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SELF-DETERMINATION SKILLS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)

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ABSTRACT
Research has shown there is a positive correlation between self-determination skills and quality of life of college students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The purpose of this literature review is to highlight research on self-determination skills, instruments used to measure self-determination skills, and interventions used to teach self-determination skills of college students with ASD in postsecondary settings. The search revealed a dearth of literature on the topic. College students with ASD face many challenges, including problems with executive functioning, social-communication skills, and social-emotional skills, which negatively impact their ability to effectively use self-determination skills. Few instruments have been tailored to measure self-determination skills of students with ASD in higher education. Similarly, there was a scarcity of literature on effective intervention programs that foster self-determination skills in university students with ASD. Implications and suggestions for future research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION
Research has shown that less than half (i.e., 42%) of students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) successfully complete postsecondary education (Gobbo et al., 2019). One contributing factor may be limited self-determination skills, as several studies have concluded there is a strong correlation between high levels of self-determination skills and positive postsecondary outcomes (Burke et al., 2018; Chao, 2018; Chao, Wehmeier, Shogren, Palmer, & Lee, 2017; Ipsen et al., 2019). Globally, students with autism spectrum disorder comprise a greater part of the college population than previous years (Anderson et al., 2017; Chao, 2018; Chao, 2018). With the increase in prevalence of students with ASD in higher education settings, the quality of life of these students needs to be known.

The level of self-determination skills can be used to measure the quality of life of individuals with disabilities (Chao, 2018). Lachapelle et al., (2005). Chao (2018) stated there is a significant correlation between the self-determination and quality of life college students with disabilities (p. 5). He elaborated that the higher the self-determination level, the better the quality of life. However, instruction on self-determination has not progressed to the college level (Gobbo, 2017). For those students with ASD, the instruments used to measure self-determination skills, and the interventions used to teach self-determination skills. It is hoped this paper will provide insight into the quality of life of postsecondary students with disabilities and create a sense of urgency in the academic community to fill an area of need—equipping students with skills to successfully navigate higher education settings.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The following questions were researched:

1. What are the self-determination skills of college students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)?
2. What instruments have been used to measure self-determination skills of college students with ASD?
3. What interventions have been used to promote self-determination skills of college students with ASD?

METHODOLOGY
In order to provide an understanding of self-determination skills of college students with ASD, a search of literature was conducted using keyword college students, autism, self-determination, autism spectrum disorder, Asperger syndrome, executive functioning, university, and higher education. The search generated very few articles (n = 40) with only seven being relevant to the topic under study. Next, the reference list of the articles was scanned which generated approximately ten relevant research articles. Only one article directly focused on measuring self-determination skills of college students with disabilities, including students with ASD. The review of the literature revealed that a dearth of theoretical and empirical research exists on self-determination skills of students with autism in postsecondary settings.

FINDINGS: SELF-DETERMINATION SKILLS

- Little literature on self-determination skills of college students with ASD
- Generally postsecondary students with ASD struggle with using self-determination skills as they face challenges impeding academic success (Robertson, 2010; Ward & Webster, 2018)
- Students face difficulty with executive functioning, social-emotional skills, and social-communication skills (Anderson et al., 2017; Hillier et al., 2018; Gobbo et al., 2018)
- Students have difficulty with processing information at the required rate, managing time, engaging in group work, making presentations, being motivated to study, attending and following lectures, and asking questions (Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2014; Gobbo et al., 2018; Van Hees et al., 2015)
- Difficulties adversely impact their choice, decision-making, self-regulation, and goal setting/attainments skills (Gobbo et al., 2018)
- Social-communication challenges including: limited ability to recognize personal space and engage in reciprocal conversations, narrow focus on their topic of interest, misunderstanding of body language, literal interpretations of figurative language, impaired theory of mind, difficulty participating in class and group discussions and presentations (Anderson et al., 2017; Gobbo et al., 2018)
- Social-emotional struggles include low self-esteem, poor motivation, stress, depression, anxiety, and loneliness (Anderson et al., 2017; Gobbo et al., 2018; Hillier et al., 2018; Ward & Webster, 2018)

FINDINGS: INSTRUMENTS

- Limited instruments have been used to measure self-determination skills of college students with ASD
- The ARC Self-Determination and AIR Self-Determination Scale are two commonly used instruments used to measure self-determination skills in K-12 settings
- One instrument used to measure self-determination skills of college students with ASD
- Self-Determination Scale for College Students (SDSCS) (Chao, 2018)
- SDSCS measures: self-realization, psychological empowerment, self-regulation, and autonomy

FINDINGS: INTERVENTIONS

- Limited empirical research exists on interventions higher education institutions employ to promote self-determination skills of students
- Three programs used to promote self-determination skills of college students with ASD
- Adult Social Knowledge (ASK): Acquiring Career, Coping Executive Control, and Social Skills (ASKICES), Connections Program
- ASK promotes three components of self-determination: goal setting, planning and organization (Dowdell et al., 2018)
- GESOT focuses on cognitive and stress management tools, components of self-determination, and social rules (Dowdell et al., 2018)
- Connections Program helps develop the following skills: goal-setting, communication, executive functioning, interpersonal relationships, and time and stress management (Dowdell et al., 2018)

CONCLUSION
- College students with ASD faced difficulty with many components of self-determination skills
- Increasing number of students with ASD attending college & limited data on self-determination skills, call for additional instruments, research on postsecondary strategies, support systems, and interventions for fostering self-determination skills
- Higher education institutions need to provide more than "traditional" supports with investment in programs and training to foster self-determination skills of college students with ASD

REFERENCES