

# Effect of Learning Support to SEN Student to Workplace Competitiveness in the UK

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## ABSTRACT

**This research explores the impact of learning support, particularly accommodations and modifications, on workplace competitiveness among Special Educational Need Disorder (SEND) students in the UK. It scrutinizes the transition from academic settings, where such supports are customary, to work environments where similar accommodations may not be readily available. The study highlights the challenges SEND individuals face in adapting to the workplace due to potential skill deficits unaddressed in educational settings. It emphasizes the importance of reevaluating educational support strategies to better prepare SEND students for competitive employment, suggesting the need for further quantitative research to assess the long-term effectiveness of these educational accommodations.**

**Keywords: Special Educational Need Disorder (SEND), Workplace Competitiveness, Accommodations, Modifications, Education, Employment Transition.**

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## INTRODUCTION

17.3% of students are diagnosed with a Special Educational Need Disorder (SEND) in England, and a further 4.3% of them have an Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plan, meaning that they need additional support (National Association for Special Educational Need, 2023). Various supports are provided to help SEN students perform better academically and socially. Accommodations and modifications are provided for them to "make fair a system based on a proven need" (United Nations, 2006). The Department of Education of the United Kingdom (n.d.) states "The purpose of SEN support is to minimize the impact of a pupil's special educational need and to help develop their educational and social skills". The SEN patient could not gain the same or all accommodations and modifications they received from school under general employment conditions. Unfortunately, SEND does not automatically get better or symptoms get better as a person gets older, despite what most people think. "Studies have consistently shown that disablism persists, as evidenced by both opinion surveys and correspondence tests" (Parson & Platt, 2022).

The Children's Commissioner for England (2022) was "surprised by how many children mentioned [what can SEN children expect in the world of work] as a concern.". Accommodations and modifications are provided for SEN patients to "make fair a system based on a proven need" (United Nations, 2006). However, accommodations and modifications might affect a student's ability to train and develop important workplace skills. Thus, this paper aims to discuss to what extent learning supports, especially accommodations and modifications, affect one's ability and workplace competitiveness as they lack the opportunity to train those skills at school. It also discusses to what extent accommodations and modifications have a negative effect on SEN's workplace competitiveness.

### Scope of Study

In the United Kingdom, "the term 'Special Educational Needs' is used to describe learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for children to learn than most children of the same age. SEN children are likely to need extra or different help from that given to other children their age (Family Lives, n.d.). SEND can affect a child's or young person's ability to learn". They can affect their:

- behavior or ability to socialize; for example, they struggle to make friends
- reading and writing, for example, because they have dyslexia
- ability to understand things
- concentration levels, for example, because they have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- physical ability(Children with special education needs and Disabilities, n.d.)

This paper focuses on the four types of SEN stated above; here, employment is defined as “either part-time or full-time work (including self-employment) in which an individual with a disability is paid at or above the minimum wage and located in an environment where the individual regularly interacts with people both with and without disabilities. In addition, the employee must have equal access to benefits and opportunities for advancement as peers without disabilities” (Transition Improvement Grant, n.d.), which is the United States legal definition for ‘Competitive Integrated Employment’ under the same-titled Act.

Current research has focused on SEN patients’ adaptability and ability in the workplace. Research mutually concludes that, both with and without job accommodation provided, their performance is acceptable in the workplace given their employer's understanding. SEN patients’ workplace competitiveness and acceptance have been analyzed from business management, labor, and equality perspectives. In the academic setting, the effectiveness of learning support measures was also researched. However, there seemed to be no or minimal studies focusing specifically on the effect of learning support on workplace competitiveness.

The required skills (or lack thereof) of persons with mental illnesses are the ability to self-manage, adaptability, the ability to dedicate oneself to work, and the ability to formulate plans (Fukuura&Shjgematsu, 2021). However, their ability has an impact on many of these skills. Although most SEND patients are protected by the Equality Act 2010 and/or other anti-discrimination laws, it remains questionable to what extent their employment is based on their skills and abilities rather than the statutory requirements or their disability.

## METHODS

Since there is not any direct research linking SEN patients’ ability and competitiveness to the type of accommodation and modification they receive, this paper will discuss each of the four types of accommodations and look at whether and how the ability to use that type of accommodation is important in the workplace.

The following four categories of accommodations will be examined here: presentation, response, setting, and time accommodation. They change how works are presented (including adjustments in the background), the way a student should respond to them (such as the format of their response), and the conditions (such as time limits) for completing the work (Accommodation Central, 2023). These are only some common types of accommodations and are not exhaustive. Personalized Learning Support Plans (PLSPs) are often used, and it is neither possible nor the intention of this paper to analyze every combination of accommodations.

## RESULTS

To eliminate the effect of the COVID pandemic on the data, the statistics for 2019–20 are taken. The general disabled employment rate is 54.1%, compared to the employment rate of 82.2%, with a 28.1% disability employment rate gap. The employment rate for “disabled people with severe or specific learning difficulties” is one of the lowest at 17.4% (The Employment of Disabled People, 2019). The report not only showed a *lower* employment rate for SEN patients but also that employers are *less* likely to employ SEN patients than people with physical disabilities.

SEN patients’ ‘inability to perform the inherent requirements of the position’ might be why they have lower employment rates than others. However, they have no opportunity to receive an assessment of their working ability, which could be an opportunity to demonstrate the working skills of SEN patients.

Setting accommodation measures for mental disorders, such as enlarged printing or color printing, does not involve excessive technology and could be replicated by the patients themselves, but will cause inconvenience to the employees, therefore impacting their competitiveness. While it is necessary to make sure that all documents accessed by the disabled employee are accessible, important workplace policies, memos, and updates must be available in accessible formats, such as large print or Braille (Wylie, n.d.). “Reasonable accommodations should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, considering the individual needs and limitations of the employee” (Wylie, n.d.). Therefore, it is possible that the employee will be negatively impacted if they do not accommodate their needs through their own efforts.

As setting accommodations and format accommodations change the nature of the task, such accommodations may unlikely be provided at the employer’s end as it is likely to constitute an ‘undue hardship’ as it changes the ‘inherent nature of the task’ as defined in the Equality Act 2010. However, the employees may adjust the details of the task on their own if the changes required are simply the text sizes or printing colors.

Additional time and breaks during long tasks are the most representative forms of condition accommodations. However, “many students with disabilities are only able to demonstrate their skills with extended time (Lovett, 2010)”. “Employees with disabilities may struggle to meet deadlines or need to perform their tasks differently.

Ensure this is accommodated in performance evaluation criteria so these workers aren't unfairly marked down" (Wylie, n.d.).

Supervised breaks are also provided for students as a more modest approach to additional time. The extra time given should not be calculated based on their examination time. While it is problematic if one cannot work without short breaks in between, recent research also recommends a break once per hour. Therefore, the effect of short breaks should be minimal. However, it would be problematic if one could not pay attention to the tasks to be done.

ASD is one of those disorders that affects one's social and interpersonal skills. However, interpersonal skills are crucial in the workplace. Lack of these skills affects not only the ability to complete a task but even the ability to understand instructions.

## DISCUSSION

In line with the results, various measures are required to tackle the relevant issues. Potential supports include counselling and guidance services, social groups, therapies, and training. Many supports are solely provided to youths or teens and unavailable to adults. Examples of these include assessment accommodations and certain types of therapies.

"For many people with disabilities, finding and sustaining work is a challenge. Indeed, it has been estimated that in the United States, only one in three (34.9%) individuals with disabilities are employed compared to 76% of their counterparts without disabilities, and this disparity appears to be increasing over time" (Houtenville & Ruiz, 2012; Kraus, 2017; Lauer & Houtenville, 2017; Bonacio et al., 2019).

"In the UK, employers are legally obliged under the Equality Act 2010 to provide reasonable accommodations unless it causes undue hardship... UK employers must evaluate any accommodation request on a case-by-case basis and try to provide workable solutions. If they are unable to, they will need to provide justifiable reasons (with hard evidence) to demonstrate why the accommodation causes undue hardship." (Wylie, n.d.).

While the Act provides work accommodations and other protections appear to enable workers with impairments to remain economically active, especially those with mental impairment (Chandola & Rouxel, 2021), "evidence indicates that a majority of individuals with disabilities and their families prefer Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) to segregated employment or day services" (Gilson, Carter, Bumble, & McMillan, 2018; Siperstein et al., 2014, as cited in Wehman et al., 2018).

## CONCLUSION

Due to insufficient training in vital skills in the workplace, some might experience disadvantages when competing in the workplace. Despite insufficient evidence for a definite conclusion, current evidence supports the tendency that accommodations and modifications do affect one's working ability to some extent. The ultimate aim of accommodations and modifications is to assist the student in their special needs. When they create negative effects on a student in the future, their value is worth reflecting on. Quantitative experiments could be conducted with students with special educational needs with accommodations as the experiment group and those who never received accommodations as the control group to conduct the same task.

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