The management of life skills program for students with disabilities

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This study aimed to explore the management of the life skills program organized by special high schools at the senior level. The case study approach was carried out by employing observations, interviews, and documentation techniques. The participants involved principal, teachers, graduates, parents, local government, and company. These participants involved themselves in efforts to support actively and their commitment to the success of the management of life skills program. The results indicated that the life skills program was well managed as it successfully delivered graduates to work in the company and be financially independent. The commitment of the school with the company and parents to enhance the independence of graduates with disabilities was through the life skills program to provide them with some valuable skills. *This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, life skills are needed for people to deal with life problems so that they can look for and figure out solutions to overcome the problems. Life skills are needed to be possessed as it enables people to adapt and behave positively [1]. The competencies that need to be provided and trained consist of the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes [2]–[4]. In the scope of the student management and the school management, principles of shared understanding of the life skills program for students should be formulated together in the preparation of the program. Thus, the program can be implemented smoothly [5].

Life skills program is one of the non-formal education programs in Indonesia. It has an important role in preparing students so that after their graduation, they can live independently either in entrepreneurship or working in a production and service company [6]. Thus, this life skills program can help students optimize their abilities, manage attitudes, explore their potential to be developed, encourage them to face life's problems and solve their problems, and face various demands and challenges in life, especially in the workplace more effectively [7], [8].

The competency of life skills in Indonesia includes the introduction of job skills, vocational training, the mastery of competencies, and awareness to master various skills [6]. This program has been implemented at special high schools in Indonesia in some aspects related to vocational education and internships in the company [9]. The implementation of vocational education in special high schools should be oriented to the workplace or company [5]. Therefore, conceptually, the curriculum provided to the students is a combination of programs formulated between schools and the company [9].

The life skills program is implemented to equip graduates with disabilities with some useful skills that will help them in obtaining employment. This comes from the real situation that students with disabilities are very dependent on living with parents through strong emotional ties [10], [11]. Several studies have revealed that children with disabilities live longer than their parents. This is also stated by data that about 54% of people with intellectual disabilities experienced the death of their parents. Moreover, about 40% live with their parents and 10% live with their parents who are more than 70 years old [12]. Thus, the independence of graduates with disabilities needs to be considered so that they have the opportunity to be independent and not depend on their parents financially.

This program is an alternative way to prepare graduates with disabilities by equipping them with the ability to enter the workplace because they still have the potential to train [13]. In Indonesia, accepting graduates with disabilities to work in companies is guaranteed by Law No. 8, 2016 stating that private companies are required to employ at least 1% of people with disabilities from the total number of workers [14]. In obtaining employment, there are policies and support to improve the quality of life of graduates with disabilities [15] by maximizing their involvement and giving confidence to them to work in companies [16]. There is a need for the special high school to support the independence of graduates with disabilities by providing a life skills program for them. In this context, the involvement of parents and the company in school programs are of particular importance. The involvement of parents is the starting point for trusting their children to be able to develop their skills through the school program. Whereas companies' involvement in compliance with government regulations and their concern for the future of graduates with disabilities.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted for one year in one of the special high schools in West Java, Indonesia. This was a qualitative research employed a case study approach with observations, interviews, and documentation techniques [17]. The selected school was a special high school in the senior level that had a good reputation because it had been delivering its graduates to be accepted to work in the company. This school represented the condition of special high schools in Indonesia. The participants involved in this study included internal and external parties of the school. The participants were actively engaged in each stage to make changes through transformative actions, ranging from designing, inspecting the interpretations, and drawing conclusions [18].

2.1. Participants

Interviews were conducted with the principal, teachers, graduates with disabilities, parent representatives, local government officials, and the company. Table 1 shows the details of the participant. The graduates interviewed consisted of students with intellectual disabilities (mild mentally handicapped) and hearing impairment.

Table 1. Characteristic of the participant

	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	13
	Female	24
Position	School principal	1
	Teachers	21
	Graduates	10
	Parents	2
	Local government officials	2
	Company manager	1

2.2. Research procedures

The data collection was carried out after obtaining official approval from the principal. After that, the observation was carried out by paying attention to the behavior of the participants. The principal and teachers' activities were carefully observed. The purpose of the observation was to obtain information and data regarding the conditions in implementing the life skills program in the special high school. The aspects observed included the teaching and learning process of vocational education, school facilities, school activities, and communication between the principal, teachers, staff, and students.

The data collection was further strengthened by conducting structured interviews. The structured interviews included face-to-face interviews with all participants and focused group discussions involving the principal, teachers, graduates, parents, local government officials, and the company. The local government officials were those from the labor department and the social services department. This interview was

conducted to determine the extent of program implementation. The interview data included the participant's identity and then continued by asking several questions related to the implementation of the life skills program.

Face-to-face interviews were designed to bring up the views of each participant regarding the concepts of the life skills program and how the school successfully managed the program so that the school graduates could be accepted to work in the company. The activities of this interview stage also included an informal inquiry to clarify the actions and events that occurred. The research data collection was ended by carrying out focused group discussions with all participants. During the data collection stage, the research was also supported by taking necessary documentation in the form of school archives related to the data of the life skills program held by the school.

2.3. Data analysis

In this study, the data analysis began early in the research process, starting from the data collection stage. Then, it was continued with the coding process, which included the stage of taking written data or pictures that had been collected and segmenting sentences or images into categories. The implementation process of coding was done to describe the settings, people, and categories [17]. Thereafter, the data was analyzed by giving descriptive information. The data validity was obtained by conducting several triangulation techniques; triangulation methods with observations and interviews; and triangulation data sources through documentation and discussion with the school principal, teachers, graduates with disabilities, parents, local government officials, and the company. Then the last step in the data validity was done by triangulation between researchers through questions and answers sessions with fellow researchers (peer debriefing) to improve the accuracy of the analysis results.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers explored the efforts of the school that made a proper consideration for the future of the graduates with disabilities. The commitment of the school to build the students' life together with the company and parents, as well as the active support from the school leadership [19] to face the challenge of equipping the students with skills [20]. The results of the life skills program were based on objective sociological measures, such as employment or income from graduates with disabilities, because employment was considered a very important variable. Therefore, programs consisting of vocational education and internship fundamentally brought positive impacts on students and their life skills [21], [22]. In this section, the points discussed included strategy formulation, needs analysis, teamwork, implementation of vocational education, implementation of the internship program in the company, and program evaluation.

3.1. The strategy formulation

Strategy formulation is the spearhead of the organization's activities and is very important for the continuation of these activities. Determination of strategy becomes a tangible form in realizing goals and targets. The strategy formulation was carried out by the principal and teachers to identify, analyze and formulate the steps for the program that would be carried out. Likewise, the documents were also prepared to support legality. In the first stage, the program that would be carried out was conveyed to parents so that parents could understand and gave full support to the school activities to build the independence of graduates with disabilities. Following this, the school also established communication with graduates, the company, and the local government.

In the second stage, the school established a partnership with the company. The partnership carried out was the result of a joint discussion based on the results of the needs analysis of students with disabilities. For the third stage, the school made a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the company. This activity was performed as the agreement of both parties to legalize the program that it was authorized formally by law. The MoU contained a partnership agreement for student internship activities between schools on behalf of the graduates with disabilities and the company. The points agreed between the school and the company included; the company as the first party was obliged to provide internship opportunities and provide job vacancies for graduates with disabilities; while the school as the second party was obliged to guide students with disabilities to take part in the internship program in the company, and direct graduates that want to work in the company.

3.2. Needs analysis

Needs analysis is carried out to determine problems and produce relevant alternative solutions. This stage aims to identify the needs of students with disabilities and determine the appropriate solution. The principal analyzed the students' needs as an effort to explore the problems faced by students with disabilities

by involving teachers, parents, and the company. The results of the needs analysis served as the basis for the school in developing the life skills program for the students. A needs analysis was considered essential in the training and education field because it was employed as a starting point for program planning.

This needs analysis made it easier for schools and especially for the company that needs the results of the analysis to give detailed information about the students with disabilities. So, they could provide reasonable accommodation to accommodate the needs of employees with disabilities in the company. Besides, the results of this analysis would determine the number of students with disabilities that would be allowed to take part in the internships program until they were accepted as employees at the company.

The results of the needs analysis conducted by schools included; the identification of the school's needs; the information about the readiness of the program participants, which covered students, teachers, principals, parents, and the company; the information about the readiness of the vocational education materials, the determination of the school partners and the company, the signing on the MoU, and the establishment of activity schedules.

Based on the needs analysis, the skills required for students with disabilities such as intellectual disabilities (mild mentally handicapped) must be responsive and have a calm attitude. They will be placed as a helper in the production department, and hearing impairments must be fast and precise because they will be placed as the main worker in the production section. The principal said:

> "*The criteria for students with disabilities that can participate in this program are students with intellectual disabilities and hearing impairments.*"

Meanwhile, the company gave some work by considering the abilities of the students with disabilities. The suitability of the jobs for the students with disabilities affected their performance and satisfaction towards the jobs and the company. Choosing suitable work for the employees with disabilities brings satisfaction from the employees, and it is associated with the higher performance that prolonged their work period [23], [24].

3.3. Teamwork

Teamwork becomes a determinant of a programs' success because teamwork consists of people who collaborate to achieve the programs' goals. The school principal, as the leader of the school, was the main figure to form teamwork consisting of the teachers, parents, and the company to monitor the life skills program. The principal shared:

> "*I formed teamwork to monitor the life skills program, including myself, teachers, parents, and the company.*"

The stages of organizing the teamwork considered the role of human resources in the success of the life skills program. Those human resources were: the principal, teachers, parents, and the company.

3.3.1. The principal

The school principal was responsible as a policymaker, leader, and executor in every activity carried out for the students. The role of the principal was crucial because it was the first gate for a mutually beneficial partnership between the school and the company, so that the life skills program could be implemented. Also, the principal played a role as an aspiration facilitator for the parents of students with disabilities. In this case, the parents became the supporting component needed by the school to succeed in this life skills program.

3.3.2. Teachers

Teachers consist of teachers in charge of teaching and providing skills in the school and supervising teachers in the company. The supervising teachers were the on-field executor team assisting students with disabilities in implementing the life skills program. These supervising teachers were needed by the company since the company did not have skilled employees to train the students with disabilities. The supervising teachers were assigned by the principal to direct and assist students with disabilities in understanding and carrying out duties in the company.

3.3.3. Parents

Parents were involved in providing support for the success of the life skills program to build graduates' independence. In addition, parents were obliged to encourage and trust their children to develop their skills through the life skills program. In this effort, parental involvement serves as a driving force and

determinant in the development of their children. Also, parents play an essential role in maintaining good relations with the school by participating in activities organized by the school.

3.3.4. The company

The company became a place for students with disabilities to develop skills and gain work experiences that were oriented to the real workplace. The company played a very important role in this life skills program because, as stated in the ultimate goal of this program. It was expected that graduates with disabilities who had completed the internship program could get good internship certificates and would be recruited by the company to become its employees.

In organizing the work to achieve the target of the program, the principal formed a teamwork of life skills program to carry out planned activities with the ultimate goal of graduates' independence. This teamwork included the school principal, teachers, parents, the company, and they were closely related to the success of the program designed by the school by working based on their respective tasks and functions. The success of the students did not come only by efforts made by schools alone, but it required commitment from others, especially the parents as the contributors of strong inputs [25]. The success of the life skills program was inseparable from the support of students' parents because they presented conditions that would optimize their children's abilities and opportunities for success in their lives [26], [27].

3.4. Implementation of vocational education

Vocational education for students with disabilities was carried out in several stages. In the first stage, the skills needed by the students were identified, and some planning was done by considering what kind of skills would be given to students. In this case, a preliminary study was carried out by conducting observation and discussion with the company. The results of this activity were in the form of 'standards of competence' and 'basic skills' items. The competency needed by students with disabilities included the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The basic skills required for students with disabilities were managing attitudes and facing various demands and challenges in the workplace. The next development of those items was a work plan as a reference that would be implemented. The second stage was the preparation of vocational education guidelines that aimed to adjust learning activities to be directed. The third stage was the implementation of the vocational education program as the debriefing activities carried out in schools for first-year students. The principal said:

> "*We carry out vocational education in the school to train students to have the basic skills needed in the internship program.*"

The third stage was carried out so that students possessed the basic skills needed before they attended the internship activities in the company. In this debriefing activity, schools involved the company in adjusting the learning program to be oriented to the workplace situation. Additionally, in 2018 the school formed a partnership with a vocational high school intended to provide a more well-facilitated place for the students to train because some facilities were lacking at the school. The debriefing in the vocational high school lasted for one month.

Schools implementing vocational education for students with disabilities are regulated by the curriculum of education units in Indonesia, stating that students have to receive teaching and training in the percentage of 40%-50% of academic aspects and 60%-50% of vocational skills aspects [28]. Vocational education also has a role in developing problem-solving skills for students [29]. Therefore, schools implementing vocational education for students with disabilities see that it is important to develop skills that add value to their ability to prepare for their independence after graduating from school [5].

3.5. Implementation of the internship program in the company

The internship program was carried out by third-year students for approximately three months. If the result of the internship were satisfying, then it would be prolonged for the other three months. In the internship activities, students with disabilities had to be accompanied, given clear work instructions, and given examples repeatedly until they understood clearly. Those characteristics of students with disabilities had to be well understood by the members of the company.

This internship activity was established in 2016, and the school began to collaborate with one of the large Japanese companies in Indonesia to implement internship activities in the company. The internship activity in the company began when an agreement was made between the school and the company. Subsequently, they produced MoU to legalize the partnership. Initially, the school only referred six students with disabilities, of which three of them were graduates, and the other three were active students. They

participated in an internship program for three months. The duties they did ranged from simple work such as a helper in the production department to a main worker in the production section.

As the program went on, the company was satisfied with the results of the internship of the students with disabilities, so that the company wanted to accept more students with disabilities for the internship program without any age restrictions. Later, the company began to set a minimum age limit of 18 years for the internship program participants. This partnership continued until the company opened vacancies for graduates with disabilities. The graduates were given internship opportunities for three months, followed by another three months if they got a satisfying result for the first three months of the internship. After that, if they met the requirements, they would be included in the recruitment test for prospective employees by taking psychological tests and medical tests. If they passed the tests, they would be given a trial contract for one month, and if they were considered good, they would be given a one-year work contract by the company. Some graduates were already employees in the company. In 2016 since the partnership program was established, 13 students who graduated in 2016 were accepted to work in the company. Then in 2017, the company again accepted 13 graduates.

The establishment of the partnership between schools and the company is driven by the existence of Law No. 8, 2016, requiring companies to employ persons with disabilities fulfilling the percentage of 1% from the total number of employees. Based on these regulations, schools expand their wings to build a partnership with the company through an internship program in the company with the intention that the graduates would be recruited in the company. As time went on, by considering the good work performed by students with disabilities, the members of the company started to trust them, which led to the additional demand of internship students from special schools. However, during the internship, fluctuations in the students' performances appeared due to some problems, the most significant of which is the considerable distance students had to go through to get to work. For this reason, schools took some steps to provide a dormitory that was close to the company where students with disabilities took the internship program.

The graduates with disabilities who can work in the company were those with intellectual disabilities (mild mentally handicapped) and hearing impairment. There are more hearing impairment graduates than mild mentally handicapped graduates. Graduates in this category can communicate well, have motor coordination that can be directed, and can focus on one job. The manager (human resources development) in the company said:

"There are 80% hearing impairment graduates and 20% mild mentally handicapped graduates."

The term mentally handicapped describes those with IQ scores below 70 and limited practical, conceptual, and adaptive skills [30], [31]. The hearing impairment classification includes mild hearing loss (27-40dB), slight hearing loss (41-55dB), moderate hearing loss (56-70dB), severe hearing loss (71-90dB), and extreme hearing loss (above 91dB) [28].

3.6. Program evaluation

Evaluation of the life skills program was carried out from the beginning to the end of the activity. In the initial stage, the planning was checked whether it was appropriate to be implemented. The principal ensured that the life skills program planning was well formulated. The performance check stage was carried out to supervise the work of the participants of the program. This activity directed participants to work following their duties. The activity mechanism review stage was carried out to ensure that one activity and another activity were in a synchronized relationship or system that would facilitate achieving the program's target.

While at the final stage, the parties involved in the life skills program were assessed and evaluated. The school evaluated the parties involved by inviting and carrying out focused group discussions. This was done to see if the program involving the school and the company ran smoothly and whether the parents were satisfied with their children's progress. The results of this evaluation would be used to develop further the life skills program so that the effectiveness of this program was at its optimal level.

Several studies have shown that people with disabilities may have diverse life outcomes. Therefore, the success of graduates with disabilities is influenced by the role of school leadership and external parties of the school to train students with disabilities [32]. The quality of strong school leadership causes a consistent change, and it can support sustainable development that will have an impact on the quality of schools and students [33]. Additionally, good collaboration in carrying out school activities shows good performance that reflects dedication, integrity, and good communication [34]–[36].

4.   CONCLUSION

The independence of graduates with disabilities through the life skills program that was presented by schools could be further optimized through the full support of parents, and mainly companies because companies were the ones who recruited the graduates, and the graduates with disabilities also had good work ethic if they were trained gradually. The school leaders were challenged to make satisfying results for the program. The school's internal and external parties' involvement in implementing the life skills program is manifested in synergy or cooperation, such as internships. In addition, a needs analysis must be carried out by the school at the beginning of the school year through collective deliberations, considering that every year, the potential and limitations of students are very diverse.

The life skills program for students with disabilities is designed to increase their independence in the future. It is inseparable from the school curriculum with guidance from teachers, as well as training in companies. Considering that the program is carried out in two different places, it is also important to evaluate. Program evaluation is carried out to show program performance in achieving predetermined goals and obtain information on improving program performance in the future.

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