

Guidance for the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs for online learning

AN EARLI RESEARCH STORY

In 2020, EARLI launched a new initiative to increase visibility for the excellent research conducted by EARLI members: the EARLI Research Story. Every other month, an EARLI member or group of EARLI members is offered the opportunity to share their research initiatives and findings in a short blogpost or video. This month: the researchers of the EARLI Special Interest Group on Special Educational Needs (SIG 15).

By looking at the technological progress, most of us expected that online-learning would eventually take its place in the educational system. However, the global pandemic caused by COVID-19 made teachers and students adapt their teaching and learning routines to an online environment overnight. Nowadays, some schools have been able to return to face-to-face teaching. However, nobody knows when will it be possible to go back to "normality", and in the meanwhile educational services need a plan to provide attention to all students, especially to students with special educational needs (SEN).

As a response to such demand, some of the members from the special interest group for special needs education (SIG15) from the European Association for Learning and Instruction (EARLI, have put together a guidance paper that integrates key recommendations for providing best-practice to online learning for students with SEN.

The guidance addresses educational professionals who work with students with some kind of special educational need and includes suggestions derived from research-based evidence.

Online learning: does it benefit students with SEN or is it a new challenge for them?

The possibility to present the material in several formats (audio, video, text) is one of the advantages of providing instruction through online environments to students with SEN. Another advantage of online learning is that students are usually motivated to use technology for learning. Despite the benefits, some challenges should be considered and minimized to make learning happen. For example, during online provision, it is important to ensure that students can approach learning and content throughout the selected technology (for example, students with motor disabilities). In several cases, students with

SEN may need continued support from an adult member at home. Another challenge relates to the assessment. For example, how can teachers provide accommodations for the assessment? Other challenges may relate to the environment and the limitations in social interaction (for example, it may be difficult for the student to interact or ask for help within this context). To overcome these and other challenges, the guidance proposes several tips, here are some of them:

Some tips for making online learning work with students with SEN

- Help students to structure their learning. For example, provide a clear overview of the front page and the activities to be completed.
- Instruct the group to make sure they take turns when participating.
- Prepare a checklist with all the tools that need to be installed or available to each student (for example, screen readers for students with visual impairments).
- Provide handouts with keywords and definitions.
- Provide more explicit instruction (for example, including the order of activities).
- Repeat instructions more than once.
- During assessments, provide opportunities to answer without writing the answers.

More information

So far, the guidance is available in English but SIG15 members are working on the translation to other languages (such as French, Greek, Swedish and Spanish).