

By Dr. Shelley Moore, Jan. 2025

In education, the term "support" is often misunderstood. Many people think that hiring Educational Assistants (EAs) will provide the necessary support for students. However, EAs themselves are not the support; they are tools that help facilitate support within the educational system.

Key Terms in Education

- **Needs:** These are the specific challenges students face while learning. Each student has unique needs influenced by obstacles in their learning environment. For example, a student with executive functioning needs may struggle with organization and time management.
- **Supports:** These are tools that help students manage their needs. Examples include visual checklists, technology aids, and organizational tools. The key is that supports should align with the student's specific needs.
- **Strategies:** These are actions taken to use supports effectively. For instance, a student might decide to leave home earlier to avoid being late. Strategies empower students to take charge of their learning.
- **Resources:** This refers to the people, time, and funding needed to implement supports and strategies. Resources should be allocated in a way that empowers students rather than simply trying to fix their needs.

The Role of Educational Assistants

EAs can be helpful, but they should not be viewed as the main solution to supporting students. Relying too much on EAs can reduce students' independence and self-determination. It's essential to understand their role and to provide guidelines for their effective use in classrooms.

Moving Forward

To improve educational planning, it's crucial to understand students' needs and develop tailored supports and strategies. Resources should be used in ways that promote independence and self-advocacy.

Actions for Improvement:

- **Needs-Based Planning:** Create individual and classroom support plans that focus on specific student needs.
- **Teaching Self-Determination:** Educate students about their needs and how to use supports and strategies effectively.
- **Evaluate Resource Allocation:** Assess how resources are currently used and advocate for better allocation focused on inclusion.
- **Encourage Collaboration:** Foster ongoing communication among students, families, educational assistants, and educators to ensure that resources are effectively used.

Understanding the difference between needs, supports, strategies, and resources is essential for promoting inclusive education. The goal is to empower students and create supportive learning environments that respect their diverse needs.

References (created with support from Scite AI)

Akintayo, O. T., Eden, C. A., Ayeni, O. O., & Onyebuchi, N. C. (2024). Inclusive curriculum design: Meeting the diverse needs of students for social improvement. *International Journal of Applied Research in Social Sciences*, 6(5), 770–784.

Bennett, S., Gallagher, T., Somma, M., & White, R. (2021). Transitioning towards inclusion: a triangulated view of the role of educational assistants. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 21(3), 187–197.

Biggs, E. E., Gilson, C. B., & Carter, E. W. (2018). "developing that balance": preparing and supporting special education teachers to work with paraprofessionals. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*, 42(2), 117–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406418765611>

Brock, M. E., & Carter, E. W. "Promoting Inclusion, Social Connections, and Learning Through Peer Support Arrangements." *Teaching Exceptional Children*, vol. 47, no. 5, 2015, pp. 246–254. doi:10.1177/0040059915594784.

Cano, S. R., Delgado-Benito, V., & Gonçalves, V. (2022). Educational technology based on virtual and augmented reality for students with learning disabilities: Specific projects and applications. In *Emerging advancements for virtual and augmented reality in Healthcare* (pp. 26–44). IGI Global.

Chuang, Y. (2014). Increasing learning motivation and student engagement through the technology- supported learning environment. *Creative Education*, 05(23), 1969–1978. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2014.523221>

Carter, E. W., Asmus, J., Moss, C. K., Biggs, E. E., Bolt, D. M., Born, T. L., ... & Weir, K. (2015). Randomized evaluation of peer support arrangements to support the inclusion of high school students with severe disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 82(2), 209–233.

Chao, P. and Chou, Y. (2017). Differences in teaching self-determination between general and special education teachers in elementary schools. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(4), 40. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n4p40>

Chen, L. (2017). Idea of resource saving higher education development on the integration and optimization of educational resources. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics Science and Technology Education*, 13(10). <https://doi.org/10.12973/ejmste/78731>

Chiedu, F., & Jirandeh, E. (2024). Quantifying Executive Functions: Bilingual Education's Cognitive Impact in Special Education. *International Journal of Religion*, 5(6), 22-38.

Cho, H., Wehmeyer, M., & Kingston, N. (2012). The effect of social and classroom ecological factors on promoting self-determination in elementary school. *Preventing School Failure Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 56(1), 19-28.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988x.2010.548419>

Devecchi, C., Dettori, F., Doveston, M., Sedgwick, P., & Jament, J. (2012). Inclusive classrooms in Italy and England: the role of support teachers and teaching assistants. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 27(2), 171-184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2011.645587>

D'Intino, J. (2022). Evaluating the rationale and evidence supporting executive functions skills instruction in the classroom: A critical review. *Psychology in the Schools*, 60(4), 1125-1148.

Doležalová, E. (2018). Teacher assistant as one of the supportive measures of inclusive education of pupils with special educational needs. *The Educational Review Usa*, 2(5). <https://doi.org/10.26855/er.2018.05.003>

Gibson, S. (2015). When rights are not enough: What is? Moving towards new pedagogy for inclusive education within UK universities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(8), 875-886.

Licardo, M. and Schmidt, M. (2016). Why is self-determination important for students with and without disabilities in vocational education?. *The New Educational Review*, 46(4), 200-210. <https://doi.org/10.15804/tner.2016.46.4.17>

Shogren, K., Lee, J., & Panko, P. (2016). An examination of the relationship between postschool outcomes and autonomy, psychological empowerment, and self-realization. *The Journal of Special Education*, 51(2), 115-124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466916683171>

Shogren, K., Wehmeyer, M., Davies, D., Stock, S., & Palmer, S. (2015). Cognitive support technologies for adolescents with disabilities: Impact on educator perceptions of capacity and opportunity for self-determination. *Développement Humain Handicap Et Changement Social*, 21(1), 67. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1086494ar>

Symes, W. and Humphrey, N. (2011). School factors that facilitate or hinder the ability of teaching assistants to effectively support pupils with autism spectrum disorders (asds) in mainstream secondary schools. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 11(3), 153-161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-3802.2011.01196.x>

Tindall, D., MacDonald, W., Carroll, E., & Moody, B. (2014). Pre-service teachers' attitudes towards children with disabilities: An Irish perspective. *European Physical Education Review*, 21(2), 206-221.

Rivera-Urbina, G. N., Bermudez-Rivera, K. A., & Molero-Chamizo, A. (2023). Differential effects of educational and cognitive interventions on executive functions in adolescents. *IBRO Neuroscience Reports*, 15, S887. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ibneur.2023.08.1855>

Ulmane-Ozolina, L. (2015). Importance of collaboration supported context in blended learning. *Society Integration Education Proceedings of the International Scientific Conference*, 1, 308. <https://doi.org/10.17770/sie2014vol1.773>

Wehmeyer, M., Cheon, S., & Silver, M. (2021). Self-determination in positive education., 225-249. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64537-3_9

Zeng, W., Song, E., & Hor, C. (2022). Parental influences on student self-determination: perspectives of college students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, 46(3), 180-190. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07319487221107890>

Zhao, Y., Rose, R., & Shevlin, M. (2021). Paraprofessional support in Irish schools: from special needs assistants to inclusion support assistants. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 36(2), 183-197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2021.1901371>