

Implementation Challenges on Career Transition Program (CTP) of Special Education Needs Learning Disabilities (SENLD)

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ABSTRACT

The Career Transition Programme (CTP) is a programme for finding and moving into a new career or starting a career. There is no set period of time for career transition and no limit to the number of times one might decide to change careers. Special Educational Needs Learning Disabilities (SENLD) refers to a child or young person who has special educational needs (SEN) and has learning difficulties or disabilities that make it harder for him or her to learn compared with other special needs children of about the same age. This study aims to explore, understand and explain the Career Transition Programme (CTP) of Special Education Needs Learning Disabilities (SENLD) implemented in an academic secondary school. The school selected for this study was one of the pilot schools for CTP. Six students who graduated from the school and who are working in the industrial sector are participants in the study, which uses qualitative research methodology and the case study research strategy based on unstructured interviews, observation and document analysis. The purposive sampling method is used. The challenges identified as a result of this study include management procedure, roles in the implementation of the programme and student enrolment. The researcher also understands better the existing procedure of the implementation of CTP. It is noted that the existence of a proven guideline would help the school improve the process of the implementation of CTP.

Keywords: Career Transition Programme (CTP), challenges, qualitative research methodology, Special Education Needs Learning Disabilities (SENLD)

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INTRODUCTION

Special education plays an important role in helping special needs people with learning disabilities i.e. those with Special Educational Needs Learning

Disabilities (SENLD) to learn and to transition to working life (Nasri, Hamzah, & Udin, 2010). As much as 738 mainstream secondary schools have implemented the Special Educational Integration Programme (Ministry of Education (MoE) Malaysia, 2013). The MoE is therefore aware of the importance of providing appropriate education to students with special needs, who may benefit more from being taught a vocational curriculum as it would provide them with life skills that would enable them to live a life of quality as well as to earn a living (Daros, Nordin, & Saud, 2012). The MoE also believes that vocational education is an alternative education pathway to support improvement in other areas for groups with special needs as it exposes them to the realities of life after leaving school through a systematic programme (2012). It is wise to prepare them for future working life through adequate transition from school to workplace by producing students who are skilled (William-Diehm, 2007). These students need to be guided and supported to enable them to increase their potential and hone their inherent talent. A career transition programme provides vocational training that is relevant and in line with requirements of the current job market, while matching the students' own ability level (Daros et al., 2012). "The career transition programme for SENLD students is a combination of activities based on the needs of individual students, taking into account the preferences and interests of students as well as the job market, including instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and the multi-objective nature of adult life"

(Polloway, Patton, & Serna, 2001). Hence, the development of transition programmes is guided by questions shaped by what, where and how students conduct everyday life and work as adults (Kiarie, 2006). In addition, transition programmes undertaken for each category of disability should have its own service design. Transition programmes should emphasise skills that are appropriate to the needs and capabilities of the individuals who will be participating in the programmes (Daros et al., 2012). To enhance the quality of education for students with special needs, the MoE has given priority to the displacement method of teaching and learning in the school system by involving parents and the community as partners in supporting learning and teaching activities (MOE Malaysia, 2013). In addition to preparing SENLD students for employment, curriculum and activities should be developed in conformity to social change, diversity, increasingly sophisticated technology and lifelong learning (Elleven, Wircenski, Wirceneski, & Nimon, 2006). Challenges in the implementation of the transition programme to prepare SENLD students from high school in Special Educational Integration Programme (SEIP) for their career should be studied in depth to produce SENLD students who are ready to step into the working world.

Implementation of the Career Transition Programme (CTP) for SENLD Students

There are several challenges to the implementation of the transition programme

for SENLD students. Students' achievement is the result of cooperation between school, families and communities (Epstein et al., 2002). Therefore, the involvement of parents and communities is needed in the implementation of the transition programme for SENLD students (Kiarie, 2006). The role of the school principal is crucial for encouraging and establishing a good relationship between the school and the community, facilitating an approach to the process of planning and evaluation, assisting in the development of policies and procedures related to the evaluation process and ensuring that the necessary resources are adequate. While the principal can supervise the process of implementation and evaluation in schools, a special education coordinator could be appointed to facilitate implementation of the programme (Daros et al., 2012). For the programme to succeed, those planning, managing and running it must have extensive knowledge of this field, as well as be prepared and focussed on strategy and management (Dupoux, 2008). Teachers' ability measured in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills must be relevant to the curriculum. Therefore, the special education curriculum must be designed for flexibility, enabling teachers to develop students' talent and potential (Nasri, 2010). Teachers who do not have the experience and training to teach SENLD students will not be able to tap into students' potential to prepare them to use their skills adequately for employment (Haber & Sutherland, 2008). This would leave SENLD students unprepared for jobs that

suit them. In addition, teachers also need to identify students' background information to provide them with a career transition programme based on individual needs (Haber & Sutherland, 2008). Teachers who do not understand transition planning for career will be less effective in ensuring SENLD students receive maximum results from the transition programme (William-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). Therefore, teachers should have self-determination and should respect the choice of students, in addition to creating positive relationships with students and being proactive in fostering partnerships with those involved in the Individual Education Plan (Haber & Sutherland, 2008). It is clear that teachers play a vital role in producing a wide range of student involvement. They should have a good relationship with students, families and communities (Applequist, Mears, & Loyless, 2009). All this will facilitate the smooth implementation of the career transition programme. Family involvement is also necessary because families have advantages over special education teachers in reaching their special needs children and gaining their trust (Tie, 2006). The challenge for special education teachers is that their duty is formal and limited by factors such as time, place and rules, while parents communicate informally and have greater opportunity to engage with their children. Therefore, communication between families and teachers is key to success of any career transition programme. Teachers have perspectives and ideas for helping children with special needs in different aspects such

as implementation of a career transition programme that is based on the interests and abilities of the individual. However, the challenge in the implementation of the programme is to create better communication between families and teachers. With good communication skills, families and teachers can establish a close relationship and this can help SENLD students to develop self-confidence. Consciously or not, the various parties should play their part in awareness to not marginalise SENLD students. The closest party to the students are teachers and families. In addition, other parties must also play a role so that SENLD students can develop themselves as independent individuals. Therefore, employers should also provide opportunities for people with special needs to work and try to train them and focus on their strengths (Ng & See, 2011). However, the challenge for SEIP teachers is also to obtain cooperation from employers. The employer does not have to keep pushing them but should take responsibility for evaluating their work and showing them that they can work well. In addition, employers should look at the individual's ability to get and maintain jobs that can satisfy them (William-Diehm & Benz, 2008). This is because the employer is a fundamental contributor for people with special needs to live a life of quality. Employers who are willing to employ people with special needs have implemented the Code of Practice for Employment of Persons with Disabilities, in which the government has provided that at least 1% of employment opportunity should be offered to people with

special needs (Haber & Sutherland, 2008). In addition, the government has requested the MoE to establish and implement a variety of programmes to help SENLD students by involving parents and the community in their education (MoE Malaysia, 2013).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The biggest challenge for people with special needs in Malaysia today is getting a job as career paths for them are less clear. The specialty of this group is that they can continue learning until the age of 19, after which, they may choose to work (Isa & Kadir, 2013). However, job security becomes an issue if they are taught the same curriculum as other children as their ability is vastly different from that of other children. The curriculum taught in regular schools is academically orientated, with vocational skills given only a small focus, infused in the subject, Living Skills (Isa & Kadir, 2013). The curriculum for SENLD students should be in line with current developments and should match their ability (Isa & Kadir, 2009). In Malaysia, the implementation of the curriculum through a career transition programme for SENLD students is still unclear (Bari, Yasin, & Yusof, 2013). However, efforts towards implementing such a programme have been set out in Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. Some teachers have implemented a career transition programme for SENLD students although there are no specific guidelines that can be used as reference (Hamdan, 2003). This causes SENLD students to lack skills for work,

making it difficult for them to get a job upon leaving school. Furthermore, employers in general do seem to have a negative view of people with special needs (Ng & See, 2011), believing them to not have workability skills and thus, they do not hire them. However, a career transition programme for SENLD students in Johor has been successful in training these students for work through Special Educational Integration Programme (SEIP) secondary schools. SMK Mawar was among one of these schools.

SMK Mawar has successfully provided training for SENLD students, and six of the school's graduates were absorbed into the workforce in 2012. The school's industry training programme began in 2012. Meanwhile, as many as 13 people have managed to be accepted into the Buying Seats Programme that is handled by the Division of Special Education (DSE), Ministry of Education (MoE), which was started in 2013. Therefore, SMK Mawar was chosen for this study. The aim of this study was to investigate the challenges faced in assessing the vulnerability of the programme in order to improve it and to see how it can be implemented in all SEIP secondary schools in Malaysia. This would be in line with the MoE's aim of implementing the CTP for students with special needs (MoE, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using the qualitative case study approach to explain the challenges in the implementation of a career transition programme (CTP)

for SENLD students in SEIP secondary schools in Malaysia. The case in this research was the implementation of CTP in SMK Mawar. The study involved six participants. The processes of collecting data were using purposive sampling approach involving interviews, observation and analysis of relevant documents. The main method used in this research was the unstructured interview. To support the data and information collected using these methods, observation and document analysis were also conducted. Observation of videos, photographs and field notes was also conducted. Documents were analysed based on the information that was obtained through the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research revealed several challenges that faced the implementation of a career transition programme (CTP) for SENLD students. These challenges were faced during design and implementation and were seen in the impact of the implementation. The main challenge faced during the implementation of the programme understood the programme and the role played by those involved in it. One of the participants stated:

The challenge is to create understanding teachers and parents on the basis of real transition for SENLD students. (Suri)

According to this participant, teachers and parents should understand the concept of transition for SENLD students. Another participant said that the school must provide clear explanation of the programme to

families of SENLD children so that the families could participate in the programme, giving it their full cooperation to ensure it is run effectively. He stated:

Collaboration must be initiated by the school because the schools should understand more about the explanations procedure to the parents. DSE (Division of Special Education, MoE) is a department which only issues an execution letter from the MoE. (Zain)

The participant said that the school must take on the role of initiating and explaining CTP to the families of SENLD students. The job of the Department of Special Education (DSE) was only to issue the letter of execution. However, the challenge was that the DSE had not up to the time of this study issued such a letter. However, the SEIP secondary schools were running the programme based on the goal of the state Education Department to enable SENLD students to live a meaningful life.

According to another participant:

Teachers are very supportive but they need a power source for the implementation. They should have links with industry. This is the problem because we do not have the power source. (Kim)

This participant explained that teachers provide good support for the implementation of CTP, but they have the authority to initiate collaboration with industry. Letters from the

MoE would help greatly to pave the way for such collaboration to ensure that CTP is run properly.

One participant identified unclear procedure given by the District Education Office (DEO) as a challenge.

The problem is we do not know the procedure from the DEO, and the top, it is hard to us to take the students out. We ought to have a letter of permission and a lot of procedure. If anything happens, who will be responsible for all that, we do not have insurance to cover there. (Suri)

According to her, the DEO should outline procedure related to proper paperwork and correspondence. In addition, the parties involved in the programme were required to bear any risks should any mishaps occur. This was why proper paperwork was necessary.

Another challenge was getting families of the children to understand the programme.

Sometimes parents do not understand. They think that when we sending their children to do practical, their children automatically work there. The reasons why we send their children there are to give practical skills. Some parents urged the employers to take their children to work. We just want to give some exercise to the students. If the employer wants to take their children to work, they can continue to work. But, if they could not work, maybe they should

stop for a moment and further training.
(Azman)

One study participant said that some parents did not understand the concept of the industrial training conducted by the school, which is conducted within the industry in order to provide skills training in the fields of employment relevant to SENLD students. This ensures that the students are properly trained to meet the requirements of future employers. If the students are not qualified, they are given the opportunity to practise further. Some families, however, end up urging employers to take their children in as workers, and this becomes a problem for the school. Other families tend to relinquish responsibility of their children to the school and industry.

These kids did not want to take a leave and do not want to go back home. We are teachers; we also want to take a leave. I had to go there and deal with them. When we contact their parents, they say that their children did not want to get home, so there is nothing that they can do. (Syahid)

Another participant noted the lack of understanding from parents about their responsibility to their children. The parents seemed to release their responsibility to the college, not wanting to take their children home during the holidays. In addition, SENLD students also do not understand that they need to go home during the holidays. Therefore, all parties need to understand the concept of the programme and play their

roles adequately to ensure that the career transition programme runs smoothly.

In terms of communication and lifestyle, perhaps the Chinese and Malay family is a slightly different. Malays parents are more open-minded. They dared to let their children try and believe them. However, the Chinese are too caring to their child. (Kim)

One research participant was of the opinion that the background of families can also pose a challenge to the implementation of the career transition programme. It is a challenge for those managing these students when the students face problems in adjusting to life without family members. Students' acceptance of the programme and lack of expertise among trainers are also challenges.

So far we have not succeeded yet in plantation. Maybe it is because of the lack of our expertise, or maybe the lack of interest in students too. (Kim)

Implementation of the programme is hampered by the lack of expertise among teachers and a lack of interest from students. The diversity of SENLD students is also a challenge in the implementation of the programme. Trainers have to deal with many different health problems, attention levels, communication styles and lifestyle issues displayed by the SENLD students. This leads to different acceptance levels among the SENLD students towards the industrial training.

Actually, they wanted our attention and always with them. There is some who

have shortness of breath. For those who have the hearing problem, we have to talk loud to them. (Syahid)

According to the participants, all parties involved in the training must understand the diversity of SENLD students and pitch the training to the level of the students' ability. SENLD students also always want attention to be given them. This is a huge challenge for teaching staff as they have many students to attend to.

The problem is focus. Focus means mental and physical readiness. It greatly affects. For example, he went on a punch card, there is no punch card at home, but there it is in industry. (Indah)

According to the participant, students should be trained in physical and mental readiness before they step out into industry, where they will have to face many different challenging situations. Therefore, they should be exposed to situations they are likely to meet in the workplace during training in order to reduce adjustment problems in working life. This makes job security another problem for SENLD students.

We are bound by the MoE. We are just the place for accreditation centre and only can train. We just help in managing jobs, but we could not promise a job placement for them. (Syahid)

The research participant was of the opinion that the trainers were bound by the MoE; as administrators of an accreditation centre

and trainers, they do not have the authority to make decisions about hiring. Hiring is based on the SENLD students' qualifications for industry. However, the Buying Seats Programme does not allow the students to work in industry before they have finished two years of study. This shows that job placement that matches SENLD students' ability is also a great challenge.

Some of our students in Imperia have been offered jobs, we did not let they go because of our two-year contract. It involves a period of study. The students should be in school at the age of 16-18 years old. It is impossible for us to pass out our students from school at the age of 17 years old. (Zain)

The research participant noted that jobs were offered to the SENLD students even if they had not completed their studies and were still undergoing training. But the DSE denied permission for students to accept the offers. This is because this programme involves a long-term contract with the college of study. Furthermore, the ministry believes that the students are not eligible for work at the age of 18 when they have yet to finish their studies and receive their certificate.

CONCLUSION

There are many challenges to the implementation of the career transition programme for SENLD students. The challenge for SEIP teachers is to run the programme effectively because they

are dealing with various procedures to collaborate with various agencies and disciplines. SEIP teachers should also play a role in the programme. They could deal with SENLD families who do not understand the programme. Another challenge is enrolment. SENLD students come with a range of abilities, potential and interest. There are also issues concerning lack of suitability of training fields. In addition, there are problems in communication as students speak a different language at home than they are required to in the centre. There are also cultural differences as the students come from different ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, SENLD students need to be prepared in terms of mental and physical readiness before they can step out into the industry. Finally, it is a challenge for the students' families and for SEIP teachers to get them to adapt to the variety of likely situations that can crop up in the working world.

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