society's resources, which includes education so that they can thrive socially and economically.

Significance of the Study

As an individual born with a disability, I know firsthand the challenges an individual with disabilities may face navigating the world. I often experience emotional and physical issues traversing the world around me and still struggle with accepting the limitations often brought about by society because of my disabilities. These limitations often transcend to higher education institutions and often can hinder individuals with a disability's prospect for securing an equitable education (Bulk et al., 2017; Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Elias et al., 2017; Gilson et al., 2020; Langørgen et al., 2018; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Ndlovu, 2019; Yusof et al., 2014). Difficulty in higher education is further heightened when, as an individual with disabilities, I am not given the necessary support or accommodations to navigate already challenging circumstances. When it comes to attending universities, most students with disabilities will likely need accommodations to thrive academically (Kendall, 2017; Moraña, 2019). When students do not get the necessary

services to navigate the university, they can be deprived of authentic educational experiences and have tremendous difficulties successfully matriculating through these institutions (Babic & Dowling, 2015; Cheatham & Randolph, 2020; Gow et al., 2020; Kendall, 2017; Kreider et al., 2015; Mutanga & Walker, 2017; Norris et al. 2019; Ostiguy, 2018). This deprivation may ultimately impede them from fully participating in the country's social and economic life (Bell & Swart, 2018; Langørgen & Magnus, 2020). For the reasons mentioned above, this study will have practical, theoretical, and empirical implications.

Practical

This study has profound importance because it has many implications. This study can serve as a reference in the discipline of education, disability services, occupational therapy, and minority studies. The study was similar to other studies that explored the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education and the barriers that these students face (Carroll et al., 2020; Eccles et al., 2018; Järkestig Berggren et al., 2016; O'Byrne et al., 2019; Osborne, 2019; Pritchard, 2018; Vlachou & Papananou, 2018). Like previous studies, this study used research methods such as focus groups and interviews to provide an in-depth review of these students' experiences while traversing these post-secondary institutions. Unlike other studies, this study had the uniqueness of focusing prominently on African American students with disabilities. African American students are considered an educationally underserved population (Reardon et al., 2019), and more significant numbers of students with disabilities are entering higher education (Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Holzberg et al., 2018), yet, the degree of completion is still low for these groups of students (Carroll et al., 2020). Therefore, the information ascertained from this study can be transformational as it can be used as a reference for policies and studies that focus on understanding the plight of minorities and how to serve them better. Educational

institutions working with students with disabilities can use this study as a mechanism to see some of the necessary accommodations needed for students with disabilities to thrive academically; understanding the issues that affect these students and their needs can decrease barriers and maximize inclusion (Carroll et al., 2020; Moraña, 2019; Mutanga, 2017).

Empirically

An abundance of studies showed that students with disabilities experience tremendous issues traversing higher education institutions (Bell & Swart, 2018; Bunbury, 2018; Deuchert et al., 2017; Koca-Atabey 2019). These issues can tremendously impede their academic progress, including stigmatization, discrimination, and negative perceptions (Biggeri et al., 2019; Bunbury, 2018; Carroll et al., 2020). However, despite the wealth of information on students with disabilities, there remains a deficiency of studies including predominantly African American students who would have received special education services in high school, which was explored in this study. It is essential to examine this population, who were traditionally marginalized and who tend to be less educated than their White peers (Reardon et al., 2019). African Americans are more susceptible to poverty (Fahle et al., 2020), which tends to be heightened when individuals have a disability (Cheatham & Randolph, 2020). Thus, since education is considered salient for economic freedom (Bell & Swart, 2018; Cheatham & Randolph, 2020; Sakiz & Saricali, 2017), and the institutions under investigation served predominantly African American students, this study was instrumental in highlighting how these students are serviced and the unique issues these students face. An understanding of these issues can, in turn, assist university policymakers and other individuals that make policies on a broader scale to enact policies that not only serve students with disabilities but address factors that are unique to only African American students with disabilities. Scholars may find the nuance of having these participants

write a letter to a first-year student with a disability informing them of some of the barriers they may face and how to overcome those barriers, which was used in the study, instrumental in further delving into these students' experiences by adding a unique layer to existing literature.

Theoretical

The social justice theory proposes that all individuals should have equal access to society's resources (Evans et al., 2017; Sisson & DeNicolo, 2014). However, the historical connotations of being labeled disabled still come with preconceived notions of what that individual can or cannot do educationally (Bulk et al., 2017; Ndlovu, 2019). These preconceived notions are often dominant throughout higher education institutions and can act as an impediment to students with disabilities meeting their full potential, as they can sometimes lead to stigmatization and discrimination (Bulk et al., 2017; Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Gilson et al., 2020; Langørgen et al., 2018; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Ndlovu, 2019; Yusof et al., 2014). Students with disabilities being stigmatized and discriminated against are concerning since education is seen as a leeway to promote economic independence (Bell & Swart, 2018; Sakiz & Saricali, 2017), aligning with social justice theory. Therefore, by exploring the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education and the barriers they face, common themes were gathered, which lead to a theoretical understanding of some of the injustices that these students face having access to more equitable education opportunities (Evans et al., 2017). This theoretical understanding can lead to why it is imperative to address their barriers, ultimately leading to a more diversely educated population and thus a more equitable workforce (Evans et al., 2017).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of students with disabilities at a four-year university?

Sub Question One

How do students with different disabilities feel about their ability to access the resources provided by the university?

Sub Question Two

How do students with disabilities feel about faculty members' response to their accommodations' implementation process in the classroom?

Sub Question Three

Do students with disabilities feel as though they are able to socially integrate with the student body?

Definitions

The terms used throughout the study are defined below to add clarity to the research and provide the readers with the context by which the various terms are being used.

1. *Disability* - Any physical or mental condition that severely limits an individual's abilities to perform a normal life ("Introduction to the ADA," n.d.)
2. *Disabled student* - Any student who attends a secondary or tertiary education institution and is eligible to receive disability accommodations through federal or state laws because of their said disabilities (Kreider et al., 2015). According to Oliver (1996), the definition of disabled students includes three features: "(a) the existence of an impairment; (b) the

experience of being restricted because of their disabilities; and (c) self-identification as a disabled person” (Oliver, 1996, p. 5).

3. *Disability Services* - Services offered to disabled students. For this dissertation, disability services will refer to services provided in the form of accommodations to disabled students at secondary and higher education institutions (Lovett et al., 2014; Moriña & Orozco, 2020; Nolan et al., 2014).
4. *Invisible Disability* - Disabilities that cannot be easily observed (Couzens et al., 2015).

Summary

The problem of students with disabilities having inferior higher educational experience is a social justice issue that warrants investigation. Studies show that these students have tremendous issues navigating the post-secondary arena compared to their non-disabled peers. Sometimes, the barriers they encounter may be due to the lack of support or accommodations needed to thrive academically or issues such as stigmatization and discrimination. The obstacles that students with disabilities may experience can result in having less successful academic outcomes, and ultimately, economic progress. Thus, it becomes equity, equality, and justice when there are diverging views between policy and practice at universities in serving these students. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education to gather whether these services provide them with authentic educational experiences. The study participants included only African American students with disabilities who received special education services in high school. The uniqueness of working with this target population and the technique of having students complete a letter writing presented a different trajectory of further delving into the experiences of this traditionally marginalized population.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter will highlight peer review studies exploring students with disabilities' experiences in receiving accommodations in higher education institutions. The first section will begin by discussing the social justice theory, guiding and framing this study. The topic of exclusionary democracy in supporting students with disabilities will be explored. This topic will be backed by research and briefly discussed in alignment with social justice. After that, a systematic review will be provided of students with disabilities transitioning from high school to higher education. Students with disabilities lived experiences in higher education institutions will be examined. Emphasis will be placed on the accommodations they receive and whether they provide them with an equitable educational experience. The barriers these students encounter will be highlighted. The perception of university faculty members and their awareness in working with students with disabilities will be conversed, including university professional practice and placement. In addition, the topic of an inclusive curriculum in higher education will be highlighted from the perspective of students with disabilities and universities faculty members. I will review lecturers' experiences in serving students with disabilities. The review's finality will be identifying gaps in the literature to support the viability of the proposed study.

Theoretical Framework

The social justice theoretical framework will be the foundational framework for this study on the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education institutions. This theory emphasizes human rights and stresses the importance of equity and access for all. The theory will be affiliated with students with disabilities receiving the necessary services and accommodations to succeed in higher education. The process of associating the social justice theory with these

students' experiences will allow me the opportunity to decipher the problem further and justify my approach to solving the problem or answering the question (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). More specifically, this theory will be instrumental in the study since Harvey (2018) noted that when lived experiences are connected to the theoretical framework, these experiences can resonate more with others. Since the United Nations listed the education of students with disabilities within the human rights domains (Ramaahlo et al., 2018), the social justice theory will prove relevant to the topic. The theoretical framework of social justice can be used as a compass to assist me to better depict some of the factors and barriers in the lived experiences of students with disabilities in higher education that lead to inaccessibility and social injustices.

Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio developed the social justice approach in 1843. However, it was merely a formal concept of justice based on religious conceptions (Burke, 2014). Since Taparelli d'Azeglio was a Catholic thinker, he was focused on discussing the notion of social justice in alignment with God's principles. Burke (2014) stated that Taparelli d'Azegli saw justice as equaling the levels between man and man since the Creator did not distinguish between any man by nature. Thus, when social justice is in society, Taparelli d'Azegli believed man would be fulfilling the plan of his Creator. Taparelli d'Azegli (1857) noted, "absolute good is the conformity of social behavior to the laws of justice and honesty or the cooperation of social behavior towards the ultimate end of man" (p. 619). He asserted that material is needed for man to obtain absolute good; therefore, civil laws must be secondary to religious doctrines. Yet, Taparelli d'Azegli (1857) noted that it was still the responsibility of those who govern society to ensure equitable distribution of goods and services in society by addressing any inconveniences in the laws. Taparelli d'Azegli maintained that "This is justice that generically considered in the identity of human nature establishes among all persons a principle of natural equality generated

by the will of the Creator” (p. 625). Natural equality then becomes intricately linked to the notion of social justice.

Social justice is defined as the just distribution of resources, wealth, and opportunities in society (Watts & Hodgson, 2019). The social and political economy and the conceptualization of justice are prominent features of social justice. The concept of social justice is not concerned with what is just for one individual alone, but what is just for the collective or society as a whole. Justice then becomes a foundational tenant of social justice. Justice is defined as that which is correct or just (Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2020). Sabbagh and Schmitt (2016) noted that equal treatment, impartiality, and all individuals being treated according to what they deserved the impetus of justice. Justice is a moral imperative founded on the premise that all individuals are born free and should have the same rights and liberties. The institutional design of society, the normative ideas of who should be afforded what, social conditionality, and the conceptualization of what is just in society can sometimes perpetuate social injustices (Sabbagh & Schmitt, 2016).

Thus, Watts and Hodgson (2019) asserted that although justice is often viewed and described in a legal context, the constitution of social justice goes beyond the law and is often considered in a moral and philosophical sense. Sadurski (1984) supported the assertion of social justice transcending laws and noted that although laws constitute legal justice, legal and social justice are two separate sectors. Sabbagh and Schmitt (2016) reported that social justice is a social force that encompasses social values. It is considered a social force because it affects all aggregates in society, i.e., society’s social, political, and economic structures. Therefore, society cannot depend on the laws for the dispensation of social justice. Watts and Hodgson (2019) stated that the everyday norms in society that lead to social injustices must be considered to negate inequities and further social justice. The theoretical perspective of social justice requires

all the voices in society to be heard to foster a society where equity and access are key features of everyday life.

Key tenants of social justice include equality, access, and liberty (Joseph, 2020).

Beckman (2017) noted that equality entails removing any issues that may impede human beings' ability to access resources or elements/actions that may be unacceptable in the social sphere.

Social justice dictates that individuals should have the fundamental human right, liberty to participate, and access society's social and economic aspects. The notion requires key officials in society to take the necessary actions to ensure that all its members can access social and economic resources so that everyone has the same advantages.

According to Watts and Hodgson (2019), social justice can be divided into distributive justice, procedural justice, retributive justice, and restorative justice. Distributive justice addresses the fair distribution of resources in society, while procedural justice deals with decision-making within institutions and how they affect individuals (Watts & Hodgson, 2019). Restorative justice includes rectifying the wrongdoings and responding to the person whose needs were violated (Schormair & Gerlach, 2019), while retributive justice consists of the rewards or punishment associated with an individual's actions (Capeheart & Milovanovic, 2020). Because of the concepts above, Capeheart and Milovanovic (2020) stated that the study of social justice should review distributive principles and retributive principles and how these principles affect individuals' progress in society. Sabbagh and Schmitt (2016) noted that the functionality of organizations, institutions, and society as a whole could be affected by the perpetuation of social injustices. Hence, it is imperative to identify injustices within institutions to reconstruct the normative logic to facilitate distributive practices. Therefore, higher education institutions,

which are known to facilitate economic independence for students is a critical area to investigate when it comes to social justice.

Social justice in education entails getting access to all of the resources or factors that can add to an individual's viability and help them to be successful. According to Evans et al. (2017), higher education conversation should go beyond providing students with legal requirements and should provide more accessibility for all students, faculty, and staff, despite their disability. Conversations must be focused on accessibility since the US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2011) reported that students with disabilities are less likely to enroll in higher education than their non-disabled peers. Students with disabilities not enrolling in higher education could be detrimental to the economic and social development of this population as researchers have maintained they tend to have severe consequences to limited education as they may find it difficult to secure suitable employment and may experience issues with social isolation (Banks, 2014; Cho et al., 2019; Rubtsov et al., 2017; Sentenac et al., 2018). These issues may be especially relevant to African Americans with disabilities, as they remain significantly underrepresented in post-secondary institutions (Banks, 2014; Long & Bateman, 2020; Tabron & Ramlackhan, 2018; Wilson et al., 2018; Yu, 2019). Thus, Deuchert et al. (2017) noted that access to education is a matter of vital policy relevance since research shows that students with disabilities are considered less educated than their non-disabled peers. Again, this statistic is troubling since employability and economic independence tend to be intricately linked to one's levels of education.

Furthermore, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) reported that individuals with disabilities are less likely to be employed than their non-disabled peers, and statistics show that there has been a decrease in individuals with disabilities employed in recent years. They are less

likely to complete a four-year bachelor's degree or higher education than those with no disabilities but were more likely to be employed when they attain higher levels of education (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). Higher education institutions offer significant prospects for these individuals with disabilities, and the lack of educational opportunities and higher unemployment can tremendously affect individuals with disabilities. It can result in a loss of capital for the government. (Banks, 2014; Bell & Swart, 2018; Langørgen & Magnus, 2020). Thus, it becomes a social justice issue when these students are not afforded the services they need to thrive since disability in higher education is often “treated as something external and ancillary,” and this needs to be changed (Ostiguy, 2018, p. 241).

Outside of the more social ideology of social justice, Goodlad and Riddell (2005) characterized the concept concerning materials and goods. Other factors such as cultural claims and politics are associated with social justice (Riddell et al., 2005). However, researchers continue to lament how crucial the notion is to the education sector, and the concept continues to be frequently used in education research to analyze education policies through different lenses (Evans et al., 2017; Francis et al., 2017). Moreover, Francis et al. (2017) noted that since inequalities in the education sector remain tremendously visible in disability status, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background, and other pertinent indicators, the notion of social justice becomes even more vital to societal development. In addition, considering that education is often viewed as an equalizer, and as more students with disabilities enter into post-secondary education, this platform can provide them with the opportunity to ascertain access to resources. Because of not being provided with equal access to education, disabled students may not ascertain the freedom to achieve their values (Moriña & Perera, 2018).

Related Literature

Often, a poor start leads to a poor finish. Individuals with disabilities usually start life at a disadvantage because of their disability. These disabilities often may impede their ability to acquire equitable educational opportunities. When they attend a university and are not given the necessary accommodations they need, this may result in them having tremendous difficulties. Their educational outcomes may serve as the foundation for a lifetime of inequities because poor education outcomes often lead to poor employment outcomes. Ultimately, it becomes difficult for them to benefit from society's social and economic life fully. It is thus imperative that universities ensure that these students have what they need to succeed. Therefore, the below literature will include research on these students and provide in-depth information on the topic. Factors such as exclusionary democracy, the transition of students with disabilities from high school to higher education, perceptions and awareness of staff members, professional practice and placement, an inclusive curriculum in higher education, and lecturer experiences working with students with disabilities will be discussed.

Exclusionary Democracy in Supporting Disabled Students

Exclusionary democracy is a common term often used when referring to students with disabilities. The term is used in alignment with individuals being excluded from democratic life because of their disabilities (Snounu, 2019). The ideology of exclusionary democracy contrast with that of social justice, which promotes that everyone should have the opportunity to participate in society's social and economic life. If left unchecked segregated/exclusionary democracy could result in severe consequences for those subjected to such exclusions. Individuals with disabilities are especially susceptible to exclusionary democracy because of their disabilities or people's perceptions of their capabilities. Places such as higher education

institutions can perpetuate exclusionary democracy by not responding to the unique needs of students with disabilities. When students with disabilities are not given the needed accommodations at higher education, this can result in them not having the opportunity to be active members of society.

Many researchers have argued that the implementation of legislative change to prevent discrimination against students with disabilities has made the notion this population attending universities more attractive (Bunbury, 2018; Carroll et al., 2020; Couzens et al., 2015; Deuchert et al., 2017; Dunn, 2019; García-González et al., 2020). Yet, students with disabilities still experience issues while there, which propagates exclusionary democracy (Kendall, 2016; Moriña & Orozco, 2020; Mutanga, 2017; Ramaahlo et al., 2018). The challenges that students with disabilities experience at universities may result from these institutions lacking the minimal access required by law. Though these universities may provide accommodations, they still may not respond to the requisite needs of these students.

It then becomes an issue of equity and access when universities do not make the necessary changes to facilitate the academic development of these students. The notion of distributive justice then becomes relevant, where there is a lack of fairness and sameness for all students at the university (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). The lack of distributive justice continues to be depicted in studies that show that through reasonable adjustment is provided through specific accommodations; the learning environment is mainly not altered to reflect the needs of students with disabilities (Collins et al., 2018; Moriña & Orozco, 2020; Mutanga, 2017). Therefore, policymakers and officials at universities and higher education institutions have a moral and professional responsibility to respond to these students' unique needs to address the issue of exclusionary democracy. In addressing exclusionary democracy, these institutions will help

propel students with disabilities further into alignment with their academic progression.

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Transitioning from High School to Higher Education

Before entering a university, students with disabilities in K-12 institutions are supported through the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). This IDEA focuses on providing students with services that promote success and foster the effective transition from secondary to post-secondary institutions (Banks, 2014; Blanck, 2019; Kanaya, 2019; Rooney, 2018; Russo, 2019). IDEA is built on the premise of personhood and promoting acceptance for human diversity through providing opportunities for inclusion and participation for individuals with disabilities (Blanck, 2019). One of the central ideologies of IDEA is to have students with disabilities educated to the maximum extent in the general education classroom or the least restricted

environment (Lim, 2019; Rojewski et al., 2013; Rooney, 2018; Russo, 2019; Underwood, 2018). Through IDEA, educators' responsibility is to seek out students struggling intellectually or cognitively and prepare an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that supports their successful matriculation through high school (Rooney, 2018; Russo, 2019). The Act includes significant procedural safeguards that protect the rights of students with disabilities and provides them with the opportunity to actively be involved in decisions that impact their future and the development of transitions plans (Lim, 2019; Russo, 2019). The Act promotes inclusive classrooms, which researchers have maintained promote positive outcomes for students with disabilities (Wehmeyer et al., 2020).

In addition, other acts, such as the No Child Left Behind Act was seen as a proactive measure to respond to the needs of students, especially disadvantaged students that struggled in K-12 education (Bullough, 2020). However, the No Child Left Behind Act proved problematic in its' implementation process (Bullough, 2020). Other acts that have been less evasive and more beneficial to students with disabilities include Section 504 Rehabilitation Act. The Section 504 Rehabilitation Act is one of the first Civil Rights Acts focused on protecting individuals with disabilities against discrimination and promoting their participation in federally funded activities (Murphy, 2021). Under Section 504, students with barriers impeding their academic progress are provided with accommodations to facilitate equity. Students that qualify for these services are guaranteed by law equity access to public education (Goodman-Scott & Boulden, 2019). Similar to the IEP process, the development of the needed accommodations is a collaborative process that includes school personnel, parents, and the student (Goodman-Scott & Boulden, 2019). These provisions can be instrumental to the success of students with disabilities in high school.

However, when students with disabilities transition to a university, they are no longer supported by IDEA but rather the Americans with Disabilities Act. Like IDEA, ADA supports the right to human diversity and prohibits discrimination. Nevertheless, ADA is much less individualized than IDEA (Blanck, 2019), and students are required to take a more proactive approach to ascertain their required needs. These students are often met with many issues ascertaining their academic goals (Biggeri et al., 2019; Bunbury, 2018; Carroll et al., 2020; Couzens et al., 2015; Deuchert et al., 2017; Dunn, 2019; Frank et al., 2020; García-González et al., 2020; Kendall, 2016; Moriña & Orozco, 2020; Mutanga, 2017; Pino & Mortari, 2014; Ramaahlo et al., 2018; Test et al., 2009). These issues may partly emanate from their accommodations and the development of the accommodation process (Mutanga & Walker, 2017). The structural inequalities of college might result in underrepresented groups such as minorities and students with disabilities having difficulties matriculating successfully to these institutions (Sutton, 2021). These institutions often provide an entirely different structure from high school, which may be problematic to some students. They present a complex platform where students must exhibit significant levels of independence. Even the most prepared student might experience difficulties transitioning to universities, as higher education has less external structure than what students are provided with at home (Carroll et al., 2020; Cheatham & Randolph, 2020; Elias et al., 2017; Goudreau & Knight, 2015; Sutton, 2021). The high level of structure and support usually provided in high school is often dismantled at the college level. The lack of support may be difficult for students who are accustomed to high levels of structure and support from their respective family members, and this lack of structure may cause psychological issues during the transition phase (Carroll et al., 2020; Elias et al., 2017; Goudreau & Knight, 2015; Sutton, 2021).

Students who demonstrate issues with executive function could especially find higher education institutions problematic since they might find it challenging to deal with distractions and manage their academic responsibilities (Carroll et al., 2020; Elias et al., 2017; Sutton, 2021). The environment of these institutions differs drastically from high school, as these students are provided with less teacher support and more self-directed learning (Elias et al., 2017). Studies have illustrated that students with cognitive disabilities were less likely to complete a bachelor's degree at a four-year college than students without disabilities and students with physical disabilities (Carroll et al., 2020; Kruse & Oswal, 2018). These students' inability to complete their programs and their high dropout rates may be due to many institutional and personal barriers that they may encounter. This continuum of issues and barriers may include lack of understanding and support, stigmatization, discrimination, and ultimately inadequate accommodations (Bell & Swart, 2018; Bunbury, 2018; Deuchert et al., 2017; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Hoben & Hesson, 2021; Koca-Atabey, 2019; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Mutanga & Walker, 2017; Ostiguy, 2018).

Furthermore, students diagnosed with Attention Deficient Disorder and learning disabilities may experience significant issues. These students tend to have huge problems with time management skills, prioritizing, focus, and attention (Goudreau & Knight, 2015; Jansen et al., 2018; Pinho et al., 2017). Researchers have noted that these students might experience difficulties developing realistic plans, taking their medication, and expressing dissatisfaction with their grade point average in college (Goudreau & Knight, 2015). For these reasons, researchers noted that higher education institutions need to go beyond the status quo and provide intensive support services that help to address self-regulatory issues while responding to students' social and academic needs (Deuchert et al., 2017; Goudreau & Knight, 2015; Hoben &

Hesson, 2021; Jansen et al., 2018; Moraña Díez et al., 2014; Moraña & Orozco, 2020; Mullins & Preyde, 2013; Mutanga & Walker, 2017).

Moreover, when individuals transition to higher education institutions, they must self-disclose their status and are responsible for seeking out the accommodations necessary to be successful (Banks, 2014; Erin, 2019; Eccles, 2018; Gilson et al., 2020; Kreider et al., 2015; Lovett et al., 2014; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019; Yusof et al. 2020). In most cases, students with disabilities must come to the institution with a high sense of self-advocacy (Bruce & Aylward, 2021; Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020). Self-advocacy might be problematic for some students since they may be unaware of their rights and responsibilities and may be ill-equipped to advocate on their behalf (Banks, 2014; Cheatham & Randolph, 2020; Pfeifer et al., 2020). The process of self-advocacy might be challenging for some students who may not know how to ascertain the necessary accommodations from the institution. Historically marginalized groups such as African Americans may struggle with self-advocacy at a university since they struggle with the foundational knowledge and experience essential for post-secondary accommodations (Banks, 2014). Students with disabilities being able to self-advocate for themselves is critical since research has shown that students with disabilities who engage in self-advocacy have higher GPAs and are more likely to succeed through college than those with disabilities who do not engage in self-advocacy (Pfeifer et al., 2020).

Experiences of Disabled Students in Higher Education

Enrollment of students with disabilities in higher education has increased over the years (Couzens et al., 2015; Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Holzberg et al., 2018; Jansen et al., 2018; Kreider et al., 2015; Lambert & Dryer, 2017; Moraña & Orozco, 2020; Pino & Mortari, 2014; Ramaahlo et al., 2018). Because of these institutions' provisions and support through legislations

such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it may be asserted that students with disabilities may feel more comfortable pursuing post-secondary education (Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Langørgen et al., 2018; Moriña & Perera, 2018; Pino & Mortari, 2014). Through the different disabilities Acts, students with disabilities are offered accommodations to respond to equity, access, and discrimination. Traditionally these issues presented tremendous challenges to students, as they found it extremely difficult to navigate the academic arena. Students with disabilities are now provided with adjustment in how they learn to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills in the learning process as their non-disabled peers (Blanck, 2019; Forber-Pratt, 2018; Weis et al., 2016).

Though the laws do not stipulate what accommodations should be afforded to students, some central elements are expected to be a part of the accommodation provision process (Dunn, 2019). Therefore, it is the institution's responsibility to develop accommodations that respond to the student's needs. Universities, thus, must create a Universal Design for learning that fosters inclusive practices where all students can thrive despite their disposition. These institutions often rely on clinicians' recommendations in the respective medical and psychological fields for this purpose (Ramaahlo et al., 2018; Weis et al., 2016). This process often results in a homogenous response that, in turn, creates barriers and affects how students experience life at a university since a student with a disability's success at a university is heavily reliant on the university's understanding of their impairment (Mutanga & Walker, 2017; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019; Ramaahlo et al., 2018).

Additionally, universities' overreliance on these professionals may affect students' abilities to advocate on their behalf (Easterbrook et al., 2015; Gilson et al., 2020). Studies have shown that the ability of students to advocate for themselves can be hindered by staff members

and the limiting control they had over the development of their accommodations (Cheatham & Randolph, 2020; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Gilson et al., 2020). These institutions' willingness to choose the accommodations without including the person who will be utilizing them can develop further barriers that hinder students' academic development.

Barriers Encountered by Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

According to researchers, barriers affect inclusion and hinder the learning process and participation of students with disabilities (Biggeri et al., 2019; Carroll et al., 2020; Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Frank et al., 2020; García-González et al., 2020; Gavira & Moriña, 2015). Barriers can significantly affect membership, development, and achievement. This assertion may be disturbing to some since the very purpose of ADA and other laws focused on advancing students with disabilities is to facilitate an equitable learning process for these students. However, researchers have noted that despite legislations such as section 504 and ADA, individuals with disabilities tend to be less educated than their non-disabled peers (Deuchert, 2017; Haber et al., 2016; Kendall, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data, America's Public Schools, 2017; Sentenac et al., 2018). Students with disabilities being less educated may especially be true for those with learning disabilities, which research shows tend to experience significant problems understanding their lectures, performing on examinations, and navigating the entire post-secondary realm (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Gow et al., 2020; Lambert & Dryer, 2017; Weis et al., 2016). These students experience less access to professional degree programs because the consensus is that specific impairment can impede the student from executing the functions needed for the particular degree and, ultimately, the skills required to complete the job (Ndlovu, 2019).

Furthermore, one of the reoccurring themes in most of the research on students with disabilities experiences in higher education is the generally having a different educational

experience at universities compared to their non-disabled peers (Couzens et al., 2015; Deuchert et al., 2017; Dunn, 2019; Frank et al., 2020; Goudreau & Knight, 2015; Hoben & Hesson, 2021; Jansen et al., 2018; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Moriña Díez et al., 2014; Moriña & Orozco, 2020; Mullins & Pryde, 2013; Mutanga & Walker, 2017; Smith et al., 2019). From facing inequalities such as social-cultural issues of lecturers not being prepared to meet students' needs to self-disclosure issues, students with disabilities face many barriers to navigate in an already challenging setting (Lombardi et al., 2016; López Gavira & Mriña, 2014; Kerschbaum, 2017; Yusof et al., 2020). The barriers that affect these students' academic progression pose significant concerns since higher education institutions offer substantial prospects for individuals with disabilities. The importance of higher education institutions has been supported by researchers who have maintained that these institutions are critical for employability (Bell & Swart, 2018; Langørgen & Magnus, 2020). These institutions could help advance individuals with disabilities' ascertaining independence (Bell & Swart, 2018; Sakiz & Saricali, 2017). Without obtaining a higher education degree, it may be challenging for these individuals to have successful economic and social outcomes.

Nonetheless, researchers have maintained that even when students with disabilities receive services at universities, they still may have inferior experiences (Gow et al., 2020; Kendall, 2017; Kreider et al., 2015; Mutanga & Walker, 2017; Norris et al., 2019; Ostiguy, 2018). Students with disabilities continue to face attitudinal and physical barriers as universities continue to treat disability as external and ancillary (Ostiguy, 2018). They may experience oppression and ableism from their classmates and faculty members who may lack understanding and awareness on how to address these students' academic needs (Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Kendall, 2016; Moriña & Orozco, 2020).

Many studies on students with disabilities were similar and aligned with the general barriers associated with what students with disparities face in higher education. Studies have revealed that students with disabilities experienced significant communication barriers, support services, and teaching assessments (Bell & Swart, 2018; Norris et al., 2019). Students have indicated in research that supports for their disabilities were inconsistently afforded to them, and issues such as the lack of awareness by lecturers, class layout, and class numbers were significant impediments to their academic progression (Bell & Swart, 2018; Norris et al., 2019). Studies have shown that students with disabilities experience issues with lecturers not adapting classes to their specific needs, using outdated teaching mythology, having no interest in using a participatory approach to teaching, having problems with affording extended time for testing, and utilizing new technology (Bell & Swart, 2018; Gavira & Moraña, 2015; Gow et al., 2020; Moraña & Orozco, 2020; Mutanga, 2017; Norris et al., 2019; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019).

Both old and new studies highlight the need for accommodations development to be reevaluated to alleviate barriers to students with disabilities' academic development (Kendall, 2016; Smith et al., 2019). Students continue to lament that while universities may provide accommodations, they are not uniquely developed, and most of the services offered are not modifications but are typical of universities' technological adaptation (Kendall, 2016; Norris et al., 2019). Other obstacles identified by students with disabilities in studies included staff not knowing about students' disabilities, reluctance to make reasonable adjustments, and a lack of assessment choice (Kendall, 2016; Norris et al., 2019). Additionally, even though students may be given accommodations, the inflexibility of test adaptation, duration of the class, social barriers, institutional bureaucracy, the utilization of old teaching methods, and lack of awareness on accessibility and disability can all contribute to significant obstacles (Collins et al., 2018;

García-González et al., 2020; Moriña & Perera, 2018).

For reasons such as the before mentioned, some have noted that ADA does not fully cater to the emotional, cognitive, developmental, and mental needs of individuals with a disability (Clouse et al., 2019). More specifically, students with disabilities with varying sensory needs such as Autism Spectrum Disorder and other neurological impairments and hidden disabilities remain unaddressed (MacLeod et al., 2018). Therefore, these students are left with a deficiency in their needed accommodations. Thus, it is imperative to understand the conceptualization of disability within higher education institutions to facilitate the ratification and improvement to provide equal access and participation (Moriña, 2019; Mutanga, 2017; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019; Smith et al., 2019).

Self-Disclosure of Disability

One of the first issues that students with disabilities have to address when entering a university is self-disclosure. Students must self-disclose their disability to access the necessary accommodations (Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Disclosure entails the students' willingness to self-identify themselves as "disabled." Self-disclosure is an issue for many students with a disability (Bell et al., 2016; Bulk et al., 2017; Couzens et al., 2015; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Eccles et al., 2018; Grimes et al., 2019; Kendall, 2017; Langørgen et al., 2018; Lovett et al., 2014; Mullins & Pryde, 2013; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019; Smith et al., 2019). Self-disclosure of disability is not a prerequisite by universities. It is, however, a prerequisite for accommodations. Disability disclosure is viewed as a complex act dependent on the individual's acceptance of the disability, which they may have (Miller et al., 2019; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Disclosure, therefore, may become problematic when individuals may not be comfortable with their disability. Thus, although the United States Department of Education reported in 2016 that over 11% of students enrolled in post-secondary institutions were students with disabilities,

the issue of non-disclosure may result in these numbers not being reflective of the actual enrollment numbers. Students may not want to disclose their disability because of the negative connotations attached to the notion and the belief of the concept being fixed (Eccles et al., 2018).

As such, students may want to weigh the pros and cons of disclosure and make an informed decision that may have coinciding consequences. For instance, Kendall (2016) and Eccles et al. (2018) noted that students might not disclose their disability when applying to universities for fear that it may influence the application process. However, when students enter the university, the fear of self-disclosure may still be present (Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Studies further show that students may not want to disclose their status because of many other issues such as the lack of understanding, fear of being perceived negatively or embarrassment, shame, or stigmatization (Bell et al., 2016; Bulk et al., 2017; Eccles et al., 2018; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Being labeled as having a disability might make it difficult for individuals to legitimize their potential, as they may be perceived as permanently incapable (Bulk et al., 2017). As such, students may engage in impression management by passing to curb stigmatization and manage the perceptions of others while protecting their abilities from being questioned and challenged (Easterbrook et al., 2015; Eccles et al., 2018; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019).

Students might focus on “passing” as a way for them to be undistinguished from their peers and help them to curb the feelings of otherness (Lovett et al., 2014; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Studies have revealed that students may believe that disability disclosure may negatively impact their settling into and successfully matriculating through the university; as such, they may refuse to acknowledge their diagnosis (Easterbrook et al., 2015; Eccles et al., 2018). Students with disabilities engaging in impression management are not surprising since studies continue to show that students with disabilities are often perceived as unable to execute some of the

necessary elements needed to transition through professional programs successfully (Bulk et al., 2017; Cunnah, 2015; Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Gilson et al., 2020; Langørgen et al., 2018; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Ndlovu, 2019; Yusof et al., 2014). Since the capacities of students with disabilities might be challenged along with their mental health, impression management may be a way for students to deal with the rigid expectations of professional programs (Bulk et al., 2017; Easterbrook et al., 2015).

In addition, disclosure correlates with the nature of students' disabilities, with less visible disabilities being seen as more challenging to disclose and easier to conceal (Eccles et al., 2018; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019; Smith et al., 2019). This is not surprising since researchers have noted that self-disclosure might be a prominent issue for students with non-visible impairments who may not want to face the scrutiny of society (Bulk et al., 2017; Yusof et al., 2019). Although these disabilities are invisible, they can still affect the functionality of individuals and include disabilities such as Attention Deficit Disorder and visual impairments. Invisible disabilities may support the ideology of passing, which can minimize some of the more social challenges experienced by students (Almog, 2018; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Eccles et al., 2018; Grimes et al., 2019). Students with invisible disabilities may be less likely to disclose their disabilities because they may feel that they had appropriate strategies to address their disabilities and fear they would be treated differently after disclosure (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Grimes et al., 2019).

Generally, when it comes to invisible disabilities, there is a census among researchers that there is an overall lack of understanding among universities staff and faculty members (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Ben-Naim et al., 2017; Gow et al., 2020; Mullins & Preyde, 2013; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Thus, students with disabilities may sometimes see it as more

feasible not to disclose their disabilities. The stigmatization, which may sometimes come with self-disclosure, can overshadow the students' potential and creates an "us versus them" mentality (Eitterbrook et al., 2015; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). An "us versus them" mentality can devalue students' capacities with disabilities (Bulk et al., 2017). Studies show that students may not understand why they need to disclose their disabilities and the added benefits that it supposedly brought, and those who do disclose may find the process of providing documentation emotionally draining and belittling (Eccles et al., 2018; Mullins & Preyde, 2013).

Furthermore, students may hide their disabilities as a means of gaining social acceptance (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). This is not surprising since studies showed that students with a high sense of belonging due to peer relationships had a stronger attachment and adjustment to the university (Brown, 2019; Carroll et al., 2020; Maunder, 2017). Research has revealed that disclosure of disability does not always lead to acceptance (Easterbrook et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2019). Disclosure can sometimes lead to students experiencing microaggression and less respect from their peers (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Smith et al., 2019). One can infer that the peers without disabilities may assume that students with disabilities would be given preferential treatments for their disabilities. The before mentioned assertion may be seen as plausible since researchers have noted that students' relationship with peers is an essential component of their college experience (Brown, 2019; Carroll et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2018; Couzens et al., 2015; Fischer & Rode, 2019; Gilson et al., 2020; Maunder, 2017; White et al., 2016). Therefore, due to the complex nature of disability self-disclosure, there is sometimes a diverging understanding between what supports the university could offer and the disadvantage students perceive that came with disclosure (Eccles et al., 2018). For the above reasons, the stigma associated with being categorized as "disabled,"

especially for a young adult transiting to a university, warrants the need for universities to rethink the language these institutions use to assist students with disabilities (Grimes et al., 2019).

Fear of Discrimination

The fear of discrimination might result in students with a disability not disclosing their status and not seeking the necessary support that they need (Lovett et al., 2014; Eccles et al., 2018; Erin, 2019). Students may feel as though they may face discrimination from their peers and their professors. This perception may not be unfounded since it was revealed that professors were sometimes resistant to implement students' accommodations in the classroom because of misconceptions they led to an unfair disadvantage, and some non-disabled classmates' exhibited resentment towards the disabled student with accommodations (Mullins & Preyde, 2013; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019; Smith et al., 2019). Some professors believe that students may be given a better grade in their class because of the extra time afforded on examinations (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). For these reasons, students with disabilities may feel the need not to disclose their disabilities, so they do not face discrimination or stigmatization.

The fear of discrimination tends to be heightened when students have specific disabilities (Eccles et al., 2018; Kruse & Oswal, 2018; Smith et al., 2019). Students with learning and mental disabilities are faced with attitudinal barriers and less positive responses from university officials. As such, they tend to keep their conditions hidden (Gow et al., 2020; Kruse & Oswal, 2018). Students may believe that the stigma attached and the lack of knowledge, training, or experience among faculty and staff in addressing these issues are not worth the perceived benefits of disclosure. There is especially a general lack of knowledge in dealing with students with mental illness at universities (Eccles et al., 2018; Langørgen et al., 2018; Kruse & Oswal,

2018). Studies have shown that lectures felt ill-prepared to serve these students (Langørgen et al., 2018; Kruse & Oswal, 2018). Because of the before mentioned, researchers have maintained that specific disabilities may be more readily accepted than others (Cheatham & Randolph, 2020; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Smith et al., 2019). This fact was empirically proven when researchers found that individuals with physical disabilities were more accepted, and accommodations were made more available to them than individuals with cognitive disabilities (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Cheatham & Randolph, 2020). In contrast, learning disabilities accommodations were not so easily attained and were based on a greater degree of subjectivity on the individual providing the accommodations (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Cheatham & Randolph, 2020).

Visible physical disabilities often make the processing of disclosing and needing accommodations more accepted. However, mental and cognitive disabilities may be frowned upon because they may be challenging to legitimize (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Gow et al., 2020, Mullins & Pryde, 2013; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). These disabilities may require students to advocate on their behalf to get the needed accommodations. Yet, students may find themselves unwilling to do so because of the fear of negative perceptions and alienation from other students and staff members.

Physical Access Issues

Another barrier that students with disabilities continue to face is physical access challenges (Biggeri et al., 2019; Frank et al., 2020; García-González et al., 2020; Kendall, 2016; Moriña & Orozco, 2020; Moriña & Perera, 2018; Mutanga, 2017). ADA was instrumental in promoting the notion of universal design, where organizations and institutions were required to complete their infrastructure in an accessible way for individuals with disabilities. The universal design may include accessing the necessary buildings around campus, such as the library. However, students with disabilities continue to experience difficulties related to access (Clouse

et al., 2019; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Yusof et al., 2019). ADA remains to be severely ineffective in addressing students with mental, emotional, and developmental disabilities. Researchers have noted that individuals with disabilities such as Autism Spectrum Disorder could especially have difficulties related to access. They showed that acoustic, transition and spatial spaces are instrumental in supporting these students (Clouse et al., 2019).

Difficulties with access were especially relevant for visually impaired students (Frank et al., 2020; Lourens & Swartz, 2016). These students generally have difficulties navigating the university terrain, and the location and timing of classes can make even the shortest route not accessible for some students. Studies show that students experience many issues in the classroom because of the physical layout and other problems such as the size of the lecture hall, the number of students in the classroom, and understanding the lecturer's speech (Frank et al., 2020; Moriña & Perera, 2018). The layout of the university's learning spaces may make it difficult for students to see written information and activity engage in the learning process (Frank et al., 2020; Yusof et al., 2019). Concurrently, even when students try to familiarize themselves with the environment, the university crowds can create significant emotional distress (Frank et al., 2020; Lourens & Swartz, 2016). Students with disabilities having difficulties with universities layout are extremely concerning since engaging in the learning process is essential to grasping and understanding the information. Consequently, substantial improvement regarding architecture and infrastructures is needed to promote inclusivity for students with disabilities. It is, therefore, imperative that sensory issues that influence students' responses be considered so that a universal solution can be established when responding to the needs of these students.

Because of all of the before-mentioned issues experienced by students with disabilities in higher education, institutional efforts must intervene and create better pathways. Since students

with disabilities continue to face challenges while in higher education institutions, it can be asserted that there remain some significant gaps between policy and practices. Thus, it is of the utmost importance that institutions work arduously to develop educational initiatives related to acceptance and the understanding of these students so that faculty members can comprehend the degree to which it is critical to adhere to policies to facilitate the successful enrollment of students with disabilities. Institutions must understand one specific population of students with disabilities and develop strategies and initiatives focused on addressing and affording collegial participation for all students with disabilities. These institutions would need to go beyond the medical model of disability and focus on altering their professional practices, which would ultimately help students with disabilities ascertain a more profound and diverse higher education experience (Moriña & Perera, 2018; Mutanga, 2017).

Universities' Response to Disabled Students

Researchers have noted that the professional practices of universities seem to create tremendous issues when serving students with disabilities (Bulk et al., 2017; García-González et al., 2020; Kreider et al., 2015; Langørgen et al., 2018; Moriña, 2019; Moriña & Perera, 2018; Sakiz & Saricali, 2017). These concerns are heightened because of a large number of students with disabilities who are now entering universities. Professional practice in this context focuses on higher education institutions' commitment to effectively serving their student population, including their policies implementation process. The practices of these institutions often can dictate how successful their student population is with whatever endeavor they choose to pursue. When it comes to students with disabilities, there is a consensus that professional practices of higher education institutions leave much to be desired (Bulk et al., 2017; García-González et al., 2020; Kreider et al., 2015; Langørgen et al., 2018; Moriña & Perera, 2018; Sakiz & Saricali,

2017). These students continue to experience issues with physical access, discrimination, the curricula, and negative attitudes of professors and other staff members (Bell & Swart, 2018; Bunbury, 2018; Deuchert et al., 2017; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Frank et al., 2020; Gelbar et al., 2015; Gow et al., 2020; Hoben & Hesson, 2021; Koca-Atabey, 2019; Mosia & Phasha 2017; Mutanga & Walker, 2017; Ostiguy, 2018). Researchers show universities policies as lacking inclusivity (Gow et al., 2020; Moriña and Perera, 2018; Mutanga, 2017; Sakiz & Saricali, 2017). Students maintain that they should be a part of the accommodations development process to ensure accessibility since they feel that the policies and rules established by universities often affect their ability to access accommodations (Easterbrook et al., 2015; Sakiz & Saricali, 2017). These policies can result in students being denied the accommodations they need to succeed, undermining their success. These inconsistencies in how universities support students showed a gap in institutional policies and implementation (Gow et al., 2020; McKenzie & Marques 2019; Moriña & Perera, 2018; Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Institutional barriers, lack of attention, and unnecessary bureaucratic procedures are highly problematic for students with disabilities. Interestingly, public universities are often provided with funding to include students with disabilities in their institutions, yet there seems to be a disconnect between policy and practice. The process of students advocating for the legitimization of their disabilities and abilities may be the reason why university policies and federal legislations continue to remain the same (Easterbrook et al., 2015). Nevertheless, it can be asserted that higher education policies seem to be serving institutional needs and are less focused on inclusion and promoting equity and access.

Inclusion is a central element of professional practice. Under the premise of inclusion, it is proposed that given access to the curriculum, individuals from diverse groups can achieve the same or similar goals (Collins et al., 2018; Gilson et al., 2020; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Mutanga,

2017; Yusof et al., 2019). More specifically, inclusion can lead to a more equitable learning environment where students with and without disabilities can thrive in a more cohesive learning environment. However, studies continue to show that while many programs claim to be inclusive, they significantly lack in areas such as the curricula or course design and the overall universities professional practices perpetuate structural discrimination (Bulk et al., 2017; Collins et al., 2018; Gilson et al., 2020; Koca-Atabey, 2019; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Yusof et al., 2019). Researchers have reported that professional programs' bureaucracy, inflexibility, and structural designs inhibited and excluded students with disabilities' matriculations through certain types of programs (Bulk et al., 2017; Dunn, 2019).

The notion of inclusion can refer to the design of the university. Yet, many post-secondary institutions do not consider students' cognitive, elemental, and mental statuses using the same space. Students who are hypersensitive and have hidden needs issues are often unaddressed, and it is the university's responsibility to develop a design that proactively fosters inclusion (Bulk et al., 2017; Clouse et al., 2019; Gilson et al., 2020). Though students are asked to disclose their disabilities on the application and the support they need, this data is often not used to further inclusivity (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). The inability of universities to utilize disability data may account, at least for poor planning and consultation between the various integral parties. Therefore, universities' policies must be addressed so that students with disabilities can be offered responsive services that extend beyond the classroom. This would require universities to create a vision of inclusion for sharing program models and enhancing professional practices by considering the challenges students with disabilities experience daily to meet their needs effectively. It would entail addressing the curriculum design.

Inclusive Curriculum Design

Universities' curriculum design correlates with some of the barriers that students with disabilities encounter at these institutions. An inclusive curriculum minimizes barriers and fosters participation for all and universities must foster an inclusive curriculum to respond to the needs of students with disabilities. However, it can be said that universities have many well-established policies supporting the rights of students with disabilities to be educated, there continue to be issues regarding the implementation process and the inclusion of these students (Bunbury, 2018; Collins et al., 2018; Mosia & Phasha, 2018; Mutanga, 2017).

When the curriculum is not well implemented, this goes against the premise of inclusive education. The ideology of inclusive education is viewed as a global imperative and is built on the belief that education is a fundamental human right (Bell & Swart, 2018). It is acknowledged as a critical element of universities' policy development and crucial for supporting students to reach their full potential and fostering partnerships (Bell & Swart, 2018; Gilson et al., 2020; Mosia & Phasha, 2018). Inclusion includes encompassing access to every aspect of life at secondary and post-secondary institutions despite one's disposition. The lack of an inclusive curriculum goes beyond the laws of ADA and infers that it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities. Reasonable adjustments entail universities developing policies to minimize barriers and improve access and equity.

However, an inclusive curriculum design is often viewed as lacking and problematic when addressing students with disabilities in higher education (Berg et al., 2017; Bunbury, 2018; García-González et al., 2020; Koca-Atabey, 2019; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Pino & Mortari, 2014). Studies revealed that though students are easily given extra time to complete their examinations, they sometimes experience challenges with extensions for their

assignments, and staff members struggle with accommodating students due to a lack of training and awareness of disabilities (Bunbury, 2018; Collins et al., 2018; Gow et al., 2020; Koca-Atabey, 2019). It may be especially difficult for students with information processing issues and certain types of disabilities such as intellectual disabilities to understand and access the curriculum in post-secondary institutions despite the accommodations provided by these institutions. These students need individualized attention and unique resources that may not be readily available at universities. They tend to have significant problems navigating the hidden curriculum at universities because of the lack of support and former exposure to adult-based systems and contexts, and the lack of response by universities to their difficulties with adaptive behavior and social participation skills (Berg et al., 2017; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Nightingale et al., 2019). Studies have revealed that when it comes to these types of students and other students with disabilities, lecturers attitudes towards the curriculum adaption can create more barriers that impede the student's ability to graduate from a university (Berg et al., 2017; Frank et al., 2020; Gow et al., 2020; Lambert & Dryer, 2017; Hoben & Hesson, 2021; Moriña Díez et al., 2014; Moriña & Orozco, 2020; Moriña & Perera, 2018; Pino & Mortari, 2014). Students tend to experience challenges with lecturers' teaching strategies, lecturers' lack of support, the inflexible curriculum, and the diminutive adjustments that are made to facilitate the learning process (Bell & Swart, 2018; Berg et al., 2017; Mosia & Phasha, 2017).

Therefore, it can be asserted that while university policies may stipulate that students with disabilities have equal access to all of the resources offered by the university, this is not always the case for these students. Difficulties with access are especially true when it comes to the curricula, and there are issues with the medium of communication that inherently impedes the way students learn. These issues were all depicted in studies conducted by Gow et al. (2020)

and Norris et al. (2019), which showed a consensus among participants that lecturers were significantly ineffective in responding to the unique needs of students and were sometimes ignorant of the laws governing curriculum adaptation. Additionally, Gow et al. (2020) and Mullins and Preyde's (2013) studies highlighted that participants felt that accommodation implementation was based on the subjective preference of lecturers. These findings, along with the others above, suggest that officials in higher education must address the curriculum's issue at their institutions to ensure an equitable educational experience for students who are disabled. As long as these issues are not placed at the forefront, students with disabilities may continue to experience problems grasping the content provided. For an inclusive curriculum to be developed, there is a need for more disability awareness for faculty and staff members at universities.

Faculty and Staff Awareness in Working with Students with Disabilities

Studies have shown that equally important to universities policies and the curriculum development was the awareness of faculty and staff members in serving students with disabilities (Berg et al., 2017; Langørgen et al., 2018; Moraña Díez et al., 2014; Moraña & Orozco, 2020; Mutanga Walker, 2017; Ndlovu, 2019; Ryder & Norwich, 2018; Yusof et al., 2019). Awareness includes being aware of the student's disability, being mindful of students' biases, and understanding disability-related issues (Berg et al., 2017; Yusof et al., 2019). The lack of lecturer awareness can present a significant challenge for students with disabilities accessing the curriculum. Studies have shown that lecturers can sometimes respond negatively when students with disabilities seek clarity regarding lessons (Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Ndlovu, 2019). Students with disabilities are often forced to make their arrangements to learn the curricula because the support of lecturers is not always provided, and though reasonable adjustments are made to accommodate them in the class, university officials may sometimes exhibit a laissez-faire

attitude, which may create additional barriers to their educational progression (Gow et al., 2020; Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Frank et al., 2020).

Concurrently, studies show that the lack of awareness and support is heightened when students have an invisible disability (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Gow et al., 2020; Mullins & Preyde, 2013; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). These disabilities cannot be readily viewed as opposed to physical disabilities. Invisible disabilities may be detrimental to students' progress since it is often not easily understood. Researchers showed that this notion often influences the negative perceptions and comments individuals may have about a students' disability, which may, in turn, place students at risk for academic failure because their disabilities may go unrecognized or their disabilities are diagnosed as mild, resulting in them not getting much academic support (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Carballo et al., 2019; Gow et al., 2020; Lipka et al., 2019; Mayat & Amosun, 2011).

Furthermore, both lecturers and the disabilities support services might find it difficult to properly serve these students because of their inability to understand the students' disabilities outside of the medical realm. This medical model provides a homogenous view of disability and associates it primarily with charity, which creates an institutional construct of disability that influences how it is perceived (Brault, 2012; Mutanga & Walker, 2017; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019; Yusof et al., 2019). This association can damage students' self-esteem, as they tend to develop the notion that they are sick and believe that they are limited by the disability (Yusof et al., 2019). This ideology may, in turn, affect how and when students disclose their disability. Hence, referring to it as a social phenomenon can help initiate disability discourse, which can reshape the notion of disability. Reshaping the idea of disability might positively influence the disclosure process and the perceptions of staff members.

Perceptions of Faculty and Staff Members

Staff members' perceptions could impact students matriculating through a university, as it can be a barrier to students' progression. Faculty and staff members may feel that students are ill-equipped for the academic rigors of life at universities (Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Ndlovu, 2019; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019). Studies have shown that faculty members may believe that students with disabilities may not have the ability to thrive in programs such as medicine, and often the message lecturers conveyed to students about the expectations of their ability to succeed or fail influenced how successful students perceived themselves (Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Ndlovu, 2019). Some educators may align problematic behaviors with students with certain types of disabilities (Elias et al., 2017). For these reasons, students with disabilities may be more inclined to enroll in humanities programs (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). These studies are concerning because one cannot assume an individual's capabilities based on their disabilities, which is sometimes the case with lecturers and other university staff members.

Lecturers' Experience with Disabled Students

The disposition of lecturers must not be ignored and must be considered when policies are being developed to facilitate students with disabilities as having access to an equitable education at universities. Lecturers play a pivotal role in the education of these students since they are responsible for the information dissemination process. While students share their social experiences with other students, lecturers determine the learning experience and academic opportunities. This notion poses issues because universities cannot provide heterogeneous accommodations to students with disabilities (Gilson et al., 2020; Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Although accommodations are afforded through the disability office, their implementation is contingent on the lecturer (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Mullins & Preyde, 2013; Pearson &

Boskovich, 2019). Lecturers must then work with students to develop a process that ensures equity, which they may feel ill-equipped to facilitate.

According to researchers, lecturers can have significant difficulties working with students with disabilities (Berg et al., 2017; Kendall, 2017; Langørgen et al., 2018; Moriña Díez et al., 2014; Moriña & Orozco, 2020; Moriña & Perera, 2018; Mutanga & Walker, 2017; Ndlovu, 2019; Ryder & Norwich, 2018; Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015; Yusof et al., 2019). These difficulties may result from many issues such as lecturers' attitudes and lack of awareness or lack of knowledge in working with students with disabilities. They sometimes find it challenging to make reasonable adjustments in the classroom and feel under pressure and scared that they may be accused of discrimination in serving these students (Kendall, 2017; Langørgen et al., 2018). Nevertheless, lecturers are a salient part of these students' academic development. Yet, studies indicated that support in the classroom for participants with disabilities sometimes depended on the "goodwill" of the academic staff (Ndlovu, 2019; Moriña & Perera, 2018; Ryder & Norwich, 2018). This type of help should not be a problem since many procedural safeguards stipulate the importance of students with disabilities being provided with the needed accommodations and adjustments in the classroom.

Additionally, studies showed that lecturers lacked knowledge related to teaching and learning, lacked anticipation, transferred service dispensation to disability support services, and felt psychologically stressed by the prospect of working with students with disabilities (Kendall, 2017; Langørgen et al., 2018; Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015). Lecturers may find working with these students an added burden as they struggle to understand and support their unique needs. Research revealed that lecturers reported that the competency standards, lack of resources, lack of knowledge, and time constraints made it difficult for them to accommodate

students with disabilities in the classroom (Kendall, 2017; Langørgen et al., 2018; Van Jaarsveldt & Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015).

Moreover, lecturers might have difficulties comprehending the fairness and need for students with disabilities to access materials and accommodations such as extra time for testing (Kendall, 2017; Kulow & Missirian, 2019; Langørgen et al., 2018; Ryder & Norwich, 2018). Although lecturers may be provided with awareness training on why students with disabilities may need more equitable learning conditions, they sometimes still exhibit reservations in providing students with more favorable adjustments in the classroom (Frank et al., 2020; Gow et al., 2020; Ryder & Norwich, 2018). This response may sometimes emanate from a concern for academic integrity and the degree of leverage provided by accommodations to students with disabilities (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Ryder & Norwich, 2018). Resistance from some lecturers may be because some may not believe in learning disabilities. One can infer that this might be due to the degree to which lecturers might have difficulties understanding the level at which a student's disability affects their functionality. Their inability to understand these elements may result in them impeding the academic development of these students. Consequently, it must be acknowledged that attitudinal and cultural changes are needed to create awareness of disabilities among faculty members and students. This awareness could be instrumental in helping lecturers to be more efficient in serving students with disabilities.

Summary

Historically, the status of being labeled disabled was very problematic. Although society has evolved where policies have been enacted that afford students with disabilities access to educational opportunities, studies show that the status of being labeled disabled still comes with some preconceived notions of what that person can or cannot do educationally. These

preconceived notions are often dominant throughout higher education institutions and impede students with disabilities from meeting their full potential. A review of the literature showed that though students with disabilities are provided with accommodations in universities, these students experience significant issues matriculating through higher education institutions because of physical access issues, stigmatization, discrimination, lack of awareness of lectures, and lack of an inclusive curriculum.

The accommodations received by these students are often not uniquely designed to meet their specific needs. Not having personalized accommodations is a stark contrast to what occurs when students are in high school. They are provided with a more individualized approach to the accommodations' development process. In high school, the development of their accommodations is facilitated through the IEP process. However, at universities, they must request their accommodations. Research shows that a lack of understanding for requesting accommodations at universities can be problematic for these students. The lack of knowledge in requesting accommodations may especially be true for African American students, who are traditionally marginalized and disenfranchised. As such, but not surprisingly, studies have indicated a tremendous disconnect between universities' policies and practices in serving students with disabilities. These issues can be troubling since research indicates that students with disabilities tend to be less educated than their non-disabled peers, and education is a salient factor for economic mobility. Thus, these students not being afforded an equitable education present a social justice issue.

The social justice theory guided this research and facilitated making it unique from other studies. The social justice theory proposes that everyone should be afforded equal opportunities to ascertain society's social and economic research. Although previous studies have examined

the experience of students with disabilities, they did not focus exclusively on students who would have received special education services in school or predominantly African American students. Research shows that African Americans are a traditionally marginalized group who still tend to be less educated than their White peers. This population being less educated tend to be heightened when they have disabilities. Therefore, by focusing specifically on these students who received special education services in school provided a unique understanding of experiences of the duality of their minority statuses. In addition, aligning these students' experiences with the social justice theory ascertain some of the injustice these students may encounter that may impede them from reaching their educational goals and, ultimately, economic freedom. It is important to illustrate how educators can address equity in higher education institutions. More specifically, common themes were gathered through this study. These themes can be instrumental in understanding the importance of social justice in the education sector. This realization can lead to a more theoretical understanding of the importance of students with disabilities having access to more equitable education opportunities, which aligns with the concept of social justice, and advocates equity and justice for all despite their dispositions.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This phenomenological study aimed to discover the experiences of students with disabilities at a state university in Maryland. In the research, disability was generally defined as any physical or mental impairment that impedes an individual from effectively executing a normal life function. This chapter aims to discuss the research design, procedures, and analysis of the present research study. The research design consisted of a qualitative phenomenology design. In the procedure section, I discussed the steps necessary to execute the study. Other factors such as research questions, the setting, participants, data collection technique, the researcher's positionality data analysis, and trustworthiness will be discussed.

Research Design

The study was executed using a qualitative method of research. Qualitative research is an evidence-based naturalistic research method that allows researchers to directly observe participants' lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Participants are observed in their natural environment and their experience becomes the center of the research focus. Qualitative research provided me with the opportunity to an interpretative, naturalistic, and holistic inquiry (Anderson, 2011; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017; Given, 2008). Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to quantify an issue and offer illustrations in numbers, qualitative research provides structured and unstructured insight and understanding into the participants' experiences by asking the why questions (Denny & Weckesser, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Given, 2008). The interpretive practices that were executed through this method allowed me to get a transformative view of the world.

Participants in qualitative research are studied in their natural setting where the researcher attempts to understand the phenomenon and the meanings participants attach to the said phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, Given, 2008). Through qualitative research, researchers can utilize several techniques such as interviews and field notes that they can use to represent the world around them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). These methods allow researchers to capture the essence of participants' experiences. Qualitative researchers are required to assist their paradigms early in the research so that it does not affect the trustworthiness of the study's results (Guba, 1990). This paradigm assessment allows researchers to use the empirical materials and interconnected interpretive practices to describe participants' experiences impartially (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). They infuse themselves contextually, which allows them to ascertain multiple realities and be transformed by their participants' experiences (Anderson, 2017; Given, 2008).

This method was appropriate because I sought to investigate students' lived experiences with disabilities, which included conducting interviews and focus groups. The exploratory nature of the approach allowed me to examine the subjective realities and in-depth experiences of participants with disabilities in higher education institutions. This method required me to assess my paradigms for the purposes of objectivity, which allowed participants' voices to be heard uninterrupted and untainted by my worldview, and by what I may have perceived in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Guba, 1990). Qualitative research decreases the power relationship between the researcher and participants, which was critical for understating participants' experiences with disabilities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, the literary flexibility of this style provided me with the opportunity to examine these students' experiences in alignment with the theoretical perspective of social justice, which advocates the importance of equitability.

Additionally, qualitative research is marked by eight criteria such as “(a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence” (Tracy, 2010, p. 839). The topic of researching the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education met all of these criteria as the equitability of these individuals’ experiences speaks to social justice. In addition, a qualitative approach to this study was instrumental in understanding the phenomenon and serving to facilitate proactive responses for improvement. Finally, the exploratory method was an essential component as it facilitated diverging new areas of inquiry that can drive future research in the respective area (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Moustakas, 1994).

Furthermore, a phenomenological method was utilized. The concept of phenomenology provided an impetus for understanding new knowledge and experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Since all knowledge is considered by some linked to a phenomenon, one can assert that there is a relationship between ourselves as knowers and the artifacts that we come to know or rely on (Moustakas, 1994). The assertion before meant phenomenology was instrumental in understanding the participants’ experiences with receiving disability services through their realities. The phenomenological research method allowed me to bring participants to the center of the research as it explored their experiences within the context of the world (Paul, 2017).

Phenomenology enables researchers to understand what all participants have in common, as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It can facilitate an in-depth understanding of universal knowledge when robust philosophical theorization is aligned with this method (Paul, 2017). It provides the opportunity to examine dualism where the participants and the environment are intricately connected yet distinctly different (Moustakas, 1994). As such, this method allowed me to delve into the students’ experiences under review. Since I was

exploring the lived experiences of students with disabilities at a higher education institution and seeking to understand whether these experiences are equitable, the duality of this method was instrumental in the research. I deciphered the commonality of experience between individuals and the essence of the phenomenon under study. This process meant that I was able to grasp how the students' disability influence their experience in higher education.

Moreover, I was able to gather each student's perspectives using transcendental phenomenology. Edmund Husserl has been credited with developing transcendental phenomenology, which is described as a transformative phenomenological approach (Moustakas, 1994; Sandmeyer, 2016). Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is a systematic approach that focuses on the derivation of knowledge through participants' subjective experience (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl believed that transcendental does not exist without subjects, the world, and their relationships, intricately aligned with transcendental structure (Sheehan, 2014; Zhang, 2021). In transcendental phenomenology, participants' subjective and objective acts correlate to form their full experiences. Transcendental phenomenology, thus, allows researchers to get a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the participant's lived experiences without their perspectives being altered. Therefore, I was able to highlight the phenomenon under study by excluding my experiences and collecting data from participants who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As such, by utilizing transcendental phenomenology, I ascertained an objective understanding of the phenomenon.

Concurrently, this approach dictates that all knowledge must conform to experiences, which means that all knowledge resides in the subjective source of self (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, reviewing the participants' experiences through transcendental phenomenology provided me with an authentic understanding of their experiences as students with disabilities at

a higher education institution. Preconceived notions and assertions were set aside, and the process of acquiring the information came directly from the source (the participants) since they were the ones experiencing the phenomenon (object). Structural analysis was ascertained through this process (Moustakas, 1994).

In addition, transcendental phenomenology aims to provide an individual with an understanding of the phenomenon meaning to the person experiencing the phenomenon. I was provided with detailed knowledge of the students with disabilities' experiences at university, which allowed me to describe the experiences more accurately. Thus, this exploration process facilitated a nuanced understanding, and I deciphered whether these lived experiences permeate a social justice issue.

I was born with an eye disease called macular dystrophy, limiting my central vision. As a result of this disability, I experienced tremendous difficulties navigating the university. Transcendental phenomenology would allow me to dismiss my experiences to understand the phenomenon not based on my perceptions or influenced by my experiences. Consequently, the concept of epoché became even more critical. Epoché means to abstain from judgment (Moustakas, 1994). Through epoché, I was able to aside my own experience, any naïve and preconceived notions and assumptions to understand the phenomenon authentically (Moustakas, 1994). The epoché process facilitated a new way of thinking by seeing what was before me to describe and decipher participants' experiences authentically. This activity, in itself, is the core of phenomenological research, stepping back and exploring the nature and the basis of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Zahavi, 2019). After the epoché, I engaged in transcendental-phenomenological reduction, where each experience was considered separately. This process allowed me to get a thematic understanding of the participants' unique experiences with the

phenomenon, thus, ascertaining a textual description of the phenomenon from the participants' perspective (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The following will be the research questions guiding this study.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of students with disabilities at a four-year university?

Sub Question One

How do students with different disabilities feel about their ability to access the resources provided by the university?

Sub Question Two

How do students with disabilities feel about faculty members' response to their accommodations' implementation process in the classroom?

Sub Question Three

Do students with disabilities feel as though they are able to socially integrate with the student body?

Setting and Participants

This section of the proposal will discuss the site selected to execute the study and the profile of the participants. A pseudonym will be used to discuss the site. The size of the university and the organizational makeup, and the reasons it was chosen for the study will be explained. In addition, participants' characteristics and the criteria for selection will be explored in this section.

Site

The study was executed at Excel University, which is a state university located in Maryland. This university is small, with about 6,000 students, and provides undergraduate and graduate courses. The organizational structure is based on the University of Maryland Board of Regents, which helps execute the vision and mission of public universities; as such, the university has a board-appointed president that governs the daily affairs of the university. Several essential personnel such as the Communication and Outreach Specialist, Director of Title, Faculty Athletic Representative, Executive Assistant, and Executive Administrative Assistants, assist the president. Other vital individuals then assist these individuals.

The site was chosen because of several reasons. The university is a historically Black College (HBCU); as such, students at the university are predominately African Americans and are enrolled in various courses. The university is located in a middle-income community, so many university students live in the surrounding areas and come from middle-income households. The university's population of primarily African American students provided me with the unique opportunity to understand these particular students' experiences, which is often not highlighted in studies with students with disabilities at universities. Most of the studies I reviewed were conducted at predominantly White institutions or institutions overseas. Therefore, reviewing this particular population's experiences will help salient individuals better understand students with disabilities' experiences and this often underrepresented population's experiences. Additionally, since researchers continue to show that African Americans are overrepresented in special education (Farkas et al., 2020), this setting will be instrumental to policymakers in the respective fields understanding how to serve this population. Since African Americans are traditionally considered a marginalized group and the theoretical perspective, which was used in

the study, is that of social justice, this setting will be ideal for understanding this group of students' experiences and overall levels of inclusivity at the university.

Additionally, I attended the university, and it is conveniently located in my area. I am visually impaired and do not drive; thus, this site provided easy access. I took an Uber to get there, which was more cost-effective than if I had chosen university farther away. The university has a disability services office, with which I was very familiar because I received this office's services. I have previously built alliances with some of the leaders within the university over the years. For the reasons above, I got fewer difficulties accessing the university to conduct my study.

Furthermore, the university's president was appointed a few years ago, and she is focused on its overall development. The university recently received several million dollars from a private donor to upgrade their services, and they have begun this process. I felt inclined to investigate whether these improvements have ventured down to the disabilities' services. Nevertheless, because I attended this university, I had to bracket out my experiences to offer an authentic depiction of participants' experiences.

Participants

The study included 12 participants. This sample was considered adequate from several perspectives, consisting of qualitative researchers' recommendations, the Liberty University School of Education Doctoral Handbook, and most importantly, the concept of saturation. The Liberty University School of Education Doctoral Handbook recommends a minimum of 12-15 participants for research. The sample size was ideal for qualitative research since researchers maintain that qualitative research aims not to generalize the information gained but to elucidate the specific information (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Given, 2008;

Saunders et al., 2017). Considering that the phenomenon studied was the experiences of students with disabilities, and past studies have shown that these experiences tend to be similarly aligned, the sample size was adequate to foster empirical and theoretical saturation for the current research and setting.

Additionally, purposive sampling was used for this research. In purposive sampling, researchers highlight what needs to be known and try to find participants willing to provide the information or knowledge required to answer the question through their experiences (Etikan, 2016). For this study, the criteria for selection were based on participants having a documented disability, i.e., any physical or mental condition that severely limits an individual's abilities to perform a normal life function. Participants must have received special education services in high school, be 18 years or older, be enrolled in the institution, and received support services at the university. Elements such as gender, race, and years of study were not considered for the study. Since the university is predominantly African American, it was predicted that most of the participants would have been African American.

Researcher Positionality

This section will be focused on vocalizing my inspiration for conducting the study. My interpretive framework is based on social constructivism, built on the premise that multiple realities exist through our individual experiences, and knowledge is ascertained through interaction with others. I articulate my philosophical assumptions in this section. These assumptions include ontological, epistemological, and axiological. All of this information was succinctly discussed so that individuals could gather a more detailed understanding of my positionality.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism was the lens through which I conducted my research. Social constructivism posits that multiple realities are constructed through our lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This interpretive framework proposes that two people live in the same world, but their realities can be different as they are contextually embedded (Patton, 2002). Since I examined the experiences of students with disabilities at a higher education institution, I believed that these students may have had similar or different experiences and perceptions of their experiences that were all important and deserve attention. Although they are contextually fused, I believed that these participants' realities could have offered a thematic understanding of the phenomenon under study. This interpretive framework allowed me to have maximum contact with the participants in the study through interviews to examine the different realities of participants without articulating which was right or more true (Patton, 2002). I believed that social constructivism is aligned with phenomenological research since researchers have maintained that the primary purpose of phenomenological knowledge is to understand meaningful relationships connected to individuals' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, since I was operating from a social justice perspective and the participants under review were disabled and predominantly African American students, this interpretive framework allows me to give voices to an often-disenfranchised population.

Philosophical Assumptions

My philosophical assumptions through which I view the world are addressed in this section to give individuals a more concise understanding of my positionality and how I approached my research. My ontological assumption is based on my Christian beliefs of God being the supreme being of the universe. On the other hand, my epistemological assumption is based on the ideology of phenomenology, in which knowledge is seen as being derived from

individuals' subjective experiences. Lastly, I discussed my axiological assumption where my experiences as a visually impaired student have intricately shaped the development of this assumption.

Ontological Assumption

As a Christian, I believe that God's truth is the singular reality. Genesis 1:1 ESV states, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Additionally, Hebrews 11:3 ESV states, "By faith, we understand that the universe was created by the word of God so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible." These scriptures constantly remind me that God is the supreme being of the universe. His truth and his knowledge are what guide the universe. I believe that he created all that exists globally, and it is difficult, even impossible, for any human being to have the level of discernment or comprehend his extensive work. I believe there is one universal reality: God is the beginning and end and the Lord of all creations, including the universe.

Epistemological Assumption

My epistemological assumption is based on my experiences as a visually impaired individual. An epistemological assumption is considered "how we know what we know," our values, and how knowledge is derived (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Patton, 2002, p.134). I believe that knowledge is derived from our subjective experiences, combined with the objective entity, and it becomes the person's realities. As an individual with a visual impairment, I know it is challenging to navigate the world when a core sense significantly degenerates daily. Yet, I value education, and I am knowledgeable that despite my disabilities, I still have the capabilities to achieve tremendous academic success. My experiences made me aware that life is more difficult for someone with a disability because of negative perceptions about one's ability, and when they are not given the support they need to thrive in higher education institutions. For the reasons

above, the relationship between myself and what is being researched then required me to acquire knowledge of participants' experiences authentically, which required me to set aside any preconceived notions or prejudices to approach the topic with openness to acquire knowledge of participants' experiences transcendently

Axiological Assumption

I was diagnosed with Macular Dystrophy, a visual impairment that significantly limits my vision, at the age of 13. In some cases, I had tremendous difficulties navigating the entire educational arena because of not being given some of the necessary services that I needed to ensure equity, especially at higher education institutions. I believe it is a social injustice when an individual with a disability is not given the necessary elements needed to be successful from educational institutions and is stigmatized, discriminated against, and perceived as less capable than an individual who is not disabled. As a result of my experiences and my values, axiotheological assumption was intricately aligned in my study. A researcher's axiological assumptions are characterized by the researcher making their positions obvious in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A person with axiological assumptions tends to have the confidence to allow their values to engage them in foresight regarding professional activities (Greshilova et al., 2020). I believe that all students should be afforded what is needed to thrive in education, and I foresaw that some of the experiences that participants in my study would have encountered would have been stories that represent my experiences in higher education institutions. Therefore, it was imperative for me to bracket my biases to effectively and authentically execute this research. Bracketing allows everything else to be set aside and the research to be placed in brackets to allow the phenomenon qualities to unfold authentically and the study and participants' experiences to be the focus (Moustakas, 1994).

Researcher's Role

I played a tremendously active role in the study since I was the human instrument conducting interviews and focus groups. These activities entailed me to directly interacting with participants since I was conducting a qualitative study. A phenomenological approach was utilized for the study, and this approach emphasizes subjectivity and the core of individual experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Because this approach emphasizes subjectivity, I had no power over my participants but was focused on authentically deciphering their experiences to derive knowledge systematically.

Although I did not know the participants, I was familiar with the university since I attended it for my master's degree. I was very familiar with the services offered by the disabilities services department. I experienced some issues with my accommodations provision and implementation at the university; as such, I had to ensure that my biases or unfavorable experiences did not alter the study's themes by engaging in bracketing, as I was solely responsible for the data collection and data analysis procedures. Bracketing is an essential component of phenomenological reduction. It is the process by which all issues are set aside that are non-essential to the research focus, and the horizontalizing takes place where all the features of the research are valued as the same (Moustakas, 1994). My experiences and my judgments were set aside to focus on the analysis of participants' experiences. Moreover, bracketing was a central component in this research, especially in the data analysis, as all biases and preconceived notions had to be put aside for me to get a more succinct understanding of the phenomenon under study (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020).

Procedures

In this section of the proposal, the phases by which the research will be conducted will be highlighted. The site approval along with Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval will be discussed. Additionally, the recruitment plan, sample size, and reasons for selecting the said size will be explained. The data collection plan and analysis will be concisely explored.

Permissions

After completing my proposal defense, I worked arduously with my chair and committee member to gain IRB approval (See Appendix A). This process entailed submitting an IRB application and submission of site permission for the chair to review. Prior to submitting the IRB application, I solicited permission from the university (See Appendix B for permission request and C for site approval). Consent was given from the university before the IRB application was submitted. Finally, after IRB approval had been provided, I worked with the university's Disabilities Support Department's head to solicit participants.

Recruitment Plan

The study included 12 participants who were purposely selected from a sample pool of 150 students with disabilities at a four-year university. The sample size was deemed appropriate to facilitate saturation (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and the Liberty University Doctoral Handbook stipulations. The sample was purposive as I sought to understand the experiences of students with disabilities; as such, all participants needed to meet the criteria of having a documented disability and should have had received special education services in high school. The participants needed to be receiving services from the disabilities support department. Purposive sampling provides the researcher with an opportunity to ascertain participants who can best inform their research inquiry under examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this sampling

technique, I solicited participants who could have purposely informed the phenomenon under exploration.

Once I was granted IRP approval, participants were recruited via emails and posters. The posters (See Appendix D) were posted in the disabilities support department and around other areas of the campus that students frequent. Participants were monetarily compensated for their time. The momentary compensation was announced in the email and on the poster. They were provided a \$30 gift card. This amount was used as a motivator for the solicitation process. Researchers could use monetary compensation as a stimulus to solicit participants (Surmiak, 2020). Researchers have found that monetary compensation mattered in ascertaining participants, and this method is seen as a technique to increase recruitment and reimburse participants for their time and efforts (Kelly et al., 2017; Surmiak, 2020). Since my participants had disabilities and attended the university, their money could buy books or help with other university expenses.

Participants' solicitation took place for an average of two weeks. After that, individuals who showed interest were notified, and an initial meeting with each participant was arranged. This initial meeting was used as a means to build rapport. Researchers must invest in relationships with participants to help minimize power imbalances and build trust (Velardo & Elliott, 2018). Building trust was a central part of this study since participants had to be willing to discuss their experiences, which may have involved some form of vulnerability. When trust is built, participants may be more inclined to discuss their issues authentically (Velardo & Elliott, 2018). In addition to the initial meeting being used to build rapport, informed consent (See Appendix E) was solicited before interviews, and inclusion criteria was strictly enforced.

Data Collection Plan

This section is focused on discussing the various data collection approaches that I employed. Three approaches were used, which included individual interviews, focus groups, and letter writing. These approaches will be described in sequential order along with their validity. In addition, the data analysis of each approach, which was based on Moustakas's (1994) modification of Van Kaam's method of analysis for phenomenological research, will be explained.

Individual Interviews

I utilized semi-structured interviews to gather information. The study was phenomenological, and interviews should be at the center of phenomenological research because of their focus on deriving meaning through individual experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In phenomenological studies, researchers refrain from making judgments and develop questions that focus on gathering information that can be foundational knowledge for new studies. The process of executing the phenomenological method requires maximum interaction and face-to-face contact with participants to assess their experiences at the moment, which is often provided through interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews would enable understanding from the world of the participants' perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). They allowed me to get the most precise and rich details regarding the phenomenon (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). One-on-one interviews were conducted in an acceptable setting that allowed participants the opportunity to narrate and elaborate on their campus experiences. I was responsible for creating an atmosphere where participants felt free to express themselves in the interview process. Thus, the setting provided for confidentiality and allowed the participants the freedom

to express themselves without feeling intimidated (Moustakas, 1994). Interviews were recorded with an audio recorder with the permission of participants.

Prior to individual interviews, an initial meeting was held with each participant to build rapport. During this meeting, the project's aim and the structure were discussed with participants. They were provided with the opportunity to ask questions and discuss any concerns. This meeting is used to ascertain biographical data from participants. Another meeting was then scheduled at the convenience of the participants to conduct the in-depth interview. The one-on-one interview was the primary data collection tool for individual perspectives. Before the meeting, I engaged in epoché to ensure biases did not undermine the interview. Epoché is a necessary part of interviews (Moustakas, 1994). The meetings were held in a private location to facilitate barrier-free communication. Participants were provided with an interview guide so that they were able to follow the sequence of the question. This interview guide allowed me to ensure that all relevant themes were convened and explored.

An interview guide is an instrumental way for the interviewer to bridge the gap between themselves and the participants and ensure a thematic alignment consistent with the research question (Pedersen et al., 2015). Participants thus had the opportunity to read and listen to a question while being asked to articulate their responses further. Follow-up questions were used, when necessary. Field notes were taken during the interview to gather themes, generate new questions, or return to questions requiring clarification that is more detailed. Each interview was conducted at a date and time convenient to the participants.

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and describe your current disability. CQ

2. Describe how your disability limits your academic development and impacts your overall life at university? CQ
3. What services do you receive to assist with this disability? SR1
4. How were you notified of the services offered by the university's disability support services? SR1
5. How involved were you in the accommodations assessment process and ensuring the disability support office met your individual needs? SQ1
6. Please tell me how you have utilized these various learning supports. SQ1
7. If you are somehow dissatisfied with the services you receive, could you explain how you can voice your dissatisfaction and how it is usually processed? SQ1
8. How are these services different or alike to the services that you received in high school? CQ
9. Could you explain whether or not these services assist in acquiring an equitable education? CQ
10. Please describe your experience with disclosing your disability or self-identify yourself as a disabled student at the university. CQ
11. Please discuss how accessible the curriculum is in your program of study as a student with a disability. CQ
12. How responsive were your professors in facilitating the accommodations outlined by the disabilities support services? SQ2
13. What else would you like to add to your experience with your professors implementing your accommodations in the classroom? SQ2
14. Please tell me about any campus activities that you are currently involved in. SQ3

15. How do you perceive the current levels of inclusive opportunities in student life and academics offered to students with disabilities at the university? SQ3
16. Please tell me about any resources on campus that you can use to help you integrate with the student body? SQ3
17. Describe any situation that resulted in you feeling socially isolated from the student body. SQ3
18. Identify and explain barriers that have impacted access, academic development, and overall performance at the university? CQ
19. If you were able to overcome these barriers, how were you able to do so? CQ
20. Could you explain any organizational barriers in the university's education system that you believe have marginalized students with disabilities? SQ2
21. Could you please discuss any form of stigmatization or discrimination you have experienced due to your disability at the university? SQ2
22. What other services do you believe would be beneficial to you getting an equitable education? SQ1
23. If you could improve one thing about the services that this department provides, what would it be? Please explain why? SQ1

Questions one to nine addresses components of the central question and address sub-question one. These questions sought to understand students' experiences and how they felt about their abilities to access the accommodations provided by the university. These knowledge questions allowed me to fully understand the types of disabilities and the limitations that the disabilities ascribed to each participant. Although I met with the participants before the meeting, I still wanted to ascertain participants' disabilities. It was vital that this information was

documented and recorded so that I could revisit and reference it when trying to complete the data analysis process. It was paramount for me to understand the services that assisted the participants to get an equitable education and understand whether these services were valuable or better than their services in high school. These questions are related to the social justice theory because this theory is concerned with fairness, equity, and access for all in society despite one's disposition (Evans et al., 2017). Education and economic freedom is intricately aligned to social justice, as students with disabilities need to access an equitable education since this inclusion helps to reduce their social isolation and economic dependence significantly (Rubtsov et al., 2017). Thus, through these questions, I was able to decipher whether participants' experiences permeate a social justice issue.

Additionally, questions four to seven helped me gather more information on the university's accommodations development process. Studies show that students with disabilities are often affected by universities' accommodations development process (Easterbrook et al., 2015; Gelbar et al., 2015; Mosia & Phasha, 2017). Students are often excluded from this process, which can be detrimental to their academic progress (Weis et al., 2016). Researchers have noted that although federal registration has facilitated making the university more accessible by addressing the rights of students, there is still a social justice issue of equity and access for these students (Evans et al., 2017). Higher education facilities' services are frequently described as ambiguous and need to be tailored to the students' needs (Mutanga, 2017). Therefore, these questions in this section allowed me to gather information about the procedure participants needed to follow to get the accommodations they need from the disabilities support department. These questions allowed me to assess whether a detailed approach was taken to develop the

participants' services by understanding the assessment protocols and policies and gathering whether these initiatives prove effective.

Questions ten to thirteen and eighteen to twenty-one were vital for answering the central research question and sub-question two. Research continues to show that students with disabilities face immense difficulties when accessing higher education (Bell & Swartz, 2018; Berg et al., 2017; Clouse et al., 2019; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Gilson et al., 2020; McKinney & Swartz, 2020). They experience stigmatization and discrimination, which can have a tremendous impact on their matriculation through a university. It is a social justice issue when institutional barriers and social barriers affect students' inclusivity and success in higher education (Evans et al., 2017). Furthermore, many students with disabilities have to request accommodations, but they may be ambiguous about this process (Langørgen & Magnus, 2018). While they are usually provided with a team that advocates for them in high school and assists them with the development process, this contradicts what occurs at university (McKinney & Swartz, 2020). Hence, although higher education institutions are responsible for disability statements and policies students with disabilities continue to be underrepresented in higher education and experience an increased number of barriers. Students continue to face negative perceptions about their abilities by their lecturers and are stereotyped about courses they should pursue based on their disabilities (McKinney & Swartz, 2020). These negative perceptions of students' abilities can facilitate a social justice issue as it can directly affect students' abilities to be successful (Evans et al., 2017). Therefore, questions ten to thirteen and eighteen to twenty-one helped me gather whether the researched issues are common to participants.

Moreover, questions fourteen to seventeen were aimed at answering sub-question three. Research indicates that students with disabilities often feel aligned by disabilities and experience

issues such as stigmatization and discrimination and may have to withstand negative perceptions and comments by their peers (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Biggeri et al., 2019; Bulk et al., 2017; Bunbury, 2018; Carroll et al., 2020; Couzens et al., 2015; Dunn, 2019; Lovett et al., 2014). For these reasons, I believed it was vital to investigate whether participants in the study felt as though they were able to integrate into life at the university socially. It was critical for me to understand if the university provided accommodations that facilitated the process of integration. By investigating this information, I was able to decipher whether the university was fostering exclusionary democracy, and therefore a social justice issue was apparent.

Lastly, questions twenty-two and twenty-three were vital for me to ascertain what services the participants believed were needed to be implemented by the disabilities support department. It allowed the participants to outline the improvements they think are necessary from their perspectives. The changes they outlined could be shared with the university and used by the officials to improve the services they offered to students with disabilities. This question was necessary since research frequently shows that students with disabilities still need more astute and tailored accommodations to attend to their unique needs (McKinney & Swartz, 2020; Mutanga, 2017).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Moustakas's (1994) modification of Van Kaam's method of analyzing phenomenal data was employed to analyze individual interviews. This analysis process was used as it is considered highly effective in ascertaining the essence of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The data was first transcribed and listed into initial groupings. Since all interviews were recorded, I used transcription software to transcribe the information. It ensured that the information was transcribed accurately by cross-referencing the transcriptions and the recording. Any inaccuracies were rectified. Horizontalizing then took place, where every statement was

taken into account. The process of horizontalizing involved me transferring the transcribed information to an excel spreadsheet. The sheet included participants' pseudonym names, the questions, and their answers.

After that, I began the process of reduction and elimination. Reduction and exclusion will be completed to determine the invariant constituent, the exclusive or unique qualities of the experience. This process was intricate and involved each experience being tested for two requirements; whether it provided details that explained the experience and whether a label could have been deciphered from it (Moustakas, 1994). I began this process by reviewing the information with intentionality and bracketing in and out what was not essential to participants' experience. For this purpose, a bracket in and bracket out column was added to the excel spreadsheet. Coding occurred in this procedure where the information was color-coded to be easily deciphered. I executed a careful review of the information, and the invariant constituents were then checked for validity by reviewing it against participants' records. Emerging themes were then noted from the reduction and coding process, and the themes were added to the excel spreadsheet. After these themes were reported, an individual textual description was provided, with examples that were verbatim transcribed from participants. This information was listed right under each theme, with the names listed next to each quote. Another column was then added that focused on providing a composite textual description, the essence of the experience. This process entailed a careful review of each textual structural description. Both the individual textual description and composite textual description had their columns on the spreadsheet.

Focus Groups

Following the in-depth interviews with students, a focus group was used as a data collection technique. Like individual interviews, a focus group was another platform that allowed

participants to tell about their experiences and the level of inclusivity offered by the university. Only interested participants were provided the opportunity to participate in focus group discussions. A focus group allowed me to gather information from participants in a group setting and decipher different themes. Gathering correct themes in phenomenological research is essential as this type of study aims to get an accurate structural analysis of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Focus groups value the collaboration between the researcher and the participants and enable the researcher to discuss specific and direct topics central to phenomenological research (Kinalsk et al., 2017; Moustakas, 1994). I was able to get varying perspectives in one setting, which resulted in me getting a richer understanding of the various barriers that impeded students with disabilities at universities. Participants were allowed to discuss each other's statements through this process and share their experiences. This process aided in finding commonality between participants and enabled me to capture a wide variety of views in a short period (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). The focus group was recorded and conducted in a private setting.

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe how your experience as a student with disabilities, who received accommodations in high school, differs from your current experience as a student in higher education. CQ
2. How do you perceive the current levels of inclusive opportunities offered by the university? SQ2
3. Discuss whether you believe that the university has developed enough procedural safeguards to facilitate the successful enrollment of students with disabilities. SQ1
4. Describe some measures that the university has taken that you believe have either impeded or facilitated the learning process for students with disabilities. SQ1

5. Describe how effectively or ineffectively you believe lecturers facilitate the learning process and serve students with disabilities. SQ2
6. What advice would you share with lecturers who have not yet encountered students with disabilities? SQ2
7. How effective do you believe the university's curriculum adaption process in serving students with disabilities is overall? SQ2
8. What do you believe is the university's position on students' advocating for their academic development? CQ
9. Identify some problems you have encountered in your efforts to address an issue related to your needs as a student with disabilities who attends the university. CQ
10. What, in your opinion, do you believe is essential for the success of a student with a disability that attends the university? SQ1
11. How accepted are students with disabilities on campus? Please give examples to support your response. SQ3
12. How do students without disabilities usually respond to students with disabilities outside of the classroom? SQ3
13. What are some campus activities that you believe are accommodating for students with disabilities? SQ3
14. How are the activities on campus structured to accommodate students with disabilities? SQ3
15. What structures does the university have in place to help students with disabilities integrate into the student body? SQ3

16. Identify and explain barriers and supports that students with disabilities have encountered at university. CQ

Questions three to four, ten, and eleven to fifteen were critical to understanding sub-question one and sub-question three, which addressed how students felt about the resources offered by the university and their ability to integrate with the student body. The focus group forum provided an excellent opportunity to delve into the practices and policies of the university that impeded or helped students with disabilities matriculate through the university. The participant's perspectives and experiences in this area aligned with the research and understanding the equability of the university's practices. Studies continue to show that although students with disabilities have access to higher education institutions, they tend to be less educated than non-disabled peers (Deuchert, 2017). They tend to have less access to professional degree programs and are often discouraged from applying to programs such as law and medicine (Ndlovu, 2019). They experience exclusion in universities' social life (Gilson et al., 2020). Being excluding from universities can be troubling since an individual's economic progress often correlates with their level of education. Students not being provided with the opportunity to integrate socially can be problematic since being excluded from social life can present a social justice issue.

More importantly, the participants in the study were predominantly African American, a historically marginalized population and a population that often has less economic stability than White Americans (Noël, 2018). These individual's racial background coupled with a disability can be tremendously problematic. Thus, it was essential to ascertain how these individuals were served, and if they were able to integrate at higher education institutions socially and whether it

led itself to inclusivity. These issues present social justice since social justice advocates that equity and access are imperative for social and economic stability.

Questions two and five to seven addressed how students felt faculty responded to their needs and whether participants believed the curriculum effectively responded to their needs. It was central to review the disposition of lecturers since they are critical to serving students with disabilities. While the disabilities support services are responsible for developing students with disabilities accommodation, lecturers are responsible for ensuring that the provided accommodations are effectively enforced (Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Lecturers ensuring that these students' accommodations are enforced are not always done effectively, and research shows that students sometimes find themselves having to figure out how to navigate the curricula (Mosia & Phasha, 2017). Studies have shown that lecturers might respond negatively when students with disabilities seek clarity on a lesson (Ndlovu, 2019). These responses can be detrimental to the academic progression of these students, considering that they often need extra attention and aid because of some of the limitations due to their disability. Developing a positive attitude about the prospects of inclusive education for students with disabilities is central for educators to effectively respond to these students' needs. It becomes a matter of social justice when educators' perceptions and dispositions do not effectively serve the needs of students with disabilities (Shyman, 2019; Evants et al., 2017). For these reasons, it was essential to investigate this issue to ascertain whether lecturers were actively involved in the information dissemination process for these students.

Questions one, eight to nine, and sixteen addressed the central research question. Eight to nine dealt with students' experiences with self-advocating for themselves at the university. Self-advocacy is fundamental to students with disabilities, as these students are often responsible for

advocating for their needs. When students transition from high school to university, they must self-disclose for their needed accommodations (Lovett et al., 2014). The self-disclosing and accommodations solicitation process require some aspect of self-advocacy, which may prove problematic for some students. Students may have to self-advocate to enforce their classroom accommodations if the professors or other university professionals are not responsive (Bunbury, 2018). However, students may encounter attitudinal barriers in the process of advocating for themselves. This barrier may create a social justice issue that university officials should address. It was thus imperative to gather how students were responded to when trying to advocate for the fundamental human right to be educated.

Questions one and sixteen answered aspects of the central question of the research focused on understanding the experiences of students with disabilities. Through these questions, the focus group participants were provided with the opportunity to discuss their experiences at the university. Participants could highlight some of the barriers they faced that impeded their academic progress and how they were treated on campus due to their disabilities. Participants were allowed to have discourse on these questions since research shows that students with disabilities are presented with many barriers in higher education institutions (Bunbury, 2018; Couzens et al, 2015; Dunn, 2019; Lovett et al., 2014; Mutanga: 2017). Students with disabilities continue to face attitudinal and organizational barriers that stall their progression. These barriers must be identified and understood for policy development purposes. However, it was crucial to have these students identify factors they believed would be instrumental to their academic development. The perspectives of these students are often not considered for policy development (Mosia & Phasha, 2017; Mutanga & Walker, 2017). Nonetheless, since these students are the ones that have to utilize the accommodations developed by the university, I believed that their

voices must be considered in the accommodations and policy development process. The process of allowing these students to voice their perspectives can be instrumental in understanding what was needed to provide access and facilitate the fair distribution of research and, ultimately, social justice (Evans et al., 2017).

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan

Similar to the interviews, the focus group information was deciphered using Moustakas's (1994) modification of Van Kaam's analysis method for phenomenological research. The information was transcribed using computer software. The questions, responses, and individual pseudonyms were placed in a spreadsheet. Every statement was then seen as relevant through the process of horizontalizing. Reduction and elimination of non-essential information were then completed through bracketing, where a bracket in and bracket out column was added to the spreadsheet. This information was then color-coded to facilitate clustering and thematizing. Each theme was noted individually on the spreadsheet along with individual textual descriptions, where individual information was listed verbatim. This individual textual description helped to facilitate an individual structural description. A textual structural description then follows the before-mentioned process, which helped provide a composite of the phenomenon, i.e., the essence of individual experiences. The textual structure and the composite were all listed on the spreadsheet.

Letter-Writing

Participants were given a writing prompt as a form of information attainment. Participants were asked to write a letter to a new student who has a disability discussing some of the barriers they may encounter at the university and strategies they could use to navigate these barriers to ensure academic success. I believed that participants should be allowed to undertake such activity for their voices to be heard and to express themselves. They can feel as though they

are making a difference and their opinions were being considered. Writing a letter was an effective technique for me to complete thematic analysis and further understand some of the initial barriers that affected students and how they overcame those barriers. They were given one week to complete their letters. This textual description helped me to effectively understand some of the social injustices students had experienced at university and how they overcame them. It can ultimately help policymakers understand some effective ways to respond to these students' issues to promote social justice.

Letter-Writing Data Analysis Plan

The letter writing data analysis process was based on Moustakas's (1994) modification of Van Kaam's analysis method for phenomenological research. The analysis process was slightly different from interviews and the focus group as the data was not transcribed. Letters were not received from all participants. Outside of this difference, horizontalizing still occurred, where all the information was considered vital to the study. These letters were read intentionally. They were printed, and all of the information in the letters were horizontalized and considered in their entirety. Therefore, reeducation took place where bracketing took place. At that point, an excel spreadsheet was created where the information, which was to be bracketed, was listed. Critical information was color-coded, and notes were placed at the bottom of the spreadsheet to indicate the meaning of the colors. I then completed an individual textual description where information was copied from the letter verbatim. Common themes were highlighted and added to the spreadsheet. This individual textual description helped to create a composite. This composite provided me with vital information regarding the phenomenon.

Data Synthesis

The data synthesis process followed the data analysis process. This process was simplified because of the extensive details carried out in the data analysis process. The

information from the spreadsheets was synthesized intentionally. Coding was a pertinent part of the data synthesis process. Coding involved the data being organized and categorized. A new excel spreadsheet was then created for the synthesis process. The individual textual descriptions from the analysis of the interview, focus groups, and letters were used to develop further themes. These descriptions were placed on the new spreadsheet and then read, coded, and organized according to their commonality. The information was coded in different colors. After that, interpretation will take place, which involved looking at the data and developing sub-themes from the broader themes. The sub-themes developed were listed on the spreadsheet. These themes helped me ascertain a textual structural description in the form of a unified statement that described the essence of participants' experience as it related to the phenomenon as a whole (Moustakas, 1994). Since the information was represented from the vantage point of the theme, all biases, preconceived notions, and judgments were set aside so that an authentic synthesis of the phenomenon emanated from participants.

Trustworthiness

This section will explain trustworthiness in the research. Trustworthiness is central in qualitative research. Trustworthiness is the degree to which a researcher's information is conceptually sound and seen as valuable by other researchers (Carcary, 2020). It includes the degree of rigor in the study and is often viewed as questionable to qualitative research. Trustworthiness includes factors such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Connelly, 2016). These concepts will all be discussed in the proceeding subsections so that readers can understand the degree of validity and objectivity that will be apparent in the study to add to it is trustworthy.

Credibility

I ensured that my investigation was done in alignment with the standards of qualitative research. Ensuring that these standards were followed involved using all of the outlined stipulations presented in qualitative research and outlined by critical researchers such as Moustakas (1994) and Creswell and Poth (2018). Triangulation was used to ensure the credibility of results, and a detailed account was given of the processes used by me to execute the research to facilitate replication. Triangulation is when the researcher collects data from various data sources to compare across sources (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). One of the purposes of research is to uncover the truth to a phenomenon, and using multiple data sources can solidify the validity of this process (Moon, 2019). I used in-depth interviews, focus groups, and personal letters to gather data and facilitate the process of triangulation, and authenticate my results. Triangulation allows multiple questions through different data collection sources (Jentoft & Olsen, 2019). Through this process, I was afforded a holistic view of students' experiences and a more nuanced understanding of how these experiences correlated with social justice.

Transferability

I ensured the transferability of my study by providing a thick description of my research. Transferability was based on methodological rigor, where a detailed description of the research process (Carminati, 2018). I ensured that I provided information that showed that the research findings could be generalizable by using a sample reflective of the desired population. Thick descriptions and explicit connections were made throughout the research process that could facilitate the transferability process.

Dependability

I ensured the dependability of my study by executing several systematic steps. I provided a detailed description of the research process to ensure that it could be replicated. An inquiry audit was executed by the Liberty University dissertation committee and the Qualitative Research Director. The inquiry audit entailed reviewing my data by analyzing the study's procedures (Carcary, 2020). I completed an audit trail to make the information more transparent and the inquiry audit process more manageable for the university officials to confirm the findings in the research.

Confirmability

Bracketing was the first component of ensuring confirmability in the study. I utilized trusted techniques such as triangulation, reflexivity, and audit trail. Triangulation included multiple data collection sources. On the other hand, reflexivity in qualitative research involves the researcher explaining the contextual relationship between his or herself and the participants (Dodgson, 2019). Process explaining contextual relationships meant that I had to explain my experiences with the phenomenon explicitly and how my experiences may have shaped the study's outcome (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process added to the study's confirmability because it allowed the readers to understand and evaluate the similarities and differences between myself and the participants (Dodgson, 2019). This process entailed me bringing to the forefront my unconscious biases to avoid unconscious cognitive errors in the research process. Since I am visually impaired and have experienced many issues and barriers navigating post-secondary institutions, I may have been more receptive to accepting exclusion details. Thus, an audio recording of the interview helped address my biases since the interviews could be transcribed verbatim.

In addition, developing a more participatory approach to the study where members were actively involved in the research process and were allowed to complete member checks aided in diminishing the power difference between myself and the participants. This process facilitates a non-exploitive process. Transparency in every step of the research process as stipulated in the manuscript to address reflexivity (Dodgson, 2019). The social and environmental context of why participants were chosen were be highlighted. I used memo functions to capture reflexive comments on how the research progresses during the data collection process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, for focus groups, an audit trail was used to increase the reliability of the data. Audit trails allow the researcher to trace how they came to a decision (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An audit trail is an essential process that involves researchers keeping a detailed account of their methodology and analysis process and how their decisions and thinking evolved through the research process (Carcary, 2020). Using this information, I promoted transparency in the research process since it established how the study was executed and what lead me to the conclusions. I showed the steps I took from creating the focus groups to developing its findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical consideration was strictly and arduously adhered to through this study to limit the vulnerability of participants. Since I was directly dealing with human subjects, there are many ethical considerations. Ethical consideration was heightened because the participants in the sample had varying disabilities. The study's specific ethical considerations included informal consent, pseudonyms, IRB approval, and the proposed research site approval. Formal consent was not solicited, as this will be done through the university site approval process. Pseudonyms were used for all participants and the site to ensure confidentiality. I ensured that approval was given from the institutional review board before seeking approval from the university where the

study was to be conducted. Approval was then sought from the intended university. I ensured that trust was built and multiple perspectives were ascertained when analyzing the data. The needs, values, and desires of the participants were respected. Anonymity and confidentiality were highly considered. Participants were made aware that their participation was voluntary, and they had the opportunity to withdraw if they were no longer interested in taking part in the study. It was explained that the study posed no physical and mental risk to participants. However, it was explained that they had the opportunity to share their experiences for a monetary fee, which could benefit policy development for students in higher education. Additionally, it ensured that recorded information is stored safely for three years, where it is password protected to provide for confidentiality. The information will then be destroyed after this period, along with any copies made.

Summary

The study had several phases that proved to be essential for the results to be generalized. The research was qualitative phenomenology, which allowed me to ascertain rich and creditability details from the participants. The study followed Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological process. The data collection tools, including interviews, focus groups, and letter writing, allowed me to become engrossed in the participants' lived experiences. The technique outlined for the data analysis enabled me to gather creditable and transferable results. The ethical consideration of dealing with human subjects was diligently addressed. Furthermore, I had to put aside my biased experience to manage and investigate the research topic with impartiality adequately.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore the experiences and needs of students with disabilities in higher education. Phenomenology is focused on the lived experiences of participants as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This systematic approach allowed me to understand the phenomenon and how it influenced participants' experiences. This chapter will illustrate the results of the data analysis in the form of detailed descriptions using in vivo quotes to support the findings. A description of participants and their demographic information will be depicted in tabular form and the themes and sub-themes of the data analysis. Outlier data will be presented and explored, and a narrative within Vivo quotes will be included to answer the research question and sub-questions.

Participants

The study included a sample of 12 university students. All participants were African Americans and were enrolled at the same university. One participant was enrolled in a three years Master's program while the other 11 participants were enrolled in four-year degree programs. Two of the participants had 504s in high school, while the additional ten had IEPs. Participants were recruited by emails with the help of the university's disabilities support coordinator. Due to confidentiality issues, I could not get direct access to participants and was required to go through the disabilities support coordinator.

I first met the disabilities support coordinator on campus to discuss my project. I then emailed him my recruitment letter. While I was on campus, I posted my flyer in the disabilities support office and the student center. My recruitment letter was then emailed to students that received disabilities services at the university by the disabilities support coordinator. While a few participants contacted me directly, a few contacted him directly, and he then provided their

details to me. Due to COVID, I first spoke with participants over the phone to further assess their eligibility and establish rapport. Participants interested and met the criteria were sent the consent form, Zoom link, and interview questions. Participants were asked to return the consent form before the interview. All of the interviews were conducted via Zoom. To further protect anonymity, participants were allowed to have their cameras off. No participants withdraw from the study. Participants' demographics can be seen below in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Major	Type of Disability	Accommodations
Aaron	21	Male	African-American	Computer Technology	Dyslexia	Note taker
Bernard	52	Male	African-American	Sports Management	Dyslexia and Learning disability	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and test. Separate room for testing and frequent breaks and notes from professors
Delsha	20	Female	African-American	Communications	Eating disorder (OSFEB)	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and tests. Frequent breaks
Cassie	20	Female	African-American	Business Management	Severe Anxiety	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and test. Separate room for testing
Aliyah	21	Female	African-American	Public Relations	ADHD and Anxiety Disorder	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and test. Notes from professors
Malachi	51	Male	African-American	Counseling Psychology	PTSD/Depression/Anxiety/Vertigo	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and test. Preferential seating.

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Major	Type of Disability	Accommodations
James	23	Male	African-American	Communications	Visual Impairment	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and test. Preferential seating
Patricia	21	Female	African-American	Biology	Epilepsy	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and test. Separate room for testing.
Joy	20	Female	African-American	Early Childhood Development	Learning disability	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and test. Separate room for testing.
Lashaun	21	Male	African-American	Digital Media Arts	Autism	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and test. Separate room for testing.
Don	22	Male	African-American	Biology	Autism/Aspersers	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and test. Separate room for testing.
Allen	20	Male	African-American	Computer Technology	ADHD	Extended time 1.5 on classwork and test. Separate room for testing.

Results

I ascertained tremendous amounts of information from the data collection tools. I used one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and a letter-writing activity to gather the essence of participants' experiences. Interviews and the focus group were conducted via Zoom. At the same time, participants' letters were received via email. Six participants participated in the letter-writing activity and the focus group. Individual interviews varied from 25-59 minutes, while the focus group was appropriately one hour 30 minutes. Due to COVID restrictions, all interviews were conducted via Zoom. All interviews were conducted in my home office and were

recorded on zoom. I used a voice recorder as a backup tool. My laptop and voice recorder were stored in a secure location to protect students' privacy. Throughout the interviews and focus group, I allowed participants to express themselves without interruption, only asking clarifying questions when necessary.

After gathering the requisite information, I analyzed the data using Moustakas's (1994) modification of Van Kaam's method of analyzing phenomenological data. This approach allowed me to extract themes and sub-themes paramount to students with disabilities' experiences. Since I have a documented disability, it was essential for me to bracket my experience in the analytical process to get an authentic representation of participants' experiences. Moustakas (1994) noted that bracketing allows participants' experiences to be the research center. I used a spreadsheet to complete reduction and elimination and gathered my themes and sub-themes. The themes that emerged from the analytical process were (a) socialization, (b) the importance of accommodations, and (c) university resources. Sub-themes and outlier findings are presented in the narrative form below.

Table 2.

Open-Codes, Themes, and Sub-themes for theme #1

Open-Codes	Frequency of open-code appearance across all data points	Theme	Sub-themes
points	50	Socialization	Social Structure/Environment
Social acceptance	40		Social Integration
Friendly students	20		Self-Advocacy
Campus activities	15		
Individualism	20		
Less supported environment than High school	30		
Advocate	70		
Constant communication	80		
Proactive	40		
Socialization			

Socialization was noted as a central theme to participants' university experiences. Students agreed that despite their disabilities, the university provided a welcoming social environment. This social atmosphere facilitated the process of social integration and a culture that empowered students to self-advocate for their rights and responsibilities. For instance, Aaron advanced that "Excel University does try to be inclusive. It gives an effort to be inclusive. I definitely have to say that. Is it there yet? No, but it definitely does try." Students without disabilities were, for the most part, considered as being welcoming to students with disabilities. When discussing the issue of disability disclosure, Patricia said, "I've gotten better, you know, everyone around me, you know, they accepted it. They don't treat me any different, you know, they treat me like they would treat anybody else." Through varying social organizations, students with disabilities can often participate in the university's social life if they choose, although their

disabilities may sometimes limit their inclusion. Malachi, who is physically disabled, advanced that many of the student activities involved walking “And sometimes some of the building doors, although they’re supposed to have a way of being able to get in with the, you know, the disability opener, some of the doors don’t work.” James, who is visually impaired, noted, “I think there’s a pretty good amount of opportunities for students with disabilities at my college. Of course, there can be more, as always, but I think the things that they have to offer now, they’re good, and they’re also fairly accessible to individuals with disabilities.”

Social Structure/Environment

Participants noted the university’s social structure as providing the opportunity to integrate with their non-disabled classmates. Events held by the university were said to be welcoming to all. Buildings such as the student center provided students with disabilities the opportunity to intergrade with their non-disabled peers. When asked whether she believed the university’s environment was inclusive, Patricia replied, “Oh yeah, very much. I always see like, activities for everybody. I never see anyone being excluded from anything. Everyone is involved in everything, for the most part.”

Social Integration

Results indicated that while some participants found it challenging to form an attachment to other students, others did not find it difficult to integrate socially with their non-disabled peers. It was shown that students with disabilities, for the most part, were not discriminated against by other non-disabled students but sometimes felt that they were treated differently when they revealed their disabilities. Aliyah said, “Honestly, I believe that like everybody’s pretty inclusive, until like, they kind of know like, what your thing is.” She went on to say even when non-disabled students become aware of a student’s disability, they may “speak slower towards you, but they still want you to be included.”

Self-Advocacy

While the university's environment was deemed socially inclusive, students with disabilities must develop a strong sense of self-advocacy to circumvent and respond to the challenges of navigating the social environment. This sense of self-advocacy was pertinent to academic success and ensuring equity for students with disabilities. Delsha said, "Being proactive and communicating our needs is a huge deal for students like us." Joy, who has a learning disability, supported this comment. She posited, "You need to advocate for yourself with the specific accommodations you need, whether it's extra time on test, a reader, or a small setting when taking test."

Students were quick to assert that the concept of self-advocacy was heightened because of the difference between the university and high school environments. All participants received special education services in high school, and they noted that while some accommodations are the same, they are less personalized, and they feel less supported. Most agreed that their teachers in high school were more responsive than their professors in ensuring that their accommodations were implemented with fidelity. For instance, Aliyah indicated that she was in a special needs program in high school. She said, "We had classes every day that help us with coping mechanisms, like how to have organized skills, stuff like that which I felt was more inclusive, hands-on, necessary for me and what I need." Bernard supported Aliyah's statement and the personalized experience provided by high school. He stated, "We had individual teaching. So it was more hands-on as opposed to college where they just send you out to the wolves, and you have to do most of the work and find your own resource."

Table #3

Open-Codes, Themes, and Sub-themes for theme #2

Open-Codes	Frequency of open-code appearance across all data points	Theme	Sub-themes
Self-Acceptance	70	The importance of Accommodations	Disability Acceptance
Self- Disclosure	55		Equality and Access
Accommodations create equity	60		Academic Success
Accommodations needed	120		

The Importance of Accommodations

Students agreed that their accommodations, when implemented, were essential to their academic progression. The importance of accommodations was linked to students' disability acceptance. James said, "Going through school with a disability can be challenging and requires accommodations and other assistance to complete coursework and to go through classes." Some students with disabilities believed that their accommodations could sometimes put them on an equal playing field with their non-disabled peers. They maintained that their accommodations were paramount to responding to the limitations of their disabilities. For instance, Cassie, who suffers from anxiety, when discussing her accommodation, said, "I am a business major, and I have to take many accounting classes. And that requires writing, and you know, doing math. So I do feel like it's very helpful." Concurrently, Malachi stressed, "If I did not have the accommodations, it would have been very difficult for me to complete my school because of my PTSD."

Disability Acceptance

Students were very accepting of their disabilities and did not see it as a detriment to their educational attainment. Joy, who has a learning disability, said, “I embrace my disability; I have it. I can’t change that.” Similarly, Aliyah, who has ADHD and Anxiety Disorder, when referencing students with disabilities, said, “Our disabilities do not limit us.” Students made it known that they were comfortable with themselves and made peace with having a disability. Aaron posited the importance of disability acceptance in his academic journey. He advanced “Because I was born this way. I’m not mad. It makes me understand that I have more faith in myself to get something done more than any other people sometimes.”

Academic Success

Students concurred that their respective accommodations were critical for academic success. While they did not let their disabilities dissuade them from pursuing their educational dreams, they agreed that they needed the necessary support provided by their accommodations to progress academically. They maintained that when the accommodations were enforced with fidelity, they felt a sense of academic security. For example, in discussing how he felt about his accommodations, Allen said, “With these accommodations, I don’t have to feel nervous about if I need some help, I don’t have to feel nervous that I’m by myself. I don’t have to feel like I’m alone. It just makes me feel comfortable.” Aaron, who has dyslexia, reported the sense of security provided by his accommodations. He said, “When I am on the same level when I am getting those services, I do feel more support and being able to accomplish what I need to accomplish. It doesn’t feel like the title is going against me.”

Table #4

Open-Codes, Themes, and Sub-themes for theme #3

Open-Codes	Frequency of open-code appearance across all data points	Theme	Sub-themes
Professors Support/Response	140	University Resources	Disabilities Support Services
Disabilities Support Services Support	70		Professors
Curriculum Access	90		Curriculum

University Resources

Students saw the resources of the university as paramount to their experience. These resources include the Disabilities Support Services, the professors, and the curriculum. Students agreed that these resources could either impede or propel their academic development. Most posited that their academic progress was contingent on whether or not these resources were effectively being executed in a way that supported them. For instance, Aaron explained that “The Disability Support Services help me receive accommodations throughout the school to allow me to pretty much be on the same level and be able to achieve accomplishments just like everyone else.” In discussing his professors’ response, James said, “Most of my professors were very responsive. They didn’t have much issue with carrying out the accommodations.”

Summarily, some students were satisfied with the university’s curriculum access, believed it aligned with their disabilities, and were satisfied with their majors. Delsha, a communication major, stated that she loved her major and that “It’s a really personable major.” She continued and said, “If I had a different major, I don’t feel as though I could be as comfortable with what I’m dealing with.” In addition, when referencing the university’s curriculum access, Malachi, who has PTSD and a physical disability, noted the accessibility

provided by the school's online teaching platform. He posited, "If I'm going through a very difficult time with my disability, I'm able to literally go online and get the work online and participate right from my bed or my desk at home."

Disabilities Support Services

The university's disabilities support services played a crucial role in ensuring that students get the accommodations they need to succeed in their respective majors. Students believed that it was central for them first to ensure that they had these support services before starting their academic journey at the university. For example, Aliyah, a transfer student, said, "That was the first like building I went to. I asked the administration people where's the learning Support Disability Services before they could even tell me because I knew that's something I needed at school."

Students have commented on how welcoming the department was in actively involving them in the accommodations development process. Allen said, "They made it feel like I am the priority, and they helped me out with my accommodations." Delsha explained the support provided by the university's Disabilities Support Coordinator. She said, "The man that was in charge, he reached out a lot. He emailed me, he called me. He was like, is there anything you need? Please don't hesitate to reach out." Yet, Delsha and other participants have expressed their frustrations with the lack of communication and support that this department sometimes does not provide. When asked to complete a letter-writing activity to a new student with disabilities on some of the barriers, they may encounter at university, and how they can overcome those barriers, Aliyah wrote "If you are still finding yourself at odds or further problems, contact your support system; Student Disabilities Services. It is their job to help, accommodate and advocate for your rights." However, she sustained and said, "I will be honest, it is sometimes hard getting in touch with them over emails or phone, go see them in person. You will receive your services."

In explaining his frustrations with the sometimes unresponsiveness of his professors, Bernard expressed his dissatisfaction with the department's degree of advocacy for students. He posited, "Because when I go to tell them something, I've always been directed to go talk to somebody else, as opposed to the person that's supposed to be advocating for me go talk to the professor themselves."

Professors

Students made it unanimously clear that professors played a pivotal role in their academic success. They believed that professors were mainly responsible for the implementation of their accommodations. When professors do not execute his activity effectively, it can create barriers to students' academic development. More specifically, students made it consistently apparent that professors' knowledge and response can result in equity or lack of access. Lashawn, who has Autism, referred to his interactions with his professors as "Mostly positive experience." He went on to say that although it was mostly positive, he did have a few negative experiences. He said, "Like one of my professors, they just like lost patience with me. Like I was struggling. Like, I get chewed out from time to time, but like, I would always push myself to get things done on time." Patricia concurred with Lashawn's experience and asserted while she had to explain her disability to a few of her professors, her experiences were generally positive. She said, "For the most part, all my professors were like, okay, cool, we understand. We got it. Like, I never really had any pushback from any of my professors."

Despite students generally having positive experiences with their professors, many students believed that it was critical that they proactively, constantly communicated with their professors. Students noted the importance of explaining their disabilities to their professors. This explanation was seen as imperative for professors to understand the importance of implementing their accommodations. Aaron posited that it was essential for students with disabilities to

introduce themselves to the professors before class started. He said, “You have to be very consistent and communicate with all your professors to say, Hey, have you received my accommodations for your class? Are you aware that I need such and such?” He noted that introducing oneself was essential. “So when you come into class, they’re not just caught off guard with just notifying that you have any accommodations, or at least they know who you are.”

However, some professors may think that students are dishonest about their condition. Students lamented that even when they sometimes communicated with professors and they may be aware of their accommodations; it may still be challenging to receive the support. This was especially relevant to students who had invisible disabilities. Cassie, in complaining about her professors not being accommodating to her disability in the classroom, said, “A lot of teachers are super lazy, and vindictive, and just like, have bad intentions, you know, they get bored. And they just start acting ridiculous and just disrespectful.” In the focus group discussion, Bernard said, “They don’t want to do their jobs of accommodating, as simple as sending you to the test lab. They don’t want to take the time to do.” Aliyah agreed with Bernard’s comment and discussed her experience with a professor who got annoyed with her for utilizing her extra time and being the last one to finish her exam. She said, “I was the last person in the study hall, and she made me feel like just trash about having a disability. Like that’s why I was wasting her time.”

While many of the students praised and criticized professors’ responses to implementing their accommodations, a few expressed empathy for them based on the number of students that they are required to serve in the classroom. Some students believed that professors’ workload was heavy, and they may be overwhelmed with the number of students in their classrooms. Allen showed empathy for professors’ workload. He said, “But the thing is with the professors;

usually, I would have to tell them, “Oh, I have my accommodations,” because you know how professors are, they have a lot of emails and all that, that all stacks up.” In addition, in providing advice in the letter-writing activity to a new student with a disability entering the university, Patricia counseled, “Do not be afraid to pull your professors to the side and let them know your situation and accommodation. They have a lot of students and a lot of work, so sometimes it may be harder for them to remember you and your accommodation, so give them friendly reminders whenever you feel like they may have forgotten.”

Curriculum

Most participants believed that they were able to navigate the curriculum. Some thought that it complemented their specific disability. For example, Joy, who is studying Early Childhood Development, when asked whether the work in the class is easy for her to complete and understand, said, “Yeah. I especially like a lot of the papers I do.” She continued by saying that her classes have made it “really easily to open up.” James has commented on how easy it is to access the curriculum. He noted that the curriculum in his field was very accessible. He said, “And that’s interesting to note because since I’m in communications, we did a lot of hands-on work with television production with cameras and things of that nature, which, honestly, I mean, that’s not the easiest thing.”

Nonetheless, a few students have noted the inaccessibility of the curriculum because of the teaching styles of some professors. Bernard said, “The problem is, they’re not teaching. They have something else teaching. And they’re not accommodating me because they don’t know how to get into the program themselves.” Hands-on learners such as Aaron and Delsha complained about their professors teaching styles. In the focus group, Delsha said, “It’s really hard for me to focus during lectures. When things are interactive, when things are hands-on, it’s better for me.

I'm not really a sit for two hours and stare at a PowerPoint type of person." Aaron agreed and stated, "Not all can be flexible to actually changing their learning styles. So it's just like sitting there in front of a computer, in front of a PowerPoint for two hours. It's not helpful." He continued and noted that during COVID, "I will go back to look at the lecture since it's recorded. That does help. But if they could try to change something to make some lecture-based more interactive so you are hands-on and do something with it would be helpful." Others like Aliyah have noted how overwhelming the curriculum can sometimes be. She mentioned she had a recent mental breakdown caused by her school workload. She said, "I had a mental breakdown. I shut down. Like school caused me that. Like I was in a low place, dark place."

Outlier Data and Findings

This section will discuss some of the unexpected findings from the study. These findings were interesting and noteworthy as they brought additional dimensions to the study. Several outlier findings included social exclusion by choice, the lack of equality even with accommodations, less support due to the COVID 19 pandemic, and feelings of being more supported in college than in high school. All of these findings will be explored below.

Outlier Finding #1

A few students in the study who were not involved in student life did so by choice or because of the pandemic instead of being excluded or discriminated against. Joy postulated, "Well, I'm not really involved, but this semester, I really want to get involved because, you know, COVID right now. So, it's like, it's really hard to get involved." When asked whether he believed the university was inclusive, Allen said, "Yes, for sure. But even with me, I'm not really the biggest person with the on-campus activities. Mainly because of COVID, because since COVID, it has just been like, I don't really want to go to these." However, it was more of a

social issue for some like Patricia, not COVID. Patricia said, “I’m currently not involved in any campus activities. I have a bit of a social problem. And I think that also comes from my condition, like having the social issue.”

Outlier Finding #2

While an overwhelming number of students believed that equity is ensured by disabilities accommodations implementation, one participant disagreed. Bernard, who has dyslexia and a learning disability, thought that the success of students with disabilities goes beyond accommodations. In exploring whether his accommodations assist him in acquiring an equitable education, he argued, “No, they don’t...you have to want it. I had a cousin, and he had a learning disability, and he dropped out of college because of this. It doesn’t work. People get discouraged.” Similarly, Don said, “Well, I would say it’s a mix of the accommodations as well as putting in a lot of hard work and just focusing on what I needed to do for that course.”

Outlier Finding #3

Students who agreed that their accommodations created equity have said that they have been feeling less supported since the start of the COVID 19 pandemic. The school transitioned to virtual learning, much to the detriment of students with disabilities. Students lamented that it was difficult to get in touch with the various stakeholders and they often felt ignored. For instance, Aliyah articulated, “I’ve been feeling like I’ve been having to do a lot of things by myself during the COVID times. It’s been a very hard time being able - to get in touch.” Aaron upheld that the pandemic has affected his accommodations implementation. He said, “I spend more time actually teaching myself the lecture, teaching myself how to learn different ways that I never imagined, because I knew the professor wouldn’t be available to do that.” Similarly, Bernard posited that he was so affected by COVID and not having the necessary support that he was

forced to withdraw from his classes. He said, “I withdrew out of all of my classes when COVID began because I couldn’t get to talk to them. I couldn’t get to anybody.”

Outlier Finding #4

Although most students felt that they were provided with more support in high school than college, one student felt more supported at the university. He praised the response of his professors. He thought that he had more tools to navigate college, Lashawn said

“So the way the experience in college differs from high school is that we have more tools. We have more opportunities to take the time to focus on the task at hand, and then we can get more resources to answer the questions that we struggle to answer.”

Research Question Responses

My research findings for each of the research questions are articulated below. I begin with answering my central question and then proceed to respond to my sub-questions. All explanations are supported by empirical evidence on the experiences of students with disabilities attending a higher education institution.

Central Research Question

What are the experiences of students with disabilities at a four-year university?

The study results showed that participants are required to navigate a number of barriers to ensure academic success. These barriers include the accommodations implementation process in the classroom, professors’ response and knowledge, and the curriculum adaptation process. Nonetheless, they are able to socially integrate with the student body despite their disabilities. They are required to have a strong sense of self-advocacy and constantly communicate with key stakeholders to get their needed accommodations. Bernard commented, “I’m just determined. Yeah, I have a learning disability. I have three degrees. So what? But, I am going to

get more” (Bernard, Personal Interview, January 19, 2022). On providing advice to students with disabilities in her letter, Patricia said, “One advice I would give is to advocate for yourself; no one knows what you need except you” (Patricia, Letter, January 27, 2022). The university’s Disabilities Support Services and professors played pivotal roles in students’ experience with disabilities. Students indicated that they were actively involved in the accommodations development process and felt supported by the department. For instance, Allen maintained, “When I need it, they’re pretty much on it right there, so I haven’t seen any problems since then” (Allen, Personal Interview, January 13, 2022).

Students have said that professors were responsive with providing them with accommodations in the classroom. Malachi noted, “In my Master’s program, everyone has been very responsive. I have not had any pushback from the accommodations that were given out” (Malachi, Personal Interview, January 28, 2022). Aliyah supported this assertion by stating, “Honestly, most of my professors have been good” (Aliyah, Personal Interview, January 20, 2022). However, students noted that professors’ responses were often contingent on the visibility of their disabilities and the level of student communication. Bernard said, “They just don’t get it. They look at me and say, “You know you don’t look like you have a disability, don’t seem like you have a disability, you’re very smart”” (Bernard, Personal Interview, January 19, 2022). Yet, students noted that when their accommodations are adequately implemented in the classroom and receive the necessary support from professors and the Disabilities Support Services, they can have an equitable educational experience. When referencing the services she received, Joy said, “These services do, like, accommodate me, like, equal to other people that have disabilities” (Joy, Personal Interview, January 21, 2022). Patricia asserted, “I have a tendency to learn a little bit different, you know, because of my condition. So with these accommodations in place, it

helps set me up to be successful, as you know, a student who wouldn't" (Patricia, Personal Interview, January 28, 2022). In addition, Delsha said, "At the end of the day, I feel like it's an equal playing field just because of the extra accommodations. If I didn't have it, it wouldn't be equal at all; it would be hard, it would be a struggle" (Delsha, Personal Interview, January 14, 2022).

Sub-Question One

How do students with different disabilities feel about their ability to access the resources provided by the university? Students with disabilities feel that they can reasonably access the resources provided by the university. They believe that the university's Disabilities Support Services is responsive, for the most part, and they are often able to get their necessary accommodations. Allen said, "They make me feel like I am the priority, and they help me out with my accommodations." James supported this assertion and stated, "If I was ever dissatisfied, I could always contact the Disability Support Services Office or one of the people there and let them know if I was not getting what I needed."

Nonetheless, some participants still lamented on the department's sometimes lack of communication and their advocacy levels. Bernard said, "If I can improve one service, I think that they should be better advocates." Participants complained about the responses of professors in implementing their accommodations. Cassie said, "Although DSS is very much involved and responsive and punctual when it comes to making sure that they do their part in helping me receive my accommodations, but teachers are just lazy." Some participants have asserted that teachers can sometimes make the university's curricula inaccessible in their respective programs. They contended that not accessing the curriculum may result from professors teaching styles. Professors may not want to adjust their teaching styles to accommodate students with disabilities.

In the focus group discussion, Lashawn said, “I feel like that there’s a majority of people that just expect you to learn to a pace that they want you to learn at.” Bernard agreed with Lashawn and retorted “I had a teacher that had a program, and I was having difficulties with the program. She was clearly aware of my disability, and she told me she don’t know how to use the program, and I needed to reach out to the people that made the program.” However, most participants quickly asserted that they enjoyed their respective majors. They contended that their program’s curriculum catered to their disabilities. Participants noted that their majors allowed them to have hands-on learning, which they enjoyed immensely. For instance, Aaron said, “My course major definitely does support me at times with my dyslexia. I’m a hands-on learner. I’m a repetitive learner, so I have to do it multiple times.”

Sub-Question Two

How do students with disabilities feel about faculty members’ response to their accommodations’ implementation process in the classroom? Faculty members’ response to students’ accommodations implementation process in the classroom was highly influenced by their knowledge and the level of communication initiated by the student and the Disabilities Support Services. Though some students were satisfied with professors’ responses to the implementation of their accommodations, participants asserted that they had to constantly communicate with their professors to ensure the accommodations were being implemented. In her letter-writing activity advising a student with a disability on how to overcome barriers at the university, Patricia said, “Although you should not have a stubborn professor, always keep a paper trail (email, text, etc.) just if you need to go above them to get what you need.” Delsha noted that she constantly has to vouch for herself to get her extra time in class, and she does this

by calling or talking in person with her professors. However, she said, “But whenever it comes to having to leave a trail, email is the best way because professors can get amnesia.”

Participants have asserted that professors’ response is sometimes contingent on their knowledge and visibility of students’ disabilities. Students felt that faculty members sometimes doubted the legitimacy of their disability, and this was reflected in how they responded to students. Bernard said, “I feel very chastised by the fact that they think I'm lying and I have proof, and you have to fight, and yes, I do advocate for myself all the time.” Aliyah supported Bernard’s comment and said, “I feel like if you don’t show up in a wheelchair or showing that you have something wrong, I feel they don’t take it seriously.” James, who is visually impaired, noted that he was only taken seriously after walking with his cane, validated Aliyah’s assertion. James said, “I think when I use the cane a bit more, there was more, more responsiveness and more quickness on the response time of professors when providing accommodations.”

Sub-Question Three

Do students with disabilities feel as though they are able to socially integrate with the student body? Most students with disabilities felt that they are able to integrate with the student body successfully. They thought that the university provided opportunities for social integration, and other students were open to socializing with them despite their disabilities. When discussing his comfort level with integration with the student body, Allen said, “From my experience, I met a lot of students that also have ADHD, so it doesn’t really make me feel less different from the other students. I just felt comfortable; I felt comfortable. I didn’t feel like I was different from the other man.”

A few of the participants were actively involved in student life. Despite their disabilities, these participants indicated leadership roles in their social endeavors. Malachi, for instance, was

the university's Graduate Student President, while Aliyah and Delsha were both members of the school's radio station. However, while participants were quick to state that the university's social life was open to students with disabilities, Malachi, who is physically disabled, noted that the venues where social activities are often held are sometimes challenging to access. He said, while the university was inclusive and did an excellent job of accommodating students with disabilities, "However, I found myself sometimes walking from the Student Center, all the way to the field, to the football field, which is a nice little walk." He continued that the walk to the field can sometimes leave him exhausted. He said, "And by the time I get to the field, I'm not able to do too much of anything because my back is – that's too much."

Summary

It was clear that the university's social structure provided a socially inclusive environment that allowed students with disabilities the opportunity to intergrade with their peers successfully. Through university resources such as the Disabilities Support Services, students can receive their needed accommodations to supplement the limitations posed by their disabilities. Students with disabilities viewed these accommodations as essential for academic success. However, these students still experience issues with faculty members implementing their accommodations in the classroom with fidelity and the Disabilities Support Services advocacy level on their behalf. The curriculum may pose problems for students when faculty members do not differentiate instruction or provide the needed accommodations. When this occurs, students with disabilities feel they are not provided with an equitable educational experience. Thus, students must constantly communicate and have a strong sense of self-advocacy to ensure that they receive their needed accommodations. This sense of self-advocacy

correlated with their acceptance of their disabilities and commitment to fulfilling their academic goals.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences and needs of students with disabilities in higher education. Chapter five will begin with a discussion of the study's key findings. After that, an interpretation of findings will take place, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, and limitations and delimitations will follow. The chapter will then conclude with recommendations for future research and a summary.

Discussion

This section will be focused on discussing the central findings of the study. It will start with interpreting the thematic finding, including socialization, the importance of accommodations, and university resources. After that, implications for policy and practice that entails students with disabilities university attendance will be discussed. Thereafter, themes and sub-themes gathered will be addressed in alignment with the study's theoretical overview. Factors that impeded the study will then be explored, and recommendations for future disability research in higher education will be articulated.

Interpretation of Findings

I discovered three themes and several sub-themes from the data analysis process. These themes included socialization, the importance of accommodations, and university resources. These themes were followed by sub-themes that expanded on the essence of the overarching themes. These themes and sub-themes were seen as critical to participants' experiences. When it came to socialization, participants felt as though the university provided a socially inclusive environment that provided them with the opportunity to integrate with the student body easily

socially. In comparison, students felt that their accommodations, when implemented with fidelity, provided them with an equal playing field to that of their non-disabled peers. Students felt that the university resources such as the Disabilities Support Services, professors, and the curriculum played pertinent roles in their overall academic experiences. These resources either impeded or facilitated the learning process for students. Interpretations of themes and sub-themes will further be provided below.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The question guiding this transcendental phenomenological study was: what are the experiences of students with disabilities at a four-year university? Since the study was phenomenological, this question proved valuable to gathering the essence of participants' higher education experiences. Three sub-questions followed this central question. These questions are as follows:

SQ1: How do students with different disabilities feel about their ability to access the resources provided by the university?

SQ2: How do students with different disabilities feel about faculty members' response to their accommodations' implementation process in the classroom?

SQ3 Do students with disabilities feel as though they are able to socially integrate with the student body?

Twelve university students were interviewed with varying disabilities. They all participated in individual interviews, while six participated in a focus group and a letter-writing activity. An analysis of the data showed that socialization, the importance of accommodations, and university resources were all seen as pertinent to students' academic experience. The sub-themes reflected in socialization included the social structure/environment, social integration, and self-advocacy. Students felt that the university's environment was very inclusive and they

did not feel discriminated against by other students because of their disabilities. However, since the environment was seen as vastly different from high school, students were required to develop a strong sense of self-advocacy to address some of the environment's impediments to their educational experience. The importance of self-advocacy in higher education is not surprising since many studies have shown that this trait is essential for academic success (Cheatham & Randolph, 2020; Easterbrook et al., 2015; Gilson et al., 2020).

Students with disabilities see their accommodations as vital to their academic development. The sub-themes that emerged from the importance of accommodations included disability acceptance, equity, and academic success. Students accepted that they had disabilities and believed they needed their accommodations to create an equitable learning environment. They thought that the equity provided by their accommodations facilitated academic success, which was shown in other studies (García-González et al., 2020; Gavira & Moriña, 2015; Smith et al., 2019).

Lastly, students felt that the university's resources play a pivotal role in their academic journey. Sub-themes ascertained from university resources included Disabilities Support Services, professors, and curriculum. Students posited that the accommodations provided by the Disabilities Support Services were invaluable, and though the department was unresponsive at times, they still appreciated their accommodations and support. Concurrently, many students felt that their professors were responsive in supporting them in the classroom. Still, they had to constantly communicate and educate them to ensure their accommodations were implemented in the classroom. Students reported that the curriculum in their various majors often catered to their disabilities. However, they may occasionally experience difficulties understanding the content because of their professors' teaching styles. Issues related to the learning environment and the

teaching styles of professors have been dominant themes in disabilities research (Bell & Swart, 2018; Gavira & Moraña, 2015; Gow et al., 2020; Moraña & Orozco, 2020; Mutanga, 2017; Norris et al., 2019; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019).

Accommodations: Equity and Academic Success. The theme and sub-themes gathered made it unanimously clear that students with disabilities believe that accommodations are central to creating equity and academic success. Students were provided the opportunity to take part in individual interviews, a focus group, and a letter-writing activity. The majority of students kept reiterating how imperative it was for them to continually communicate with their professors to ensure their accommodations were being enforced with fidelity. I saw a correlation between students' acceptance of their disabilities and how important they felt their accommodations were to their academic progression. I believe these findings may be interpreted as students with disabilities thinking that they cannot have an educational experience that facilitates academic progression unless they are provided with the necessary support services. For instance, Aaron voiced his frustrations with sometimes not receiving his accommodations, as he feels he is more supported and able to accomplish more academically when they are provided. He articulated, "When receiving these accommodations, I believe it does put me on an equal playing field at times. I say at times because you always don't receive your note taker. You always don't receive your accommodations when you need them." There is empirical evidence to support the importance of accommodations for students with disabilities' academic success at university. These studies suggest that accommodations are invaluable to supplementing the limitations caused by their disabilities and providing opportunities for academic success (Ehlinger & Ropers, 2020; Langørgen et al., 2018; Moraña & Perera, 2018).

Self-Advocacy Central for Academic Progress. Throughout the study, it was highlighted how vital students believed they needed to advocate for themselves. Students stated that they had to constantly communicate with professors to ensure that their accommodations were being enforced in the classroom. Aliyah, who has ADHD and Anxiety, noted that she considers herself very reserved and shy but still indicated that she was an “extremist” when it came to her accommodations. She asserted she will go to whomever it takes to enforce her accommodations if it is not done adequately. Aliyah said, “I will go to Provost or the president’s office herself. I need answers, and I will find answers.”

I found this interesting since many participants were under 21 years old, and some were relatively new to the university arena. These students received special education services in high school and posited that they felt more supported in high school. Thus, it may be interpreted that because students would have received special education services, they considerably understand the need to ensure that their accommodations are provided to them. Self-advocacy has constantly been shown imperative for students’ education and has been linked to higher GPAs and academic success (Holzberg et al., 2018; Pfeifer et al., 2020).

Visible Disabilities More Accepted. Ten out of twelve of my participants had invisible disabilities, and all lamented how difficult it is to get their needed accommodations because of their physical appearance. Participants indicated that teachers thought they were often dishonest and held them to the same standard as students without disabilities. For example, most of my participants who have invisible disabilities complained of how they have to prove that they have a disability and constantly communicate with their professors. Intersecting James and Malachi, who have visible disabilities, noted how responsive their professors were in implementing their accommodations in the classroom. When referring to his accommodations, Micah said, “They

never at the university, they never challenge them, you know, which was very positive.” Students with invisible disabilities felt disturbed that teachers held them to the same standard as their non-disabled peers because they knew they could not function without the necessary support. Or rather, their academic journey would be further challenging because of the absence of their accommodations. This may be interpreted as faculty members being more responsive when they can see the actual nature of the student’s disability. This finding is not surprising since studies have shown that professors lack a general understanding of invisible disabilities, and professors tend to be more agreeable to providing accommodations when the student’s disability is visible (Abed & Shackelford, 2020; Gow et al., 2020; Mullins & Preyde, 2013; Pearson & Boskovich, 2019).

Implications for Policy or Practice

The literature supports the importance of students with disabilities being supported with their needed accommodations to facilitate equity and access. Yet, students with disabilities still find it challenging to ascertain the necessary accommodations from the various parties at their respective higher education institutions. Thus, federal and state policies must be enacted, and institutional practices must be altered and addressed to afford students support and equal access. This section will focus on articulating the study’s implications for policy and practice.

Implications for Policy

Though the Americans with Disabilities Act supports individuals with disabilities accessing various institutions and being ascribed accommodations, the study results showed that this federal mandate does not guarantee equity. Students with disabilities still experience many challenges getting access to their needed accommodations and having the support of pertinent institutions. This act needs to be amended to include further procedural safeguards beyond the

mere provision of accommodations. Additional protocols need to be set at the state and federal levels that ensure the unequivocal provision of these services required by the various stakeholders. Implementing federal protocols would mean ascribing more severe penalties for institutions and organizations that do not provide individuals with disabilities the requisite accommodations. These sanctions could be in the form of higher fines or judicial subjugation for individuals or institutions that do not ensure an equitable educational experience for students with disabilities.

Implications for Practice

Though the study only included African Americans and was executed at a Historically Black institution, the findings may apply to other institutions serving students with disabilities from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. The study showed that students with disabilities could access their accommodations through state institutions governed by federal and state laws. However, these accommodations were not implemented with fidelity. Many professors were still reluctant to ensure students get the needed support, even when pressured by students themselves. Thus, it may be admissible to say that organizations must develop practices that hold individuals who work with students with disabilities more accountable to ensure that these students are provided with their needed support services in the classroom. The study showed that faculty members' response was contingent on the visibility of students' disabilities. This act may be a clear indicator that training is needed to educate faculty members not only on disability laws but on how to accommodate students with various disabilities. Such an initiative undertaken by the university and other universities may be invaluable to ensuring equity and access for students with disabilities.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The study has both theoretical and empirical implications, which will be discussed in this section. Subheadings were provided to deliver more clarity to subtopics gathered from each implication. The theoretical implications related to social justice will be explored, and thereafter I will articulate how the study corroborates or supports previous studies through descriptions of the empirical implications.

Theoretical Implications

Through my study, I covered the main points of social justice. When it came to accessing resources, equity, and participation, all of my participants agreed that they were provided the opportunity for an education, which was considered a human right. The results indicate that they were provided access to resources, including their accommodations. Access to the university resources indicated by students sometimes facilitated equity. The findings revealed that students could integrate with the student population, which facilitated participation socially. However, students still encountered some injustices.

While most of my participants agreed that their professors were somewhat responsive, they still expressed having equitable educational experiences. From professors being unwilling to adjust their teaching style to responding to students with disabilities' unique needs. These factors all present problems that culminate in advancing social injustice. Interestingly, this social injustice occurs at a school with African Americans and predominantly African American faculty members. Thus, it may be said that the study shed new light on the theory in showing that social justice may not be guaranteed by the mere fact of an individual attending an institution where faculty members are predominantly of the same race. The study showed the importance of self-advocacy in promoting social justice. While the social justice theory focuses on equity and

access, the study made it clear that social justice may only be ascertained when individuals are proactive and consistent. Through these features of self-advocacy, most students were able to get the necessary support that placed them on an equal educational playing field to that of their peers. More specifically, they were able to get social justice. Because of the before-mentioned indicators, I believe that my theoretical framework of social justice was appropriate for the study.

Empirical Implications

My findings' covered many of the topics highlighted in my literature reviews, such as barriers students with disabilities experienced in higher education, universities' response to students with disabilities, which included lectures dispositions towards students with disabilities, accommodations implementation, and curriculum design. Thus, the study corroborates and confirms previous research findings on individuals with disabilities. Like other studies, my study showed that individuals with disabilities experience many difficulties navigating higher education. These difficulties can often create barriers that can affect inclusion and access. For instance, Bell and Swart (2018) and Norris et al. (2019) showed that students with disabilities experienced tremendous difficulties accessing the curriculum and issues related to professors' responsiveness. Students in my study experienced these issues and voiced their frustrations on their professors' sometimes lack of responsiveness. My study showed that faculty members seemed to respond more to students with visible disabilities. The notion of faculty members being more responsive to these types of disabilities was proven in studies conducted by Mullins and Preyde (2013), Pearson and Boskovich (2019), and Smith et al. (2019), where the researchers showed that faculty members thought that there was a legitimacy to visible disabilities.

However, my study does extend previous studies. Although my research validated the findings of previous studies, it is unique in the sense that it only includes participants who would have received special education services in high school and university. All participants were African Americans, and the study was conducted at a Historically Black College. On the other hand, many of the previous studies reviewed were conducted either overseas or at predominantly white institutions. These studies did not indicate whether their participants received special education services in high school. Thus, the findings in my research can be invaluable and contribute to not only the field of disabilities research but studies focusing on equity and access for African Americans.

In addition, my distinct methodological design of letter writing allowed participants to provide a representation of themselves without feeling pressured by the presence of someone else. This exercise allowed me to get a thick depiction of participants' experience as a student with a disability. This design shows researchers the importance of enabling participants to express themselves in the written form without feeling impeded by the researchers' presence, as it can help researchers ascertain rich data.

Limitations and Delimitations

The study had a few limitations and delimitations. Firstly, I was limited because I could not get direct access to participants. Due to confidentiality issues, I was forced to depend on the Disabilities Support Coordinator to solicit my participants. I would have preferred to solicit participants without the school's coordinator being directly involved because of the study's sensitivity. Secondly, I was limited by my sample. A more diverse sample would have added some interesting findings to the study. It would have been interesting to explore the educational experience of individuals of different racial backgrounds at a historically black college. Thirdly,

due to COVID, I was required to conduct interviews via Zoom, and the cameras were off, as opposed to in personal interviews where participants' facial expressions could be seen.

On the other hand, I believe that the delimitations of the study did not negatively influence the research. I think that the rationale behind decisions made to limit or define the scope and focus of the study was invaluable to gathering participants' authentic educational experiences of students with disabilities. The sample criteria dictated that participants were required to be 18 years old, have received special education services in high school, be enrolled, and receive support services at the university. Because of the age minimum, I did not have to seek permission from parental authorities and was allowed to hear the perspectives of individuals with disabilities that started universities at varying points. I was able to decipher the difference between the services students received in high school and their university experiences with support services.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the limitations and delimitations of my study, I would highly suggest that studies focus on researching a more diverse sample. While I believe it was great to gather information from only African American participants, a researcher can collect a great deal of data with a more diverse population from another historically black college or higher education institution. I would recommend researchers including students and faculty members in further research. Researchers can establish an even deeper understanding of students with disabilities' experiences and the factors that influence these experiences when the perspectives of these key stakeholders are reviewed along with students. Additionally, it would be interesting to observe these students in the classroom. Many students noted how unresponsive professors could be in implementing their accommodations; as such, through observation, I think researchers can get a

unique view of how students' accommodations are being implemented and whether or not they are being implemented faithfully.

Conclusion

The study was transcendental phenomenological and focused on exploring the experiences and needs of students with disabilities in higher education. The theoretical framework guiding the study was that of the social justice theory. The finding in the study suggests that though individuals with disabilities may be provided with accommodations, they still experience barriers related to the professors' response and the curriculum. Students may find the curriculum inaccessible because of professors' teaching styles and their unwillingness to ensure that students' accommodations are implemented with fidelity. They may experience barriers related to communication with the disabilities support services and the university faculty members. These barriers can affect students with disabilities' academic progression. Thus, students are required to have a strong sense of self-advocacy to navigate the barriers posted by their universities. Their emphasis on self-advocacy is driven by their need to be academically successful and the acceptance that their accommodations are needed to fulfill their academic endeavors.

Nevertheless, although students may experience difficulties with equitable academic access, the study results showed that students are still able to integrate with the student population socially. The study suggests that students are not discriminated against by their peers and often feel socially accepted despite their disabilities. Participants were adamant that the university provided a socially inclusive environment that made them feel accepted despite their disabilities.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval

December 10, 2021

Alanka Babb
Ellen Ziegler

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY21-22-377 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS OF DISABLED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Dear Alanka Babb, Ellen Ziegler:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: December 10, 2021. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B
Request for Permission

July 23rd, 2021

Dr. Anika Bissahoyo
Assistant Vice President for Research
Bowie State University
14000 Jericho Park Road
Bowie, MD 20715-9465

Dear Dr. Bissahoyo,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education. The title of my research project is A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences and Needs of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education and the purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of these students.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at Bowie State University. Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email.

Sincerely,

Alanka Babb
Ph.D. Candidate

Appendix C

Permission Approval

MEMORANDUM

TO: Ms. Alanka Babb
 Researcher/Investigator
 Department of Education
 Liberty University

Cc.: Dr. Anika C. Bissahoyo
 Assistant Vice President for Research & IRB Administrator
 Office of Research & Sponsored Programs
 Bowie State University

Ms. Pamela Ann Moses
 BSU Research Compliance Manager
 Office of Research & Sponsored Programs

FROM: Dr. Benjamin Arah *BA*

 Professor & Chair, BSU-Institutional Review Board (IRB)
 Department of History & Government

DATE: September 4, 2021

RE: BSU-IRB Number 17-004 (2021-2022)/Approval Letter

Please be advised that the members of Bowie State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) have reviewed your project's application for renewal. It is my pleasure to inform you that your project, titled "A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences of Students with Disabilities at University," is hereby approved in accordance with 45 CFR 46 requirements and the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects consistent with the institution's guidelines or procedures. This approval was based on the Exempt Review Categories 1-4. Always reference the above-cited IRB application number in your future communications with the BSU-IRB regarding this particular research.

We are cognizant that your research focuses on a particular population of students at Bowie State University (18years and above), among African Americans, with disabilities and receiving some kinds of accommodation considerations at this institution (site for your project). For this reason, we strongly recommend that you immediately contact and collaborate your research activities with Dr. Michael Hughes, who is the Coordinator of Disability Support Services at Bowie State University, and he can be reached via email.

Recruitment/Consent: For research requiring written informed consent, please adhere to the IRB approved principles, guidelines and procedures as provided and treat each participant with

utmost regard and courtesy (as a human being). The IRB approval expiration date has been reserved, and you can secure the copies of the Consent Form used for this research and this memorandum for no more than three years after the completion of your said research study.

Unanticipated Problems or Adverse Events any Participants: The investigators must clearly and promptly report any unanticipated concerns, problems, adverse events, or accidents involving the subjects and/or any other persons in the course of conducting and completing this project.

Please bear in mind that the IRB Chair may not provide additional copies of this approval document, if or when several years have elapsed from the time of its first approval and issuance. Please be advised of the following information:

Original Approval Date:	September 4, 2021
Expiration Date (one year):	September 3, 2022
Type of Application:	Initial Application
Type of Research:	Exempt Categories
Type of Review for Application:	Expedited Review

Once again, congratulations to you (and your team) and best wishes in your effort to complete your research study. If you have any IRB-related questions or concerns, please contact:

Dr. Anika C. Bissahoyo
Assistant Vice President for Research & IRB Administrator
Office of Research & Sponsored Program @ BSU
Bowie State University

Appendix D

Recruitment Poster

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS OF DISABLED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
-
- Are you a student at the university?
-
- Did you receive special education services in high school?
-
- Do you receive disabilities support services at the university?

If you answered **yes** to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research is to describe the experiences of students with disabilities in receiving accommodations at a higher education institution.

Participants will be asked to take part in an interview, focus group, and complete a letter-writing activity. Each activity will take approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Participants will receive a \$30 gift card for each procedure that they participate in.

The study is being conducted via zoom at the link below

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://pgcps->

[org.zoom.us/j/4387942222?pwd=RkZlVzQ3WUFsMVJyUVJxdytSdTAYdz09](https://pgcps-org.zoom.us/j/4387942222?pwd=RkZlVzQ3WUFsMVJyUVJxdytSdTAYdz09)

Meeting ID: 438 794 2222

Passcode: 166770

One tap mobile

+13017158592,,4387942222#,,,,*166770# US (Washington DC)

+13126266799,,4387942222#,,,,*166770# US (Chicago)

Alanka Babb, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.
Please contact Alanka Babb for more information.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

Appendix E

Consent

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study on the Experiences and Needs of Disabled Students in Higher Education

Principal Investigator: Alanka Babb, Ph.D. Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a current university student with a documented disability (i.e., any physical or mental impairment that severely limits an individual's ability to perform a normal life function), have received special education services in high school, be 18 years of age or older, and receive support services at your university. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of students with disabilities in receiving accommodations at a higher education institution. At this stage in the research, disability will be generally defined as a physical or mental impairment that impedes an individual from effectively executing a normal life function.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Be willing to be interviewed. Interviews will be approximately forty-five minutes to an hour. Interviews will be audio-recorded and conducted on Zoom.
2. Be willing to participate in a focus group. This group will be held for approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. Six participants will be provided the opportunity to participate in focus group discussions and will be selected randomly. The focus group will be audio-recorded and conducted on Zoom.
3. Be willing to write a letter to a new student who has a disability and discuss some of the barriers they may encounter at the university and strategies they can use to navigate these barriers to ensure academic success. The letter-writing opportunity will only be provided to six participants who will be selected randomly. The letter must be emailed to me.
4. Be willing to review your interview transcript for accuracy.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include the information being used as a reference for policy development and studies that focus on understanding the plight of minorities and how to serve them better.

Educational institutions working with students with disabilities can use this study as a mechanism to see some of the necessary accommodations needed for students with disabilities to thrive academically.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews and the focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will receive a \$30 VISA gift card for each data collection procedure that they participate in, which includes the interview, the letter-writing activity, the focus group, and the transcript review. The gift cards will be emailed to participants after each procedure that they participate in.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Alanka Babb. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her. You may contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ziegler.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher[s], you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515, or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subject's research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date