

## Teaching Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Institutions: Educators' Perceptions

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The right of students with disabilities to pursue higher education is being increasingly recognised while simultaneously being regarded as a new challenge. This study explored the perceptions of educators teaching students with disabilities in post-secondary institutions in Malta, using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. In the first phase, a quantitative survey (n= 150) was conducted to obtain a general understanding of educators' perceptions, strategies used, and training and support needs. In the second phase, ten educators participated in semi-structured interviews: six from academic institutions, and four from vocational institutions. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS, while qualitative data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis and NVivo software. The results from both phases were integrated with the aim of answering the research question. Survey data indicated significant positive correlations between the three generated educator perception scales: positive attitude towards teaching students with disabilities, sufficient training and support, and extensive and effective use of different strategies. Interview data confirmed and supplemented the survey data. Four main qualitative themes were identified: educators embraced a generally positive attitude towards students with disabilities; navigating practical challenges; educators used various strategies to enable student participation; and calls for improvement of a more inclusive system. Educators in academic institutions reported more challenges and less support compared to those in vocational institutions. The findings call for several systemic changes, including improved communication and more seamless transitions to post-secondary education; more accessible institutional support and resources; and practical and tailor-made training for educators.

**Keywords:** students with disabilities, post-secondary institutions, educators' perceptions, inclusion, mixed methods

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