

Transition to career for students with disability: lecturers' readiness

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ABSTRACT

Career transition is a process of transition from school education to adulthood that involves various processes of needs, skills and knowledge to prepare students with disabilities to enter the world of work. However, the career transition program is not new, but there are still a few lecturers who do not understand the implementation of the program and lack preparation and knowledge in the management of the transition program. This study explores the readiness of lecturers in the implementation of career transition for students with special needs. A semi-structured interview session was conducted with six northern community college participants under the management of the special education department. Findings show that various factors influence the implementation of career transition management for students with disabilities. The knowledge of lecturers in managing career transition programs is still lacking. In addition, there are challenges in collaboration with stakeholders to understand the importance of the career transition of students with disabilities for future marketability. Finally, this study provides significant findings that need to be followed and used as reference material by other researchers in the future.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the persons with disabilities (PWD) action plan 2016-2022, in strategic core, two outlines related to empowering and improving the economy of the PWD, either at the government or private level [1]. In addition, the sustainable development goals (SDG4) emphasize empowering education and improving the needs of students with special needs to work [2]. Therefore, the Malaysian Ministry of Education provides a plan to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities for marketability by giving a career transition program. The focus and concern of this career transition program have increased since the individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA 2004) was created to ensure that special education needs are met, especially in the management plan of the career transition program [3].

Career transition programs for students with disability developmental process that offers courses and skills to increase their readiness to enter the real-world workforce [4]. In addition, these programs help students with the ability to shape behaviors and mental, emotional, and psychological readiness to adapt to the work environment and face the real challenges of adulthood after leaving school [3]. Undoubtedly, the transition to a career program is essential in preparing students capable of facing adulthood's challenges. In

addition to implementing a transition program that involves the marketability of students with these abilities, curriculum planning in the guidelines must be based on the marketability of students with disabilities [5].

However, the implementation of this program is unclear [6]. Therefore, various factors are needed to determine the success of the transition program. Furthermore, multiple parties, including teachers, parents, and industry, play a role in determining the success of career-to-transition programs for students with disabilities [6]. The teacher's approach and the career transition program's implementation significantly affect the program's planning and implementation for students with disability [7]. Accordingly, in providing career transition support to students with disabilities, the lecturer's experience in guiding them to prepare themselves to enter the world of work is an essential element. This study aims to explore the experience of lecturers in implementing career transition programs for students with special needs at community colleges. This study seeks to answer the following questions:

- i) What is the lecturer's experience managing the career transition of students with special needs at North Region Community College?
- ii) How is the career transition implemented?
- iii) What are the issues and challenges in implementing the career transition program for students with disabilities?

The results of this study can provide a better overview of the situation regarding the implementation of the career transition program for students with disabilities. They will also give an overview of the issues and challenges faced during the program's implementation. Apart from that, from the findings of the lecturers involved in the implementation, they can plan strategies and requirements to make the career transition program successful for future students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Career transition program

Transition-to-career programs are implemented to provide training and experience to students with special needs to adapt to the work environment, acquire skills, and meet the demands of the job market when they finish school [8]. In addition, career transition programs abroad, such as in Japan and the United States, are crucial in guiding students with abilities as early as 14 in school. In this regard, stakeholders involved, such as employers, parents, and students, can discuss and plan strategies to ensure the success of the career transition program as part of the program's ongoing planning and improvement strategy [9].

Early planning gives students with abilities an advantage in exploring their potential and adapting to the workplace [10]. Career transition programs that begin at an early stage can help achieve this set goal by mentoring teachers and stakeholders. In Malaysia, the career transition program for students with abilities only starts at ages 16 and 17, during the fourth and fifth forms [11]. Therefore, with careful planning in implementing the career transition program, students with special needs can train students more effectively to meet their needs for entering the workforce.

In addition, lecturers need to plan curriculum requirements in implementing career transition programs. They need to provide specific skills to ensure that students have the skills required in the industry and are ready to face challenges in the real world [12]. However, lecturers must undergo an initial assessment to ensure students' strengths and weaknesses and plan appropriate career transition activities [8]. By focusing on life skills, individual adaptation, collaboration with stakeholders, use of technology, and continuous assessment, lecturers can ensure that students with special needs are prepared to enter the world of work confidently and competently.

2.2. Experience of lecturers in the implementation of transition programs

According to the special education report issued by the Ministry of Education on October 31st, 2022, 43,532 students with special needs are enrolled in three programs offered by the special education division: i) The special education school; ii) The integrated special education program; and iii) The inclusive education program. Based on the Special Education Department 2022 report [13] (Ministry of Education Malaysia), teachers should train their students to be capable of career transition and prepare them for the workforce. In this regard, teachers face challenges in understanding and implementing career transition programs. This includes determining the appropriate curriculum that can provide positive feedback to ensure students gain the knowledge and experience needed to enter the world of work [14].

To achieve such goals, teachers must prepare students with the necessary skills to achieve the quality required by the job market and the industry [14]. According to Abu-Alghayth *et al.* [15], teachers need more profound career transition knowledge when giving courses and skills to students with special needs in line with industry requirements. This aligns with Mensah *et al.* [16], who mentioned that knowledgeable teachers can translate knowledge and develop skills for students with disabilities. While

special education teachers are confident that this career transition program can help students become workable when they finish school, they are less satisfied with their skills and knowledge in handling this program [17]. Moreover, even though teachers know how to implement career transition programs according to guidelines, a few do not know how to conduct career transition programs for students with special needs [18].

Notably, some employers might have a negative attitude towards students who can accept them to work. Such a negative attitude is reflected when some employers say they cannot accept students with disability because these students cannot carry out a task assigned [2]. Even though some employers initially welcome collaborations with schools and accept students with the ability for career transition, many will reject these students when they see that they cannot adapt to the working environment due to communication problems and inappropriate behavior in the workplace [19]. Besides, career transitions and incompatibilities also lead to discord between existing employees and students with special needs. Some staff members cannot accommodate students with abilities due to behavioral and communication issues in the workplace [20]. In this situation, teachers play a role in helping employers understand the behavior of students with ability, for instance, by fostering continuous communication and collaboration that increase both parties understanding of each other's tasks and needs and helps the success of the career transition program [21].

Collaboration with stakeholders also plays a vital role in the success of the transition-to-career programs. This collaboration involves various parties from educational institutions, industry, organizations providing support to students with disability, and the private sector, all of which are directly involved and working together in the career transition of students with special needs. In addition, the collaboration of various agencies has been known to be effective in achieving career transition goals because it combines different needs to get comprehensive learning to improve the quality of the transition program [22]. Schools' cooperation with agencies can positively influence drafting and exchanging opinions about curriculum and industry requirements in preparing students with special needs for career transition [17]. In addition, the collaboration of parents also plays a vital role in implementing the career transition program. According to Kely and Wakabayashi [21], collaboration between parents, such as providing support in career transition management, can positively impact students with special needs.

Overall, teacher involvement plays a vital role in making the career transition program for students with disabilities successful in the world of work. Teacher knowledge and skills, collaboration, and attitude are essential in giving the best exposure to students with special needs. Every student with special needs should be allowed to explore and experience the world of work before they finish school, as outlined in the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013-2015 [23], to produce productive and independent special needs students.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed the qualitative research approach, using a case study design to better understand participation experiences [24]. It also explored the lecturers' experience managing the career transition program for students with special needs at community college. The study sample was selected based on the informants' experience of managing students with ability, and being involved in implementing a career transition program can provide information that coincides with this program. The sample comprised six lecturers teaching pastry and food quality manufacturing courses and are experienced in managing career transition programs for students with special needs. The informants' background in age, education level, teaching experience, and experience handling students with disabilities, as described in Table 1.

The study site should be chosen based on value-added factors and suitability with the research questions [25]. The study sites consisted of three community colleges in the Northern Regions. These sites were selected according to the study's objective to explore the management of the transition-to-career program in community colleges. These community colleges were chosen as they fulfill the study's sampling criteria: first, a community college with students with special needs, explicitly learning difficulties, and offering courses in pastry and food manufacturing and processing.

Table 1. Informants' background in terms of age, level of education, teaching experience, and experience handling students with special needs

Respondent	Age	Academic qualification	Teaching experience	Experience in handling student with disabilities
Amira	49	Degree	20 years	15 years
Suhaila	43	Master's	15 years	9 years
Katty	44	Degree	19 years	3 years
Siti	47	Master's	20 years	8 years
Rosli	43	Degree	12 years	8 years
Ayu	30	Degree	3 years	1 years

3.1. Research instrument

A set of interview protocols was prepared for the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as they are more flexible and provide opportunities for the informant to state opinions to the researcher [26]. Therefore, based on the guideline, the interview protocol was divided into four parts, namely: i) introduction and demographics; ii) transitional questions; iii) questions aimed at the study's objectives; and iv) closing or reflection questions. The use of semi-structured questions helped facilitate the process of interviewing the informant and avoid the possibility of the informant not conveying important information.

3.2. Data collection procedure

In general, there are several methods of data collection for qualitative research, namely interviews, observations, and document analysis, to obtain more in-depth information [26]. Before the study was conducted, several procedural steps were taken. Data collection planning begins. The first procedure was to apply for permission to conduct research from the Department of Polytechnics and Community Colleges (JPPKK), Ministry of Higher Education. The JPPKK research and innovation division is responsible for issuing the letter of authorization to conduct the study in three community college institutions in the Northern Region. The approval permitted the researcher to survey the specified location. To protect the confidentiality of the data, the names of the lecturers and community colleges involved were concealed, and pseudonyms were used to protect the parties' privacy.

3.3. Data analysis procedures

According to previous studies [27], [28], there are six steps to analyzing and interpreting research data: organizing the data, generating categories of themes and patterns, coding the data, testing the understanding that arises, finding alternative explanations, and writing a report. In this study, the researcher analyzed the interview transcripts to derive concepts, themes, and theories related to the study from the data. The data analysis procedure involved using the ATLAS.ti software to generate themes. The data analysis was divided into five steps: i) preparing and organizing the data to be analyzed; ii) coding and forming the initial code; iii) identifying the initial codes; iv) refining the themes, categories, and constructing the model; and v) writing the report.

The interview protocol was built so that the informants could answer and convey what they wanted to share clearly and deeply [29]. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain more detailed information from the informants. The data were collected in three community colleges in the Northern Region that offer courses under the food specialization cluster. This study involved six lecturers teaching pastry and food quality manufacturing and are experienced in managing career transition programs for students with special needs. The data analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti 24 to derive themes that could be used to answer the research questions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews conducted with six lecturers in North Region Community College, it was found that there were three themes that emerged: i) lecturers' knowledge and training; ii) readiness in implementing the career transition program; and iii) stakeholder involvement. Lecturers need to get appropriate courses to give exposure and increase knowledge in implementing career transition programs. In addition, lecturers are prepared to implement career transition programs by providing programs such as entrepreneurship and interviews with the industry for students with disability. Stakeholder involvement is essential in implementing career transition—involvement from parents who always support and improve the program. In addition, lecturers need to establish collaborative relationships with the industry and provide exposure to the sector related to career transition and the unique needs of students during the career transition program.

4.1. Lecturers' knowledge and training

Lecturer training and expertise play an essential role in career transition management. Four out of six informants stated that they received no training in implementing career transition programs. Most of these informants have less than five years of experience in teaching special education.

“....Hmm, so far, in my experience teaching special needs students, no training was given on career transition. But the course on student behavior is given, but I think it is insufficient...”
(Amira)

Meanwhile, two informants with more than five years of teaching experience say they have received exposure, training, and courses about career transition.

“..... Oo... regarding training and career transition courses, the management of the polytechnic department and the community college organize it. The training was given for two weeks, and I learned a lot to manage this career transition program...” (Katty)

“There is no training, there are no guidelines about career transition, we have to do our procedures and so on....” (Siti)

Meanwhile, some informants increase their knowledge of career transition programs by seeking help from other teachers and their peers to ensure the success of the career transition program.

“Ok... to increase my knowledge in this career transition, I often ask friends in the field of special education, as well as special education teachers in schools I know, and I get a lot of knowledge. Some teachers give examples of career transition implementation guidelines at the school level that I can reference...” (Rosli)

From the results of the study discussion, it was found that the training and knowledge of lecturers in implementing the career transition program for students with special needs is at a moderate level. Training for lecturers needs to be implemented to help lecturers implement the transition program and increase their knowledge in career transition management in line with Byrd and Alexander [14]. Teachers' knowledge and skills in self-involvement and career transition planning are still at moderate level despite being aware of the need for career transition for students with disability. In addition, teachers also need to be given appropriate training so that they have sufficient skills and knowledge to teach and guide students with disabilities toward the transition to a career [30].

4.2. Readiness in implementing the career transition program

Various programs are offered to students with special needs to ensure the successful implementation of the career transition program for students with disabilities. Such an implementation consists of increasing students' exposure via programs like talks by industry players, entrepreneurship workshops, visits to sites, and mixing special needs students with their peers to increase their confidence and help them adapt to the environment.

“... during the third semester of lectures, special students will participate in an interview program with the industry; this program is like an event every year for students to know their way after finishing their studies.” (Siti)

The entrepreneurship program is integrated into the syllabus for students with special needs to improve their confidence and train them to communicate.

“After the practical class, the students' products made during the class will be sold around the college; I see the students are happy when their products are made and can be sold. Some say that later we can start our own business.” (Ayu)

However, some lecturers are less prepared to implement career transition programs due to time and knowledge constraints in managing the program.

“... I did not have time to prepare a program for these special students due to time constraints and also knowledge in transition management for fear of making a mistake if for a visit; as of today, I do not plan to take special students out of college for fear of student safety.” (Amira)

Early exposure to students with disability is a good step in opening their minds and interests to work. The program arrangement can help students build their self-confidence. In addition, the entrepreneurship program in career transition is seen to help develop and interest students. This finding is consistent with Awsumb *et al.* [31], which says that developing job-related skills that match students' unique talents and abilities can facilitate students' development of an understanding of their capabilities and limitations, personal interests, and fundamental beliefs. Entrepreneurial skills are considered an addition to employability skills for students who can later build careers. This finding is supported by Muñoz *et al.* [32], saying that the benefits of giving exposure to entrepreneurship to students with special needs can increase

their self-confidence and confidence in working on their own in the future. However, lecturers need guidance and entrepreneurship training to implement teaching and learning effectively.

4.3. Stakeholders' involvement

Lecturers act as liaisons between stakeholders, namely parents and the industry. They play a role in making the special needs career transition program a success. This study found that lecturers face various challenges in implementing career transition programs involving stakeholders. Informants Rosli and Ayu explained the critical role of parents in implementing the transition program.

".... In terms of parental support, so far today, there is no problem; parents of students with special needs always give good feedback and are willing to send their children to the transition program." (Rosli)

".... there are parents who give the lecturers to do whatever, with the promise that their child can be independent." (Ayu)

Meanwhile, some parents worry about allowing their children to participate in the transition program due to communication problems and a lack of self-confidence.

"There are... parents who are worried that their children cannot work and the employer cannot accept them, parents always say 'my child doesn't talk much, and he doesn't know how to manage his time, I'm worried that he can't cope with work'..." (Katty)

In addition, safety factors and difficulty arranging transport are the main reasons parents feel less confident about allowing their children to join the career transition program.

"Two or three parents say that I should let my children join the program, but teachers have to arrange the transportation to work because the parents are working, so they can't send them." (Siti)

"Parents always ask about the safety of their children so that I will explain the procedures and so on to reduce the parents' worries and allow these students to follow the career transition program." (Suhaili)

Another challenge of the transition to career program management is students' industrial training placement. Four informants said placing students with special needs to undergo industrial training as part of the career transition program is challenging.

"Hmm... it is also quite challenging to find an industry to accept special students; employers are often afraid to take them because they have unique needs because of behavioral problems and cannot do the tasks given." (Amira)

"... There are employers who accept, but after a week, they don't want to continue because of behavior and communication problems; there are also problems with fights with permanent employees." (Rosli)

On the other hand, some employers are open and offer guidance to students with special needs. Some employers also give allowances to these students when they perform their duties well.

"My experience with employers is good; they give allowances to students because they can do work, and some also offer to conduct industrial training for four months at their premises." (Katty)

The results of the discussion on the implementation of the career transition program involving stakeholders impact career transition management. This statement is also supported by Cavendish *et al.* [33], who states that the involvement of parents is the central pillar and contributor to the effectiveness of the transition process in a more practical direction. Findings found that the participation and role of parents are still at a moderate level. This aligns with the findings of Mensah *et al.* [16], which show that family involvement is moderate because most parents leave it entirely to the teacher to implement. A study by Kurth *et al.* [34] explains more about the involvement of parents when it comes to making decisions and influencing students' decisions. Parents cooperate in making decisions for and allowing their children to undergo training based on a planned career transition program. Parents also need to help teachers implement

this career transition. With the commitment given by the parents, the plans made can be implemented well. In addition, the industry and employers play a role in career transition management. The cooperation of various agencies is considered effective in achieving career transition goals because it combines multiple needs to get comprehensive learning to improve the quality of the transition program [20]. The data analysis found that employers and the industry accept students with disability at a moderate level due to several factors, such as communication and behavior of students with disability. This response occurs when some employers say they cannot accept students with special needs because these students cannot carry out a task assigned [35]. The findings of this study are supported by Lambert *et al.* [10], who said teachers need to play a role in improving students' communication skills and student behavior in a better direction so that they can be accepted by employers and workers in the industry.

5. CONCLUSION

Experience is an approach supporting the acquisition of knowledge, the development of skills and attitudes, and the adaptation of situations involved in learning. Lecturers' skills and expertise can help transform teaching and learning in various ways. In this regard, special attention should be given to lecturers' experience managing students' needs and the needs of parents and the industry to foster and facilitate effective collaboration between stakeholders in implementing career transition programs. Support in providing courses related to career transition needs to be enhanced. This is because knowledge and skills related to managing career transitions are the key to the effectiveness and success of the transition program to prepare students with special needs for the workforce. Apart from entrepreneurial skills, lecturers need to open students' minds by increasing the number of dialogues with industry or non-governmental organization (NGO) involved in career transition programs for student with disabilities. Efficient planning and organizing can further increase lecturers' activities and knowledge in managing transition programs to careers. In addition, stakeholder involvement also plays an important role.

Parents' awareness of the importance of career transition should be increased to reduce their worries, support their children during the transition program, and help lecturers manage delivery to transition places. Disclosure to employers is vital in ensuring employers understand the behavior of students with abilities and can provide opportunities for students to become career transition programs. This implies the essential roles lecturers play in conveying information to the industry. A high level of knowledge among lecturers can ensure they can deliver accurate information to industry players about career transition needs for students with special needs. Therefore, support and collaboration between various parties, such as the JPPKK, college administrators, employers, parents, and teachers, are needed to support the implementation of career transition programs for students with abilities. This effort aligns with the second strategic core of the 2016-2022 PWD action plan with the objectives of empowering and improving the PWD economy at the government and private levels.

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C : Conceptualization

M : Methodology

So : Software

Va : Validation

Fo : Formal analysis

I : Investigation

R : Resources

D : Data Curation

O : Writing - Original Draft

E : Writing - Review & Editing

Vi : Visualization

Su : Supervision

P : Project administration

Fu : Funding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research received ethical approval from Research and Innovation Centre, Department of Polytechnic and Community College Education on 29 November 2023, under reference number KPT.JPP.PPPP.700-1/1 Jld.27 (15).

DATA AVAILABILITY

All data have been stated in this research.

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