

Exploring Effective Approaches to Learning Disabilities in Employment: An Analytical Review

Eleanor T. Loiacono
Professor of Business Analytics
Mason School of Business
William & Mary
eloiacono@wm.edu

Heartley Huber
Associate Professor of Special Education
School of Education
William & Mary
hhuber@wm.edu

Abstract: This research proposal builds on ongoing research to better understand employment inequities affecting individuals with learning disabilities and ways businesses can better support a more diverse workforce in the U.S. and worldwide. Led by a multidisciplinary team of faculty from the William & Mary School of Education and Mason School of Business, this extensive research project will 1) examine U.S. Census data for recent trends in employment data for people with disabilities and 2) explore the extant literature on policies, practices, procedures, and supports businesses may implement to improve employment outcomes and build more robust careers for neurodiverse workers. To build on the existing and ongoing research, we are currently designing the proposed research activities in coordination with our current research partner, the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), which has for over 45 years championed the rights of individuals with LD through research, resource development, and advocacy.

Research Idea: There are two aspects of this research.

- (1) **Examination of the U.S. Census Data:** A significant barrier to understanding ways to improve outcomes for employees with LD is the paucity of data on employment because data sources include only broad categories of disability (e.g., cognitive disabilities, physical disabilities, deafness, blindness). The Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a longitudinal survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, provides data about labor activities, income, participation in government assistance programs, health coverage, disability status, and other demographic information. Using statistical analyses (i.e., descriptive, logistic regression, ANOVA), we will examine how the employment and earnings of individuals with LD align or differ from individuals without disabilities and those with different disabilities (i.e., mental health conditions). Similarly, our research partners at NCLD are currently analyzing Workforce Performance Results data collected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (2014). Along with our findings from SIPP data analysis, they plan to use these analyses to inform a survey for adults with LD to gather information about their employment

experiences and factors that support or hinder gainful employment, retention, and advancement.

(2) Systematic Literature Review of Supportive Business Practices: To examine effective strategies to support individuals with LD and other mild/moderate disabilities at work, we will conduct a systematic literature review of employment policies, practices, and procedures designed to improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities. To be included in this review, studies must 1) examine the impact of policies, practices, and procedures that are or could be feasibly implemented by an employer; 2) target individuals with LD, ADD/ADHD, mental health conditions, and/or autism without intellectual disability; 3) be conducted by or within a business; and 4) include an employment-related outcome. Including studies focused on other mild/moderate disabilities will offer valuable insight into practical and effective ways to improve employment outcomes for other individuals with life-long disabilities and inform future research to determine if similar supports are helpful for individuals with LD. We will conduct an electronic library search of the Proquest database to gather published articles from January 1975 to the present related to vocational rehabilitation, education, psychology, public health, and business equality. Studies will be coded for participant and workplace setting characteristics, intervention components, employment outcomes, and study design/quality.

Research Questions:

- (1) The first research study will answer the following questions: (Please note that this is an abbreviated list due to space limitation)
 - What is the current state of employment, income, and healthcare status for individuals with LD, ages 18-35?
 - How does the employment, income, and healthcare status of individuals with LD compare to individuals without disabilities? How does the employment, income, and healthcare status of individuals with LD compare to individuals with mental health conditions?
 - What other relevant demographic characteristics predict the employment, income, and healthcare status of individuals with LD?

- (2) The second research study will answer the following question:
 - What are effective strategies to support individuals with LD and other mild/moderate disabilities at work that come from the existing literature?

Goal: The researchers will share their findings from this data analysis and extensive literature review. By conducting such a review, we aim to identify and share successful practices in the preparation, recruitment, persistence, and/or advancement of neurodivergent individuals in the workplace. We look to the conference attendees for feedback and suggestions on our current methodology.