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Abstract
Purpose: Although promoting self-determination in secondary transition is an important goal when working with adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the conceptualization and definitions of self-determination and its associated skills are not consistent. The aim of this scoping review was to examine how self-determination and its associated skills have been conceptualized and defined in interventions that support secondary transition in adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities and how self-determination is operationalized accordingly in those interventions.

Method: Studies published between 2006 and 2021 were searched using databases, including MEDLINE, PubMed, ERIC, PsycINFO, Education Source, and OTseeker. Hand-searching of bibliographies was also performed.

Results: Twenty-eight articles were included in this review. Eighteen articles provided explicit definitions of the term self-determination, which was categorized into four orientations: special education, disability rights advocacy, public health, and psychology. Interventions that support secondary transition in adolescents with disabilities developed under these different orientations were described.

Conclusions: Skills associated with self-determination may vary depending on the definition being used. By gaining a deeper comprehension of the different perspectives on the concept of self-determination in the field of education, occupational therapists can tailor their interventions in a manner that is best suited to the individual requirements of students.

Keywords
self-determination, secondary transition, intellectual and developmental disabilities, scoping review, concept definition

Cover Page Footnote
The authors declare that they have no competing financial, professional, or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

Credentials Display
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The secondary transition service is established and implemented in the United States (US) school system to prepare adolescents and young adults with disabilities for positive postschool success in the area of postsecondary education, integrated or supported employment, and independent living or community participation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004). As members of school transition service teams, occupational therapists examine the students’ current and projected occupational needs in their present and anticipated contexts and environments (Orentlicher et al., 2017). Occupational therapists also prepare, plan, and support adolescents and young adults with disabilities and their families as they transition into adulthood (Kardos & White, 2005; Orentlicher et al., 2017).

The transition from secondary school to adulthood can be especially challenging for adolescents and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). There is a high number and percentage of students in the US (12%, estimated 800,000 students) with developmental delay or intellectual disability that receive special education under IDEA (McFarland et al., 2018). Data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 that tracked students with disabilities after graduating from high school showed that students with IDD were less likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education, be employed, or live independently after transitioning out of high school than students in other disabilities categories (Newman et al., 2011). Promoting secondary transition is, therefore, imperative for students with IDD, which is one of the most commonly reported disability types with whom occupational therapists work in high schools (Eismann et al., 2017).

Adolescents and young adults with disabilities who demonstrate skills associated with self-determination are more likely to be employed and live independently in the community after completing high school (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003; Wood et al., 2005). These skills also prepare students to self-advocate to obtain postsecondary supports when those supports no longer operate as “entitlements” and are instead based on “eligibility” (Newman et al., 2011). Self-determination is reported to be the strongest predictor for successful employment and education outcomes for students with disabilities after high school (Mazzotti et al., 2014; Test, Fowler et al., 2009; Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009). Moreover, research has demonstrated that adolescents with disabilities are typically less self-determined than their non-disabled peers (Wehmeyer et al., 1996). This could be related to fewer opportunities to make choices and express preferences in their daily lives. There is also a consensus from school transition service teams, such as teachers (Test, Mazzotti et al., 2009), occupational therapists (Orentlicher et al., 2017), and physical therapists (Doty et al., 2020), that skills associated with self-determination should be introduced and taught to adolescents with disabilities as early as possible to support them in attaining improved transition outcomes.

The causal agency theory (Shogren et al., 2015) is the most adopted framework used to conceptualize and define self-determination in the education context. As an extension of the functional model of self-determination developed by Wehmeyer (1996), Shogren et al. (2015) proposed in their causal agency theory that individuals possess the capacity to shape their lives and achieve their desired outcomes. Under this framework, the term “self-determination” is defined as the ability of an individual to act autonomously to enhance and sustain their quality of life and to make decisions that are not unduly influenced by external factors (Shogren et al., 2015; Wehmeyer, 1996, 1999; Wehmeyer et al., 2000). Shogren et al. and Wehmeyer further outlined a set of associated self-determination skills employed frequently in special education in developing instructional activities that promote self-determination. These associated skills include self-awareness, choice-making, decision-making, and goal-setting, among others.
Because of the abstract nature of self-determination, it has been defined and conceptualized in diverse ways across different disciplines and contexts (Field, 1996; Ward, 2005). As a result, besides the dominant definition proposed by Shogren et al. (2015) and Wehmeyer (1996), other definitions have also been used in education settings. Historically, self-determination originally referred to people with the ability to govern themselves, and later, the definition was extended to the “right of a people of a nation to self-governance” (Ward, 2005). Activists for civil rights, disability rights, and advocacy movements further used self-determination as a way for people to “gain greater control over their lives” (Field, 1996). It is often used interchangeably with the terms “empowerment” (Test et al., 2005) and “self-advocacy” (Field, 1996). The polysemous nature of the self-determination concept presents a substantial obstacle to researchers, leading to the development of multiple definitions to facilitate interventions (Peterson et al., 2021). Consequently, the skills associated with self-determination may vary depending on the definitions, thus leading to different directions of intervention.

This scoping review aimed to (a) identify the definitions reported in the literature that conceptualized self-determination and its associated skills in the context of secondary transition for individuals with IDD in the education setting and (b) identify associated skills targeted in the interventions to promote self-determination in supporting secondary transition given different definitions.

**Method**

A scoping review methodology was chosen, as this is used to clarify key concepts and synthesize the literature that addresses and informs practice in a topic area (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). No existing review protocol was found after a preliminary search of the *JBI Database of Systematic Reviews and Implementation Reports* (Peters et al., 2020a). Therefore, three existing scoping review frameworks (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005; Tricco et al., 2018; Peters et al., 2020b) were used to inform the review process of this paper. The process encompassed the following steps: (a) identifying the research question; (b) identifying relevant studies; (c) study selection; (d) charting the data; and (e) collating, summarizing, and reporting results. This scoping review was underpinned by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al., 2018) to increase methodological rigor and reduce bias.

**Identifying the Research Question**

The population, concept, and context (PCC) framework (Peters et al., 2020b) was employed to formulate the research questions for the scoping review. The guiding research questions for this review and the interpretation of the findings were:

1. How is the concept of self-determination defined in interventions that support secondary transition for adolescents with IDD?
2. What are the associated skills in interventions that promote self-determination to support the secondary transition of adolescents with IDD, given various definitions?

The scoping review was conducted by first identifying interventions that promote self-determination behaviors with adolescents with IDD in the secondary transition context, followed by identifying and synthesizing how self-determination was defined and used in the interventions.

**Identifying Relevant Studies**

The search strategy was developed and carried out with the assistance of a health sciences librarian at the university where the research was conducted. The authors determined the databases and key search terms to ensure broad coverage of both education and allied health literature. A systematic search of six databases (MEDLINE, PubMed, ERIC, PsycINFO, Education Source, and OTseeker) was conducted to
identify studies for inclusion (See Appendix for PubMed search strategy). The search strategy combined the keywords with the US National Library of Medicine’s Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) and the search was performed using the Boolean operators “AND” and “OR” to combine the search terms and structure the delimitation in the database. Main groupings of search terms included the following: children and youth (i.e., child, teen, youth, young adult), disability (i.e., disabled, students with disabilities, intellectual disability, developmental disability), secondary transition (i.e., transition), and self-determination (i.e., autonomy, self-advocacy, empowerment). Self-advocacy and empowerment were included as search terms since they have often been used interchangeably with self-determination (Field, 1996; Test et al., 2005; Wehmeyer, 1996). The search terms were first used individually and then in combination. All articles using the terms self-determination, self-advocacy, and empowerment were included for screening. The searches were further narrowed by filters, including peer-reviewed journal articles, publication year, and types of study. A hand search was conducted to locate additional articles that may have been missed in the keyword search. After performing a hand search of the reference lists of all full-text articles selected for eligibility (n = 25), 18 additional articles were identified and added, resulting in 43 full-text articles that were reviewed for eligibility. The search was completed in March 2022, and the search strategy for PubMed was included in the supplemental material (S1).

Study Selection

Articles reviewed and included for analysis met the following criteria: (a) empirical interventional studies that used randomized control trials (RCTs) design, quasi-experimental designs, and case-control studies; (b) published in peer-reviewed journals in English between January 2006 and December 2021; (c) studies reported interventions that were developed based on using self-determination to improve secondary transition, including employment, postsecondary education/training, and independent living; (d) at least 50% of the participants were diagnosed with IDD-related medical diagnosis or classified under IDEA as intellectual disability or multiple disabilities; (e) interventions targeted middle/high-school-aged adolescents and young adults (14 to 21 years of age) in U.S. schools and other related educational and health-care settings (e.g., after school programs, home-schooling, community center, summer camp, etc.). The 15-year timeframe was determined to incorporate articles published after the term of “transition” was officially defined in the 2004 IDEA revision. The age range selected for this scoping review was guided by IDEA mandates. According to IDEA (2004), transition planning for students with disabilities should start at age 14, and that service must remain accessible until the student turns 22 years of age.

Article screening and inclusion determination were managed through Covidence, a web-based software platform that enables each reviewer to independently determine inclusion or exclusion at screening and full article review stages. The abstracts and titles were first screened for relevance according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. A full-text review was then conducted. Articles were independently screened for inclusion by two authors at each stage. In the event of conflicting perspectives regarding inclusion or exclusion, the authors reviewed the inclusion/exclusion criteria and arrived at a consensus decision.

Charting the Data and Collating, Summarizing, and Reporting results

Information including author, year of publication, self-determination definitions, associated skills, and the intervention characteristics from each selected article were listed in a data extraction form. Inductive thematic synthesis was applied to explore the definition of self-determination and the implementation of associated skills, following the methodology outlined by Thomas and Harden (2008). Definitions or descriptions of self-determination and its associated skills were extracted and coded from
the reviewed articles. These codes were then organized into related areas to construct descriptive orientations that captured the framing of self-determination. Four orientations were identified as the results of this analysis. They were special education, public health strategy, disability rights advocacy, and psychology (see Table 1).

**Results**

**Characteristics of Included Studies**

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram was used to describe the study selection process (Figure 1). Twenty-eight articles were included in this review. Twenty-six of the interventions were school-based and delivered via curriculum implementation. Two of the 28 interventions were delivered outside the school setting: one at an educational residential site (Sheppard & Unsworth, 2011) and the other at a summer camp (Grenwelge & Zhang, 2012). Out of these 28 interventions, 26 were administered by educators, with the remaining two being delivered by occupational therapists (Kramer et al., 2014; Sheppard & Unsworth, 2011). Of the 28 articles, 20 studies examined self-determination interventions delivered as a single entity, while the other eight examined models that combined different interventions.

**Figure 1**

*PRISMA Flow*
Concept of Self-Determination

In this review, 18 out of 28 articles explicitly defined self-determination. Ten studies did not explicitly define “self-determination”; these studies described self-determination as a set of behaviors or assumed the definition provided by the curriculum used in the intervention. Table 1 summarizes the presented explicit or implicit definitions of self-determination under the four orientations: special education, public health strategy, disability right advocacy, and psychology.

Table 1
Definition of Self-Determination Under Four Orientations: Special Education, Disability Rights Advocacy, Public Health, and Psychology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition of Self-determination</th>
<th>Author(s)/Year</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“People controlling their own lives and their own destinies” (p. 194).</td>
<td>Arndt et al. (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“a combination of skills that facilitate self-regulated and goal directed behavior. The self-determined person exhibits control by responding to events in an independent, empowered, self-realized manner” (p. 137).</td>
<td>Campbell-Whatley (2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“includes teachable, measurable skills, such as choice making, decision making, and problem solving” (p. 258).</td>
<td>Cease-Cook et al. (2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The current article is mostly informed by Causal Agency Theory . . . . (It) supports the development aspect of self-determination over time, including meeting basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness with motivation to take causal action toward self-determination” (p. 460).</td>
<td>Garrels &amp; Palmer (2020)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the causal agent in one's life” (p. 45).</td>
<td>Konrad et al. (2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, take initiative to reach one’s goals, and accept consequences of one’s actions” (p. 185).</td>
<td>Lingo et al. (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one’s life and to maintain or improve one’s quality of life” (p. 104).</td>
<td>Lee et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“individuals . . . who are self-determined set goals and take action on their plan to attain their goals” (p. 72).</td>
<td>Martin et al. (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“is a construct that includes skills related to choice-making, decision-making, and goal-setting” (p. 25).</td>
<td>Mazzotti et al. (2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“refers to the volitional acts that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one’s life and to maintain or improve one’s quality of life” (p. 76).</td>
<td>Palmer et al. (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the causal agent in one’s life. Self-determined people (i.e., causal agents) act in service to freely chosen goals. Self-determined actions function to enhance a person to be the causal agent is his or her life.” (p. 236).</td>
<td>Raley et al. (2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“be active participants in educational planning, instructional delivery and assessment of progress” (p. 23).</td>
<td>Scott et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Include choice and decision making, problem solving, goal setting and attainment, independence, self-management, self-awareness, and self-efficacy” (p. 394).</td>
<td>Sheppard &amp; Unsworth (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“dispositional characteristic manifested as acting as the causal agent in one’s life. Self-determined people (i.e., causal agents) act in service to freely chosen goals” (p. 166).</td>
<td>Shogren, Burke, Anderson et al. (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“defined by Causal Agency Theory - volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs” (p. 4).</td>
<td>Shogren, Burke, Antosh et al. (2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“acting as the primary causal agent in one’s life and making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference” (p. 99).</td>
<td>Van Laarhoven-Myers et al. (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disability Rights Advocacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-determination contains four components: “knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership” (p. 159).</td>
<td>Grenwelge &amp; Zhang (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specifically defined. Described it as “rights to request reasonable accommodations” (p. 258).</td>
<td>Karmar et al. (2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Definition of Self-determination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Author(s)/Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Health</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specifically defined. Self-determination was described as gaining knowledge about safety, self-advocacy, developing confidence in one's ability to protect themselves from sexual assault and other harmful situations, as well as cultivating feelings of safety.</td>
<td>Dryden et al. (2014, 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Psychology</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“focus on the belief that an individual is inherently motivated and proactive” (p. 212).</td>
<td>Flowers et al. (2018)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Special Education**

Twenty-three articles (82%) were categorized under the special education orientation. Eighteen out of these 23 articles used the functional model of self-determined behavior (Wehmeyer et al., 1996) or its extension, causal agency theory (Shogren et al., 2015), to define self-determination. Self-determination was defined in these articles as “making choices and decisions regarding one’s quality of life free from undue external influence or interference” (Wehmeyer et al., 1996, p. 632) and included three characteristics: volitional action, agentic action, and action-control beliefs. Self-determined people act autonomously, self-regulate their behavior, and are psychologically empowered and self-realizing (Wehmeyer et al., 1996).

The other five articles assumed the definition of self-determination provided by Martin and Marshall (1995) in the ChoiceMaker curriculum. Martin and Marshall describe self-determined people as individuals who “know how to choose . . . know what they want, and how to get it” (p. 147) and self-determination behaviors include self-awareness, self-advocacy, self-efficacy, decision-making, independent performance, self-evaluation, and adjustment.

**Public Health**

Based on the descriptions of self-determination reported in the reviewed articles, two articles (Dryden et al., 2014; Dryden et al., 2017) were categorized under the public health orientation. In the public health context, self-determination refers to interventions that support independence, self-advocacy, and the ability of adolescents to live in accordance with their values (Catalano, 2004). In addition, it was described as gaining knowledge about safety and self-advocacy, developing confidence in one’s ability to protect oneself from sexual assault and other harmful situations, as well as cultivating feelings of safety.

**Disability Rights Advocacy**

Two articles (Grenwelge & Zhang, 2012; Kramer et al., 2014) were categorized under the disability rights advocacy orientation. In the disability rights advocacy context, self-determination, empowerment, and self-advocacy were used interchangeably to present the same concept. Grenwelge and Zhang (2012) outlined four main components of the self-advocacy framework: knowledge of self, knowledge of rights, communication, and leadership. Although Kramer et al. (2014) did not offer a clear definition of self-determination, they implicitly described it as “the rights to request reasonable accommodations” (p. 258).

**Psychology**

The article by Flowers et al. (2018) was classified under the psychology orientation as it directly employed the definition of self-determination from Ryan and Deci’s self-determination theory (2000). This article described self-determination as a “focus on the belief that an individual is inherently motivated and proactive” (p. 212).
Intervention Implementation of Associated Skills Related to Self-Determination

The associated skills related to self-determination in interventions aimed at supporting the secondary transition of adolescents with IDD varied depending on the particular definition of self-determination adopted by the intervention. Table 2 summarizes the skills associated with self-determination that were extracted from the intervention curricula used in the reviewed articles. These curricula and associated skills were then organized and presented based on the four orientations of self-determination.

Special Education

In the context of special education, self-determination was viewed as skills and knowledge that can be taught and which contribute to goal-directed behaviors. Goal-directed behaviors include learning and engaging in the transition planning process and participation in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. For example, interventions may consist of knowledge-based learning to inform adolescents about the key principles of self-determination, the secondary transition process, an IEP, and participation in IEP and transition planning meetings. In the studies reviewed, all of these interventions were coupled with strategies to encourage adolescents with IDD to participate in IEP meetings or transition planning. Most of the reviewed studies reported positive outcomes, despite the fact that the strategies used in the interventions varied.

In addition to learning and engaging in transition planning and IEP meetings, four studies implemented their interventions with different focuses, such as educating teenagers about their own disabilities (Campbell-Whatley, 2008), making plans to attain their goals (Martin et al., 2014), obtaining interview skills through peer tutoring (Bobroff & Sax, 2010), and promoting activities of daily living (ADL) engagement in an educational residential setting (Sheppard & Unsworth, 2011). See Table 2 for the details of the curricula and associated skills.

Public Health

In the context of public health, the associated skills of self-determination were focused on teaching skills to prevent imminent harm and sexual assault through a safety and self-defense training program (Dryden et al., 2014, 2017).

Disability Rights Advocacy

In the context of disability rights advocacy, the associated skills of self-determination were focused on advocating for the rights of people with disabilities. Knowledge and skills in disability history, leadership, team-building, self-advocacy, legislative advocacy, and volunteerism were emphasized in Grenwelge and Zhang’s (2012) intervention, and skills to identify environmental barriers, generate modification strategies, and advocate for accommodations were addressed in Kramer et al.’s study (2014).

Psychology

Guided by the self-determination theory, Flowers et al. (2018) proposed the creation of environments that offer support and opportunities for adolescent autonomy by implementing collaboration between community organizations and schools.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientations</th>
<th>Curriculum Used in Intervention</th>
<th>Identified Associated Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge of secondary transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education (included 15 curricula)</td>
<td>Whose Future is it Anyway (Lee et al., 2011; Wehmeyer et al., 2011)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who I can Be Is Up to Me (Campbell-Whatley, 2008)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student-Directed Transition Planning (Woods et al., 2010)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Directed IEP (Arndt et al., 2006; Martin et al., 2006; Seong et al., 2015)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-Advocacy Strategy (Cease-Cook et al., 2013)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Me! Bell Ringers (Lingo et al., 2018)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MY VOICE (Multimedia for Youth to Voice Outcomes Individually Created for Empowerment; Van Laarhoven-Myers et al., 2016)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GO 4 IT NOW (Konrad et al., 2017)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take Action: Make Goal Happen (Martin et al., 2014)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer tutoring on interview skills (Bobroff &amp; Sax, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Residential Program (Sheppard &amp; Unsworth, 2011)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer-Assisted Instruction (Mazzotti et al., 2010)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beyond High School Model (Palmer et al., 2012; Wehmeyer et al., 2006)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-determined Learning Model of Instruction (SDLMI; Garrels &amp; Palmer, 2020; Shogren, Burke, Anderson et al., 2018; Shogren, Burke, Antosh et al., 2018; Shogren et al., 2012; Raley et al., 2021)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universal Design for Transition (Scott et al., 2011)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Rights Advocacy (included 2 curricula)</td>
<td>Project TEAM (Teens Making Environment and Activity Modifications; Kramer et al., 2014)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Texas Youth Leadership Forum Summer Training (Grenwelge &amp; Zhang, 2012)</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Health (included 1 curriculum)</td>
<td>IMPACT: Ability (Dryden et al., 2014; Dryden et al., 2017)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology (included 1 curriculum)</td>
<td>Communicating Interagency Relationships and Collaborative Linkages for Exceptional Students (CIRCLES; Flowers et al., 2018)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The findings of this scoping review revealed that the concept of self-determination could be defined and categorized under four orientations: special education, public health, disability rights advocacy, and psychology. Subsequently, the interventions that promote self-determination to support the secondary transition of adolescents with IDD were dictated by these definitions under the four orientations.

The Concept of Self-Determination

This scoping review confirmed the continued lack of clarity surrounding the concept of self-determination. Consensus remained elusive regarding its definitions and associated skills. Close to 40% of the studies reviewed did not offer a clear definition of self-determination, while even among those that did, an operational definition was not always provided. This lack of precision resulted in varying interpretations of the associated skills that are related to self-determination.

Throughout the study selection process, we encountered various terminologies in the excluded articles that could be related to self-determination. Terms such as planfulness, self-regulation, identity formation, and ecological theory have the potential to be used as a means of conceptualizing self-determination. Specifically, Demetriou (2000) claimed that adolescents develop “planfulness” through forethought, advanced planning, goal setting, and acting with intention as part of their cognitive development. Mithaug’s self-regulation theory (1993) describes how people have the desire and ability to act to maximize their gains toward getting what they want. Crocetti et al. (2017) proposed that identity development begins with selecting identity-appropriate goals and actions. In addition, the ecological theory (Abery & Stancliffe, 2003) offered another perspective on self-determination. It proposed that increased self-determination is achieved through the interplay of an individual’s abilities, the level of control and opportunities available to them, and environmental assistance. However, it should be noted that none of the articles mentioned above-presented interventions for self-determination based on these terminologies. Therefore, further investigation and expansion of the connections between self-determination and terminologies mentioned above are warranted.

Associated Skills Related to Self-Determination

The ambiguity surrounding the concept of self-determination resulted in different emphases being placed on specific self-determination-associated skills in the same orientation or discipline. For example, interventions that adopted a special education orientation primarily focused on goal-directed skills relevant to transition preparation, such as providing lectures on knowledge related to secondary transition. However, there were variations in their approaches. While most interventions emphasized teaching adolescents with IDD about decision-making, choice-making, setting transition goals, and participating in IEP meetings, some studies emphasized educating adolescents about their own disabilities (Campbell-Whatley, 2008), making plans to attain their goals (Martin et al., 2014), job-seeking skills (Bobroff & Sax, 2010), and self-care (Sheppard & Unsworth, 2011).

An instance of ambiguity in the same discipline is exemplified by two interventions created by occupational therapists (Kramer et al., 2014; Sheppard & Unsworth, 2011). Despite being developed in the same discipline, these interventions adopted different orientations without providing an explicit definition of the concept. As a result, the associated skills promoted by each intervention were markedly dissimilar, with one emphasizing environmental modification advocacy (Kramer et al., 2014) and the other prioritizing the development of ADLs skills (Sheppard & Unsworth, 2011). The absence of a unified definition in the profession of occupational therapy was also evident in the AOTA official document, The
Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process (AOTA, 2020). In this document, self-determination was not explicitly defined and was only described as part of self-advocacy.

Determining the appropriate skills to focus on and reaching a consensus on achieving self-determination posed a challenge for occupational therapists working in secondary transition services with adolescents with IDD (Peterson et al., 2021). This scoping review aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the different definitions of self-determination and the associated skills based on various perspectives, with the hope of assisting occupational therapists in effectively communicating and collaborating with service providers, as well as designing interventions that focus on different sets of knowledge, skills, and behaviors in the education context. Occupational therapists may support interventions under the special education orientation to reinforce and promote skills that are emphasized by teachers and other special education service providers. Occupational therapists may also focus on introducing and teaching associated skills of self-determination that were identified beyond the special education orientation, such as self-advocacy and problem-solving (Kramer et al., 2014), self-defense (Dryden et al., 2014, 2017), empowerment and leadership (Grenwelge & Zhang, 2012), or community and school collaboration (Flowers et al., 2018).

The scoping review’s findings further suggest the following recommendations for occupational therapists as members of the secondary transition team in the education context: (a) occupational therapists should have a comprehensive understanding of the definitions, theories, and perspectives that inform self-determination; (b) occupational therapists should not assume a shared understanding of self-determination when communicating with colleagues or other professionals, and should instead clarify expected outcomes to promote understanding; and (c) more research is needed to develop and implement self-determination interventions that align with occupational therapy’s scope of practice and philosophy.

Limitations

Several shortcomings were identified in this review. First, we only included articles that reported self-determination interventions in this scoping review. Excluding articles that did not specifically discuss self-determination as an applicable concept may have resulted in the omission of potentially relevant information. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this scoping review may not capture a complete picture of the descriptions of the self-determination concept.

Second, the inclusion criteria were limited to English-language studies focusing on the U.S. education system. As a result, the generalizability of the findings to other countries or regions, as well as the applicability of the identified self-determination definitions and interventions to diverse cultural contexts, is uncertain.

Third, a limited availability of interventions associated with promoting self-determination and the decline of research in this area (Raley et al. 2018) were noted. Many programs and published curricula in this review were no longer in print, not compatible with current technology, or discontinued. It is notable that many of the articles included in this review were reported by the same group of researchers. Raley et al. (2018) observed that “new curricula to promote overall self-determination have not been developed recently, and existing curricula have been rarely used and examined in the research literature” (p. 359).

Fourth, in this review, self-advocacy, personal autonomy, and empowerment were included as search terms because of their frequent interchangeability with self-determination (Field, 1996; Test et al., 2005; Wehmeyer, 1996), providing a comprehensive exploration of this concept. However, it is crucial to highlight that while self-advocacy, personal autonomy, and empowerment share similarities with self-determination, their scopes do not entirely overlap.
Lastly, this review underscores the limited applicability of intervention curricula for health practitioners. The majority of the self-determination interventions identified in this review were primarily conceived in the context of special education, thus, the design of the interventions (e.g., length of the lessons) and the strategies used may not necessarily be aligned with practice from occupational therapists’ perspective. For example, the curriculum guide “Whose Future Is It Anyway?” (Lee et al., 2011; Wehmeyer et al., 2011) stands out as one of the most effective and frequently used curricula among educators in school systems. It offers lesson materials designed for adolescents with disabilities to read through the pages without much adult support. The involvement of occupational therapists is restricted in this type of approach, which mainly focuses on reading and writing without hands-on practice.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this scoping review revealed that the concept of self-determination could be defined and categorized under four orientations: special education, public health, disability rights advocacy, and psychology. Subsequently, the interventions that promote self-determination to support the secondary transition of adolescents with IDD were dictated by these definitions under the four orientations. The scoping review presented a thorough depiction of the self-determination concept and the skills associated with it from different orientations. By understanding different perspectives on self-determination and its associated skills, occupational therapists could clearly articulate the intended and expected outcomes of their interventions, tailored to the unique needs of each student.

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**References**


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* Articles included in the review
Appendix

Search Strategy for PubMed