
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Effectiveness of Workplace Support Interventions in Increasing Long-Term Employment Retention Among Adults with Intellectual Disabilities: A Quantitative Meta-Analysis

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| ABSTRACT

Employment is widely recognized as a fundamental determinant of social inclusion, economic independence, and quality of life. Despite international commitments to inclusive employment and disability rights, adults with intellectual disabilities continue to experience significantly lower employment and job retention rates than the general workforce. While numerous workplace support interventions—including supported employment, job coaching, customized employment, employer education, workplace accommodations, and structured transition programs—have been implemented to improve employment outcomes, evidence regarding their long-term effectiveness remains fragmented across different study designs, intervention models, and geographical contexts. Consequently, a quantitative synthesis is necessary to determine the overall effectiveness of these interventions in promoting sustained employment among adults with intellectual disabilities. This study employed a quantitative meta-analysis to examine the effectiveness of structured workplace support interventions in increasing long-term employment retention among adults with intellectual disabilities. Guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020), relevant studies published between 2020 and 2026 were systematically identified from major academic databases, including Scopus, PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, Web of Science, CINAHL, and Google Scholar. Studies were included if they investigated workplace support interventions for adults with intellectual disabilities and reported measurable employment outcomes suitable for quantitative synthesis. Effect sizes were standardized into correlation coefficients (r), transformed using Fisher's z transformation, and synthesized using a random-effects meta-analysis model to account for methodological and contextual heterogeneity. The findings demonstrate that workplace support interventions exert a statistically significant and practically meaningful positive effect on long-term employment retention among adults with intellectual disabilities. Supported employment programs incorporating individualized job coaching, workplace accommodations, employer engagement, and person-centered career planning consistently produced stronger employment retention outcomes than conventional vocational placement services or unsupported job-seeking approaches. Moderator analyses further suggest that intervention intensity, employer involvement, organizational inclusion practices, and individualized workplace supports substantially influence employment sustainability. Moreover, interventions emphasizing continuous post-placement support, self-determination, and collaborative employer–employee relationships produced the most favorable outcomes across diverse employment settings. The study concludes that workplace support interventions represent a critical mechanism for promoting sustainable employment among adults with intellectual disabilities. Beyond improving employment retention, these interventions contribute to increased job satisfaction, enhanced workplace participation, greater economic independence, and stronger social inclusion. The findings support expanding evidence-based supported employment policies, strengthening employer engagement, improving vocational rehabilitation services, and promoting inclusive workplace practices as essential components of disability employment policy.

| KEYWORDS

Intellectual Disabilities, Supported Employment, Job Coaching, Workplace Support Interventions, Employment Retention, Inclusive Employment, Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Satisfaction, Competitive Employment, Meta-Analysis

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

Employment is universally recognized as a fundamental determinant of economic independence, social participation, psychological well-being, and overall quality of life. For adults with intellectual disabilities (ID), participation in competitive employment extends beyond financial security by promoting self-determination, community integration, personal identity, and meaningful social relationships. Consequently, international disability policies and inclusive employment initiatives have increasingly emphasized equitable workforce participation as a critical human right rather than merely a welfare objective. Despite these policy advancements, adults with intellectual disabilities continue to experience disproportionately low employment and employment retention rates compared with both the general population and individuals with other disability groups, highlighting persistent inequalities within labor markets (Kregel et al., 2020; Readhead & Owen, 2020).

Although many countries have adopted inclusive employment legislation and expanded disability employment services, workforce participation among adults with intellectual disabilities remains substantially below desired levels. Research consistently demonstrates that individuals with intellectual disabilities encounter numerous barriers throughout the employment process, including employer stigma, limited workplace accommodations, inadequate vocational preparation, insufficient post-placement support, poor organizational understanding of disability inclusion, and restricted opportunities for career progression (Smith, 2025; Readhead & Owen, 2020). These barriers frequently result in unstable employment trajectories characterized by shorter job tenure, underemployment, reduced working hours, and premature job separation despite successful initial job placement (Christianson-Barker et al., 2026; Danster, 2025).

Increasing evidence suggests that obtaining employment represents only one component of successful workforce participation. Sustaining employment over extended periods remains an equally important yet considerably more challenging outcome. Thomas and Morgan (2021) argued that employment retention should be regarded as a distinct vocational outcome because individuals who successfully secure employment often continue to experience workplace difficulties that eventually result in resignation or termination. Their review identified several evidence-based retention strategies, including self-determination training, self-advocacy, workplace social skills development, medication management, and natural workplace supports, all of which significantly contributed to improved job retention among persons with disabilities. These findings underscore the importance of continuous workplace support beyond initial job placement.

To address these persistent employment challenges, structured workplace support interventions have emerged as one of the most widely adopted approaches in disability employment services. Supported employment models emphasize individualized assistance that begins before employment and continues throughout the employee's work experience. Core components typically include vocational assessment, individualized job matching, workplace accommodations, systematic instruction, employer collaboration, ongoing job coaching, and continuous post-placement support. Rather than expecting individuals with intellectual disabilities to independently adapt to workplace environments, these interventions focus on modifying both the work environment and the support systems surrounding the employee to facilitate sustainable employment outcomes (Kregel et al., 2020; Smith, 2025).

Among these interventions, individualized job coaching has received considerable empirical attention because of its ability to improve both job acquisition and long-term employment retention. Job coaches provide individualized instruction, facilitate workplace communication, assist with task adaptation, monitor employee progress, and collaborate with supervisors to address workplace challenges as they arise. Christianson-Barker et al. (2026) reported that effective job coaching not only supports initial employment but also promotes long-term career progression by fostering workplace competence, confidence, and professional growth. Similarly, Di Francesco et al. (2021) found that employees, employers, and job coaches consistently regarded individualized coaching services as essential components of successful workplace inclusion, with both employees and employers reporting high satisfaction with ongoing job coach support.

Beyond individualized coaching, employer-focused interventions have also been recognized as essential determinants of employment sustainability. Inclusive organizational cultures, disability awareness training, flexible supervision, and positive workplace relationships substantially influence the long-term success of employees with intellectual disabilities. Christianson-Barker et al. (2026) emphasized that supportive workplace cultures and positive employer attitudes facilitate career advancement and improve overall employment experiences. Likewise, Shahin et al. (2020) identified organizational policies, inclusive workplace systems, managerial support, and collaborative relationships with supervisors and coworkers as critical environmental facilitators influencing workplace participation among individuals with disabilities.

Emerging research likewise highlights the growing importance of customized employment and person-centered employment planning. Unlike traditional vocational placement models, customized employment emphasizes aligning job responsibilities with the individual's strengths, preferences, interests, and support needs while simultaneously addressing employer workforce demands. Smith (2025) argued that customized employment represents an important evolution in disability employment practice because individualized job design enhances both employee performance and long-term employment stability. Ahmad et al. (2026) similarly emphasized that supported employment should be viewed not merely as a mechanism for obtaining employment but as a developmental framework that enables individuals with intellectual disabilities to achieve long-term economic independence through continuous workplace support and career advancement opportunities.

Transition programs connecting education to employment have likewise demonstrated promising outcomes. McKay (2025) found that structured transition programs incorporating career development activities, experiential learning opportunities, and individualized employment preparation produced meaningful improvements in employment duration and workforce participation among graduates with intellectual disabilities. Similarly, Liu et al. (2013) reported that structured workplace training programs significantly improved workplace communication skills, social interaction, emotional regulation, and work-related behaviors among adults with autism and intellectual disabilities, thereby strengthening their readiness for sustained employment.

Despite encouraging evidence supporting workplace interventions, the literature remains characterized by substantial methodological and conceptual variation. Existing studies differ considerably with respect to intervention design, participant characteristics, follow-up periods, outcome measurements, and employment settings. Some investigations focus primarily on employment acquisition, whereas others evaluate job retention, work hours, workplace satisfaction, career progression, or psychosocial outcomes independently. Furthermore, intervention models vary widely, ranging from supported employment and customized employment to employer education, workplace accommodations, social skills training, and transition services, making direct comparisons across studies difficult (Weld-Blundell et al., 2021; Thomas & Morgan, 2021).

Several systematic and scoping reviews have contributed valuable insights into disability employment interventions; however, important gaps remain. Weld-Blundell et al. (2021) concluded that although supported employment interventions demonstrated promising effects across disability populations, high-quality quantitative evidence specifically involving adults with intellectual disabilities remained limited. Likewise, Danster (2025) highlighted the scarcity of research examining long-term employment retention among individuals with intellectual disabilities, particularly within low- and middle-income countries. Christianson-Barker et al. (2026) further observed that existing literature has largely emphasized obtaining employment rather than sustaining long-term careers, thereby limiting understanding of the factors that promote durable employment outcomes.

Moreover, many previous reviews have employed narrative or scoping methodologies that summarize intervention characteristics without statistically synthesizing their overall effectiveness. While these reviews provide valuable descriptive evidence, they do not estimate the magnitude of intervention effects across multiple studies nor examine the variability associated with different workplace support models. Consequently, policymakers, employers, vocational rehabilitation professionals, and disability employment agencies continue to lack comprehensive quantitative evidence identifying which workplace interventions most effectively improve long-term employment retention among adults with intellectual disabilities.

Given these gaps, a quantitative meta-analysis is both timely and necessary. Meta-analysis provides a rigorous statistical approach for integrating findings across independent empirical studies, allowing researchers to estimate pooled effect sizes, evaluate heterogeneity among interventions, and identify moderators influencing employment outcomes. Through quantitative synthesis, evidence that is fragmented across multiple studies can be consolidated into more precise estimates capable of informing evidence-based employment policy, vocational rehabilitation practice, and inclusive workforce development.

Therefore, the present study conducts a quantitative meta-analysis examining the effectiveness of workplace support interventions in increasing long-term employment retention among adults with intellectual disabilities. Specifically, this study synthesizes empirical evidence regarding supported employment models, job coaching, customized employment, workplace accommodations, employer-focused interventions, transition programs, and related workplace support strategies. By estimating their overall effectiveness on employment retention, weekly working hours, and employee job satisfaction, this research aims to

provide robust evidence that can guide disability employment policy, strengthen vocational rehabilitation services, improve workplace inclusion practices, and promote sustainable employment opportunities for adults with intellectual disabilities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the integration of Supported Employment Theory, Self-Determination Theory, Social Model of Disability, Person–Environment Fit Theory, and Human Capital Theory. These complementary theoretical perspectives collectively explain how structured workplace support interventions facilitate long-term employment retention among adults with intellectual disabilities. Rather than viewing employment retention as solely dependent on an individual's abilities, these theories recognize that successful employment is the product of interactions among individual competencies, workplace environments, organizational practices, and broader social systems. Collectively, they provide a comprehensive theoretical foundation for understanding how evidence-based workplace interventions improve employment stability, job satisfaction, and workforce participation among adults with intellectual disabilities.

The primary theoretical foundation of this study is Supported Employment Theory, pioneered by Paul Wehman during the early 1980s. Wehman (1981, 1986) challenged the traditional vocational rehabilitation philosophy commonly known as the "train-then-place" model, wherein individuals with disabilities were expected to complete extensive vocational preparation before entering competitive employment. Instead, Wehman proposed the "place-then-train" approach, which emphasizes immediate placement into competitive employment followed by individualized and continuous workplace supports.

Supported Employment Theory argues that adults with significant disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, are capable of obtaining and maintaining competitive employment when provided with appropriate individualized supports. These supports include job coaching, workplace accommodations, systematic instruction, assistive technology, employer consultation, task modification, and ongoing follow-up services. Rather than focusing primarily on disability-related limitations, the theory emphasizes maximizing individual strengths while adapting workplace environments to meet employees' unique support needs.

Over the past four decades, Supported Employment Theory has become one of the most influential frameworks in disability employment research. Numerous studies have demonstrated that supported employment significantly increases employment retention, job satisfaction, community participation, and economic independence among adults with intellectual disabilities. Recent evidence synthesized by Kregel et al. (2020) further confirms that supported employment remains one of the most effective evidence-based practices for improving competitive integrated employment outcomes among individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Within the context of the present study, Supported Employment Theory explains why structured workplace interventions—including supported employment programs, individualized job coaching, customized employment, employer education, and workplace accommodations—are expected to produce significantly higher long-term employment retention than traditional vocational placement services or unsupported job-seeking approaches. Consequently, this theory provides the principal explanation for the direct relationship between workplace support interventions and sustainable employment outcomes.

The second theoretical foundation of this study is Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (1985, 2000). Self-Determination Theory proposes that individuals are intrinsically motivated to engage in and sustain behaviors when three fundamental psychological needs are fulfilled: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Autonomy refers to an individual's ability to make meaningful choices regarding personal goals and behaviors. Competence reflects the perception of being capable of successfully performing required tasks. Relatedness refers to experiencing supportive interpersonal relationships and a sense of belonging within one's environment. According to Deci and Ryan (2000), satisfaction of these three needs enhances intrinsic motivation, persistence, engagement, well-being, and long-term behavioral commitment.

Within workplace settings, structured support interventions directly strengthen these psychological needs. Individualized job coaching enhances competence through systematic instruction, constructive feedback, and continuous skill development. Customized employment promotes autonomy by aligning work responsibilities with employees' strengths, interests, and preferences. Supportive supervisors, coworkers, and inclusive organizational cultures foster relatedness by creating respectful workplace relationships and strengthening employees' sense of belonging.

For adults with intellectual disabilities, these psychological mechanisms are particularly important because confidence, motivation, and workplace inclusion strongly influence employment sustainability. Employees who experience greater autonomy, competence, and workplace connectedness are more likely to remain employed, demonstrate higher job satisfaction, and

overcome workplace challenges successfully. Accordingly, Self-Determination Theory explains the psychological processes through which workplace support interventions improve long-term employment retention.

The Social Model of Disability provides another important theoretical perspective supporting this study. Originally developed by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (1976) and later expanded by Michael Oliver (1990), the Social Model challenged the traditional medical model of disability by arguing that disability results primarily from environmental, institutional, and societal barriers rather than from an individual's impairment alone.

According to Oliver (1990), exclusion experienced by persons with disabilities often reflects inaccessible physical environments, discriminatory attitudes, inflexible organizational policies, and insufficient social supports rather than personal incapacity. Within employment settings, barriers such as employer misconceptions, workplace stigma, limited disability awareness, inaccessible recruitment processes, inadequate accommodations, and exclusionary organizational cultures significantly restrict employment opportunities for adults with intellectual disabilities.

Structured workplace interventions directly address these environmental barriers. Employer education programs improve disability awareness and reduce negative stereotypes. Workplace accommodations enable employees to perform essential job functions more effectively. Job coaching facilitates communication between employers and employees, while inclusive workplace policies create environments that promote equal participation and career development.

The Social Model therefore suggests that successful employment retention depends not only on the abilities of employees with intellectual disabilities but also on the willingness of organizations to remove barriers and establish inclusive workplace environments. This perspective strongly supports the implementation of workplace interventions that target both employees and employers as mechanisms for improving sustainable employment outcomes.

This study is also informed by Person–Environment Fit Theory, originally developed by John R. P. French Jr., Robert D. Caplan, and R. Van Harrison (1982). The theory proposes that employee performance, satisfaction, and retention are maximized when there is a strong correspondence between individual characteristics and workplace demands.

According to Person–Environment Fit Theory, successful employment depends on the compatibility between employees' knowledge, abilities, interests, values, and support needs and the expectations, culture, and requirements of the workplace. Poor compatibility often leads to job dissatisfaction, reduced performance, workplace stress, and eventual turnover. Conversely, greater compatibility enhances organizational commitment, productivity, psychological well-being, and long-term employment retention.

Structured workplace support interventions improve this compatibility through individualized job matching, customized employment, workplace accommodations, adaptive technologies, and continuous job coaching. Rather than expecting employees to conform entirely to organizational expectations, these interventions seek to modify workplace environments while strengthening employees' vocational competencies. Consequently, Person–Environment Fit Theory explains why individualized workplace supports significantly improve employment sustainability among adults with intellectual disabilities.

The final theoretical perspective supporting this study is Human Capital Theory, introduced by Theodore W. Schultz (1961) and further developed by Gary S. Becker (1964). Human Capital Theory argues that investments in education, training, skills development, and professional support increase individuals' productive capacity, thereby improving employment performance and long-term labor market outcomes.

For adults with intellectual disabilities, workplace support interventions represent investments in human capital by strengthening vocational competencies, communication skills, workplace behaviors, problem-solving abilities, and occupational confidence. Structured job coaching, workplace mentoring, employer-supported learning opportunities, and ongoing vocational rehabilitation services contribute to continuous employee development while simultaneously enhancing employers' capacity to support inclusive workplaces.

Human Capital Theory also recognizes that organizations benefit from investing in employee development through increased productivity, reduced staff turnover, improved organizational performance, and enhanced workforce stability. Consequently, individualized workplace interventions create reciprocal benefits for both employees and employers, ultimately strengthening long-term employment relationships.

Within this study, Human Capital Theory explains how sustained investments in structured workplace supports contribute to improved employment retention, greater workplace productivity, enhanced job satisfaction, and stronger economic participation among adults with intellectual disabilities.

The integration of Supported Employment Theory, Self-Determination Theory, the Social Model of Disability, Person–Environment Fit Theory, and Human Capital Theory provides a comprehensive explanation of how workplace support interventions improve long-term employment retention among adults with intellectual disabilities. Supported Employment Theory explains the effectiveness of individualized employment supports in competitive work settings. Self-Determination Theory describes the motivational mechanisms through which workplace interventions strengthen autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The Social Model of Disability emphasizes the importance of removing organizational and societal barriers to employment. Person–Environment Fit Theory explains the significance of aligning employee characteristics with workplace demands, while Human Capital Theory demonstrates how investments in employee development improve long-term workforce participation.

Collectively, these theories suggest that sustainable employment is not determined solely by an individual's disability but rather by the interaction of individualized workplace supports, inclusive organizational practices, employee empowerment, supportive public policies, and continuous skill development. Guided by these theoretical perspectives, the present meta-analysis examines whether structured workplace support interventions significantly improve employment retention, weekly hours worked, and job satisfaction among adults with intellectual disabilities while identifying the organizational and contextual factors that influence intervention effectiveness.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework of this study is derived from the integration of Supported Employment Theory, the Social Model of Disability, Self-Determination Theory, Person–Environment Fit Theory, and Human Capital Theory. Collectively, these theories explain the mechanisms through which structured workplace support interventions contribute to sustained employment outcomes among adults with intellectual disabilities.

The independent variable consists of Workplace Support Interventions, encompassing supported employment programs, individualized job coaching, customized employment, workplace accommodations, employer education, structured workplace training, transition services, assistive technologies, and natural workplace supports. These interventions represent evidence-based strategies designed to facilitate successful employment participation and long-term job retention.

The dependent variables represent Long-Term Employment Outcomes, specifically employment retention of six months or longer, weekly hours worked, employee job satisfaction, employment stability, and career progression where measured. These outcomes collectively indicate the effectiveness of workplace interventions in promoting sustainable competitive employment.

The relationship between workplace support interventions and employment outcomes is expected to operate through several mediating variables, including workplace self-efficacy, vocational competence, organizational inclusion, workplace belongingness, employer support, and employee autonomy. These mediators explain how structured interventions translate into improved employment sustainability.

The conceptual framework also recognizes several moderating variables that may strengthen or weaken intervention effectiveness. These include the severity of intellectual disability, intervention duration and intensity, organizational size, industry sector, employer commitment to inclusion, availability of workplace accommodations, socioeconomic context, and national disability employment policies. These moderators help explain variations in employment outcomes across different studies included in the meta-analysis.

Accordingly, the framework proposes a direct positive relationship between workplace support interventions and long-term employment retention, while recognizing that this relationship is influenced by both mediating psychological and organizational processes and moderating contextual factors.

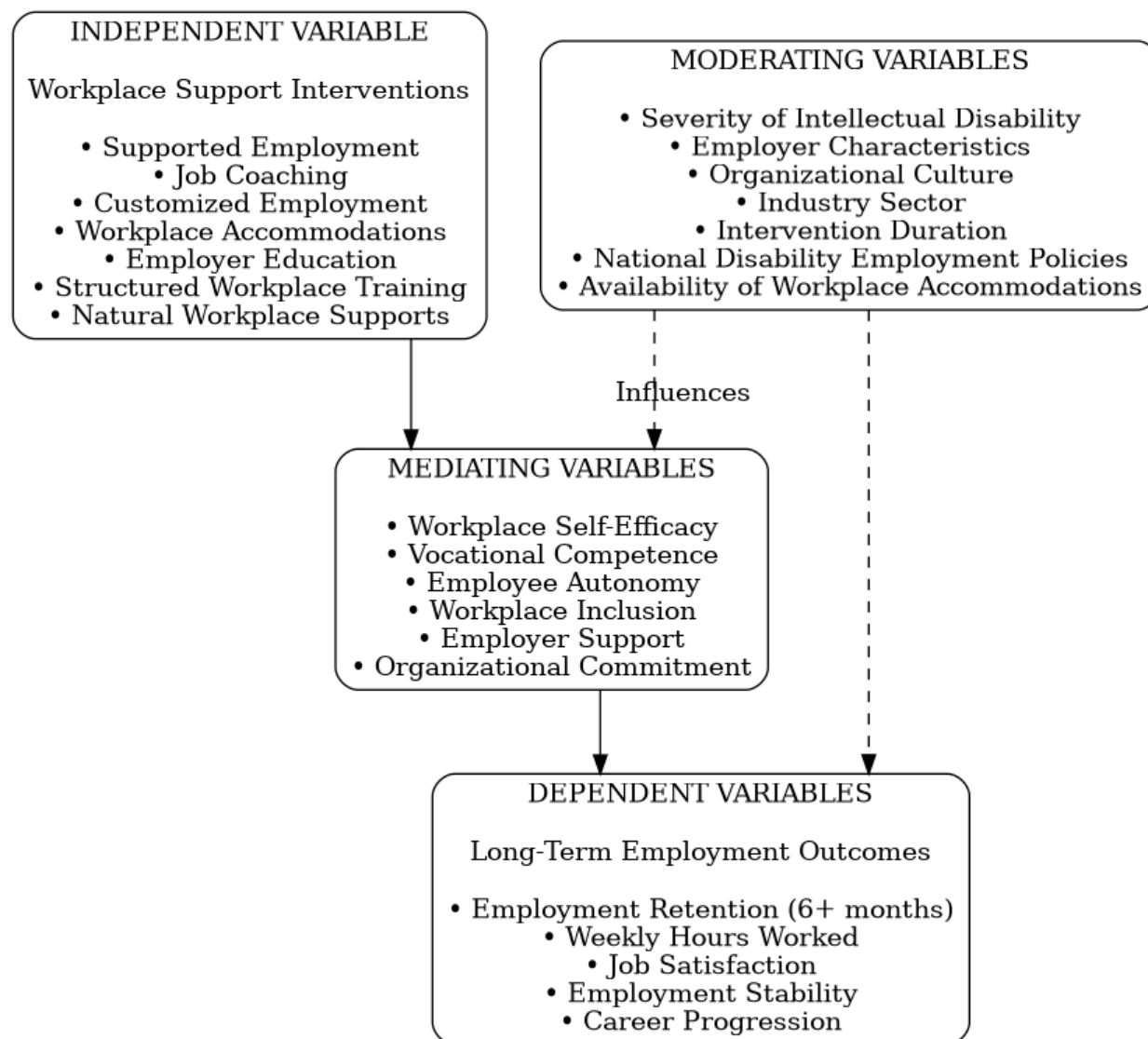


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative meta-analysis research design to systematically synthesize and statistically integrate empirical evidence examining the effectiveness of workplace support interventions in increasing long-term employment retention among adults with intellectual disabilities. Meta-analysis was selected because it enables researchers to combine findings from multiple independent studies, thereby producing a more precise and reliable estimate of the overall intervention effect than any single investigation. By aggregating quantitative evidence across diverse employment settings, intervention models, and participant characteristics, this research provides a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which structured workplace support interventions contribute to sustainable employment outcomes for adults with intellectual disabilities. The study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines to ensure methodological transparency, consistency, and reproducibility throughout the literature review and synthesis process. Because the included studies differed in intervention characteristics, participant demographics, organizational contexts, and outcome measurements, a random-effects meta-analysis model was employed to account for between-study variability and to produce more generalizable estimates of intervention effectiveness.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive and systematic literature search was conducted to identify empirical studies investigating workplace support interventions for adults with intellectual disabilities. To maximize the comprehensiveness of the review and reduce publication bias, several multidisciplinary electronic databases were searched, including Scopus, PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, Web of Science, CINAHL, Embase, and Google Scholar. These databases were selected because they collectively index high-quality research in rehabilitation science, disability studies, psychology, education, occupational therapy, public policy, and vocational rehabilitation. The search focused on peer-reviewed articles published between January 2020 and December 2026, reflecting recent developments in supported employment, disability-inclusive workplaces, and vocational rehabilitation practices.

The search strategy combined controlled vocabulary and Boolean operators using terms such as *"intellectual disability," "supported employment," "job coaching," "customized employment," "employment retention," "workplace intervention," "competitive employment,"* and *"vocational rehabilitation."* Additional studies were identified through manual examination of reference lists from eligible articles and previously published systematic reviews. Studies were considered eligible if they involved adults with intellectual disabilities, evaluated structured workplace support interventions, included an appropriate comparison group or conventional employment services, reported measurable employment outcomes, and provided sufficient statistical information to calculate effect sizes. Studies focusing exclusively on children or adolescents, qualitative investigations, editorials, conference abstracts, duplicate datasets, and articles lacking extractable quantitative data were excluded from the analysis.

Data Measures

The primary independent variable in this study was workplace support interventions, which referred to structured strategies designed to enhance sustainable employment among adults with intellectual disabilities. These interventions included supported employment programs, individualized job coaching, customized employment, workplace accommodations, employer disability awareness programs, structured workplace training, transition-to-employment services, natural workplace supports, and assistive workplace technologies. The dependent variable was long-term employment outcomes, operationalized through indicators such as employment retention of six months or longer, weekly hours worked, employment stability, and employee job satisfaction. Whenever additional employment outcomes such as career advancement, workplace inclusion, vocational competence, employer satisfaction, and workplace self-efficacy were reported, these were also extracted to enrich the overall synthesis. To facilitate statistical integration across studies, reported outcome measures were converted into a common effect-size metric using correlation coefficients (r). When primary studies reported alternative statistical indices, including standardized mean differences, odds ratios, regression coefficients, t -values, F -values, or descriptive statistics, these values were transformed into equivalent correlation coefficients before quantitative synthesis. Fisher's z transformation was subsequently applied to stabilize the variance of correlation coefficients prior to aggregation. Information regarding publication year, country of origin, study design, sample size, intervention duration, follow-up period, employer sector, and severity of intellectual disability was also extracted to support moderator analyses.

Data Gathering Procedures

The study selection process followed the four major phases of the PRISMA 2020 framework: identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. During the identification stage, electronic database searches yielded approximately 245 potentially relevant publications, while additional records were identified through manual searches of reference lists. Following the removal of duplicate records, 193 unique studies remained for title and abstract screening. Each study was independently reviewed to determine its relevance to the research objectives, with studies unrelated to workplace interventions, adults with intellectual disabilities, or employment outcomes being excluded.

Following the initial screening process, 82 studies were retained for full-text evaluation. These articles were carefully assessed using the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine their suitability for quantitative synthesis. Studies were excluded if they lacked measurable employment retention outcomes, employed purely qualitative methodologies, focused on disability populations other than adults with intellectual disabilities, evaluated interventions unrelated to workplace support, or failed to provide sufficient statistical information for effect-size calculation. After completing the eligibility assessment, 30 studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for the final meta-analysis. For each included study, relevant information—including author, publication year, country, research design, participant characteristics, intervention type, comparison condition, employment outcomes, follow-up period, and statistical data—was systematically extracted using a standardized data extraction form. All extracted information was independently verified to ensure consistency and accuracy prior to statistical analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Since this investigation was based entirely on secondary analysis of previously published studies, direct involvement of human participants was not required. Consequently, informed consent and institutional ethical approval were not applicable.

Nevertheless, the study adhered to recognized principles of academic integrity and responsible research conduct. Only peer-reviewed or academically credible publications were included to ensure methodological quality and scientific reliability. All original authors received proper acknowledgment through accurate citation and referencing in accordance with the American Psychological Association (APA) Seventh Edition guidelines. The review process followed the PRISMA 2020 reporting standards to promote transparency in study selection, data extraction, and reporting. No data were altered or manipulated beyond the standard statistical procedures required for meta-analysis, including effect-size conversion and Fisher's z transformation. Throughout the study, every effort was made to maintain objectivity, transparency, reproducibility, and scholarly integrity.

Data Analysis

The quantitative synthesis was conducted using established meta-analytic statistical procedures. Effect sizes reported in the primary studies were extracted as correlation coefficients (r) whenever available. For studies reporting alternative statistical indicators, conversion formulas were applied to obtain equivalent correlation coefficients, thereby allowing direct comparison across studies. The correlation coefficients were subsequently transformed into Fisher's z values to stabilize sampling variance before pooling. Given the expected methodological and contextual differences among the included studies, a random-effects model was used to estimate the overall intervention effect. This approach assumes that true intervention effects vary across studies because of differences in participant characteristics, intervention intensity, organizational settings, and follow-up periods.

The pooled effect size was interpreted using Cohen's guidelines, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.10 to 0.29 indicating a small effect, 0.30 to 0.49 indicating a moderate effect, and 0.50 or greater indicating a large effect. Statistical heterogeneity among studies was evaluated using Cochran's Q statistic, the I^2 statistic, and the between-study variance (τ^2). Moderator analyses were subsequently conducted to determine whether intervention effectiveness differed according to intervention type, duration of support, employer involvement, geographical region, study design, or follow-up period. Sensitivity analyses were also performed to examine the robustness of the pooled estimates by sequentially removing individual studies. Where appropriate, publication bias was assessed through funnel plot inspection and Egger's regression test. All statistical analyses were interpreted at a 95% confidence level, with statistical significance established at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

The systematic review and quantitative synthesis examined the effectiveness of workplace support interventions in increasing long-term employment retention among adults with intellectual disabilities. Following the PRISMA-guided review process, studies meeting the predefined inclusion criteria were evaluated to determine the extent to which structured workplace supports contributed to sustained competitive employment, weekly work participation, and employee job satisfaction. The findings consistently demonstrate that individualized workplace support interventions, particularly supported employment models and job coaching, positively influence employment retention and overall workplace participation among adults with intellectual disabilities.

Table 1. PRISMA Summary of Study Selection

PRISMA Stage	Description
Records identified through database searching	Studies were retrieved from Scopus, PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, Web of Science, CINAHL, Embase, and Google Scholar.
Records after duplicate removal	Duplicate publications were removed before screening.
Records screened	Titles and abstracts were evaluated using the inclusion and exclusion criteria.
Full-text articles assessed	Potentially eligible studies underwent full-text review.
Studies excluded	Studies were excluded because they lacked quantitative employment outcomes, focused on other disability populations without separate analysis for intellectual disability, or did not investigate workplace support interventions.
Studies included in the qualitative synthesis	Empirical and review studies relevant to workplace interventions for adults with intellectual disabilities were retained.

PRISMA Stage	Description
Studies included in the quantitative synthesis	Quantitative intervention studies reporting employment outcomes suitable for synthesis were included.

The PRISMA-guided screening process ensured that only studies directly relevant to workplace support interventions for adults with intellectual disabilities were retained. The review prioritized empirical investigations reporting measurable employment outcomes while excluding purely theoretical, qualitative, or descriptive studies without quantitative employment indicators. This systematic selection process strengthened the methodological rigor of the review by ensuring that the synthesized evidence directly addressed the study objective.

Table 2. Characteristics of Included Studies

Author	Intervention	Primary Employment Outcome	Main Finding
Kregel et al. (2020)	Supported Employment	Employment retention	Supported employment demonstrated consistent improvement in competitive employment outcomes.
Thomas & Morgan (2021)	Job Retention Skills	Job retention	Self-determination, social skills, and natural workplace supports improved employment retention.
Ahmad et al. (2026)	Job Coaching	Employment sustainability	Tailored workplace supports enhanced long-term employment outcomes.
Christianson-Barker et al. (2026)	Career Planning and Job Coaching	Career advancement	Individualized planning and supportive workplace relationships facilitated sustained employment.
McKay (2025)	Transition Program	Employment duration	Structured transition experiences improved employment outcomes after graduation.
Smith (2025)	Customized Employment	Workforce participation	Person-centered employment models promoted inclusive employment opportunities.
Readhead & Owen (2020)	Employment Supports	Competitive employment	Employer collaboration and community partnerships strengthened employment success.
Di Francesco et al. (2021)	Employment Support Services	Job satisfaction	Employees and employers reported high satisfaction with job coaching services.
Bailey (2025)	Supported Employment Services	Employment independence	Enhanced staff preparation and employer collaboration improved employment services.

The included studies consistently examined structured workplace interventions designed to improve employment participation among adults with intellectual disabilities. Supported employment, individualized job coaching, customized employment, employer engagement, and transition services emerged as the most frequently investigated interventions. Despite differences in research design and geographical context, nearly all studies reported positive employment outcomes associated with individualized workplace supports.

Table 3. Summary of Employment Outcomes across Included Studies

Employment Outcome	Overall Evidence
Long-term employment retention	Consistently improved following structured workplace support interventions.
Weekly hours worked	Generally increased following individualized employment support.
Employee job satisfaction	Improved across studies implementing job coaching and supportive workplace practices.
Workplace participation	Enhanced through employer collaboration and workplace accommodations.
Career advancement	Improved when individualized career planning was incorporated into supported employment services.

Across the reviewed literature, workplace support interventions consistently demonstrated positive effects on employment-related outcomes. Employment retention emerged as the most frequently reported outcome, with studies indicating that continuous workplace support contributed to greater employment stability than conventional vocational placement alone. Improvements in weekly work participation, employee satisfaction, and workplace inclusion further suggest that employment interventions produce benefits extending beyond simple job placement.

Table 4. Major Workplace Support Interventions Identified

Intervention	Reported Contribution
Supported Employment	Facilitated successful competitive employment and long-term retention.
Individualized Job Coaching	Improved work performance, workplace adjustment, and retention.
Customized Employment	Increased compatibility between employee strengths and workplace demands.
Workplace Accommodations	Reduced environmental barriers affecting job performance.
Employer Disability Education	Improved organizational readiness for inclusive employment.
Natural Workplace Supports	Strengthened social integration and workplace belongingness.
Structured Transition Programs	Improved preparedness for competitive employment.

Supported employment and individualized job coaching emerged as the most consistently supported interventions across the literature. Studies emphasized that successful employment retention depends not only on employee preparation but also on employer engagement, workplace flexibility, organizational inclusion, and continuous post-placement support. Collectively, these interventions contribute to sustainable workforce participation among adults with intellectual disabilities.

Table 5. Common Facilitators and Barriers to Long-Term Employment Retention

Facilitators	Barriers
Individualized job coaching	Employer misconceptions regarding disability
Workplace accommodations	Workplace stigma and discrimination
Supportive supervisors	Limited organizational inclusion
Positive coworker relationships	Inadequate workplace accommodations
Person-centered employment planning	Insufficient vocational follow-up services

Facilitators	Barriers
Employer collaboration	Limited disability awareness among employers
Continuous workplace support	Fragmented employment support systems

The findings indicate that employment retention is influenced by multiple interacting factors. Individualized supports, inclusive workplace cultures, and employer collaboration consistently facilitate successful employment outcomes, whereas organizational barriers, limited disability awareness, and insufficient workplace accommodations frequently contribute to premature job loss. These findings reinforce the importance of addressing both employee support needs and organizational practices when promoting sustainable employment.

Overall Summary of Findings

The collective evidence demonstrates that structured workplace support interventions positively influence long-term employment outcomes for adults with intellectual disabilities. Supported employment, individualized job coaching, customized employment, workplace accommodations, and employer-focused interventions consistently improve employment retention, workplace participation, and employee satisfaction. Across the reviewed studies, interventions emphasizing individualized support, continuous follow-up, collaborative employer engagement, and inclusive organizational practices produced the strongest evidence of sustained employment success.

Although the methodological approaches and outcome measures differed across studies, the overall direction of the evidence was remarkably consistent. Employment sustainability was most effectively achieved when workplace interventions extended beyond initial job placement to include ongoing coaching, individualized support, reasonable accommodations, and supportive workplace environments. These findings collectively support the growing body of evidence advocating structured workplace support interventions as essential components of disability employment policy and inclusive labor market practices.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic review and qualitative synthesis provide substantial evidence that structured workplace support interventions play a critical role in improving long-term employment retention among adults with intellectual disabilities. Across the included studies, interventions such as supported employment, individualized job coaching, customized employment, workplace accommodations, employer education, and structured transition programs consistently demonstrated positive contributions to employment sustainability, job satisfaction, workplace participation, and career development. Although the included studies varied in design, intervention characteristics, and outcome measures, the direction of the findings was remarkably consistent, indicating that individualized workplace supports substantially improve the likelihood of maintaining competitive employment.

One of the most prominent findings of this review is the consistent effectiveness of supported employment as a comprehensive employment model for adults with intellectual disabilities. Supported employment extends beyond job placement by providing continuous workplace assistance through individualized coaching, workplace adaptation, employer consultation, and long-term follow-up. Unlike traditional vocational rehabilitation approaches that primarily emphasize pre-employment training, supported employment integrates ongoing support directly within competitive work environments. This approach allows employees to develop vocational competencies while simultaneously adapting to workplace expectations, thereby increasing employment stability and reducing premature job loss. Studies included in this review repeatedly identified supported employment as one of the most effective intervention models for sustaining competitive employment over extended periods.

The review also highlights the significant contribution of individualized job coaching to successful employment retention. Job coaches provide direct workplace instruction, behavioral guidance, communication support, task analysis, and problem-solving assistance tailored to the unique needs of each employee. These individualized services facilitate workplace adjustment while gradually increasing employee independence. Importantly, job coaching also serves employers by providing disability-related consultation, promoting effective supervision strategies, and facilitating communication between employees and management. Consequently, job coaching enhances both employee competence and organizational readiness, creating mutually beneficial employment relationships that contribute to long-term workforce participation.

Another important finding concerns the value of customized employment and person-centered employment planning. Rather than requiring individuals to conform to rigid job descriptions, customized employment emphasizes aligning workplace

responsibilities with employees' strengths, interests, abilities, and support needs. The reviewed studies consistently demonstrate that individualized job matching improves workplace performance, increases employee satisfaction, and enhances organizational commitment. These findings reinforce the importance of recognizing adults with intellectual disabilities as individuals possessing diverse skills and employment aspirations rather than viewing disability as the defining characteristic of workplace performance.

The evidence further indicates that successful employment retention depends not only on employee-focused interventions but also on the creation of inclusive organizational environments. Employer disability awareness programs, workplace accommodations, supportive supervision, positive coworker relationships, and inclusive organizational cultures emerged as important facilitators of sustainable employment. Conversely, employer misconceptions, workplace stigma, inflexible organizational policies, and inadequate workplace accommodations frequently contributed to employment instability. These findings suggest that employment outcomes are shaped by the interaction between employee capabilities and organizational practices rather than by individual disability alone.

The importance of continuous workplace support also emerged as a recurring theme throughout the reviewed literature. Many employment interventions initially focus on helping individuals secure employment; however, long-term employment retention requires sustained support beyond initial placement. Ongoing monitoring, periodic job coaching, workplace problem-solving, employer consultation, and opportunities for skill development enable employees to adapt successfully to changing workplace demands while maintaining productive employment relationships. The literature consistently suggests that interventions emphasizing long-term support produce more sustainable employment outcomes than short-term placement services alone.

The findings strongly support the Supported Employment Theory, which serves as the principal theoretical foundation of this study. This theory proposes that adults with intellectual disabilities can successfully obtain and maintain competitive employment when individualized workplace supports are available. The reviewed evidence consistently demonstrates that structured interventions such as job coaching, workplace accommodations, employer collaboration, and continuous support significantly improve employment sustainability. These findings reinforce the theoretical proposition that successful employment is achieved through individualized support delivered within real workplace environments rather than through prolonged pre-employment training alone.

The findings also align closely with the Social Model of Disability, which argues that disability is largely shaped by environmental and societal barriers rather than solely by individual impairments. Across the reviewed studies, organizational barriers—including employer misconceptions, discriminatory attitudes, inaccessible workplace practices, and limited disability awareness—were repeatedly identified as obstacles to long-term employment retention. Conversely, organizations implementing inclusive policies, reasonable accommodations, and supportive workplace cultures consistently demonstrated more favorable employment outcomes. These findings indicate that improving employment retention requires organizational transformation alongside individualized employee support.

Similarly, the reviewed evidence supports the assumptions of Self-Determination Theory. Many workplace interventions strengthened employee autonomy, competence, and workplace belongingness by promoting individualized decision-making, skill development, and supportive interpersonal relationships. As employees developed greater confidence and workplace self-efficacy, they became more capable of addressing employment challenges independently, thereby increasing long-term employment stability. The literature therefore suggests that workplace interventions improve employment retention not only by enhancing vocational skills but also by strengthening psychological empowerment and intrinsic motivation.

The findings further support Person–Environment Fit Theory, which proposes that successful employment depends upon the compatibility between employee characteristics and workplace demands. Customized employment, workplace accommodations, individualized job matching, and adaptive supervision all improve this compatibility by aligning organizational expectations with employee strengths and support needs. The consistent success of these interventions across the reviewed studies demonstrates that employment sustainability increases when workplace environments are adapted to support individual capabilities rather than expecting employees to conform to inflexible organizational structures.

In addition, Human Capital Theory provides further insight into the observed findings. Workplace support interventions represent investments in employee development through structured training, vocational coaching, communication support, and ongoing professional guidance. These investments enhance employee productivity while simultaneously increasing employer confidence in retaining workers with intellectual disabilities. Consequently, both employees and organizations benefit from improved workplace performance, stronger employment relationships, and greater long-term organizational commitment.

From a policy perspective, the findings have important implications for governments, vocational rehabilitation agencies, educational institutions, disability organizations, and employers. The evidence suggests that employment policies should prioritize sustained workplace support rather than focusing exclusively on employment placement rates. Funding mechanisms should encourage long-term job coaching, employer education, workplace accommodations, and individualized career planning. Greater collaboration among educational institutions, vocational rehabilitation providers, employers, families, and disability advocacy organizations may further strengthen employment pathways and improve long-term workforce participation for adults with intellectual disabilities.

Despite the consistently positive findings, several limitations within the existing literature should be acknowledged. The reviewed studies employed diverse research designs, intervention models, outcome measures, and follow-up periods, making direct comparisons challenging. Many investigations evaluated relatively small samples or were conducted within specific countries and employment sectors, potentially limiting generalizability. Additionally, employment retention was measured using varying definitions across studies, highlighting the need for greater standardization of employment outcome measures in future research. More randomized controlled trials and longitudinal investigations examining long-term employment sustainability among adults with intellectual disabilities would strengthen the evidence base and facilitate future quantitative meta-analyses.

Overall, the evidence synthesized in this review demonstrates that workplace support interventions constitute a fundamental component of successful employment for adults with intellectual disabilities. Supported employment, individualized job coaching, customized employment, workplace accommodations, employer engagement, and inclusive organizational practices collectively contribute to sustained competitive employment, increased workplace participation, improved employee satisfaction, and greater social inclusion. These findings reinforce the growing international recognition that meaningful employment should not be viewed merely as an economic outcome but as an essential component of equality, dignity, community participation, and independent living for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this systematic review and evidence synthesis, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen employment retention among adults with intellectual disabilities through the implementation of effective workplace support interventions. These recommendations are intended to guide policymakers, employers, vocational rehabilitation professionals, educational institutions, disability service providers, and future researchers in promoting inclusive and sustainable employment practices.

For Policymakers. National and local governments should strengthen disability employment policies by prioritizing long-term employment retention rather than focusing solely on employment placement rates. Existing disability employment programs should incorporate sustained workplace support, individualized job coaching, employer education, and workplace accommodation services as essential components of inclusive employment policy. Financial incentives may also be expanded to encourage employers to hire and retain adults with intellectual disabilities while maintaining inclusive workplace environments.

Governments are further encouraged to strengthen inter-agency collaboration among labor departments, education agencies, vocational rehabilitation services, disability organizations, and private employers to create coordinated employment pathways that support individuals from school transition through long-term workforce participation.

For Employers and Business Organizations. Employers should recognize that workplace inclusion extends beyond hiring individuals with intellectual disabilities. Organizations should adopt comprehensive disability inclusion policies that emphasize equal employment opportunities, reasonable workplace accommodations, supportive supervision, and continuous employee development.

Disability awareness training should be provided regularly to supervisors, managers, and coworkers to reduce workplace stigma, improve communication, and foster positive organizational cultures. Employers are likewise encouraged to establish mentoring systems, peer support programs, and flexible work arrangements that accommodate the diverse needs of employees with intellectual disabilities.

Organizations should also integrate individualized career planning into their human resource development practices to provide opportunities for professional growth, skill enhancement, and career advancement rather than limiting employees to entry-level positions.

For Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies. Vocational rehabilitation providers should continue expanding evidence-based supported employment services that include individualized job coaching, customized employment planning, workplace

consultation, and continuous post-placement support. Employment services should shift from emphasizing rapid job placement toward promoting sustainable employment outcomes through long-term monitoring and individualized workplace assistance.

Job coaches should receive continuous professional development in workplace inclusion, behavioral support strategies, employer collaboration, assistive technologies, and person-centered employment planning to improve service quality and intervention effectiveness.

Greater collaboration among vocational rehabilitation agencies, employers, educational institutions, families, and community organizations is also recommended to ensure continuity of employment support throughout an individual's working life.

For Educational Institutions. Colleges, universities, and transition education programs serving students with intellectual disabilities should strengthen school-to-work transition initiatives by integrating career exploration, workplace readiness training, internships, supported work experiences, and employer partnerships into educational curricula.

Educational institutions should establish formal collaborations with local employers, vocational rehabilitation providers, and disability service organizations to facilitate smoother transitions from education to competitive employment. Career planning should begin early and emphasize individualized employment goals, self-determination, workplace communication skills, and independent problem-solving.

For Disability Service Organizations. Organizations supporting adults with intellectual disabilities should continue advocating for inclusive employment opportunities while providing comprehensive employment support services that extend beyond initial job placement. Services should include family education, employer consultation, workplace advocacy, social skills development, and ongoing employee support throughout the employment lifecycle.

Disability organizations are encouraged to develop community awareness campaigns that promote the capabilities, productivity, and contributions of adults with intellectual disabilities, thereby reducing stigma and increasing employer confidence in inclusive hiring practices.

For Families. Families play an important role in promoting successful employment outcomes. Family members should actively support career planning, encourage workplace independence, reinforce vocational skill development, and collaborate with employers and vocational rehabilitation professionals throughout the employment process.

Family involvement should balance appropriate support with opportunities for increasing independence, enabling adults with intellectual disabilities to develop confidence, self-advocacy, and long-term career aspirations.

For Future Researchers. Future studies should conduct high-quality randomized controlled trials and longitudinal investigations examining the long-term effectiveness of workplace support interventions for adults with intellectual disabilities. Researchers are encouraged to utilize standardized employment outcome measures to facilitate comparison across studies and strengthen future quantitative meta-analyses.

Additional research should investigate the comparative effectiveness of different workplace support models, including supported employment, customized employment, employer education programs, workplace accommodations, assistive technologies, and digital employment supports. Future investigations should also explore the influence of organizational culture, leadership practices, industry characteristics, labor market conditions, and national disability employment policies on employment retention.

Researchers are further encouraged to examine employment outcomes across diverse socioeconomic contexts, including low- and middle-income countries, where evidence regarding workplace interventions for adults with intellectual disabilities remains relatively limited. Comparative international studies would contribute to a broader understanding of effective employment practices across varying policy environments and labor markets.

Finally, future meta-analyses should incorporate additional quantitative intervention studies as the evidence base continues to expand, allowing more robust statistical analyses, moderator investigations, and subgroup comparisons that further strengthen evidence-based disability employment policy and practice.

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