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## In-school service predictors of employment for individuals with intellectual disability

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### ABSTRACT

**Backgrounds/aims/methods:** Although there are many secondary data analyses of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) to investigate post-school outcome for students with disabilities, there has been a lack of research with in-school service predictors and post-school outcome for students with specific disability categories.

**Methods/procedures:** This study was a secondary data analysis of NLTS-2 to investigate the relationship between current employment status and in-school services for individuals with intellectual disability. Statistical methods such as descriptive statistics and logistic regression were used to analyze NLTS-2 data set.

**Results:** The main findings included that in-school services were correlated with current employment status, and that primary disability (i.e., mild intellectual disability and moderate/severe intellectual disability) was associated with current employment status.

**Conclusion/implications:** In-school services are critical in predicting current employment for individuals with intellectual disability. Also, data suggest additional research is needed to investigate various in-school services and variables that could predict employment differences between individuals with mild and moderate/severe intellectual disability.

### What this paper adds?

This study adds to the limited literature that in-school service variables predicted employment of individuals with intellectual disability using the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2). This paper also includes all degree of severity of intellectual disability (i.e., mild, moderate, severe), so each individual with mild or moderate/severe intellectual disability could benefit from in-school services for preparing future employment.

### 1. Introduction

The purpose of special education, according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is to help students with disabilities further their education, gain employment, and live independently (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. §1400[d]). IDEA mandates the process of transition planning for a student's movement from school to post-school environments be included in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). The inclusion of their transition plans in their IEP needs to occur before the student turns the age of 16. According to IDEA, a transition plan should incorporate what a student's strengths are, what a student prefers, and what a student is interested in (IDEA, 2004). In order to establish a transition plan, there must be dedicated communication and organization between

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IEP team members, including educators, employers, and community agencies. However, when collaboration fails among them, individuals with disabilities lack adequate services and have relatively lower rates of post-school outcomes (e.g., employment, post-secondary education, independent living) than individuals without disabilities (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Newman et al., 2011). Such problems are heightened in individuals with intellectual disability (ID) because of their relatively weaker cognitive functioning and adaptive behaviors compared to individuals in other disability categories such as learning disabilities. Typically, individuals with ID often experience greater difficulties regarding enrollment in post-secondary education, securing gainful employment, and experiencing independent living after graduation (Newman et al., 2011; Sanford et al., 2011).

Researchers have reported studies including post-school outcomes of individuals with ID using secondary data analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2). Bouck (2012) studied post-school outcomes (i.e., employment, independent living, post-secondary education) with regard to the functional and academic curricula taught during high school. The author found that students with moderate and severe intellectual disability reported low rates for positive outcomes, and no relationship between curriculum type (i.e., functional and academic) and any post-school outcomes. However, the author suggested an in-depth analysis is needed to find which in-school services (e.g., quality of the curriculum, resources) lead to successful post-school outcomes. Bouck and Chamberlain (2016) examined the relationship between post-school services and post-school outcomes for individuals with mild ID using the NLTS-2 data set. The authors found there was a lack of post-school services and supports (e.g., job training services, life skills training services, and postsecondary education accommodations) provided to individuals with mild ID, as well as a lack of benefits (i.e., working full time) even when individuals received post-school services compared to those who did not receive. The authors argued that preparing students with mild ID for their post-school life in school seems more promising and realistic rather than assuming students will receive services after high school. Papay and Bambara (2014) found best practice school program variables (i.e., “family involvement, work experiences, life skills instruction, interagency involvement”; Papay & Bambara, 2014, p. 144) and individual characteristic variables (e.g., functional academic skills, ethnicity, parental expectations, family income, and urbanicity) were significant variables for predicting post-school outcomes when examining the NLTS-2 data.

To better prepare individuals with ID for post-school success, previous studies have examined factors related to curriculum, post-school services, and best practices in employment, independent living, and post-secondary education (Bambara, Wilson, & McKenzie, 2007; Papay & Bambara, 2014; Wehman, 2006). Common best practices for success include: (a) transition planning and self-determination at an early age, (b) engagement of family members when planning the transition, (c) individualized transition plans, (d) vocational education experiences, (e) utilization of a functional curriculum for independent living, (f) inclusive educational practices, and (g) interagency embedded in the process of collaboration. However, these best practices are not usually directly considered in experimental or quasi-experimental research studies (Test et al., 2009). Instead, school program variables are identified as significant indicators of post-school success in research designs (e.g., career awareness, self-determination, vocational education; Mazzotti et al., 2016).

According to a systematic review of NLTS-2 secondary data analysis of in-school predictors of post-school success by Mazzotti et al. (2016), parental involvement and parent expectations have potential evidence as predictors for independent living. The level of evidence was based on Test et al.’ (2009) methods for determining levels of evidence (i.e., limited, potential, moderate). Additionally, career awareness, exit exam performance, interagency collaboration, parental involvement, self-determination, self-care, social skills, transition programming, community experiences, occupational courses, and school-based programs (e.g., school sponsored work, job shadowing, vocational preparation; Shandra & Hogan, 2008) have potential evidence as predictors for employment. However, much of the research summarized here has included various categories of disabilities (e.g., severe disabilities including intellectual disability, autism, and multiple disabilities) in order to investigate in-school predictors for post-school outcomes (e.g., Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012). Due to a lack of information regarding specific disabilities, the results cannot be interpreted with respect to different disability categories. Given this, research that examines in-school predictors of post-school success for individuals with ID is needed (Mazzotti et al., 2016). Moreover, when considering predictors of post-school outcomes for individuals with ID, post-school services and supports (e.g., vocational rehabilitation programs) often are aimed at individuals who need more intensive instruction – those students who have more severe ID (Wehman, Fong, Ditchman, & Kang, 2014). To prepare individuals with all degrees of severity of ID, in-school services are perhaps more promising and realistic (Bouck & Chamberlain, 2016). Also, in-school services enable educators to determine students’ strengths, weaknesses, and interests, and identify the best fit for students’ future success by providing a variety of programs though to lead to positive post-school outcomes (Bouck, 2012).

As noted, post-school services are focused on individuals with more severe ID, so individuals with mild ID may not benefit as much from these services (Bouck & Chamberlain, 2016). Also, it cannot be assumed that students with all levels of severity of ID will be trained after graduating from high school, and effective in-school services need to be provided to ensure students’ success in adult life (Bouck & Chamberlain, 2016). In-school services can help individuals with ID get a job without delay after exit from high school (e.g., Carter et al., 2012). The specific services are included in a student’s transition plan in order to design a more systematic approach because greater coherence in services positively affects post-school outcomes (e.g., Bouck, 2012; Mazzotti et al., 2009).

Ultimately, it is necessary to identify what in-school services are provided to students with ID as well as the impact of these services on post-school outcomes. The purpose of the current study is to identify what in-school service variables predict employment for individuals with ID using the NLTS-2 data set. Detailed research questions are as follows: (1) what is the nature of in-school services provided to students with ID?; (2) what in-school services significantly predict employment in individuals with ID?; (3) what, if any, association is there between the level of disability and employment after secondary school?; and (4) what, if any, association is there between the demographics and the student satisfaction with in-school services and employment after secondary school in individuals with ID?

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