

## Poster Abstract Book (All Poster)

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Teaching and learning practice and the retention of disabled students in Scottish higher education

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**Abstract:** Despite their increased presence in higher education (HE), disabled students are graduating at lower levels than their non-disabled peers. This means that many disabled students are not enjoying the benefits of completing HE qualifications and might face difficulties linked to early withdrawal. Although the reasons leading to the said discrepancy in retention rates are complex and dynamic, it is necessary to understand them better to help improve the situation. With that aim, this project explores the impact of pedagogical practice on the retention of disabled students in HE, which is an essential aspect of the student experience, potentially shaping disabled students' decisions to persist or withdraw. This poster presentation focuses on the study's preliminary results, which adopted a qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews conducted with disabled students and staff working in Scottish HE. The aim is to shed light on how pedagogy can enhance the retention rates of disabled students.

### Poster Outline:

The number of disabled students entering higher education (HE) has recently been increasing (Hector, 2020). However, despite the positive outcomes associated with obtaining qualifications at this level of education (see Newman et al., 2020), disabled students are retained at lower levels than their non-disabled peers (Koch et al., 2018). Unfortunately, there are multiple, dynamic, and complex reasons behind this phenomenon (Fichten et al., 2014, Thompson-Ebanks, 2014), which include low academic and social integration (Fichten et al., 2014) or financial hardship (Thompson-Ebanks, 2014).

Therefore, facilitating access into HE seems to be simply the first step towards inclusion (Bartz, 2020); it is essential to understand the factors impacting the academic progression of disabled students to help enhance the retention rates of this group of students. In this regard, pedagogical practice is a factor deserving of attention since it is an essential part of the academic experience of all students (Tinto, 2003), and it plays a crucial role in improving student retention (Thomas, 2016). Nevertheless, disabled students in HE still face negative attitudes and difficulties to successfully access education (Lopez-Gavira, Moriña and Morgado, 2019, Bartz, 2020), and the ways in which teaching and learning practice is shaping their decisions to persist (or withdraw) has not been widely researched.

The current research project focuses on studying how teaching and learning practice is affecting the retention of disabled students in Scottish HE. Consequently, this study explores current practices in the field and their role in enhancing the retention of disabled students in Scotland. Additionally, it also focuses on the experiences of disabled students in Scottish HE and the impact that pedagogical practice has, or had, on their intentions to graduate. The poster presented at this conference will

concentrate on the preliminary results expected to be obtained during the second half of 2021, in line with the study's aims. These preliminary results will be the product of a qualitative research design based on semi-structured interviews, and Critical Discourse Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as the instrument and analysis methods chosen for this study. The participants included in this research are disabled students - currently and formerly - enrolled in Scottish HE and staff working in the same educational sector. The preliminary results included in this poster aim at shedding light on how pedagogical practice can enhance the retention of disabled students in HE, which is one of the expected outcomes of this research project.

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