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Resilience Factors in Students With Disabilities at a Portuguese State University

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Annotation. The study aims to investigate resilience factors identified in students with disabilities at a Portuguese public university. Resilience, self-esteem, family support, subjective well-being, and psychological well-being are protective factors that contribute to a good adaptation and better inclusion in higher education. Accessibility conditions on campus continue to present barriers that hinder mobility and the students' academic experience.

Keywords: *inclusive education, students with disabilities, higher education, resilience factors, Portugal.*

Introduction

Following the consolidation of global policies resulting from the implementation of inclusive policies (UNESCO 1994, 2017), the access of students with disabilities into Higher Education (HE) has been increasing (Aguirre et al., 2021; Morgado et al., 2017).

As an educational movement, inclusion is based on the need for HE institutions to change their cultures and practices in order to ensure adequate education for all students. Inclusive educational institutions should seek to develop the skills and competences of all students (Melero et al., 2020).

Several studies have been conducted to analyse the inclusion of students with disabilities in HE (Biggeri et al., 2020; Firat, 2021). While some students seem to succumb to the barriers, they encounter in HE, others are able to cope successfully, overcoming difficulties and succeeding academically. According to the researchers,

resilience is conceptualized as a developmental process that allows the subject to be able to face adversity through risk management, enhanced by the quantity and quality of the protective factors that it is able to mobilize. This process is operationalized throughout the life course, enhances the use of both the subject's internal and external resources, and allows them to achieve a positive adaptation despite adversities (Edwards et al., 2022; Rutter, 2012).

Research on resilience reveals that many students with disabilities in HE have individual abilities that facilitate positive development and mitigate the difficulties and obstacles they encounter in their academic path. In addition to these individual abilities, environmental resources such as parental support, relationships with other adults and peers also facilitate the positive development of these students (Piers & Duquette, 2016).

The literature shows an increasing number of studies in this area, although it should be noted that there is a relative scarcity of studies that analyse these issues from the perspective of students with disabilities. This research aims to carry out an in-depth analysis of the complex realities that students with disabilities face on a day-to-day basis in their experiences in HE institutions. We are particularly interested in analysing the resilience factors, difficulties, challenges identified by students with disabilities at a Portuguese public university.

Background: Portuguese Universities and Disability

Educational support for students with disabilities in Portugal, as in other countries, has been evolving in recent decades, with a growing number of students entering HE (Melo & Martins, 2016). Indeed, universities have witnessed profound transformations arising from attention to student diversity and from principles of inclusive education.

Although Portuguese law provides for student access to HE, the students still face many adversities and obstacles in their pursuit of permanence and success. As a result of this new reality, universities have implemented institutional measures to respond to all students, contributing to academic success and work transition. Many universities have created support services to ensure academic support for students with disabilities through tutoring, curriculum adjustments, provision of materials and technologies, provision of furniture and adapted transport. These support services also aim to advise the academic community through awareness raising and training to ensure the inclusion of students with disabilities (Melo & Martins, 2016).

In accordance with the Portuguese legislation, everyone has the right to education with a guarantee of equal opportunities for access and academic success. To implement the principles of inclusive education, the university where the present study was carried out, created the Support Office for Students with Special Educational Needs. This office aims to support students with disabilities based on the recognition of the right to

difference, without giving up the normal quality parameters of the teaching and learning process. The inclusion protocol for Students with Special Educational Needs aims to ensure conditions for all students to have an equal and quality education, that all students have access to an education that respects their needs and characteristics, and intends to facilitate students' transition to active life with autonomy and independence.

Barriers to Inclusion

Numerous studies found that the barriers to inclusion faced by students with disabilities can be personal and communicational, institutional barriers related to physical and architectural structures, attitudinal barriers, and the availability and use of teaching equipment and resources. Barriers in physical and architectural structures are important obstacles for students with limited mobility (Odame et al., 2019). A lack of ramps, or ramps that are too steep, low sidewalks, narrow doors in rooms and laboratories, inaccessible auditoriums, lack of visual and tactile signage, no lifts or lifts that are too narrow, classrooms and laboratories with unsuitable wheelchair-accessible desks, unadapted toilets, absence of parking are some of the many barriers that students face in their daily life at university (Zabeli et al., 2021).

Attitudinal barriers, which can range from express rejection to more hidden rejection, arguing that universities and faculty members are not prepared for students with disabilities, seem to be the hardest to overcome. Indeed, the non-admittance of students with disabilities by HE institutions is often expressed by a feeling of insensitivity, associated with a negative perception of their abilities and competences (Zabeli et al., 2021).

According to Spörer et al. (2020) the success of inclusive education implies not only changes in structural and accessibility factors, but above all, profound changes in the attitudes of the academic community.

Aid for Inclusion

Although most studies tend to identify more obstacles than aids, there are several facilitators for students with disabilities which can contribute to their permanence and success. Among the facilitators, family support, friendships and peer support networks, support from faculty members, as well as services for students with disabilities can be highlighted, or personal support, referring to the personal strategies for facing difficulties in their daily lives at university (Melero et al., 2020).

Protective factors, related to personal, family and social characteristics, act as support and protection against changes and risks in life. Thus, it is important not to focus exclusively on the individual, but rather broaden the perspective and also analyse social and community variables (Rutter, 2012).

Academic Success and Students with Disabilities

Regarding academic success, the scientific literature has revealed that students with disabilities also mention pedagogical barriers, which are decisive in achieving academic success (Melero et al., 2020). In fact, many pedagogical barriers are still present, and the faculty members also face many difficulties, dealing with the diversity, requiring flexibility and adaptation to their teaching and assessment methodologies (Bunbury, 2018). On the basis of these difficulties, some researchers report on a negative perception regarding the disability and special needs of students with disabilities and, consequently, a disbelief in their abilities, reflecting the still very prevalent understanding in society in general (Ryder and Norwich, 2019; Zabeli et al., 2021). Notwithstanding these difficulties, some studies have suggested the importance of mediator variables associated with the student, which may constitute factors for academic success and psychological adjustment or as risk and vulnerability factors. Indeed, personal characteristics, in particular resilience to challenges in less favourable contexts, self-esteem, social support, subjective well-being, and psychological well-being, seem to be the main determinants of adaptation and protection regarding to the academic success of students with disabilities in HE (Rutter, 2012).

Resilience for Academic Success

Resilience has been conceptualized as an adaptation process, implying psychological changes when the subject is faced with adversity, tragedies, threats or other significant sources of stress (Rutter, 2012), constituting a possible justification for the apparent paradox of adversity and adaptation in life. Psychological resilience develops through adaptive relationships between the characteristics of the individual (e.g., personality, self-regulation mechanisms, namely coping and self-efficacy beliefs) and context (e.g., educational, leisure, health care and other social resources), throughout the individual's life history, resulting in a constellation of personal resources (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2014). These personal resources, in interaction with other available social resources, provide the ability to overcome difficulties and adversities and promote the development of the individual. Resilience, understood as a process of adaptation, is fundamental for students with disabilities to be able to face more effectively the various adversities they may encounter in HE. Thus, it is possible to argue that many of the students with disabilities are considered resilient people, since throughout their lives they had to face several adverse situations and managed to overcome many of these barriers.

In order to overcome these difficulties and obstacles, several studies reported that self-esteem and social support are crucial. The academic achievement of students with disabilities is further attributed to individual effort and to the social support the students received (Alexandrino et al., 2016).

Self-esteem is considered as the positive or negative orientation of each individual towards himself/herself, conceptualised as one of the components of self-concept. Self-esteem is generated from social interactions and results from the subject's perception

of himself/herself and how others see him/her, influencing appreciation, personal and professional trust in the individual's life and relationships (Rosenberg 1989).

Social support is a multi-dimensional concept that expresses the availability of people who show concern and value us as individuals. The concept of social support recognises the various forms of support provided by family members, friends, neighbours, and others (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2014).

Furthermore, psychological well-being seems to be important for inclusion and successful adaptation to HE. For Diener (2000), subjective well-being consists of the appreciation that the person makes of himself/herself and his/her life, and this assessment is based on lived experiences, whether positive or negative. It is a complex concept that integrates two different dimensions, the cognitive dimension and the affective dimension. Ryff's concept of psychological well-being aims at self-fulfilment, i.e., the individual's ability to fulfil his/her desires, satisfy his/her needs, and at the same time deal with his/her environment (Ryff, 2014).

The resilience approach can help to understand the experiences, barriers, and challenges of university students with disabilities. Intending to increase our awareness of their experiences in HE, it is important to understand how students with disabilities face difficulties, obstacles, challenges. Understanding protective factors will contribute to developing responsive interventions to support these students with disabilities at universities. This study aims to analyse the difficulties, obstacles, challenges, adaptation, and protective factors for students with disabilities at a public university from the students' perspectives. Furthermore, the importance of self-esteem, social support, subjective and psychological well-being and resilience as protective factors for successful adaptation to HE is also analysed.

Methodology

The focus of the present study

This empirical study investigates a current issue in its real context and employs a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2014). In order to achieve the proposed objectives, a multiple case study design was used (participant A, participant B, participant C, participant D), based on a retrospective approach. The interviews were conducted with each university student with disabilities attending a Portuguese public university. Intending to analyse students' perceptions of their resilience, self-esteem, psychological well-being (positive and negative affects), satisfaction with life, and satisfaction with social support, it was decided to request the completion of scales that intend to analyse these factors. These instruments were used in the context of qualitative and intra-individual analysis of these personal characteristics.

Participants

The sample is non-probabilistic, for convenience, and included 4 students attending a public Portuguese university. Study participants were selected based on several previously defined criteria. As the main selection criterion, participants should be enrolled as students at a Portuguese university, that they have been formally diagnosed with disabilities, and be supported by the SEN Student Support Office. Participants were selected from students enrolled in the Support Office and an email was sent requesting their collaboration in the study.

The sample was composed of a female, 20 years old, attending the 2nd year of Psychology (participant A); a male, 18 years old, attending the 1st year of the Language and Communication Course (participant B); a 20-year-old male student attending the 1st year of the Higher Vocational Technical Course for Internet Programs and Applications (participant C); and finally, a female participant, 19 years old, attending the 1st year of Social Education (participant D).

Participants A and B have motor disabilities and use wheelchairs, restricting their autonomy. Student A has major motor difficulties, affecting upper limb movement and communication. Student B has fewer motor and communication difficulties by comparison. Student C has Williams syndrome, showing a mild to moderate delay in cognitive development. Student D has a hearing impairment and has difficulties writing and speaking.

Instruments

Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview aimed to characterise the students and to establish their personal data, life history, and various issues related to their academic experience. The interview protocols for the present investigation were based on a literature review of disability in HE, and the interviews lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. The semi-structured interview addressed four main dimensions, namely: difficulties, obstacles, challenges, and support and protective factors in HE. Some of the questions asked were: 'Did you find it difficult to apply for HE? If so, who supported you? What kind of support was provided? How important is your family during the university integration process? And throughout the course? Do the university buildings provide good access and mobility conditions (academic services, offices, bars, reprographics, toilets, etc.)? If not, indicate some of these obstacles: Do the available resources at the university meet your learning and academic success needs? What did you need and didn't find?'

The interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, and then analysed. The transcript was later sent to the participants in order to provide them with the opportunity to reflect on their testimonials, ensuring that they matched their experiences at the university.

Measuring State and Child Resilience Inventory (MSCR)

The MSCR was developed by Hiew (1998) and adapted to the Portuguese context by Martins (2011). The inventory aims to measure resilience and consists of two scales, Measuring State Resilience and Measuring Child Resilience. In the Portuguese version, the Measuring State Resilience scale is composed of 14 items that describe the current characteristics of resilience (e.g., "I am praised for doing things on my own ", "I know I can count on my family when I need to", "I like myself"). The Measuring Child Resilience scale consists of 18 items that describe characteristics of childhood resilience (e. g., "I am able to figure out effective ways of dealing with problems", "My parents paid me a lot of attention", "I was exposed to stressful situations that I learned to control"). The inventory is organised on five-point Likert scales, on a continuum between Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Strongly Agree, and Agree.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)

The RSES was developed by Rosenberg (1989) and adapted by Pechorro et al. (2011) to the Portuguese context. The scale consists of 10 items, measures global self-worth by measuring positive and negative feelings about the self. Is rated on a four-point Likert scale, on a continuum between Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (e. g. "At times I think I am no good at all", "I take a positive attitude toward myself").

Positive Affect and Negative Affectivity Scale (PANAS)

PANAS was developed by Watson et al. (1988). It aims to measure the affective component of the construct subjective well-being, i.e., positive affectivity (AP) and negative affectivity (NA). The original version consists of 20 items, arranged on a five-point Likert scale, half of which are intended to measure the positive dimension (e. g. "Indicate the extent you have felt this way over the past week … interested", "Indicate the extent you have felt this way over the past week … Enthusiastic") and the other half to assess the negative dimension (e. g. "Indicate the extent you have felt this way over the past week … upset", "Indicate the extent you have felt this way over the past week …irritable"). (Watson et al., 1988).

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

SWLS was developed by Diener et al. (1985) and adapted by Simões (1992). It is a self-reported instrument that aims to assess the cognitive component of the subjective well-being construct. The scale consists of 5 items, organised on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree (e. g., "I am satisfied with my life").

The Social Support Satisfaction Scale (ESSS)

Developed by Wethingson and Kessler (1986) and validated for the Portuguese population by Ribeiro (1999). It is a five-point Likert self-completed questionnaire that evaluates the variable satisfaction with social support. It consists of 15 items, organised from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree (e. g. "Friends don't look for me as often as I would like", "I'm satisfied with the amount of time that I spend with my family").

Procedure and Data Analysis

After approval by the Ethics Committee, the collaboration of the students from the University was requested. Intending to observe the ethical standard principles, all participants were informed about the objectives and relevance of the study, and all provided their informed consent. The principle of confidentiality of all information collected was taken into account, with participants being assured that their identities would not be mentioned at any stage of the study. Participants were informed that they could drop out at any time that the statements made would remain confidential. All documents related to the participants were kept in a safe place, and their destruction is expected as soon as the study is completed.

The instruments were applied by the researchers in a single session between May and July 2020. The application took place in a meeting room in the presence of one of the researchers.

The data were inductively analysed through content analysis (Bardin, 1988) for the results to emerge naturally from the participants' experiences. The first stage in the analysis process consisted of reading the data and highlighting the significant text. Then, the data were coded, intending to determine the key ideas into the predetermined categories, or, if necessary, in new categories. The applied scales were analysed through a qualitative approach, aiming to better understand the personal characteristics of each student.

Results

Identification, Students Support, Barriers, and Challenges to Inclusion

Students A and B have motor disabilities and cerebral palsy, respectively. Student C has Williams syndrome, and student D has a hearing impairment. Throughout school, all have benefited from the support of Special Education. According to their testimony, this support allowed them to achieve academic success, except for student C, who repeated a year because of their learning disabilities. It should also be noted that the students interviewed knew that they wanted to enter the university from a young age and reported that they had worked hard to overcome the challenges encountered along the way to being admitted to university. All students showed a desire for continuity in HE and believed the prospect of having a college degree would help them in entering the labour market.

Regarding the inclusion process at the University, according to their testimonies, all the students reported that their parents were an important source of support during the university integration process and throughout the course. They also highlighted the importance of support services in their access to the University.

All students reported a good reception from faculty members, administrative staff, and peers. They had support from the Special Needs Student Support Office and had a Special Needs Student Status (support measures in the teaching / learning process, e.g., having more time to carry out assessments, benefiting from accessibility support, etc.). However, despite reporting that they felt included, they pointed out a variety of difficulties and obstacles.

According to their testimonies, issues relating to physical limitations were mentioned, namely 'the difficulty of maintaining a more active social life' (student A) and issues relating to 'the need for more time to perform the tasks / activities in the classes' (students A, B, C and D), 'handling objects such as books and others' (student A and B). 'Difficulties in eating and in the autonomy to move around on campus were also raised' (students A and B). Student B referred to 'limitations on moving to the classroom because I have to use the wheelchair'. Note, however, the humour and capacity to joke in these adverse situations, referring to student A 'the doors obligatorily have someone present to open them, because I obviously cannot'.

All the students highlighted the bureaucracy required to apply for the SEN Student Status, 'I required the status and although it was easy, it took a while' (student B).

Students C and D reported having difficulties in following academic content, 'I need help to be able to follow the subject matter' (student C), 'I have difficulty following what the teacher is presenting in class (…)' (student D). Student C states that he is having great difficulty adapting to higher education 'it was difficult to adapt to the way teachers teach (…)'.

In the barriers category, there were strong references from students A and B regarding the lack of permanent monitoring, highlighting that 'the worst part is that we do not have a fixed person who is always taking care of us' (student A). The inaccessibility to certain campus locations was also an aspect that both referred to, pointing out 'that when this building was built, no one thought that a student with these difficulties could come here (…)' (student B). For student C, one of the main obstacles was keeping up with the other students '(…) I need help to keep up with the subject (…)'. Student D considered the lack of cooperation by some faculty members as an obstacle, stating that 'at first the faculty members are available to help, but later they forget or do not adapt in the best way (…) I felt that faculty did not know how to respond to the situation'.

The main challenges were time management '(…) I have a three times full schedule' (student B),'(…) it takes me triple the time… so I don't have time for anything else' (student A), '(…) the hardest is finishing the tasks within the time set by the teacher' (student D). Students A and B also pointed out the new social interactions as a challenge, 'although this was a challenge that had been achieved, it was a very good acceptance! we immediately socialized with each other' (student B) (Table 1).

Table 1
Difficulties, Barriers, Challenges, Support, and Protection Factors Reported by Students

Categories	Indicators			
	Student A	**Student B**	**Student C**	**Student D**
Difficulties	- Maintain a more active social life; - More time to perform tasks; - Handling of objects, books, etc; - Food / autonomy; - Mobility on campus; - Bureaucracy.	- More time to perform tasks; - Handling of objects, books, etc; - Food / autonomy; - Mobility on campus; - Bureaucracy.	- Difficulties in performing the tasks; - Difficulties in understanding the subject; - More time to perform tasks; - Adaptation; - Bureaucracy.	- Difficulties in listening to classes and understanding the subject matter; - Write correctly; - More time to perform tasks; - Difficulties in accompanying the teacher; - Bureaucracy.
Barriers	- Lack of permanent monitoring; - Inaccessibility to certain campus locations.	- Lack of permanent monitoring; - Inaccessibility to certain campus locations.	- Keep up with my colleagues.	- Lack of cooperation by the teachers.
Challenges	- Time management; - New social interactions.	- Time management; - New social interactions; - Acquisition of new knowledge.	- Time management; - Acquisition of new knowledge.	- Time management; - Acquisition of new knowledge.
Support and Protection Factors	- Resilience; - Family support; - Availability of colleagues; - Teacher support.	- Resilience; - Family support; - Availability of colleagues; - Union and companionship; - Respect; - Teacher support.	- Resilience; - Family; - Availability of colleagues; - Union and companionship.	- Resilience; - Family; - Union and companionship.

Resilience, Self-Esteem, Positive and Negative Affectivity, Satisfaction With Life and Satisfaction With Social Support

Regarding resilience and protection factors, the results obtained through the resilience scale reveal that all students have good resilience capacities. The analysis of the answers showed that student C presented a very high perception of his resilience to overcome adversities when he was a child, revealing that even in the face of difficulties and barriers, he does not give up and fights to achieve his goals. He was exposed to stressful difficulties that he learned to deal with, and he felt that all would work out, even in difficult situations. Students B and A also revealed good resilience skills as children, reporting that they were persistent in their actions in order to be successful and to find effective ways of dealing with problems. Although also showing good resilience skills, student D revealed, however, that he sometimes had some difficulties in dealing with adversities and that he was not always very persistent.

When asked about his current resilience skills, student C showed high resilience, demonstrating being able to persist and fight for his goals, even 'if he sometimes fights against everything and everyone'. Students A and B also showed good abilities to face difficulties, although they need to be supported sometimes. Student D showed that he 'can deal with and overcome difficulties most of the time, although not always'.

It should be noted that student A pointed out that: 'I want to take the course to show myself that I have been able to do something in my life. I have always fought for this (…)'. Student B also says also that she feels that 'must work harder than her peers and that sometimes it is not easy'.

The analysis of perceptions of self-esteem reveals that all students had high self-esteem. Student A stood out with high self-esteem indicators, revealing that he believes in his abilities and is able to establish well-defined goals for his life. Students B, C, and D also showed good self-esteem, indicating positive feelings about their personal worth and realistic and appropriate expectations about themselves and their abilities.

The responses of students A, B, and C reflected medium / high positive affectivity, indicating subjective well-being. According to the analysis carried out, they feel strong, enthusiastic, proud, determined and attentive. However, it should be noted that student D presented some negative affectivity, showing that he can sometimes experience the world in a more negative way, reporting some distress, irritability, and nervousness.

The assessment of life satisfaction showed that the students also have medium / high results, suggesting that they were very satisfied with their current life. Student responses indicate that they are achieving what is important in their life, although they point out that sometimes they would like to change some aspects of their life.

Regarding satisfaction with social support, the answers show that students were very satisfied, especially student D who said: 'I was supported by my parents, who told me not to be afraid (…)'. Student B had the next highest satisfaction score. Students A and C had equal satisfaction score for social support. As for satisfaction with social support,

students A and B both valued family support '(…) I know they will always be there to support me' (student B), 'and the availability of peers and faculty members support (…) from the moment I came in, there was a huge union, everyone was available to help, and that's great!' (student B).

Discussion

Identifying factors that increase resilience in students with disabilities is of paramount importance for their successful inclusion in HE. In general, according to the results obtained, the students valued their university experience positively, despite the various difficulties and obstacles. They felt that they adapted well and were included at the university. Their resilience, self-esteem, subjective and psychological well-being, positive and negative affectivity, satisfaction with life and satisfaction with social support are variables that, according to the results, were protective factors, contributing to the good adaptation and inclusion of these students at the university. This is consistent with previous studies, which demonstrated the importance of social support, personal strategies to facilitate permanence, and success at the University (Moriña & Biaggioti, 2021; Piers & Duquette, 2016; Melero et al., 2020).

However, it should be noted that there are still several other factors to be considered for better inclusion and adaptation, especially regarding achieving better results, in terms of academic success. As mentioned by one of the interviewees also point out that these students need to work much harder to achieve the same goals than their peers (Morgado et al., 2017). This implies that their trajectories at university are not easy and that they face barriers during their studies. It is therefore necessary for HE institutions to implement inclusive policies and practices that facilitate the retention and success of these students.

In addition, other studies by Biggeri et al. (2020) or Zabeli et al. (2021) reached the same conclusion as ours. Architectural barriers, accessibility conditions that prevent access and mobility on campus, namely difficulties in moving within the institutions, between different buildings and access to public transport continue to hinder their academic experience (Odame et al., 2019). Furthermore, faculty members often lack training, which results in misunderstandings, possibly resulting from a lack of sensitivity in communication, disbelief in their capabilities, coupled with limitations of pedagogical and technological materials adapted to their needs, lack of support related to the scarcity of support structures. Urgent investments in these areas are required (Morgado et al., 2017). In particular, in relation to teaching staff, it would be recommendable for universities to design training plans to prepare their staff to provide an inclusive and accessible response to the needs of students with disabilities.

While some lack of knowledge and sensitivity can still be noted from some faculty members and peers, the students pointed out that their willpower, resilience, family

support, the availability of faculty, administrative staff, and peers are essential to overcoming obstacles. Another important factor for the success of these students is related to the attitude and availability of the faculty to implement the necessary changes and adapt the curricula to their needs (Melo & Martins, 2016). They clearly stated that training and knowledge of strategies and methodologies that meet their needs are of the utmost importance for them to truly feel included, both in the course and at the university in general, and for them to succeed academically.

It is important for the construction of an HE for all students that their voices can be heard; these can be a powerful mean to inform teaching staff about the difficulties, obstacles, challenges and support needs of these students, as well as the necessary educational developments arising from the identification of prejudices or other problems that have been mentioned in academic practices. It is critical that educational and learning opportunities accessible to all students are provided (Andriana & Evans, 2020).

In this sense, HE institutions must design training policies for the faculty staff on strategies and methodologies to respond to the needs of all students. In this regard, Universal Learning Design (UDL) should be fundamental content to be included in this training policy. From an inclusive approach, it is considered that a syllabus should be designed for all, and therefore, multiple models of representation, expression, and commitment should be offered, following the recommendations of the CAST (2011) on UDL. UDL requires teachers to act proactively in order to include the whole student body in the subjects from the beginning (Meyer et al., 2014).

In addition, Liasidou (2014) studied people with disabilities and, on many occasions, they were confronted with difficult trajectories, described as an "obstacle course". Sometimes their university experiences are different from the university experiences of their colleagues, because the additional obstacles and strategies they have to mobilize to face the challenges in their day-to-day life at university. However, as our study confirms, the resilience, persistence, and dedication shown in their academic career are noteworthy and, despite these difficulties, they continue to struggle every day to make their dreams come true, facing a daily life that is not always easy.

Conclusions

The objective of the present study was to verify the importance of self-esteem, social support, subjective and psychological well-being, and resilience as protective factors for successful adaptation to HE. Across all interviews, it was possible to observe that the students indicated external environmental factors as barriers to their academic success. The most significant external barriers mentioned by the students included the low expectations and insensitivity of the teaching staff to perceive their needs, the lack of support

from university administrative staff, course materials in non-accessible formats, financial difficulties, and other needed support services.

The reported strategies to overcome the barriers and challenges they encounter in academia included support from family and peers, their self-discipline, perseverance, adaptability, resourcefulness, as well as acceptance of their disability and the establishment and reassessment of goals in the short term.

In view of these results, which corroborate the results of other studies mentioned above, there is a clear need for change at universities in order to meet the needs of all students. Despite the progress we have seen toward inclusive education in HE, teaching remains largely driven by adjustments for each student, creating diverse organizational and personal challenges (Collins et al., 2019; Yusof et al., 2019). It is very important to listen to the voices of students, so we can make a difference and facilitate changes (Leeuw et al., 2020). Universities can be more human and inclusive, where everybody has their place, able to learn and participate. Universities should see individual empowerment as their mission, as a legitimising ideological direction, mobilising around the principles of human rights defense (Collins et al., 2019).

Is urgent to implement inclusive policies and actions to ensure success for all students in HE. In this sense, it should be noted that the answers cannot be the result of particular initiatives by individual institutions, but it is necessary to create specific legislation that includes support measures, such as attendance and evaluation conditions, the creation of services to welcome these students and to respond to their needs, and access to assistive technologies that deliver better results and greater autonomy. The success of inclusive education "depends on structural factors as well as the attitudes of all involved actors" (Spörer et al., 2020, p. 11). Such actions would contribute to reinventing Universities, investing in the well-being and resilience of students with disabilities would equate to investing in entire communities, strengthening inclusion and promoting a fair and more equal society.

There are several limitations to this study. Due to the fact that only two students were interviewed, the results should be interpreted with caution. One of the limitations may be the response bias, participants may have been less open to discussing their experiences, due to the sensitive nature of the subject. Future research should try to collect a more meaningful and diverse sample. Another limitation is that the study was carried out in a single university, so the findings cannot be generalised to other universities. It would have been particularly important to include members of the students' families and their faculty members to provide further analysis. Additional research combining students' voices and academic communities across several HE institutions would allow for a deeper exploration of the considerations raised in this article. Future research should also seek to investigate the difficulties, challenges and barriers that students with disabilities felt and that led them to dropped out of HE. Longitudinal research can also be an important contribution to better understanding the influence of resilience on the well-being of

these students and their academic results. Furthermore, it is also particularly important to focus attention on investigating educational attitudes and practices and include the discourses of inclusive teachers.

Finally, it is important that universities adopt the UDL paradigm by responding more effectively to the needs of all students (Meyer et al., 2014). The literature suggests that the UDL contributes to ensure the full participation and inclusion of students with disabilities in the university and their adequate access to the educational curriculum. Therefore, future studies should explore the design, development, and evaluation of teaching practices based on the UDL.

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Portugalijos valstybinio universiteto studentų su negalia atsparumo veiksniai

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Santrauka

Šiuo tyrimu siekiama išsamiai atskleisti sudėtingą realybę, su kuria kasdien susiduria neįgalūs studentai, besimokantys aukštosiose mokyklose. Tyrimo tikslas – išanalizuoti neįgalių studentų sunkumus, kliūtis, iššūkius, adaptaciją ir apsauginius veiksnius Portugalijos valstybiniame universitete iš studentų perspektyvos. Taip pat analizuojama savigarbos, socialinės paramos, subjektyvios ir psichologinės gerovės bei atsparumo, kaip apsauginių veiksnių sėkmingam prisitaikymui prie aukštojo mokslo, svarba. Tyrime taikoma mišri metodologinė prieiga derinant kokybinį ir kiekybinį tyrimo metodus. Tam naudojamas retrospektyvus kelių atvejų tyrimo dizainas. Atlikti individualūs interviu su negalią turinčiais studentais. Darytina išvada, kad atsparumas, savigarba, šeimos palaikymas, subjektyvi gerovė ir psichologinė savijauta yra apsauginiai veiksniai, prisidedantys prie studentų geros adaptacijos universitete ir geresnio įsitraukimo į aukštąjį mokslą.

Studentų miestelio prieigos sąlygos ir toliau sudaro kliūčių, kurios trukdo judumui ir studentų akademinei patirčiai. Be jų atsparumo, verta paminėti šių studentų atkaklumą ir atsidavimą,

nes jie kasdien stengiasi įgyvendinti savo svajones, susidurdami su ne visada lengva kasdienybe. Atsižvelgiant į šio tyrimo rezultatus išryškėja akivaizdus poreikis universitetuose keistis, kad būtų patenkinti visų studentų poreikiai.