

# **The Fairness and Validity of the Higher Education Selection System for Students with Disabilities**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates into two aspects of the selection of university applicants who requested test accommodations to compensate for various disabilities. The first is the fairness of the selection system, and the second is its predictive accuracy. The study groups consist of students at Israeli universities, selected by a combination of PET (Israeli SAT-like Psychometric Entrance Test) and Bagrut (high-school plus matriculation scores), who commenced their studies between the years 1992-1997. The focal groups comprise impaired applicants who were granted various accommodations to suit their disabilities, and a minority of applicants who were not found eligible for accommodations, and were therefore tested regularly. The regular students in the same departments of study served as the reference groups. Two approaches to defining prediction bias were employed. If we prefer a conservative point of view and adopt the Boundary Condition approach which requires that the two reverse regressions (criterion-on-predictor and predictor-on-criterion) show consistent results, we reach the conclusion that the whole selection system has not been proven biased against persons tested with accommodations. The second approach's requirement for an unbiased selection system is that the mean difference between a focal group and the reference group be equal for both the predictor and the criterion. In this view, the results of our study show – with respect to the non-eligible Learning Disability group and the Hearing Impaired group – that PET slightly under-predicts First Year Average (FYA). The English subtest of PET seems to be responsible for under-prediction of the Hearing Impaired and the non-eligible Learning Disability group, while the Quantitative subtest is over-predictive for most groups, suggesting over-compensation where the impaired skills are mainly verbal. Regarding the accuracy aspect of prediction: The selection system seems to be less predictive for both the Learning Disability and non-eligible Learning Disability

groups than it is for the reference Regular Students group. The resemblance of validity profiles between PET and Bagrut suggests that the criterion's reliability might account, at least partly, for the decreased prediction accuracy in groups of students with disabilities. The non-eligible Learning Disability group's FYA grades appear slightly under-predicted, and less accurately predicted, by non-accommodated PET. Since no information was available about accommodations that these examinees may have enjoyed during their university studies, only a further study, that facilitates such control, might elucidate to what extent the criteria according to which LD candidates are found eligible for test accommodations need to be reconsidered.