

# Acceptance of Students with Disabilities in Higher Education Institutions: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

This review focuses on the acceptance of students with disabilities in higher education. Due to the fact that peer acceptance or rejection can have a significant impact on the well-being of students with impairments, numerous relevant studies have been undertaken on attitudes toward these students. Unfortunately, the majority of previous studies focused on the effect of peer acceptance or rejection on the self-esteem, social skills, and inclusion of students with disabilities. Considering this, the present study conducted a comprehensive literature review on the factors that influence the acceptance of students with disabilities in higher education by students without disabilities. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) was utilised for the review of the current research, with Google Scholar, Scopus, and Taylor & Francis serving as the primary journal databases. The search efforts generated a total of 21 documents that can be thoroughly examined. The review was able to identify six major aspects of SWD acceptance: peer acceptance, disability closure, internalised disability acceptance, SWD acceptance, the relationship between knowledge and acceptance, and external support. Several suggestions for future researchers are provided at the conclusion of this study.

**Keywords:** Disability Closure, External Support, Peer Acceptance, Peer Rejection

## Introduction

Humans are naturally concerned with how they appear in the eyes of others to obtain acceptance and self-esteem. As a result, the views of others have an impact on one's self-worth and acceptance (Lourens & Swartz, 2016). Maslow (1954) defines acceptance as respecting a person's unique features and allowing them to accept themselves (Harun et al., 2019). People's acceptance of people with disabilities is critical for their well-being because they are constantly associated with negative stereotypes. Labeling people as charity subjects, for example, who rely on others for survival and are unable to live freely, is a widespread negative connotation. People with these attitudes see their disability as an impediment or weakness, feeling they lack credibility and competence as compared to non-disabled people.

Often, the impairment will be linked with other physiological processes, giving the appearance that students with disabilities (SWDs) are unable to live their everyday lives as those without impairments (Nasir & Hussain, 2016). However, this is not the case.

People with disabilities may and should achieve in a variety of fields, including education. According to Chapter 8 of the Education Act of 1996, everyone has the right to an education. Furthermore, Malaysia's Persons with Disabilities Act of 2008 highlighted that people with disabilities should not be declined an education because of their disabilities. These regulations indicate the government's strong support for their full inclusion in society, ensuring that they have the same rights as students without disabilities in elementary and secondary school, as well as the ability to pursue further education. Despite their "difference," they have the same potential as non-disabled persons. Their potential can present them with a plethora of options to achieve more amazing things in life, such as the opportunity to extend their studies in higher education institutions.

This is not an easy undertaking, however, because higher education expects them to be self-sufficient and imaginative when needed (Harun et al., 2019). In comparison to secondary school, Ziswiler (2014) stated that higher education is primarily unstructured and unsupervised. Students with disabilities (SWDs) will have to reconcile the transition from secondary school with becoming self-sufficient enough to manage their difficulties and advocate for them. Students in higher education are taught a variety of skills, including time management, independence, and, more broadly, the balance of academic and non-academic pursuits. Having limitations may make the experience much more challenging. As a result, transitioning to higher education leads some SWDs to struggle with achieving regular success and forming relationships with faculty members and peers (Meyer, 2012). Participating in social activities, on the other hand, is critical to them since it helps to shape their self-concept (Ule, 2017). Interactions in social systems, classrooms, and extracurricular activities between a student and instructors, staff, or peers can also be used to describe social integration (Smith, 2015).

For SWDs, the significant challenges are involved in society without having their disability interfere with participation, acceptability from the outside world, and goal achievement (Ule, 2017). People with disabilities are subject to prejudice, social isolation, and discrimination due to this unfavourable view (Nasir & Hussain, 2016). Discrimination against people with disabilities is a sort of exclusion that should be abolished from society. However, society is not the only one with views on SWDs. The truth is that SWDs have different perspectives on society. People's unfavourable labelling and judgment of SWDs have led to SWDs' negative perception of society as unhelpful, unsupportive, and prejudiced against them (Nasir & Hussain, 2016).

SWDs are more likely to interact with non-disabled peers who have little to no experience with disabilities in higher education. As a result, SWDs may find it challenging to connect with their peers. In addition, poor interaction makes it considerably more difficult for people with disabilities to educate their non-disabled peers about their difficulties. Social isolation for SWDs is sometimes unavoidable due to lifestyle variations. They may, for example, need more

time to revise than their colleagues and may be compelled to forsake social activities (Meyer, 2012). Although academic performance is important, SWDs must also have social experiences and be accepted by their peers to have a healthy existence (Meyer, 2012). Students who did not have disabilities typically did not accept SWDs, instead recognizing them as distinct. As a result, the focus will be on their disabilities rather than their strengths. SWDs also believed that other people's gazes frequently reflected ignorance and avoidance (Lourens & Swartz, 2016).

SWDs in Western countries, similarly, confront challenges when attempting to adapt to higher education institutions. They had difficulty claiming the accommodation to which they were entitled due to the staff's and lecturers' lack of understanding. Even with the availability of accommodation, it appears that the execution falls short of expectations. Students with mental disabilities, for instance, are denied their rights because the disability is not apparent to the eyes (Berggren et al., 2016). In other instances, a lack of understanding of disabilities led key stakeholders, such as the staff or lecturers, to act inappropriately toward students with disabilities, such as avoiding or ignoring them in class. This causes SWDs to conceal their disability status, which indirectly affects their educational experience in higher education institutions. Berggren et al (2016) further emphasised the significance of lecturers' adaptability and tolerance in enhancing the academic performance of students with disabilities.

According to Meyer (2012), SWDs conceal their disabilities and avoid using disability support services because they are aware of cultural stigmas that drive them to fear rejection, censure, or exclusion from their peers. SWDs said that being linked with any type of disability service support or being observed heading into the Disability Office made them feel uneasy. As a result, they concealed their disability, revealing that people with disabilities are not fully integrated into society (Lourens & Swartz, 2016). As a result, it encourages avoidance behaviour, with SWDs hiding their infirmities more. However, by concealing their limitations, individuals miss out on opportunities to receive the accommodations to which they are entitled. The loss demonstrates how important peer acceptance is to SWDs, and how it may damage their lives in higher education (Christian, 2020).

### **The Need for a Systematic Review**

A systematic review, according to Petrosino et al (2001), is the quantitative and qualitative recognition, synthesis, and evaluation of all available data to generate a robust, observationally determined solution to an active research issue. When compared to literature reviews written in the traditional style, the systematic review has several advantages. A transparent article retrieval procedure, a more meaningful, larger scope of the study, and more major aims that can manage research bias can all boost the reviews. Additionally, this encourages the researcher to create a solid proof with more meaningful outcomes (Mallet et al., 2012).

Meanwhile, a considerable amount of existing systematic reviews related to the attitudes to people with disabilities have been conducted across the globe. Nevertheless, only a limited number of studies were performed within the context of higher education (Badri et al., 2018;

Berggren et al., 2016; Nasir et al., 201) and the factors influence the acceptance (Toran et al, 2009; Toran et al., 2010) because the available literature heavily focused on the school (Kurniawan & Rofiah, 2018; Marlinah, 2017) as well as impacts of the negative attitudes of rejection for students with disabilities (Herrick et al., 2020; Marlinah, 2017; Toran et al., 2010). The impact of acceptance and rejection by peers without disabilities on the level of self-esteem, social skills, and inclusivity among students in higher education has been the subject of a scenario that has led to several understandings.

Thus, the current paper attempt to systematically review all the relevant literature with the aim of fulfilling the gap by examining a growing body of evidence of the elements that influence acceptance of Students with Disabilities (SWDs) among peers without disabilities in higher education. The development of the current systematic review is based on the main research question: *How do students with disabilities socialise with other students without disabilities and what are the elements that influence acceptance?*, with the aim to examine and synthesize the challenges surrounding peer acceptability of SWDs and potential contributions to acceptance. The identification of difficulties and factors may help to increase the acceptance of SWDs among their non-disabled peers. As a result, acceptance from their peers would enhance their experience and well-being in higher education.

### **Materials and Methods**

This part explains the five main sub-sections, namely PRISMA, resources, inclusion and exclusion criteria, the systematic review process, and data abstraction and analysis which are employed in the current research.

#### ***PRISMA***

To guarantee a high-quality systematic literature review, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) checklist was employed as a guideline. PRISMA's goal is to help authors improve their systematic review and meta-analysis reporting. It is an evidence-based minimum set of items for reporting reviews evaluating the effects of interventions, but it can also be used as a foundation for conducting systematic reviews with aims other than evaluating interventions. PRISMA can also be used to report on other sorts of research, most notably intervention evaluations and assess the quality of published systematic reviews (Moher et al., 2010).

#### ***Resources***

The search strategy used in this review includes using the three electronic databases resources- Google Scholar, Scopus, and Taylor & Francis. Researchers trust these publications because they publish accurate and high-quality research. Google Scholar provides a more globally diversified selection of materials from many disciplines and openly published journals while Scopus locates high-quality scientific research which combines an extensive, curated abstract and citation database, enriched data, and linked scholarly content. Taylor & Francis Group Journals was chosen because it is now the most prominent global publisher of ranked Social Science journals, with more titles newly listed in the 2010 Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports (JCR) in the Social Science Edition than the Social Science Edition publishers.

***The Systematic Review Process and Search Outcome******Phase 1: Identification***

There were three phases to the systematic review method for choosing relevant publications for the current investigation. The first stage is to identify keywords discovered by scanning the thesaurus, dictionaries, and previous research articles for related and similar topics. As a result, in April 2021, search strings for Scopus, Google Scholar, and the Francis & Taylor database were produced after identifying all relevant keywords and 410 articles were collected, including 190 from Google Scholar, 27 from Scopus, and 193 from the Francis & Taylor database.

The search was carried out using exact keyword combinations on titles and abstracts, as these were handled by breaking down the review questions. A systematic search approach was developed, which included essential search phrases as well as associated text words. Table 1 shows the keywords that were used.

*Table 1 Databases and keywords used in the search process*

Databases	Keywords used
<b>Google Scholar</b>	English: "peer acceptance" OR "acceptance" OR "accept*" AND "disabled students" OR "students with disability" OR "students with disabilities" AND "higher education institutions" OR "university."  Malay: "penerimaan rakan sebaya" OR "penerimaan" OR "terima" AND "pelajar kurang upaya" OR "OKU" AND "institusi pengajian tinggi" OR "university"
<b>Scopus</b>	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("peer acceptance" OR "acceptance" OR "accept") AND ("disabled students" OR "students with disability" OR "students with disabilities" ) AND "higher education institutions" OR "university").
<b>Francis &amp; Taylor</b>	"peer acceptance" OR "acceptance" OR "accept" AND "disabled students" OR "students with disability" OR "students with disabilities" AND "higher education institutions" OR "university."

***Phase 2: Screening***

The objective of the initial screening phase was to eliminate non-Malay and non-English articles. In this instance, a total of 378 items were rejected at the first stage because they were written in a language other than English or Malay. In a further step, 32 papers were evaluated based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria specified by the researchers in the second stage. The first criterion was the type of literature, and the researchers chose to concentrate solely on journals (research articles) because they serve as primary sources of empirical data. This further suggests that publications in the forms of systematic reviews, reviews, meta-analyses, meta-syntheses, book series, books, book chapters, and conference proceedings were omitted from the current study. In addition, it is essential to mention that a 10-year span (2012-2021) was selected for the timeline. As of 2012, all public institutions had implemented the Action Plan to Improve Teaching and Learning Experience for Students

with Disabilities (SWDs). Importantly, papers published in the fields of social science, human development, special education, and disability studies that contained specialised study on Students with Disabilities (SWDs) in higher education were chosen to maximise the likelihood of retrieving relevant materials. In total, 389 articles were disqualified based on these criteria (Refer to Table 2).

*Table 2 The Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Eligibility</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
<b>Language</b>	English and Malay	Non-English and Non-Malay
<b>Literature type</b>	Journal (research article)	Review papers, meta-analysis, meta-synthesis, non-research papers, books or book series, conference proceedings
<b>Time line</b>	Between 2012 to 2020	<2012
<b>Subject area</b>	Social science, human development, special education, disability studies	Other than social science, human development, special education, disability studies
<b>Research focused</b>	Students with disabilities (SWDs) in higher education	Other than students with disabilities (SWDs) in higher education

### *Phase 3: Eligibility*

A total of 32 articles were prepared for the third stage, called eligibility. The titles, abstracts, primary contents, discussion, and subject matter of the publications were thoroughly checked to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria and were appropriate for review in the current study to achieve the current research aims. As a result, 11 papers were removed since they did not employ empirical data and focused on SWDs in schools or in general. As a result, 21 papers fulfilled the criteria of this systematic review. The PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1 depicts the procedure used to reduce and analyze the records.

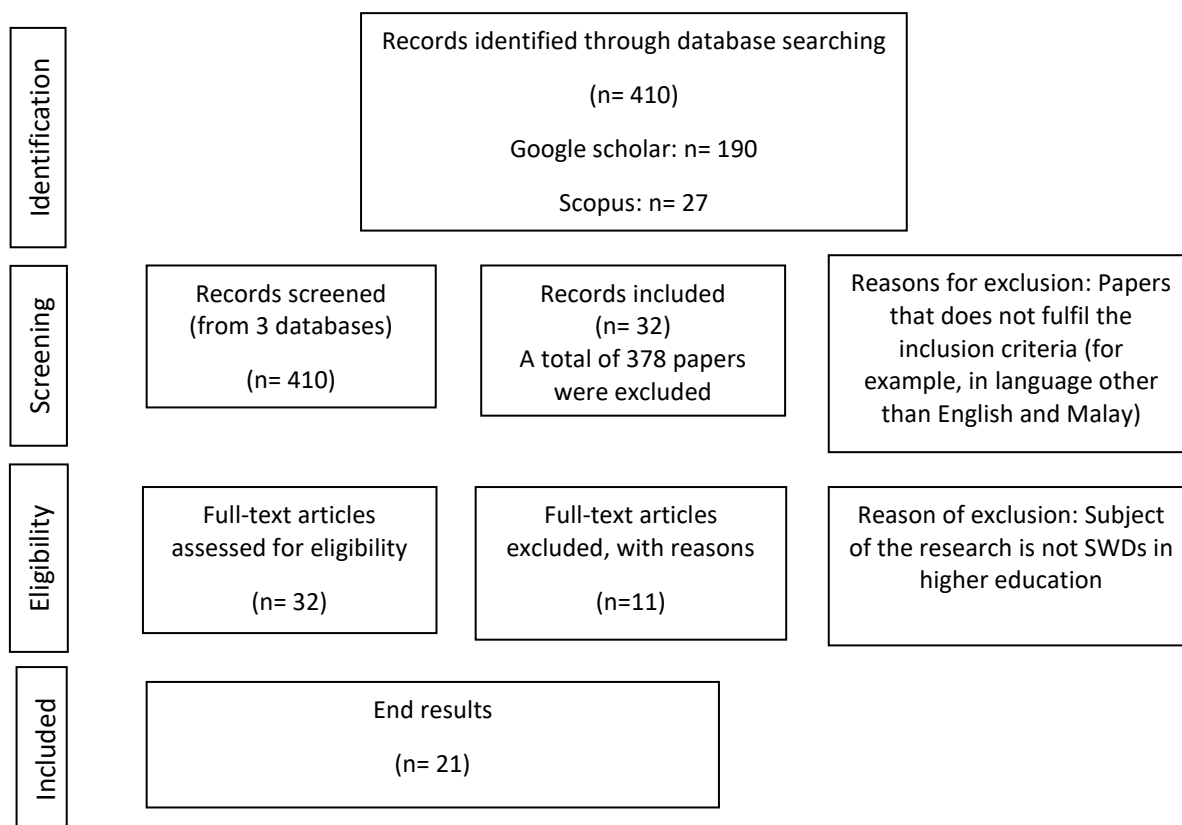


Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram

### ***Data Abstraction and Analysis***

This study conducted an integrative review, which is one of the review techniques that analyses and synthesises diverse research designs (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods) together, and this can be resolved by transforming one type into the other (qualitizing quantitative data or quantizing qualitative data) (Whitemore and Knafel, 2005). This study opts to qualitatively evaluate all collected data. On the basis of thematic analysis, the processes of establishing suitable themes and subthemes were executed. The initial step in the process of theme development was the collection of data. In this step, the writers analysed a group of 21 carefully selected articles in order to extract statements or facts that provide responses to the study questions. In the second phase, the authors formed meaningful categories based on the nature of the data using the coding approach. In other words, the second step transforms raw data into usable data by identifying themes, concepts, or ideas for more interconnected and relevant data (Sandelowski, 1995; Patton, 2002). Peer acceptance, the relationship between knowledge and acceptance, disability closure, internalised disability acceptance, acceptance among SWDs, and external assistance are the culmination of this process.

## **Results**

### ***Background of the studies included in the review***

The review included all papers published between 2012 and 2020. One article was published in 2012 (Meyer, 2012), two in 2013 (Ambati & Ambati, 2013; Yusuff & Kurniawan, 2013), two

in 2014 (Bruce, 2014; Ziswiler, 2014), one in 2015 (Smith, 2015), and three in 2016 (Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Nasir & Hussain, 2016; Yssel et al., 2016). Meanwhile, five articles were published in 2017 (Ule, 2017; Mutanga, 2017; Sánchez et al., Tambi & Hazan, 2017; 2017; Tuomia et al., 2017), two in 2018 (Badri & Amin, 2018; Mohamed et al., 2018), two in 2019 (Harun et al., 2019; Russak & Hellwing, 2019), and three in 2020 (Buljevac et al., 2020; Christian, 2020; Herrick et al., 2020).

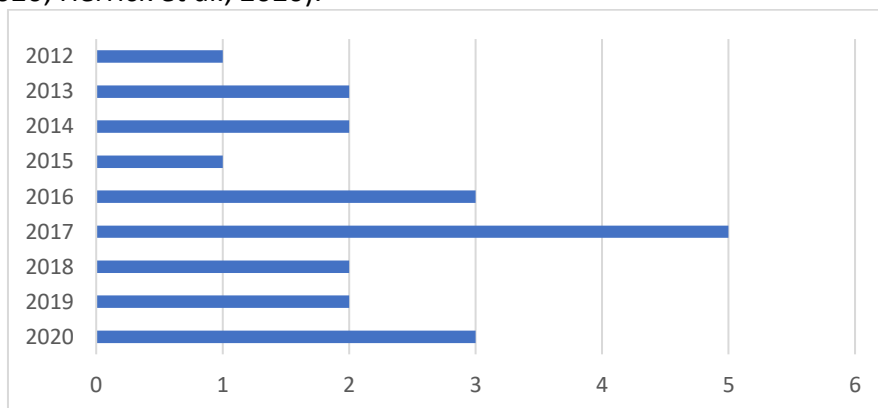


Figure 2: Years of Publication

It is important to note that the papers come from all over the world. Seven papers are from the United States (Bruce, 2014; Bullock et al., 2020; Christian, 2020; Meyer, 2012; Smith, 2015; Yssel, 2016; Ziswiler, 2014), and six from Malaysia (Badri & Amin, 2018; Harun et al., 2019; Mohamed et al., 2018; Nasir & Hussain, 2016; Tambi & Hazan, 2017; Yusuff & Kurniawan, 2013), two from South Africa (Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Mutanga, 2017), one from Germany (Ambati & Ambati, 2013), one from Ohio (Ziswiler, 2014), one from Slovenia (Ule, 2017), one from Southern Spain (Sánchez et al., 2017), one from Tanzania (Tuomia et al., 2017), one from Israel (Russak & Hellwing, 2019) and one from Croatia (Buljevac et al., 2020).

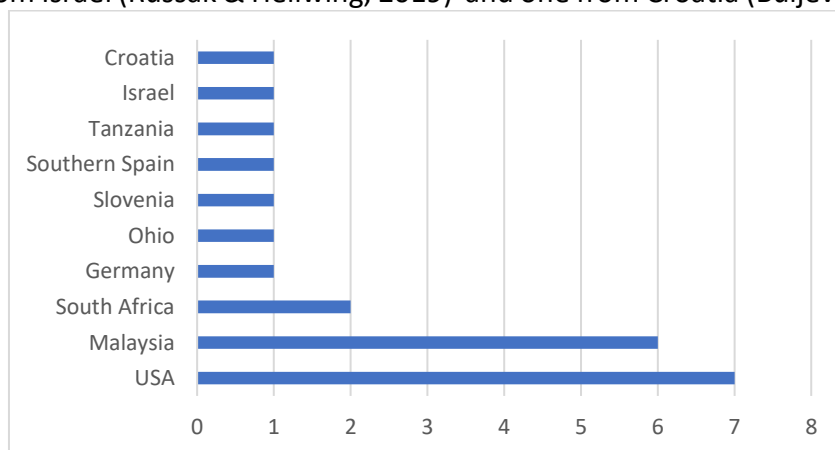


Figure 3: Research Countries

In terms of research design, seven papers used quantitative design (Harun et al., 2019; Herrick et al., 2020; Mohamed et al., 2018; Sánchez et al., 2017; Smith, 2015; Tambi & Hazan, 2017; Ziswiler, 2014), while thirteen papers used qualitative design (Ambati & Ambati, 2013; Badri & Amin, 2018; Bruce, 2014; Buljevac, 2020; Christian, 2020; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Meyer,



2012; Mutanga, 2017; Nasir & Hussain, 2016; Russak & Hellwing, 2019; Tuomia et al., 2017; Ule, 2017; Yssel et al., 2016;) and one used mixed methods (Yusuff & Kurniawan, 2013).

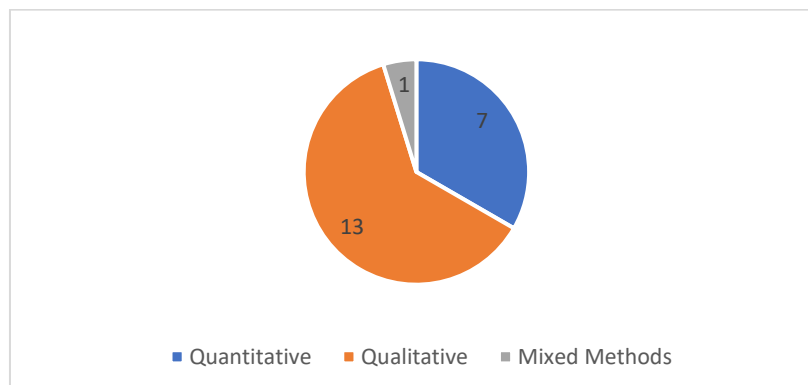


Figure 4: Research Design

Fifteen papers conducted studies among SWDs (Ambati & Ambati, 2013; Badri & Amin, 2018; Buljevac, 2020; Bullock et al., 2020; Christian, 2020; Herrick et al., 2020; Lourens & Swartz, 2016; Mutanga, 2017; Nasir & Hussain, 2016; Russak & Hellwing, 2019; Smith, 2015; Tuomia et al., 2017; Ule, 2017; Yssel, 2016; Ziswiler, 2014;). While four studies conducted studies among non-SWDs (Bruce, 2014; Mohamed et al., 2018; Tambi & Hazan, 2017; Yusuff & Kurniawan, 2013) and two studies seek from both, SWDs and non-SWDs views (Harun et al., 2019; Sanchez et al., 2017)

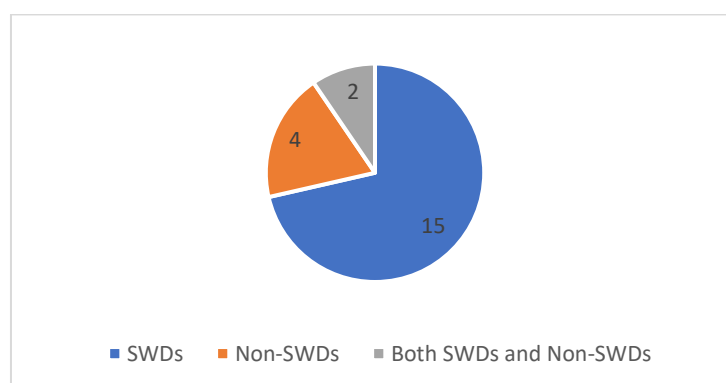


Figure 5: Research Sample

**Main Findings**

In general, the majority of the reviewed studies discussed the acceptance of SWDs solely from the perspective of SWDs themselves. It is critical to assess SWD’s acceptability in a two-way framework, which includes their viewpoints and the perceptions of those around them, such as peers, lecturers, or staff. As a result, self-bias can be eliminated, and the results will be more comprehensive. Furthermore, even though few articles have examined engagement between SWDs and non-SWDs in general, elaboration on the interaction lacks, particularly in lecture space settings. Their contact in class is necessary since the acceptance of SWDs is vital in academic affairs. SWDs are predicted to perform well academically in higher education

institutions, with strong peer support. Furthermore, the lecture room will be many contacts, especially when completing chores and group assignments.

Next, none of the publications evaluated discussed the differences in acceptance based on race or course of study. People of various nationalities coexist in Malaysia. As a result of the cultural variances between ethnicities, there should be a difference in the acceptance rate for SWDs. Moreover, different courses of study would demonstrate varying levels of acceptance of SWDs. The discrepancy is attributable to the nature of the course and its faculty's experience with SWDs. Engineering students, for example, may have a low acceptance rate for SWDs since their faculty has little exposure to SWDs due to the nature of their course. SWDs are less likely to choose the course because most of their tasks entail hands-on and practical labour. As a result, the course of study could influence the acceptability of SWDs, but it was not addressed in any of the publications assessed.

Some publications explored the different sorts of disabilities and the rate of acceptance, but not in-depth. It was generally mentioned which disability type had a high acceptance rate, but there was no explanation for why. Additionally, the level of intimacy preferred by peers was addressed. Non-SWDs are willing to accept SWDs as classmates and close friends but are hesitant to accept SWDs as family members. Again, however, no more explanation of the circumstances that determine it is provided. Although knowledge about disability does not determine acceptance, it does alter people's perceptions of SWDs. Unfortunately, only a few publications have been published that assess the extent of peer knowledge on impairments. As a result, peers should be exposed to diverse disabilities knowledge, such as SWDs' fundamental rights, accommodations rights in higher education institutions, basic policies, and categories of disabilities. This knowledge may assist students in better understanding and perception of their classmates with disabilities.

When researching peer acceptance, lecturers and faculty members bridge builders, bringing SWDs and non-SWDs together. However, according to the review, faculty staff and lecturers prepared programmes to foster interaction between SWDs and non-SWDs, but no follow-up or outcomes were given to clarify the usefulness of the programmes. More articles on the effectiveness of lecturers and faculty staff in improving interactions between SWDs and non-SWDs would be beneficial.

Furthermore, Tuomi (2015) wrote only one paper about gender inequalities among SWDs, particularly among women in higher education. It is fascinating to talk about in higher education. Gender has distinct obstacles and levels of acceptance in society. Women are more likely to be rejected than men because of the standard of normalcy and the notion that they do not need to pursue higher education. As a result, there may be gender disparities in SWD acceptance. Finally, peer rejection of SWDs was mentioned in a few articles. There is, however, no more discussion of the different sorts of rejection or the grounds for rejection. Peer rejection can occur in a variety of contexts, including academic, social, and personal settings. Therefore, intervention plans can be designed to overcome the problem by understanding the types and causes of rejection.

***Major Themes***

From the current review, there are six major themes related to acceptance of SWDs that can be listed as follows: Peer acceptance, the relationship between knowledge and acceptance, disabilities closure, internalized disability acceptance, acceptance among SWDs, and external support. Table 4 shows the major themes related to the acceptance of SWDs in higher education and their sources.

***i. Peer Acceptance***

The attitudes of others determine the success or failure of SWDs in higher education institutions (Ambati & Ambati, 2013). Furthermore, SWDs underline the importance of having people to support them, such as family members, peers, and support service providers, in their success (Russak & Hellwing, 2019). SWDs benefit from social support because it gives them a sense of stability and comfort, and it has helped them do better academically (Ambati & Ambati, 2013).

Furthermore, peer networking, where peer assistance supported them in many academic, social, and campus participation areas, is a significant component contributing to their well-being in higher education. Acceptance from peers, as well as their motivation and encouragement, move SWDs ahead to achievement. Receiving recognition from others provides some people with a sense of achievement, and recognition is required to convince and verify that they are successful. Acceptance from peers validates or acknowledges SWDs' accomplishments ultimately, allowing them to accept and internalize their success (Russak & Hellwing, 2019).

The perceived stigma of others mediates the association between disability acceptance and college adaption (Herrick et al., 2020). SWDs frequently struggle to identify as persons with disabilities because they fear being rejected by their peers. As a result, the presence of close friends is crucial in the lives of SWDs, and the consistency and sensitivity of such people bring comfort to them (Ule, 2017). Having a disability, without a doubt, exposes SWDs to peer rejection and prohibits them from fully participating in society. As a result, they are cut off from the rest of the community. Peer rejection denotes unfavourable acceptance and labelling of SWDs as being distinct from the rest of the population in some way (Buljevac, 2020). In certain aspects, it widens the gap between SWDs and non-SWDs. For example, SWDs with mental disorders are more likely to encounter peer rejection, and social exclusion in this regard since their disabilities create inattention, make it difficult to sustain relationships, and cause them to behave markedly different than the rest of the population (Ziswiler, 2014).

The proximity of SWDs to their non-disabled peers can foster positive acceptance and encourage SWDs' engagement in social activities. SWDs who reside on campus have stronger interpersonal self-esteem, communicate with instructors, and participate in more extensive social responsibilities, according to Ziswiler (2014). SWDs who live on campus are also happier in terms of their social lives. However, designated housing indirectly adds to the social marginalization of SWDs. Although the objective was to provide appropriate treatment, the separation of SWDs from their peers created a gap between them and their non-disabled counterparts (Mutanga, 2017).

Although the objective was to provide appropriate treatment, the separation of SWDs from their peers created a gap between them and their non-disabled counterparts (Mutanga, 2017). Because of the disparity, individuals without disabilities would have minimal exposure to and knowledge about SWDs, leading some to discount the issues that SWDs confront. It may be a complex scenario when SWDs are accused of lying about their disability, being an attention seekers, and burdening the class. People feel that disabilities should be apparent, so SWDs with invisible disabilities, such as blindness, suffer additional challenges (Mutanga, 2017). Peer groups can be utilized to address non-academic problems such as socialization and life skills (Bruce, 2014). SWDs benefit from peer mentorship because it helps them enhance their social skills, knowledge, and capacity to interact with others. As a result, routinely normalizing relationships with peers without disabilities will lead to their independence in adjusting to higher education institutions (Smith, 2015).

**Table 1**  
*Synthesis of issues related to acceptance of SWDs in higher education*

Issues	Articles***																				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Peer acceptance	√	√	√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√	√			√	√	√	√		√	√
Disabilities closure	√	√		√						√											
Internalised disability acceptance	√				√					√				√							
Acceptance among SWDs					√		√											√			
Relationship between knowledge and acceptance					√	√	√	√			√	√	√	√		√	√	√	√		
External support		√				√	√		√		√						√		√	√	

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- |                              |                            |                            |                              |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Meyer (2012)              | 6. Smith (2015)            | 11. Tambi & Hazan (2017)   | 16. Mohamed et al., (2018)   |
| 2. Ambati & Ambati (2013)    | 7. Lourens & Swartz (2016) | 12. Mutanga (2017)         | 17. Harun et al., (2019)     |
| 3. Yusuff & Kurniawan (2013) | 8. Nasir & Hussain (2016)  | 13. Sánchez et al., (2017) | 18. Russak & Hellwing (2019) |
| 4. Bruce (2014)              | 9. Yssel et al., (2016)    | 14. Tuomia et al., (2017)  | 19. Herrick et al., (2020)   |
| 5. Ziswiler (2014)           | 10. Ule (2017)             | 15. Badri & Amin (2018)    | 20. Christian (2020)         |
|                              |                            |                            | 21. Buljevac et al., (2020)  |

According to this review, peer acceptance can be classified as either positive or negative. According to Harun et al (2019), when campus people are aware of the presence of SWDs on campus, and the institution offers the essential facilities for SWDs, acceptance of SWDs is generally favourable.

However, there is still room for improvement in knowledge about disabled-friendly facilities and the state of the facilities. According to Sanchez (2017), students without disabilities feel that SWDs have similar potential and rights and can live independently, emotionally, and mentally strong to lead a satisfying life.

Furthermore, those without disabilities indicated a modest level of favourable acceptance if SWDs become family members (Yusuff & Kurniawan, 2013). Humanity, morality, and religion all have an impact on acceptance. Acceptance rates were higher, however, when SWDs were considered friends or casual acquaintances in society. The example indicated that people, particularly in intimate connections, are not entirely prepared to embrace SWDs. Nonetheless, individuals generally accepted SWDs, and conditional acceptance may occur due to misconceptions about disabilities or a lack of disability information.

On the other hand, Mohamed et al (2018) discovered that peer acceptance of SWDs is poor, and SWDs are usually perceived as a burden in group activities. Peers have accused SWDs of abusing benefits when they are not suffering any difficulties. As a result, depending on where they reside, SWDs may feel disabled from the norm's perspective (Ambati & Ambati, 2013). Some people dislike SWDs because of the preferential treatment they receive from the government or receive attention and aid from others. Furthermore, lousy perception is based on isolated incidents of people with disabilities who use their disability to ask for help or something similar. Furthermore, negative impressions may have formed during earlier contact with SWDs and will likely persist for some time until they have a new experience and can make sense of positive outcomes from the interactions (Nassir & Hussain, 2016). Because this is a mental shortcut that individuals utilize to make sense of their circumstances, it is influenced by individual experiences or mental schema.

### ***ii. Disabilities Disclosure***

Dependence on peers harms SWDs' experiences with accommodations. First, it is difficult for SWDs to seek help regularly and disclose their difficulties for that purpose (Bruce, 2014). Second, SWDs generally do not use supplied disability support services because they are afraid of being judged by their colleagues and singled out for particular advantages. Third, they choose the assistance that ostensibly satisfies their need for belonging if they use disability support services (Meyer, 2012). Finally, they frequently seek peer assistance to satisfy the three psychological requirements of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. If these three demands are addressed, SWDs will perform better in all parts of life.

Usually, after graduating from high school, SWDs are more likely to report their disabilities and use the disabilities support programme (Meyer, 2012). Adequate social assistance during their high school years will help them understand their limitations better, resulting in a more positive self-concept and confidence. They will have more influence over their own life as a result. In addition, peer acceptance will encourage SWDs to share their difficulties without feeling burdened by their differences. When SWDs notice a negative stigma among their peers, they try to hide it intuitively. Although clear communication is beneficial in strengthening bonds with others, it does not always work. To develop tolerance and minimize confrontation, SWDs, for example, may have informed their roommates about their disability.

However, not everyone can receive such information favourably, and as a result, they may become more distant and awkward (Meyer, 2012).

Such behaviour could be explained by supposing that people avoid SWDs because they are embarrassed and uncomfortable dealing with impairments issues considered sensitive. As a result, people avoided interaction to relieve stress rather than dislike SWDs (Lourens & Swartz, 2016). People naturally rely on one another to meet their social needs, and if one fails to meet those expectations, the relationship will disintegrate. SWDs expect their peers to understand and tolerate their disabilities, and if that expectation is not satisfied, SWDs will find it challenging to connect with them (Nasir & Hussain, 2016), discouraging SWDs from reporting disabilities.

### ***iii. Internalised Disability Acceptance***

SWDs are often fully aware of unfavourable stereotypes, and their fear of being judged pushes them to live in concealment. If SWDs believe they belong or deserve to be a part of the community, they may face social isolation in higher education. As a result, individuals would engage in avoidance behaviour, isolating themselves from social activities and connecting with peers less frequently (Ziswiler, 2014). Such behaviour would result in social marginalization, and they cannot rely on others to understand them completely. Self-esteem originates from within, and for others to accept them, they must first accept themselves. Non-disabled people are more accepting of SWDs who accept and adapt to their limitations successfully (Lourens & Swartz, 2016). Only then would they be able to better understand themselves and allow others to do the same. When used correctly, disabilities might be helpful. Although disabilities can be perceived as a hindrance, they are also a factor in the success of SWDs. Because they have limitations, they are forced to encounter obstacles that help them become mentally and emotionally strong. They learned to seize opportunities, push themselves, and accept their limitations as a natural part of who they are (Russak & Hellwing, 2019). Internalizing their disabilities can lead to disability acceptance, allowing people with disabilities more confidence and strength to live better lives.

### ***iv. Acceptance among SWDs***

To blend in and seek acceptance from non-disabled people, SWDs cover or disguise their disabilities as much as possible. They prefer companionship with other SWDs since they are unable to be their real selves in the majority, and Goffman (1963) referred to this as "sympathetic others," where people shared a stigma (Lourens & Swartz, 2016). It is understandable because only people who have been in their shoes will acknowledge their thoughtfulness. As a result, it is simpler for people to relate to and express their experiences without passing judgment. Furthermore, disability support programmes help SWDs connect and foster bonding and overcome similar obstacles that form a supportive network (Meyer, 2012).

### ***v. Relationship between Knowledge and Acceptance***

The formation of an attitude without sufficient understanding is dangerous since it is more prone to rejection (Nasir & Hussain, 2016). People's acceptance of SWDs depends on their awareness of disability, according to (Tambi and Hazan, 2017). People with disabilities are

frequently associated with negative perceptions held by people with little to no knowledge about impairments. SWDs are typically defined as solely visible impairment (Fakhriah et al., 2018). Therefore, exposure and disability understanding is essential to be emphasized. For example, peers who connected with SWDs on and off-campus acted in a kind and inviting manner toward SWDs (Tambi & Hazan, 2017).

Although it is not always correct to believe that superior knowledge implies acceptance, information is vital in moulding one's perspective. As previously said, knowledge serves as the foundation for behaviour execution, directing people to respond to a variety of challenges. Because ignorance can lead to inaccurate assumptions, it is vital to provide enough information regarding SWDs and disabilities to encourage acceptance among non-disabled students.

Students who are not disabled but are aware of SWDs' rights will benefit both themselves and SWDs. They would, for example, accept any special treatment offered to SWDs, such as extra time in tests, without seeing it as unjust to them. They will also be more aware of the perks and accommodations that institutions should offer. Meanwhile, knowing that their peers are aware of their needs gives SWDs a sense of belonging and comfort, and they are welcomed as a part of the community. As a result, students with disabilities in higher education will enjoy a better learning and living experience (Mohamed et al., 2018).

In contrast, Toran (2011) discovered that peers without impairments had a high understanding of disabilities but had low acceptance of SWDs. Furthermore, according to another study, having a student with a disability as a family member or friend does not affect their knowledge of disability law (Mohamed et al., 2018). As a result, it is possible to conclude that information alone is insufficient to promote positive acceptance; environmental elements must also be considered.

#### ***vi. External Support***

Supportive individuals, such as parents, family members, faculty members, and peers, can help secure the well-being of SWDs by strengthening the social support networks that SWDs have access to (Smith, 2015). Family, being the closest person to SWDs, is critical in giving proper care and resources. Above all, emotional support will serve as a motivator for SWDs to progress in life.

Furthermore, seeking higher education boosts their worth and esteem, giving them the freedom and autonomy to engage in debate and decision-making. As a result, it instills a strong drive in SWDs to attain their life goals and pushes them to flourish in further education. They feel that education may help them improve their quality of life and break down cultural and social boundaries. External encouragement from others is critical in reinforcing their inner desire to succeed in society. However, women students with disabilities might require additional assistance (Tuomi et al., 2015)

On the other hand, most higher education institutions have offered support services for SWDs to ensure their well-being and rights are safeguarded and assist them in academic matters and social activities (Meyer, 2012). Acceptance of others influences whether or not SWDs

reveal their difficulties. In his study, Christian (2020) reported that faculty members and peers who displayed unfavourable acceptance of SWDs by providing little or no collaboration caused SWDs to conceal their disability more. Individuals participating in the teaching-learning process, in particular, should take the topic of aiding SWDs seriously. Even if they have the same possibilities as non-disabled people, negative attitudes will stymie the growth of SWDs (Sanchez et al., 2017).

SWDs require specialized unit services to help them acclimatize to higher education by providing relevant information and guidance. For example, in the United States, an organization supports SWDs by involving persons engaged in the creation and implementation of disability services inside higher education. The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) was established in 1977. Faculty, disability service personnel, parents, counsellors, and graduate students who are directly involved in advocating the inclusion of SWDs in higher education are members of this association. AHEAD involves training, advocating, and assisting to improve the experience of SWDs in higher education by providing its members with a variety of support programmes, such as information on best practices in the field, documentation guidelines, and programme standards, as well as professional development opportunities for disability services professional staff (Meyer, 2012). The programme is expected to aid in developing SWDs in higher education with the cooperation and support of diverse stakeholders.

### **Discussion**

This paper has synthesized that students without disabilities may feel uneasy in the presence of SWDs, causing SWDs to conceal their limitations for mutual gain (Lourens & Swartz, 2016). As a result, to avoid awkwardness and discomfort, SWDs may display hesitation and withdraw from social interaction with peers. Meanwhile, the divide has caused non-SWDs to become more distant from comprehending SWDs. Attitudinal obstacles can be overcome by introducing programmes that promote disability awareness by facilitating interactions between all students, including SWDs and non-SWDs (Smith, 2015).

The review revealed that rather than merely academics, it is vital to develop and build programmes that aid SWDs in transitioning to college life in general. The programmes should promote interpersonal engagement and include measures to break down social barriers between SWDs and non-SWDs, such as a peer mentor programme and disability-related support groups (Herrick et al., 2020). It is necessary to develop a social environment where SWDs and non-SWDs can interact and learn more about one another. In this sense, positive acceptance and tolerance can be expected.

Furthermore, the review shows that Ziswiler proposed more programmes that contribute to disability assistance and increase SWD participation with non-disabled peers, such as peer mentoring, informational sharing sessions, and campus services 2014. The peer support programme should address inclusion issues and increase SWDs' access to school (Ambati & Ambati, 2013). Yssel (2016) also advocated incorporating cooperative learning in the classroom to boost academic and social integration for SWDs. Cooperative learning means breaking up a large group of students into smaller groups to discuss and learn together. It aids



in the prevention of unintended or intentional social exclusion of SWDs from group activities, and the interaction should be monitored to ensure that roles in group activities are assigned appropriately.

Alternatively, a good awareness programme educating university members about disabilities should be created. Programs must reach their intended audiences via proper means and messages. A specific platform should be built for the purpose, and the implementation should be in line with current trends and technology. Combining old approaches, such as sharing sessions and campaigns, with current communication platforms, such as social media and YouTube, should be utilized (Nasir & Hussain, 2016). Social media has a broad reach for delivering information and can quickly reach a vast audience. Furthermore, the establishment of disability service offices facilitates the provision of academic accommodations for SWDs. However, it is necessary to assign a specific person in charge who has sufficient knowledge and abilities to deal with SWDs to facilitate associated adjustments (Smith, 2015).

The review also showed that although acceptance from peers is important, but SWDs must first internalize their limitations (Meyer, 2012) before searching out the need for belonging among their peers. It will be easier for them to interact with and share their disabilities with their peers if they understand their limitations and recognize the importance of their presence. Furthermore, internalized disability acceptance may provide SWDs more courage and drive to succeed in life, and the opinions of others will not sway them easily. If they have a firm foundation of disability acceptance, they can help educate others and inspire positive acceptance. Because most faculty members have little experience or awareness of SWDs, SWDs are partly responsible for educating them about accommodations and disability issues (Meyer, 2012).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This review has searched, selected and synthesised related journals and provided broad insights regarding the acceptance of SWD in higher education. Although the number of sources discussing SWDs in higher education is small, it is adequate to lay the groundwork for SWDs acceptance in higher education. Furthermore, a considerable amount of feedback, such as acceptance concerns and a few good proposals for future study and improvements, can be recognized by analyzing the articles.

The majority of the research had a small population size, which was one of its weaknesses. As a result, the results cannot be generalized to the entire population. Furthermore, because most of the research relied on SWDs' self-reported data, the risk of self-bias is exceptionally significant. As a result, the outcome may or may not accurately reflect the circumstances. Following that, the rate of response from SWDs is low. It suggests that SWDs declined to cooperate and were unwilling to admit or discuss their disability. Last but not least, the current systematic literature analysis indicated a scarcity of relevant research on non-SWD perceptions of SWDs in higher education because the majority of it was undertaken in schools instead.

### **Recommendations**

The present systematic reviews have yielded a consistent number of recommendations for additional studies. Firstly, future academics can do more quantitative studies to better understand the impact of the environment on SWDs by collecting empirical data on disability in higher education. Furthermore, when assessing SWDs' experiences in higher education, demographic criteria such as ethnicity, gender, and disability type should be considered. The experience of SWDs in higher education should be linked to the more significant population and how it contributes to their social involvement and academic performance. Future academics should also compare SWDs and non-SWDs in higher education regarding social involvement, tasks, and responsibilities. Scholars can use comparison to uncover gaps in SWDs' experiences, and measures can be made to improve SWDs' participation alongside their counterparts.

Tolerance, mutual understanding, and disability awareness would be promoted through social engagement between SWDs and their peers. As a result, they should have a positive relationship and interaction. The level of engagement can be measured in terms of contact frequency, engagement type, and disability kind. Future researchers should study the engagement of SWDs and non-SWDs to see if there is a link between the types of disabilities, type of engagement, and frequency of interaction. Furthermore, levels of involvement can be examined across different fields of study or courses to discover a difference in disability acceptance. Students from distinct disciplines of study may have varied views toward SWDs since environmental influences might influence behaviour. A relevant awareness programme can be designed after determining the distinction.

Following that, social media plays an essential function as a source of information in educating the public about disabilities. As a result, more research is needed to establish the influence of social media in higher education. Because a modern problem necessitates a modern solution, addressing acceptance among SWDs necessitates using current technologies. Traditional approaches, such as campaigns, awareness campaigns, and information sharing sessions should be adapted and merged with current practices. Disability issues should be revealed through various digital social platforms such as Zoom Meeting, Google Meet, etc. Messages may be broadcast to big audiences and instantaneously shared globally with a simple click. As a result, employing social media to raise awareness and exposure for SWDs in higher education would be more efficient.

As a result, awareness is accompanied by attitude. Most significantly, understanding the needs and rights of SWDs should first reach every member of higher education institutions to create a conducive environment. For example, an online campaign on the official higher education website and live broadcasting of SWDs and non-SWDs integration programme. The awareness campaign should not be considered a one-time event but rather an ongoing effort to distribute important disability information.

On the other hand, capacity building is essential to encourage more excellent knowledge and abilities in handling SWDs in higher education. Two-way contact between university members and SWDs may assist students to reveal their impairment and use services when they begin

college. Furthermore, if students perceive an initial boost in support for autonomy and relatedness, they may be inspired to seek services from the disability support unit in higher education. As a result, future scholars were advised to research the experiences of those involved in managing SWDs in higher education. Their capacity growth can be tracked, and relevant training or programmes to boost efficiency can be devised.

Meanwhile, research can be undertaken from the perspective of SWDs to compare their perceptions of success and contributing factors between SWDs who got support services and those who did not. The findings highlight the importance of disability support services in SWDs' academic progress in higher education. Finally, qualitative research on SWDs with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or other mental disabilities should be carried out. It would be helpful to interview them to learn about their personal experiences in higher education and their thoughts on programmes, procedures that motivate them to graduate, and future job placement. People are suggesting mental disabilities because they are unfamiliar with them, and they have an unseen limitation that needs a different experience than visible disabilities.

After reading through all of the articles, it is feasible to infer that most past studies focused on the perspectives of SWDs themselves. As a result, more research on SWD acceptability from the standpoint of non-SWDs should be done. Acceptance of disability is ostensibly a collaborative effort of SWDs and non-SWDs; so, perception of SWDs alone is insufficient to declare the condition because it may lead to bias. A quantitative study can be carried out to assess overall disability acceptance among non-SWDs, followed by a qualitative study to provide specific explanations and build more profound knowledge of the issue.

Furthermore, based on the current analysis, additional recommendations might be made to promote SWD adoption in higher education. First, non-disabled students could be educated and raised knowledge of the disability experience, potentially making it more straightforward for them to approach their peers with disabilities in a positive manner. Second, university management should review current policies and make adjustments to the current system to better fulfil the demands of SWDs. Third, campus-wide support for SWDs should be decentralized, and a disabilities service unit should be developed to offer SWDs support and help in higher education. Finally, counselling or psychology services to SWDs in higher education to address their psychological well-being and mental health maintenance is crucial.

### **Conclusion**

The current systematic review has shed light on the challenges of SWDs acceptance in higher education among non-disabled students. The review of these publications highlighted six concerns that explain the scenario of acceptance of SWDs in higher education and the factors that contribute to acceptance. The review concentrated on the acceptance of SWDs in higher education in various nations, as well as on the holistic features of SWDs, such as internal acceptance, accommodation, and social well-being. Acceptance of SWDs is essential for their learning experience in higher education, as it contributes to academic achievement and well-being. Acceptance among non-disabled students benefits both parties and indirectly fosters

a happy environment. SWDs inclusion among peers would produce a healthy learning environment, resulting in a good and well-balanced society.

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