

## Research Trends Explored Over the Last Two Years in Inclusive Postsecondary Education

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The *Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education* was created to fill the dearth of publication outlets for research in inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE). To better evaluate the types of articles published, and the journals publishing this work, a trend evaluation was conducted. Research syntheses, such as literature reviews and meta-analyses, are commonly employed to aggregate findings across studies of a similar intervention or target behavior. This allows researchers to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. Another type of analysis that can help researchers evaluate research within a specific field is the trend analysis. Rather than evaluating the efficacy of a specific educational practice, journal articles are reviewed to discover trends in research. Within a relatively new field such as IPSE, this type of review serves to explore articles published and to discover gaps in the quantity or quality of research.

### Trend Analysis

In the field of learning disabilities (LD), Lessen, Dudzinski, Karsh, and Van Acker (1989) conducted a journal analysis of seven LD-specific research journals. Articles that were published in these journals between 1978 and 1987 were evaluated for trends. Results showed that less than 4% of articles were intervention research. Researchers were also able to identify under-researched and over-researched areas related to students with LD and then make recommendations about methodological information that should be reported when disseminating research findings for this population. Similarly, in 2009, Mastropieri and colleagues extended this work through a trend analysis of 11 professional journals that publish research related to high-incidence disabilities (LD, emotional disabilities, and developmental disabilities) over a 19-year period (1988 to 2006). Journals were targeted that had high circulation rates or were published by professional organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) or CEC Divisions. Findings showed that while more than half (58%) of articles published were research, only 15.9% were intervention research. Furthermore, in 2014, Graff, Berkeley, Evmenova, and Park extended this review to investigate research within popular autism journals. Findings uncovered that the primary research conducted was on medical models, followed by research on characteristics of social emotional behavior issues. Only a small amount of intervention research was conducted with school-age children. In regard to the field of

IPSE, the findings in the current brief yield information that informs future research efforts and is of interest to researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.

### Method

All feature articles published in selected journals over 2 years (2017 and 2018) were included in the analysis; this is the period in which JIPE was looking at viability in the publishing realm. Using the Think College Research Affinity Group (<https://thinkcollege.net/technical-assistance/affinity-groups/research>) forum and compiling a bibliography from meeting notes for both years, a base list of references was assembled. New searches were also initiated from the databases of Social Science Index and Psych Info under the following terms in isolation and combination: *inclusive*, *postsecondary*, *intellectual disability*, *developmental disability*, *college*, *university*, and *autism*. A coding instrument and coding conventions were developed and used during data collection. In all, 58 variables were coded. First basic information was identified: (a) coder name, (b) journal name, (c) year of publication, (d) volume number, (e) issue number, and (f) last name of the authors. Next, each article was classified as (a) a research study, (b) a literature review, (c) a position paper, or (d) a program evaluation/description. Introductions, commentaries

### Research

If an article was classified as research, it was further coded as either qualitative, quantitative, single-subject design, secondary data analysis, or mixed methodology research. Qualitative research was further evaluated and coded as (a) an interview, (b) a case study, (c) a narrative, (d) other, or (e) a combination. Narrative research studies were personal stories told in the first person. Case studies investigated a single person, program, event, process, social group, or phenomenon related to IPSE. The “other design” category was used to capture studies that did not fit into one of these categories. Quantitative research was further evaluated and coded as (a) an assessment study, (b) a characteristics study, (c) an experimental/group study, or (d) a statistics study. Assessment studies focused on comparison among tools used specifically for assessing various abilities of individuals with intellectual or developmental disability (IDD). Characteristics studies examined the features of individuals with IDD—in most cases, compared to either other disability groups or to a typically-developing population. Statistical studies looked at secondary analyses of previous data sets. Single-subject research designs were further evaluated to determine if they were (a) AB, (b) ABA, (c) ABAB, (d) ABC, or (e) other (e.g., changing criterion, alternating condition). Specific data relating to the participants and focus of each intervention study were also coded.

### Participants and Topics

Participants were classified as (a) parents, (b) teachers/paraprofessionals, (c) individuals with ASD, (d) individuals with IDD, (e) individuals with another disability, (f) professors, (g) families, (h) other individuals, (i) mentors, (j) people without disabilities, (k) people with different disabilities, or (l) a mixture of subjects with disabilities and without disabilities. Additionally, each research study was then sorted into an age category: (a) transition

students, (b) postsecondary, (c) graduates, (d) alumni-post-graduation, (e) middle adult, (f) lifespan (birth to death), or (g) other. The primary focus of all articles was also determined and coded in one of the following categories: (a) employment, (b) independent living, (c) residential housing, (d) behavioral/emotional health, (e) foundational academics, (f) college classes, (g) community integration, (h) life experiences, (i) special services/support, (j) combination, (k) mentors, (l) self-determination, (m) self-advocacy, or (n) Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSID).

## Procedures

There were three primary coders, with one having a Ph.D. in special education, the second in doctoral-level studies, and the third completing a master's in applied behavior analysis. The first two authors developed the coding conventions based upon previous research (Graff, Berkeley, Evmenova, & Park, 2014; Mastropieri et al., 2009) and all authors were trained in coding conventions prior to coding. Journals were accessed through electronic databases and articles for each issue were coded using the coding instrument and conventions described previously. If there was a question about how to code an item, the first author documented the question and discussed it with the research team to obtain a consensus about how the item should be coded. Data were entered into the SPSS 19.0 software package for analysis. To establish reliability, 40% of articles were randomly selected and coded by a different researcher than had conducted the original coding. Reliability was established at 100%.

## Results

Data were analyzed with SPSS. No emerging leader was found in the field of journals. There were 59 articles published in 46 journals, with the biggest contributor (five articles) being the *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*. The *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities*, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, and *Remedial and Special Education* each published three articles. Other journals that had two articles included *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *Journal of Special Education Technology*, *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, and *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. First authors Carter, Francis, Gilson, Grigal, and Shogren were noted to each have two articles published. Other prolific authors, with three or more articles, regardless of author order, included Bumble, Carter, Smith, and Papay.

There were 43 research studies, 2 literature reviews, 7 position papers, and 7 program evaluations. For research, the analysis showed 4 surveys, 13 qualitative studies, 14 quantitative studies, 4 single-subject designs, 5 secondary data analyses, and 3 mixed-methods studies. For qualitative studies, interviews were the largest, with 10 articles. Twenty statistics were published, with many exploring the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 data. Thirty-two articles targeted the IDD population, with only 4 studies for autism, 4 for other disability, and 4 mixed, focusing on those individuals with and without disabilities. With the noted age of the subjects, 38 articles were with postsecondary

students and 12 were with the transition-aged population. The biggest topics of study were college classes (11 articles) and articles with a focus on employment (9 articles).

### Conclusion and Implications

Based upon the results, there is an overwhelming need for a journal to publish research on inclusive postsecondary education. There are productive and creative researchers in the field who want to explore using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to seek best practices for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Therefore, the *Journal of Inclusive Postsecondary Education* will serve to highlight research activities to uncover solutions, to better inform programs, and to be a site for dissemination of information and publication.

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