

The experiences of Girls and Young Women with Disabilities in
Participation in Education
A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Inclusive education is considered an integral component of human rights. However, girls with disabilities are less likely to attend or finish their education. They are often left out of research based on school participation, even though they are more likely to be absent from school. This study aims to answer the question “*What is known about the participation of girls or women with disabilities in educational settings?*”. In order to identify and synthesise literature a systematic literature review was conducted, using the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Thirteen peer-reviewed articles were included, using various research designs to describe the experiences of girls and women with disabilities in education. A deductive approach was used to analyse various forms of participation - formal and informal belonging, accessibility (physical, socio-communication, meaning context), interaction, involvement, and acceptance - in these articles. Findings revealed that schools failed to offer all aspects of participation to these girls and women. They felt excluded in their participation and not accepted by their school community, with in some cases reports of dropping out because of this. In addition, intersectionality was used to look at these unique experiences of girls and women with disabilities, finding that they faced double discrimination based on their gender and disability. The results of this study emphasises the need for further research in these unique experiences, and the need for schools to be more reflective about their contribution to the participation of girls and women with disabilities.

Samenvatting

Inclusief onderwijs wordt beschouwd als integraal onderdeel van de mensenrechten. Meisjes met een beperking hebben echter minder kans om onderwijs te volgen of af te maken. Ze worden vaak uitgesloten in onderzoek naar schooldeelname, ook al zijn ze vaker afwezig op school. Deze studie wil een antwoord geven op de vraag: *“Wat is er bekend over de deelname van meisjes of vrouwen met een beperking aan het onderwijs?”*. Om de literatuur te identificeren en samen te vatten, is er een systematisch literatuuronderzoek uitgevoerd op basis van de PRISMA 2020-richtlijnen. Dertien peer-reviewed artikelen zijn geïncludeerd, om de ervaringen van meisjes en vrouwen met een beperking in het onderwijs te onderzoeken. Er is een deductieve benadering gebruikt om verschillende vormen van deelname – formele en informele verbondenheid, toegankelijkheid (fysiek, sociaal-communicatief, betekenis van context), interactie, betrokkenheid en acceptatie – in deze artikelen te analyseren. Uit de bevindingen bleek dat scholen er niet in slaagden om hen alle aspecten van participatie aan te bieden. Ze voelden zich buitengesloten bij hun participatie en niet geaccepteerd door hun schoolgemeenschap, waarbij in sommige gevallen er sprake was van schooluitval. Daarnaast werd intersectionaliteit gebruikt om naar deze unieke ervaringen van meisjes en vrouwen met een beperking te kijken, waarbij bleek dat ze te maken hadden met dubbele discriminatie op basis van hun geslacht en beperking. De resultaten van dit onderzoek benadrukken de noodzaak van verder onderzoek naar deze ervaringen en om scholen meer na te laten reflecteren over hun bijdrage aan de participatie van meisjes en vrouwen met een beperking.

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Introduction and theoretical background

Inclusive education

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that education is a fundamental human right. While terminology may vary between countries and educational systems, the principle of inclusive education is that everyone has the right to participate in education without exclusion. Nevertheless, not everyone has access to education. The most vulnerable are more likely to be excluded from school, including those who live in poverty, girls and women, those with impairments, and more (Stubbs, 2008). Inclusive education is a belief system that challenges any instance of exclusion, and it can be viewed as an ongoing, unfinished process (Moriña, 2016). Preventing stigma, stereotyping, prejudice and alienation can be achieved through inclusive education. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report Team (2020), inclusive education can improve academic performance, social and emotional development, self-esteem, and acceptance by peers.

Several policies have influenced the process of inclusive education, advocating the rights of children to participate in education and defining the process of making education inclusive to all. The Salamanca Statement is one of the key policies. In this statement, nations agreed that schools should accommodate all students, regardless of their needs. Inclusive education is considered an integral component of human rights (UNESCO, 1994). Another important policy is the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), particularly Article 24. The Convention aims to guarantee that people with disabilities are able to exercise all their human rights, with Article 24 addressing their educational needs. In summary, people with disabilities should receive the necessary support within the general education system, free from discrimination and based on equal opportunities. Although the rights of girls with disabilities are not explicitly mentioned in Article 24, it is noted in Article 6 that girls and women with disabilities are subjected to multiple discrimination (Hendriks, 2007). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, particularly the fourth goal, contribute to these key policies. The objective of the goal is *“ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and fostering opportunities for lifelong learning for all”*. The aim is to make all educational levels accessible to vulnerable groups - including those with disabilities - and to eradicate gender inequities (United Nations, 2023).

Despite these policies and many other agreements, not everyone has access to education. While inclusive education centres on recognising and addressing diversity in all its forms and developing an inclusive educational system for all, it is most often associated with the inclusion of individuals with disabilities. It could be argued that people with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable groups to educational exclusion (Stubbs, 2008).

Disability

The World Health Organization (2011) describes disability as 'a complex, dynamic, multidimensional and contested' concept. This definition includes disability, activity restrictions, limited participation, and the adverse aspects of the relationship between an individual and their context, including personal and environmental factors. Another way to define disabilities is through the relationship between an individual's disabilities and the attitudinal and environmental barriers that make full and effective participation in society difficult. These limitations are viewed as ways in which the environment hinders participation rather than as personal characteristics (World Health Organization, 2011).

The concept of disability is defined by multiple perspectives that have shaped the way we view it. Historically, there was a clear distinction between the medical and social models (World Health Organization, 2011). The medical model views disability as anything that can be directly attributed to illness, trauma, or other health issues. Following this, the person with a disability requires medical attention or adjustments. In contrast, the social model explains disability as a complicated set of conditions, most of which are brought about by the social environment in which an individual lives. While the medical model views disability as a personal characteristic necessitating personal adjustment, the social model advocates changes to the social context to promote full participation (Emmet & Alant, 2006). The World Health Organization has advocated a more balanced approach, arguing that disability should not be viewed from a single perspective. As well as health issues brought on by their impairments, a person may encounter issues brought on by their living environment (World Health Organization, 2011). The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) is nowadays used to define and assess health and disability (World Health Organization, 2002). It is an attempt to create a universal language for talking about and classifying disability. It places more emphasis

on people's health than their limitations. Everyone may experience a decline in health and become disabled as a result. The framework helps to determine how well an individual functions in society and how the social and physical environment affects the disadvantages people face in their daily lives (World Health Organization, 2002).

The population of people with disabilities is sizable, diverse and heterogeneous. Due to the varying definitions of disability in different countries, it is difficult to estimate the number of people with disabilities. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2011) estimates that 1.3 billion people worldwide experience some form of disability, including around 780 million women (Stienstra, 2022) and 240 million children (UNICEF, no date). Not only is the prevalence of disability higher among girls and women in all nations (World Health Organisation, 2011), but they are also more likely to experience exclusion and prejudice. Ensuring their participation in education and other rights is challenging for girls and women with disabilities (Emmett & Alant, 2006).

Social participation of children with disabilities in education

The concept of participation has been widely used and studied in a variety of scientific fields, including health and social care. However, no precise definition has been made (Piškur et al., 2013). The ICF uses definitions as 'involvement in an individual's life' or 'the lived experience of a person in their living situation' for the term participation (World Health Organisation, 2001). The term evolved into a resource for comprehending the potential effects of impairments on an individual's life. Some researchers use the term interchangeably with the concept of social participation, others connect social participation with concepts such as social integration, social inclusion or social activity (Piškur et al., 2013). Koster et al. (2009) identified that interactions were a significant aspect of social participation in educational settings. Playing together and forming lasting connections, friendships, and social contacts were other significant components of social participation. Social participation involves positive social contact and social ties between children and their classmates, acceptance of the child by their classmates, and the perception of acceptance by the children themselves (Koster et al., 2009).

A model which describes participation based in the school context is the Participation Model (Janson, 2005, as cited in Edström et al., 2022), with six aspects supporting a student's

participation: belonging, accessibility, interaction, autonomy, involvement and acceptance. These aspects are explained by the authors as the following descriptions: belonging is described as having two aspects, formal belonging (legitimation of entry) and informal belonging (student's subjective feeling of being an important part of the group). Accessibility has three aspects: physical (availability of the physical environment), socio-communication (ability to understand, be understood and communicate with others) and meaning context (understanding the meaning and purpose of what one is doing and being able to understand according to the context). Interaction is the act of contributing to an activity with others. Autonomy means being able to make decisions about one's own situation. Involvement means feeling interest and joy in an activity and acceptance means being acknowledged and accepted by others. To access full participation, students should be offered all of the aspects (Edström et al., 2022).

Social participation has been shown to be important for children's development. It is regarded as an indicator of well-being, health, and constructive behaviour (Bedell & Dumas, 2004; Law, 2002). Children with disabilities may benefit from more frequent interaction with their peers who do not have disabilities in terms of their social and emotional development (Koster et al., 2009). One way to facilitate interaction between children with and without disabilities is through schools. It is suggested that an educational system may be an effective means of creating opportunities for children with disabilities to participate fully (Vandenbussche & De Schauwer, 2018). The interplay of inclusion and exclusion is theorised to give rise to new inclusive and exclusive conditions and possibilities (Armstrong et al., 2011). Participation and inclusion are connected, and the shift indicated by the Salamanca Statement to the new era was described as a 'full participation paradigm' shift. It has been suggested that inclusive education can be achieved through participation (Edström et al., 2022). Participation is a key component of inclusion; however, challenges remain in conceptualising and developing interventions. Although involvement is considered important in inclusive education (Maxwell et al., 2018), this is not always evident in reality.

Participation of girls with disability in education

Despite efforts to make education more inclusive (Mizunoya et al., 2017), children with disabilities, especially girls, are less likely to attend school than children without disabilities. It is

reported that 41.7% of women with disabilities have completed primary school, compared to 52% of women without disabilities. This is in contrast to the percentages of men with and without disabilities who finished their education: 61.3% and 50.6% respectively (World Health Organisation, 2011). Over the past twenty years, girl's participation in education has improved. However, these improvements are mostly seen in lower-middle income countries and are primarily concentrated in the first half of this century. In low-income countries, young women of upper secondary age have a higher likelihood of not attending school than young men. Among those who are most likely to be absent from school at all levels are girls with disabilities (United Nations Girls Education Initiative, 2022). In spite of the emphasis on marginalised girls, in the report of the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (2022) there is little mention of girls with disabilities and their school participation compared to girls living in conflict, poverty and/or countries dealing with gender inequalities. When discussing gender equity, people frequently overlook disabilities, and they also overlook girls and women when discussing disability equity (Cnockaert, 2009; Rousso, 2003).

The fact that girls with disabilities are often forgotten when they are discussed in literature about educational justice is a major problem. Because disabilities are frequently overlooked in their work, these girls are invisible to researchers who are dedicated to educational equity for women, and to those who are dedicated to educational justice for children with disabilities because they frequently fail to take gender into account. It is often challenging to determine the combined effects of gender and disability bias when research is published (Rousso, 2003), whereas the combination of these identities affects educational participation. Examining how being a girl and having a disability affect participation in educational settings is insufficient.

Intersectionality and girls with disabilities

Intersectionality is a useful approach for analysing the educational experiences of girls with disabilities. One of the key points of intersectionality is the concept that social identities - such as gender, race, and (dis)ability - influence a person's identity comprehensively (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality can be used as an analytical tool and conceptual framework to gain a deeper understanding of how social identities and experiences are constructed. Rather than being the sum of their social identities, a person's identity is a meaningful complexity. These social

identities influence each other's meanings; a person's gender and other characteristics affect how disability is defined (Cnockaert, 2008). Intersectionality makes it easier to understand and respond to the ways in which gender overlaps with different identities, and how these intersections lead to distinct experiences of exclusion (Symington, 2004). The analysis of the intersection of gender and ability provides a framework for examining how schools influence the identity of students. The intersection between schooling and disability, as well as the various identities that influence the meanings of disability at the intersection of gender, mediate the social interactions of girls with disabilities in society (Nguyen & Mitchell, 2014). It has been argued that the lived experiences of girls with disabilities are different from those of both boys with disabilities and girls without disabilities (Guzmán, 2021), therefore it is crucial to examine them from an intersectional viewpoint.

Current study

The Salamanca Statements emphasise that schools are to accommodate students with special needs (UNESCO, 1994), ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality education (Stubbs, 2008). Over the years, more attention has been given to the most vulnerable children, who are often excluded from educational settings (Global Education Monitoring Report Team, 2020; Hendriks, 2007; United Nations, 2023). Compared to their male peers, girls with disabilities are often excluded from school (Emmet & Alant, 2006; World Health Organization, 2011). Relatively little research has been conducted to provide a comprehensive picture of how girls with disabilities participate in school environments. This systematic literature review aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the research examining the combined impact of being a girl and having a disability on school participation experiences. This systematic literature review will attempt to answer the following research question: *'What is known about the participation of girls or women with disabilities in educational settings?'*

Methods

Design

In order to provide a response to the research question, '*What is known about the participation of girls or women with disabilities in educational settings?*', this literature review was conducted in accordance with the 2020 PRISMA guidelines to ensure a structured, transparent and accurate process (Page et al., 2021). A systematic literature review is intended to identify all studies pertaining to a particular topic, in order to reduce the possibility of selection, publication, and data extraction bias (Nightingale, 2009). In order to answer the research question, the objective of this systematic review is to find, evaluate, and synthesize empirical research that meets the predetermined criteria. A literature review was chosen in order to gain an overview of the existing literature on the experiences of girls and women with disabilities in education. By analysing the articles, an attempt was made to gain a detailed picture of the factors that contribute to the school participation of these girls and women, and their unique experiences as girls or women with disabilities.

Selection criteria

The decision to include literature in the study was determined by evaluating all publications using predetermined criteria. For the purposes of inclusion in this research, articles had to be published between January 1994 and May 2025. The date of 1994 was selected on the basis that it corresponded to the year in which the Salamanca Statement was both held and subsequently published. The decision was taken to include all publications pertaining to inclusive educational settings in order to enhance the probability of incorporating articles that are relevant to the present review. In accordance with academic standards, articles were only included if they had been peer-reviewed. Finally, the article was required to take the form of an empirical study, including qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research. The article was excluded from the selection process when these criteria were not met.

The titles and abstracts of each identified study were analysed to determine their likelihood of meeting the inclusion criteria of this review and whether they warranted further examination. The following criteria were applied in the selection of papers for this study:

1. The primary focus of the paper was participation, based on the forms described in the Participation Model (Eström et al., 2022): belonging, accessibility, interaction, autonomy,

involvement, and acceptance; or a closely related concept, such as social participation, social integration or social inclusion.

2. The paper was focused on girls, young women or female students with a disability.
3. The study took place in an educational setting, including regular and inclusive educational settings.
4. The paper was published in English.
5. The paper has been peer-reviewed.
6. The paper was based on empirical research, including qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods research.

The following articles were excluded of this literature review:

1. The concept of participation or a closely related concept was not relevant in the article.
2. The focus was on boys, young men or male students with a disability or the focus was on girls, young women or female students without a disability.
3. The research did not take place in an educational setting or the setting was not the focus.
4. The language was not in English.
5. The paper was not peer-reviewed.
6. The paper was not based on empirical research or the type of research was not specified.
7. The paper was not fully published.

Search strategy

For this review, peer-reviewed literature from 1994-2025 were found using the scientific databases ERIC, PsychInfo, SocioIndex, and Web of Science. The search for articles was done between May 2025 and June 2025. The Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to apply the following search terms:

(participation OR 'social participation" OR "social inclusion" OR "social integration" OR friendships OR "social relationships" OR "peer acceptance" OR "group activities" OR "social connections" OR belonging OR accessibility OR interaction OR involvement OR acceptance OR autonomy)

AND *(girl* OR wom* OR female OR feminin)*

AND *(disabilit* OR disabled OR impair* OR "special health problems" OR disorder* OR "special educational needs")*

AND (*“inclusive education” OR “inclusive classrooms” OR “mainstream education” OR “regular education” OR “primary education” OR “elementary education” OR “early childhood education” OR school**).

Additionally, in Web of Science the following Web of Science categories were chosen to narrow down the search and thereby reduce the number articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria: Psychology Clinical, Psychology Multidisciplinary, Educational Research, Neurosciences, Education Special, Psychology, Multidisciplinary Sciences, Social Sciences Interdisciplinary, Orthopedics, Psychology Social, Behavioral Sciences and Sociology.

Selection procedure

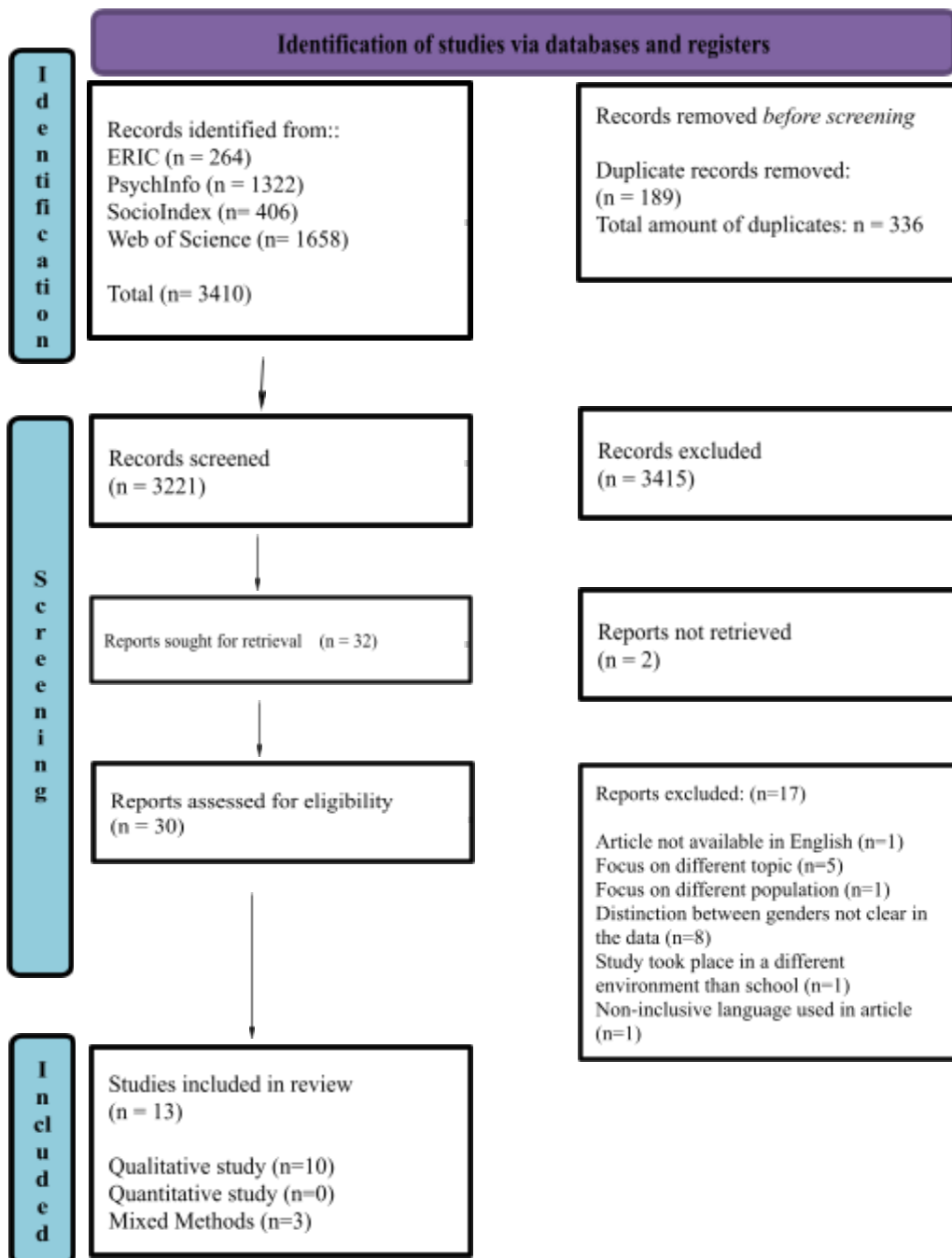
A total of n= 3636 studies were identified using the search strategy from the following databases: ERIC (n = 247), PsychInfo (n=1322), SocioIndex (n=408), and Web of Science (n=1658). Duplicate studies will be eliminated once all the retrieved studies have been integrated into Rayyan (Rayyan, n.d.). To guarantee accuracy, the remaining articles have been checked manually. The titles and abstracts of the remaining studies were screened in accordance with the predetermined inclusion criteria, and those that did not meet these criteria were eliminated. During the initial screening, the articles were categorised as “yes”, “maybe” or “no” using Rayyan. The inclusion criteria were used to determine why articles were excluded. For instance, studies were excluded because they did not address participation or a closely related concept, or they did not focus on girls, young women, or female students with a form of disability. If it was not clear from the title and abstract whether an article met the inclusion criteria, it was placed in the “maybe” category. After reviewing the articles, 30 articles were identified that appeared suitable for analysis based on the initial screening. In this stage these articles were reviewed again using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, not based on the title and abstract but based on a general reading of the text. Only articles that were screened as appropriate after a general reading were placed under the final category “yes” and were chosen to be screened based on the full text. After this stage, seven articles were chosen to be excluded. The reasons why are provided in Figure 1.

In the final stage, the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) was used to evaluate the quality of the articles. This tool is designed for assessing qualitative, quantitative and mixed-methods research when conducting a systematic literature review (Pluye et al., 2011). The MMAT appraises the most common types of study methodology and design and has separate

sections for the three empirical research methods used in this study. For example, the criteria for qualitative research are based on the sources of data and their relevance to the research question. The criteria for quantitative research are also based on withdrawal and outcome data. For mixed-methods research, the quality is examined through the relevance of integrating qualitative and quantitative data (Pluye et al., 2011). All articles that were left in the final stage were assessed for their quality and were chosen, based on the criteria, to be included in the literature analysis. Figure 1 shows the PRISMA chart, which provides an overview of the selection process.

Figure 1.

PRISMA flow chart for article screening and selection (Page et al., 2021).



Data extraction and synthesis

Microsoft Excel will be used to create a table of the chosen articles in order to methodically collect the relevant data. This will include: (a) the title; (b) author(s); (c) year of publication; (d) research aim; (e) research design and the population of the study; (f) key findings of the study; and (g) categories of participation.

A thematic synthesis was used to find the concepts of participation of girls with disabilities in educational settings and translating these between the found articles (Thomas & Harden, 2008). The thematic analysis was conducted by using the approach provided by Braun and Clarke (2006). The first stage is to become familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the articles. After this, initial codes were generated using a 'theory-driven' approach based on the predetermined categories of participation. This meant that the analysis was deductive. The data were categorised according to the forms of participation set out in the Participation Model (Edström et al., 2022): (a1) belonging; (a2) accessibility; (a3) interaction; (a4) autonomy; (a5) involvement; and (a6) acceptance. The themes found in the articles were then examined for similarities and differences. The broader context of the literature review - the intersectionality of gender and disability - was examined through the forms of participation in schools. Ultimately, the codes relating to participation were organised into broader themes that provided insight into the research question. Throughout the analysis, the data were re-read and assessed to determine whether they supported the themes (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017).

Results

To answer the research question *'What is known about the participation of girls or women with disabilities in educational settings?'* thirteen articles were analysed. These articles were published between 1999 and 2024. The studies were conducted in the following countries: Canada (1), India (1), Saudi Arabia (1), Spain (1), Sweden (1), the United Kingdom (1), and the United States of America (3). One study was conducted in several countries in West and East Africa: Guinea, Niger, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Togo and Zambia.

Ten of the studies used a qualitative research approach, while three used a mixed methods approach. None of the articles in this literature review used only a quantitative approach. The most frequently used data collection methods were (semi-structured) interviews (8), focus groups (3), observations (2), questionnaires (2), and pre- and post-intervention studies (1). One study reported on two studies (Hui et al., 2017). In nine studies researchers reported only the information from female students, in four studies they also reported information from teachers, parents and/or classmates. The number of participants in the studies ranged from one (Casale-Giannola & Wilson Kamens, 2006) to 336 (Bromley et al., 2022). Two studies took place in a primary school setting, the ages of the children in which were not disclosed (Chingunwe & Tembachako, 2017; Hui et al., 2017). Eleven studies took place in a secondary or higher education setting, with participants aged between 12 and 52 years (Alsamih, 2024; Apeldo, 2018; Bromley et al., 2022; Casale-Giannola & Wilson Kamens, 2006; Erten, 2011; Hodges & Keller, 1999; Leon-Larios et al., 2024; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022; Nateetha & Srihari, 2021; Porter & Ingram, 2021; Tuomi et al., 2015). One study addressed one participant (Casale-Giannola & Wilson Kamens, 2006), while twelve studies addressed two or more participants. In table 1 below the summary of the articles can be found, organised in the following categories: (a) the title; (b) author(s); (c) year of publication; (d) research aim; (e) research design and population of the study; (f) key findings; and (g) categories of participation.

The following aspects of participation were searched in the articles: (formal and informal) belonging, accessibility (physical, socio-communication and meaning context), interaction, involvement and acceptance. In the following paragraphs these aspects will be discussed further.

Table 1.*General summary of the articles included in the literature review.*

Author(s)	Year of publication	Title	Country	Research aim	Research design and population of the study	Key findings of the study	Categories of participation
Alsamih	2024	Social Experiences of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students at a Saudi Arabian University: a Qualitative Study.	Saudi Arabia	To explore the social experiences of d/Deaf and hard of hearing university students, including instances of exclusion, inclusion and communication with others.	Qualitative study, using interviews. 12 young women studying at the university, age range 22-26: 6 deaf (indicating profound hearing loss), 6 hard-of-hearing (indicating mild hearing loss)	The social experiences of deaf and hard-of-hearing students at the university were positive and better than their previous school experiences. There was a high awareness of hearing disabilities among hearing students at the university, which helped to improve their attitude towards disabled students.	Formal and informal belonging, accessibility (physical, socio-communication and meaning context), interaction, autonomy, and acceptance were met.
Apelmo	2019	'You do it in your own particular way.' Physical Education, Gender and (Dis)Ability.	Sweden	To explore, from a gender perspective, how young sporting women with physical impairments experience physical education (PE), and which strategies they use to manage situations that arise in the everyday interaction in connection with those lessons.	Qualitative study, using semi-structured interviews. 10 young women, aged 15-28 years. In addition a male coach and three boys aged 10-15 years were interviewed.	Disabled women are made 'the other' by being excluded and pointed out, PE teachers seem to find it difficult to view them as sport-interested youths. The students wanted to be seen as normal, but experienced exclusion and special treatment in relation to PE in which they reacted with different strategies.	Formal belonging, and accessibility (socio-communication) was met.
Bromley et al.	2022	Paths 2 the Future and the Development of Perceived Peer Support: A Mixed Methods Study.	United States of America	To examine environmental and curricular influences on peer relationships and support for young women with disabilities within a clustered, randomised controlled trial of gender-specific, disability-focused intervention (Path 2 the Future).	Mixed methods study. Quantitative data was collected using a pre- and post-intervention with a follow-up survey. Qualitative data was collected using focus groups. 336 young women with disabilities, age range 14-18 years. The intervention group had 153 participants, the control group had 213 participants. Disabilities were high incidence disabilities, meaning learning disabilities, other health impairments, ASD, speech/language and emotional disabilities.	Quantitative results suggested P2F did not affect peer support for young women with disabilities. Qualitative results suggested the relationship and relationship skills of young women with disabilities who participated in focus groups were impacted by P2F.	Formal and informal belonging (only through all-girls classrooms), accessibility (physical, socio-communication, meaning context), interaction, involvement and acceptance were met.

Casale-Giannola & Wilson Kamens	2006	Inclusion at a University: Experience of a Young Woman with Down Syndrome.	United States of America	To explore the impact of the experiences of participating in a speech communication course at a 4-year, private university on the student, her classmates, and preservice teacher who offered peer support.	Mixed methods study. Qualitative data was collected using interviews and observations. Quantitative data was collected using a pre- and post survey. One young woman (21 years old) with Down Syndrome, her peer support person, the mother of the participant, the course instructor, two special education teachers and peers enrolled in the same course.	The student successfully completed the course, practicing organisation and giving speeches. Her peer support person adapted the assignment, reinforcing learning at home by facilitating communication and providing continuity by helping with organisation, practicing, and planning. Both the student and the peer support person, as the student and her peers had positive interactions.	Formal and informal belonging, accessibility (physical, socio-communication), interaction, autonomy, involvement, and acceptance were met.
Chingunwe & Tembachako	2017	Public School Toilets: A Curse or Blessing for Girls with Physical Disabilities	Zimbabwe	To assess the effect of inaccessibility of school toilets to girl pupils with disabilities.	Qualitative study, using interviews. Girls with physical disabilities at a primary school in Bindura Urban, Zimbabwe.	The observed school had inaccessible infrastructure at their toilet buildings that made it difficult for students with disabilities to use. Girls in wheelchairs faced more difficulties, especially during their menstruation. This resulted in girls absenting themselves from school during their menstruation. Most girls with disabilities also dropped out of their schools.	Formal belonging, accessibility (socio-communication) was met.
Erten	2011	Facing Challenges: Experiences of Young Women with Disabilities Attending a Canadian University	Canada	To examine the perspectives of students with disabilities studying at a postsecondary institution in Canada.	Qualitative study, using focus groups. Seven undergraduate and graduate women with disabilities, age range 22-28 years. Five women had learning disabilities, one woman had chronic health problems, and two women had mobility difficulties.	Students did not feel supported by their university in terms of accommodations. Research revealed that there were hidden attitudinal barriers that restrained equal participation opportunities for all students.	Formal belonging, accessibility (socio-communication), and autonomy were met.
Hodges & Keller	1999	Perceived Influences on Social Integration by Students with Physical Disabilities	United States of America	To identify what undergraduate students with physical disabilities perceived as influencing their social involvement on a university campus.	Qualitative study, using focus groups with semi-structured interviews. Sixteen undergraduate students: seven male students , nine female students with physical disabilities, age range 22-52 years. Types of disabilities were congenital impairments, including orthopedic impairments and cerebral palsy (nine students), visual impairment (one student), spinal injuries (five students), organic brain impairment (one student).	Students perceived some barriers to their involvement at their university, such as perceived lack of acceptance by their peers, transportation, scheduling of extracurricular events and the need for assistance. An identification with subgroups was an indicator of social integration for these students.	Formal and informal belonging, accessibility (socio-communication, meaning context), interaction, autonomy, involvement, and acceptance were met.

Hui et al.	2017	Gendered Experiences of Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in West and East Africa	Canada	To explore the gendered experiences of Inclusive Education for children with disabilities in West and East Africa (Guinea, Sierra Leone, Togo, Niger, Zambia, Malawi).	Qualitative study, an interpretive secondary analysis from two primary studies using interviews. Children from primary schools, community members and policy stakeholders from Guinea, Sierra Leone, Togo, Niger, Zambia, Malawi.	Both girls and boys experienced similar situations of social exclusion at their schools. Disability often took precedence over gender in influencing social inclusion and exclusion at school. Girls were further hindered by societal biases against their educational potential and by sexual abuse.	Formal and informal belonging, accessibility (socio-communication, meaning context), interaction, involvement, and acceptance were met
Leon-Laris et al.	2024	Bridging Gaps, Fostering Inclusion: A Gendered Look at Disability Support for Women in Higher Education	Spain	To explore the situation of women with disabilities who are part of the university community at the University of Seville, analysing their risk factors and protection measures, as well as their difficulties and felt needs.	Qualitative study, with semi-structured interviews. Twelve young women from various university roles: four students (age range 25-46 years), five administrative staff members, three lecturers. The students reported having physical disabilities, mental disabilities, hearing loss and deafness.	Students experienced challenges at their university, such as shortage of resources or barriers to access, a lack of understanding about disabilities, insufficient awareness within the university community, and a one-size-fits-all approach. Direct discrimination based on gender was not overtly perceived, it operates within a patriarchal framework where such discrimination is embedded.	Formal belonging, accessibility (physical), interaction, autonomy, and acceptance were met.
Mukuna & Maizere	2022	Exploring the Experiences of d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children in a Mainstream School in Zimbabwe: A Narrative Analysis	Zimbabwe	To explore the experiences of d/Deaf and hard of hearing children at a mainstream school in Zimbabwe.	Qualitative study, with semi-structured interviews. Three girls and two boys, age range 13-14 years. The girls had no residual hearing and relied on sign language.	Students who were d/Deaf or hard of hearing did not feel accepted by hearing students and would mostly interact with other d/Deaf students. They experienced behavioural and mental health issues, a lack of support, discrimination and labeling.	Formal and informal belonging, and accessibility (physical) were met.
Nanteetha & Srihari	2021	A Case Study on Information and Communication Technology in Empowering the Visually Challenged Women in Inclusive Education.	India	To determine the effects of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) inclusiveness of education in empowering visually challenged women.	Qualitative study, with observations and unstructured interviews. Two young women, aged 27 and 24 years, who were both congenitally blind.	ICT facilitates visually impaired women, as they support various tools. ICT helps with their learning process, making it more effective, exciting and impressive. It helps women with visual impairments to participate in mainstream education.	Formal and informal belonging, accessibility (physical, socio-communication and meaning context), interaction, autonomy, and acceptance were met.

Porter & Ingram	2021	Changing the Exclusionary Practices of Mainstream Secondary Schools: the Experiences of Girls with SEND. 'I have some quirky bits about me that I mostly hide from the world.'	United Kingdom	To collect data on the barriers and supports to inclusion and girl's feeling of belonging in school.	Mixed methods study. Qualitative data was collected using an iterative approach, quantitative data was collected using descriptive statistics. 108 young girls (age 12-14 years) with self-disclosed SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability).	Girls with SEND felt less connected to their school than girls without SEND. Their sense of belonging was associated with the challenges and support they felt across school contexts. The most important part of school belonging was the relational aspect.	Formal belonging, and involvement were met.
Tuomi et al.	2015	As Capable as Other Students: Tanzanian Women with Disabilities in Higher Education	Tanzania	To investigate women in Tanzanian higher education with the double marginalisation of being a woman and having disabilities.	Qualitative study, using semi-structured interviews. Six women with disabilities, age range 23-32 years. Four women had visual impairments, one woman had hearing difficulties and one woman had physical disabilities.	The women felt encouraged to complete their education, with factors such as support from their families and previous teachers, full participation in student life and sufficient financial support. Student life, especially peer study groups, and university staff training were mentioned as important. They understood the importance of an education, especially as women with disabilities.	Formal and informal belonging, accessibility (socio-communication, meaning context), interaction, autonomy, involvement, and acceptance were met.

Various forms of participation

Belonging - formal and informal

Two aspects of belonging are described by Edström et al. (2022): formal belonging - which is defined as the legitimation of entry- and informal belonging - which is defined as the student's subjective feeling of being an important part of the group. All thirteen articles describe students with disabilities being able to enrol in (mainstream) schools. Being admitted to a school did not mean that students with disabilities completed their education. Four articles reported students dropping out of school for various reasons, such as bullying by peers (Hui et al., 2017; Mukuna & Maizere 2022), inaccessible physical environment (Chingunwe & Tembachako, 2017), and inaccessible classes (Apelmo, 2018).

When students did continue their education, they felt disconnected from their school and excluded from the school community (Apelmo, 2018; Erten, 2011; Hodges & Keller, 1999; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022; Porter & Ingram, 2021). This did not mean they could not feel part of a self-made subgroup. Girls and women with disabilities often felt more connected to students who had similar experiences, for example, because they also had a disability (Hodges & Keller, 1999; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022). It was striking that students themselves reported being happy at school, while observation revealed situations in which these students were excluded by their peers or teachers (Hui et al., 2017; Mukuna & Maize, 2022). This demonstrates the importance of understanding that this participation aspect concerns student's subjective experiences and feelings.

Accessibility

According to Edström et al. (2022), accessibility is defined as the availability of the physical environment, the ability to understand and be understood, and the ability to comprehend the purpose of one's actions. The following paragraph is organised based on these three aspects as listed above.

Four articles were written about the accessibility of the physical environment (Chingunwe & Tembachako, 2017; Hodges & Keller, 1999; Porter & Ingram, 2021; Tuomi et al., 2015). Accessibility in terms of the physical environment was found to be expressed in various ways in practice. Schools often had infrastructure that was difficult to access for students with disabilities, resulting in a negative school experience for them. Sometimes the infrastructure was not accessible to girls with physical disabilities, as in Chingunwe and Tembachako (2017). Girls

were unable to easily access and use the toilet facilities due to steps (which could not be used with a wheelchair), squat toilets, lack of support, and small passageways (Chingunwe & Tembachako, 2017). In other cases, the infrastructure was obstructive because the corridors were narrow and caused feelings of anxiety during busy times for girls with SEND (Porter & Ingram, 2021).

Three articles were written on meaningful communication (Alsamih, 2024; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022; Nanteetha & Srihari, 2021). Meaningful communication focuses primarily on clear communication that can be understood by students. The problems experienced by women with disabilities in this regard were particularly evident for women who were hard of hearing or deaf (Alsamih, 2024; Mukuna & Maize, 2022). These women were often the only ones in their immediate environment at school who spoke sign language. School staff and fellow students were often not proficient enough in sign language, which caused communication problems. In an environment where almost no one spoke sign language, being unable to communicate effectively meant that much of the education for girls and women with disabilities was inaccessible. This inaccessibility did result in exclusion from classes, breaks, and extracurricular activities (Mukuna & Maize, 2022). Meaningful communication can also become a problem when the people who are communicating are too rapid and unclear in their speech. This became evident as a problem in two studies. Peers who spoke too fast caused deaf women to feel excluded from social activities (Alsamih, 2024) and girls with SEND had difficulties keeping up with their classes due to unclear instructions from their teacher (Porter & Ingram, 2021).

Full understanding of what the purpose of one's actions, to understand what is expected of you and be able to interpret this in the context (Edström et al., 2022), was not described in any of the articles so will not be discussed further in this literature review.

Interaction

Interaction is defined as contributing to an activity with others, to be a part of a group and to be able to learn through interactions with others (Eström et al., 2022). Interacting with others through participation in (extracurricular) activities, mainly with peers, was one of the most common themes in the reviewed articles. The analysis of the articles shows that the interactions experienced by students are very different from one another, with students having either mostly positive or negative interactions with peers or in some cases mixed experiences. Seven articles describe women with disabilities having positive overall interactions with peers, teachers and the

school environment (Leon-Laris et al., 2024; Alsamih, 2024; Hodges & Keller, 1999; Nanteetha & Srihari, 2021; Casale-Giannola & Wilson Kamens, 2006; Bromley et al., 2022; Tuomi et al., 2015). Positive interactions with peers were an important influence on academic performance (Tuomi et al., 2015). The more positive the interaction, the better women with disabilities were able to perform in school. These interactions with peers spanned beyond education to encompass personal life and involvement in university. In general, it could be concluded that women with disabilities found it easier to be themselves around others when interacting with classmates who had similar experiences or an open attitude (Bromley et al., 2022; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022; Tuomi et al., 2015). Women who studied in higher education understood that initiating interaction should not be one-sided, and that they also had a role to play in promoting interaction with their non-disabled peers. They felt that, as students with disabilities, they also had a responsibility to give their classmates the space to become comfortable, given that not everyone had experience of interacting with people with disabilities (Hodges & Keller, 1999).

Four articles described students with disabilities having mostly negative experiences with their interaction with others in their school community (Apelmo, 2018; Chingunwe & Tembackako, 2017; Erten, 2011; Porter & Ingram, 2021). Girls reported that they were frustrated that their teachers made it difficult for them to participate, resulting in negative interactions between pupils and teachers. These negative experiences with interactions often involved feeling misunderstood and having the impression that teachers were unwilling to make an effort to adapt to their needs (Apelmo, 2018). The interaction problems they experienced were related to the way teachers gave instructions (Porter & Ingram, 2021), the feeling that teachers were targeting them, and verbal aggression through the use of negative language (Chingunwe & Tembackako, 2017). But not only teachers caused girls to have negative interactions, their peers would often engage in negative behaviours such as shoving, name calling, being mean, annoying or rude to girls with disabilities (Porter & Ingram, 2021).

Sometimes girls within the same school or class experienced different interactions, with some reporting having positive interactions with their classmates while others reported being excluded or experiencing emotional violence (Hui et al., 2017). This example illustrates once again that a student's subjective feelings play an important role, which makes it difficult to draw a generalised conclusion about the research population.

Autonomy

Autonomy is defined as the ability to make decisions about one's own situation (Edström et al., 2022). In this literature review, it is considered to be the capacity to make decisions regarding one's learning process. Autonomy over one's learning process was not explicitly described in the articles, and in one article the aspect was implicitly described. What did become clear was that students in a primary or secondary education had less autonomy over their education than those in higher education, but all schools had a set curriculum that could not be changed significantly. Young women in higher education had more autonomy in their daily lives and were able to advocate for accommodations that would enable them to participate in their academic careers. They could ask their university's resource department for specialised equipment (Alsamih, 2024; Leon-Laris et al., 2024; Nanthheetha & Srihari, 2021; Tuomi et al., 2015), whereas at primary school children didn't have access to such a department. The lack of autonomy in their learning process did cause girls with disabilities to have a more negative experience in school as they felt compelled to take the courses (Apelmo, 2018; Porter & Ingram, 2021; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022).

Involvement

Involvement is defined as feeling interest and joy in an activity (Edström et al., 2022). This aspect is again based on the subjective feelings of students, which means that it is mainly based on the individual experiences of students. It is helpful that the activities match the interest of students, in order to increase their involvement and make the experience more positive. When students did not like the extracurricular activities that were offered, they were less likely to participate in them (Porter & Ingram, 2021). But when they did like the activities and were able to participate, they felt more involved in their school community (Porter & Ingram, 2021). Two subthemes were identified during the analyses of this aspect, namely the negative experiences around involvement and the positive experiences.

Sometimes girls were interested but were unable to participate. Not being able to participate was mostly due to the fact that the activities were inaccessible for students with disabilities (Apelmo, 2018; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022; Hui et al., 2017). Girls with disabilities were left out of physical activities because teachers could not accommodate the activities to their needs, which left the girls frustrated (Apelmo, 2018; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022).

In total, there were two articles that wrote about the positive experiences of women with disabilities who felt involved in the activities offered by their universities, which let to them generally experiencing a more positive experience in their education (Casale-Giannola & Wilson Kamens, 2006; Tuomi et al., 2015).

Acceptance

Acceptance refers to being accepted and acknowledged by others, and is characterised as being dependent on the opinions of others (Edström et al., 2022). Being accepted by others depends on others' opinions about students with disabilities. The experiences of students with disabilities also play a role in this aspect, as they contribute to shaping their experiences in terms of the degree of acceptance they feel. Subthemes that were identified under this aspect were feeling accepted by peers and school staff, experiencing mixed feelings from others, and not feeling acknowledged about their educational needs.

Two studies reported that women with disabilities felt accepted by their school community (Nateetha, 2021; Tuomi et al., 2015). They had positive interactions with peers and teachers and felt that they listened to their individual needs due to their disabilities. This feeling of being accepted by their school community spanned across more areas than just academics. Being able to follow an education in a welcoming environment made women with disabilities more confident, which carried over into their personal and family lives (Tuomi et al., 2015). In turn, being accepted by their families because they felt accepted by their peers meant that women with disabilities got more easily accepted by their communities and in turn felt more comfortable taking up space. It can also be concluded that girls and women with disabilities felt more accepted by students that had similar experiences to them, this often being other girls/women or students with disabilities (Bromley et al., 2022; Erten, 2011; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022; Nateetha, 2021; Tuomi et al., 2015) .

Three articles described students not feeling accepted at their school, girls with disabilities felt as though others did not want to interact with them or had difficulties interacting with them because of their disability (Apelmo, 2024; Chingunwe, 2017; Porter & Ingram, 2021). They also reported situations in which they were addressed in negative ways by the people around them, with others using hurtful descriptions such as “*pathetic*” or “*half-person*” (Chingunwe & Tembachako, 2017; Hui et al., 2018). In two articles, students felt accepted in some situations while in others they felt less accepted by their peers (Hodges & Keller, 1999;

Hui et al., 2017), which again shows the fact that the feeling of being accepted is based on individual experiences.

For many women with disabilities, the feeling of being acknowledged in terms of their educational needs was a negative experience. Women with disabilities often needed special equipment in order to study, but encountered problems in the application for those. This was a complex process that took months or even years, which meant that these women were unable to study properly and felt that their needs were not being heard (Leon-Laris et al., 2024). Another theme that arose within this subtheme was the fact that often schools did not have enough resources for the amount of students that needed them, hindering girls and women with disabilities further in their education (Erten, 2011; Leon-Laris et al., 2024; Mukuna & Maize, 2022; Tuomi et al., 2015).

Discussion

This literature review aims to answer the question *'What is known about the participation of girls or women with disabilities in educational settings?'*. In order to answer this question, thirteen articles were analysed for the forms of participation they practised. These are discussed in the following section.

Inclusion in educational settings/experienced participation in educational settings

In order for students to access full participation they should be offered all of the six aspects of the Participation Model (Eström et al., 2022). Of the thirteen studies that were used in this literature review, none mentioned that students experienced all aspects of participation. The analysed studies did have differences in terms of these experiences by students with disabilities, with some studies reporting students having mostly negative experiences and others reporting students having mostly positive or neutral experiences. Negative experiences were identified with the following aspects: informal belonging, accessibility (physical, socio-communication, meaning context), interaction, involvement, and acceptance. Positive or neutral experiences were identified with the aspects of informal belonging, interaction, involvement and acceptance.

In all thirteen studies, students with disabilities were able to enroll in an educational institution. Being enrolled in a school did not always mean that students felt comfortable in their class or at school. Aspects such as informal belonging, accessibility (physical, meaning context, and socio-communication) could be grouped as factors that enable students to feel comfortable and secure at their schools. However, these aspects were not usually met in the reviewed studies (Apelmo, 2018; Erten, 2011; Porter & Ingram, 2021). Students who did not feel part of the group or secure at school perceived their classes negatively. In this literature review, three studies reported schools failed to make the physical environment accessible to students with disabilities causing students to drop out of the class or school (Apelmo, 2018; Chingunwe & Tembachako, 2017; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022). This adds to the findings of existing literature, in which it was found that the use of accessible and usable spaces enable participation for children with disabilities. When schools had areas that were restricted, crowded or difficult to navigate, children with disabilities experienced more difficulties in their school participation than when schools were accessible (Maciver et al., 2019). Another driver of participation for children with disabilities in this article of Maciver et al. (2019) was seeking independence and autonomy which also was found to have an impact on school participation in this study. Girls and women

with disabilities that felt as if they had no impact on their own learning process viewed their education more negatively as they felt obliged to either take their courses or to drop out of the class (Apelmo, 2018; Porter & Ingram, 2021).

The analysed studies also showed differences in levels of interaction with peers, involvement in the educational community and acceptance by others. Some studies (Apelmo, 2018; Chingunwe & Tembachako, 2017; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022; Porter & Ingram, 2021) reported students feeling excluded and not involved. Other studies (Alsamih, 2024; Bromley et al., 2022; Casale-Giannola & Wilson Kamens, 2006; Erten, 2011; Hodges & Keller, 1999; Hui et al., 2017; Leon-Laris et al., 2024; Nanteetha & Srihari, 2021; Tuomi et al., 2015) reported students feeling acknowledged and accepted by educational staff and their peers. In earlier research (Nguyen et al., 2015), peers were found to have an important role in the school participation of children with disabilities. When students have positive experiences with their peers, in the form of friendships, positive interactions, and solidarity, they also experienced greater participation in their school and had an overall better school experience. When they had negative experiences with their peers, such as experiences of bullying, discrimination, negative attitudes and friendship avoidance, students felt as if they were hindered in their participation and did not have a positive school experience (Nguyen et al., 2015). It has also been concluded before that children with disabilities are less involved in activities than children without disabilities. It has been found that children's enjoyment and motivation for involvement in activities is a significant predictor of participation (Bedell et al., 2013). This was also found in this study. When girls with disabilities liked the activities provided by their schools more they were more likely to be involved, and when they were more involved with their school they experienced their participation more positively (Porter & Ingram, 2021).

At the same time, not all students experienced difficulties with the aspects of participation, making it difficult to generalise the results as they reflect an individual's experience. The aspects of participation are often based on the subjective feelings or experiences of students, making them personal and difficult to compare to others. In order to examine the individual experiences of this population, it is necessary to consider how they view these aspects. An intersectional approach helps to understand these experiences by looking at the intersecting aspects of their lives that cause these experiences (Wickenden, 2023).

Being a girl/woman with disabilities in educational settings

In addition to examining the participation experiences of girls and women with disabilities in education, this literature review also sought to find answers about what was known about the unique experiences of these girls and women, as girls/women and as people with disabilities. The review examined what the analysed articles had reported these perspectives and whether girls/women with disabilities have a different experience at school than girls/women without disabilities. This will be further discussed in the following section.

It was found that six articles had written explicitly about the unique experiences of being a girl/woman and having a disability in education (Apelmo, 2018; Bromley et al., 2022; Chingunwe & Tembachako, 2017; Hui et al., 2017; Leon-Laris et al., 2024; Tuomi et al., 2015). They experienced that their participation was hindered by their gender and disability. They felt hindered by societal biases against their educational potentials, by being viewed as less determined (Hui et al., 2017), vulnerable and weak (Apelmo, 2018; Chingunwe & Tembachako, 2017). Girls and women were viewed more often as *“ashamed or shy in places, which is why they do not go to school”* (Hui et al., 2017), which meant they were more likely to be excluded from education than boys and men were. Even though girls with disabilities were aware of the influence of societal bias from a younger years due to the exclusion they experienced, older women seem to understand this even further. One woman with hearing loss shared her opinions on the discrimination she experiences as a woman with a disability, saying she felt as if *“girls with disabilities have their freedom much more curtailed. I think it affects you completely, in your studies, relationships, aspirations (...) Besides, we must be aware of the fact that we are talking of people with disabilities in the context of a heteropatriarchy, a society with stereotypes shared also by people with disabilities, and particularly applied to women.”* (Leon-Laris et al., 2024). To look at disabilities is to look at the person experiencing them, and understand that they are part of a marginalised group, with their experiences of being excluded being aggravated (Wickenden, 2023). As a girl or woman, they were more likely to experience sexual abuse by men (Hui et al., 2017) and as being disabled they experienced more exclusion from participation (Apelmo, 2018; Chingunwe & Tembachako, 2017).

However, it is important to not overlook that this is not the general experience for girls and women with a disability. In seven articles it could be concluded that the discrimination that girls and women with disabilities faced were based on the fact that they were disabled, and not

because they were female (Alsamih, 2024; Casale-Giannola & Wilson Kamens, 2006; Erten, 2011; Hodges & Keller, 1999; Mukuna & Maizere, 2022; Nanteetha & Srihari, 2021; Porter & Ingram, 2021). Girls and women with disabilities in these studies found that their disability was the only individualized characteristic that affected their participation. It is also important to keep in mind that when people are known as having a disability, this is often the only thing by which others identify them. This means that other characteristics, such as gender, are no longer seen and therefore form part of a person. Whickenden (2023) argues that as a result, women with disabilities are less inclined to participate in activities or conversations about their gender identity. This was also found to be true in this literature review, girls with disabilities felt often more comfortable with other girls with disabilities, than with other girls without disabilities or with boys (Bromely et al., 2022).

Ultimately, it has become clear that girls and women with disabilities do feel that they are treated differently and excluded from education, whether this is based on their gender, disability or the intersection of these factors. The disadvantages and exclusion they experience suggest that there needs to be more consideration should be given to what can be done to get them into education and keep them there.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to answer the question *'What is known about the participation of girls or women with disabilities in educational settings?'*. The study investigated the participation of girls and women with disabilities in education by focusing on different aspects of participation as outlined in the Participation Model (Edström et al., 2022). The analysis found that these girls and women engaged with their educational institutions through these aspects of participation, including formal and informal belonging, accessibility (physical, socio-communication and meaning context), interaction, autonomy, involvement, and acceptance. However, the findings revealed a trend of negative experiences as the majority of these aspects were not generally experienced. While formal belonging was met, other aspects varied among girls and women, leading to feelings of exclusion and discomfort within the school environment. In addition, intersectionality was used to look at these experiences. It was found that six studies highlighted the experiences of double discrimination faced by these girls and women. They reported feeling disadvantaged not only due to their gender, affected by social stereotypes, but also because of their disability, which further marginalised their educational engagement. It is important to note that the findings reflect the subjective nature of these individual's experiences and stresses the necessity of an intersectional perspective to comprehend these unique experiences.

The findings of this study add to the existing literature about the experiences of girls and women with disabilities on their school participation. The findings in this study emphasised the need for further research to get a more in-depth understanding of these unique experiences regarding school participation. The findings also show that schools need to be more reflective about their contribution to the participation of girls and women with disabilities in school, in order to better include them in education and give them the opportunity to pursue their education.

Limitations and further research

The present study does have some limitations. Firstly, the use of the search terms resulted in unnecessary articles, which made the search process inefficient. The term "disorder" was previously used as a synonym for the term "disability", which initially led to it being added to the search terms. However, using this term resulted in topics such as substance abuse, mental health issues and pregnancy being included in the search queries. In the future, more research on appropriate search terms should be done, to identify the key search terms and their synonyms before conducting the search (Fromm et al., 2025). Secondly, this literature review's topic has

been scarcely researched before, resulting in a small number of suitable articles. This emphasises the need for more research into the experiences of disabled girls and women in education and the importance of avoiding generalisation of the conclusion made here. It is also worth noting that, in most articles, girls or women were not the only participants, with boys or men often being overpresented in the sample. Thirdly, a systematic literature review carries the risk of biases during the process, such as confirmation bias (Plous, 1993 as cited in King et al., 2018) or negative bias (Pfeffer, 2007). Confirmation and negative bias can arise in a literature review through the researcher's own analysis, but it can also be present in the articles used for the analysis. Ways to combat this include working transparently, having well-founded inclusion and exclusion criteria, and using multiple researchers who can carry out quality control.

In addition, inter-rater reliability was supposed to be calculated to reduce subjective bias (West & Martin, 2024), but this was cut due to time limitations.

In the future it would be interesting to get a more individualised perspective on inclusion and participation in education, in order to get a more in depth description of the experiences of girls and women with disabilities. It has been established that the experiences of girls and women with disabilities are based on subjective feelings and experiences, making it difficult to generalise. It would be interesting to conduct a case study to investigate in depth how one or a few girls or women experience the various aspects of participation. However, if this case study were to be conducted as a multiple-case study, the insight gained into the experiences of participation would be more reliable than if it were conducted as a single-case study (Heale & Twycross, 2018). For example, this would be helpful for an educational institution to gain more insight into participation in their school.

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