

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSITION PROGRAMME FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DIFFICULTIES IN GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN PENANG STATE.

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**Abstract:** *The problem of this study is concerned with the implementation of the transition program and the lack of standard guidelines to be used as a guide to the implementation of the transition program in integrated special education secondary schools. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine the implementation of transition program for students with learning difficulties in integrated secondary schools and propose a set of guidelines that can be used as a reference in the implementation of the transition program. The first objective of this study is to examine the implementation of the transition program in integrated special education secondary schools. The second objective is to assess the skills mastered by the special education students in the perception from teachers, parents and employers who are hiring former special education students. The third objective of this study is to understand the factors that contribute to the success of the transition program, or deterioration in the integration program of special education. The fourth objective is to identify the relationship between the transition programs with the transition skills acquired by special education students with learning difficulties. The fifth objective is to develop standard guidelines which contain positive psychology as a reference for the practice of the transition program in the future. Four research questions investigated in this study. Quantitative and qualitative surveys were used for the study design. The sample consisted of 154 students involved in the transition program were taken as samples for quantitative studies, while a total of five special education senior assistants, twenty parents and ten employers were taken as respondents for the qualitative research. Five sets of questionnaires designed to assess the transition skills of special education students. CIPP model was used to assess the implementation of the transition program. The results showed that the implementation of transition program needs is at a high level. While the overall transition skills mastered by the special education students are moderate and low. The main implication of this study is the contribution of transition guidelines, oriented positive psychology that can be used as a reference for the implementation of the transition program in integrated special education secondary schools in future. Finally, the findings have also contributed to the development of transition theory in Malay language.*

### INTRODUCTION

Transition program attracted many researchers who see special education as an area that requires special attention and effort to develop it. Based on the results of previous studies that have been done by the researchers, the US Congress has decided that the transition program is very important and needed by students with learning difficulties. There are many researchers studying occupational status for individuals with disabilities. Edyburn (2005), has listed the studies as follows:

The definition of Transition Program:

- 2 study of post-adolescents in special education programs in the area of Vermont has identified that 55% were working compared to 82% of a normal teenager who got a job. (Alwell, & Cobb,2009).
- 2 study of post-adolescent special education programs in the area of Vermont got 55% were working compared to 82% of a normal teenager who got a job. (Alwell, & Cobb 2009).
- Only 23% adolescent women with disabilities in special education program work after 2 years of their

post secondary education compared to 71% of normal teenage girls. (Bellini & Akullian 2007).

- 69% of 324 youth with disabilities get jobs only 4 years after they graduated from secondary school and only 1/3 was employed full-time. (Cobb, B. Lehman, J., NewmanGonchar & Alwell 2009).
- A study by Edyburn, D.L. (2005) found that 39% of individuals who suffer from mental retardation works for a wage, but 77% of them in isolation at the skill training workshop.
- Edyburn (2005) also found that overall 50% - 75% of individuals with disabilities is not working.
- On payment of wages, individuals suffering from mental retardation and work after three years of high school education, just get paid salaries to \$ 1.59 for each hour worked, NewmanWagner Cameto & Knokey (2009).
- A study in Iowa by Whitehurst (2001) found that 5-8% of the 737 students with learning disabilities, 5 mental retardation of 142 students (3.5%) and only 1 out of 59 students with behavior that deserves to be categorized as having been successful in life.

There are also other studies undertaken on the transition abroad and studies that may be associated with the research on transition in local context are as follows:

- The study by O'Sullivan Beresford 2004 and 1999, found that the qualifications and skills acquired from school / educational institution not guarantee the disable's career.
- Beadles, Mc Daniel and Waters (2002) has made a telephone survey over 80 graduate students in vocational program and found that training alone is not sufficient for students with special needs for getting a job. A follow-up after training should be provided to help them to get a job.
- Ramlee Mustapha study (2000) found that technical and vocational education plays an important role in education and for employment.
- Hudson (2006), found that basic skills, the competence to work as a high school graduate, will increase the chances for employment among the disables.
- Boyle (2004), found 19 individuals with learning disabilities succeed through life except in matters of financial and social.
- The study by Emerson and Hatton (2003), states that a balance must exist in the process and procedures for the implementation of the transition.

## RELATED THEORIES

**Career Development Theory:** Knowledge about the theory of career development is closely related to transition planning for career development theory provides a period of time for the stakeholders to assess the progress of a CHILD children and help experts to interpret assessment data to determine what should and should not be expected of a child at a certain age level (Levinson, 2002). It also seeks to avoid placing high expectations and unrealistic to achieve such a pupil; expect a pupil should set their goals a reality in which students learn the skills and still immature to identify his favorite work. Here is an overview of the process with respect to the career development of the students.

### Theory of Career Development Stages Among Children with Special Needs Development stage

#### □ Fantasy stage (0-10 years)

- Imagination and game themes related to employment

#### □ Interest stage (11-12 years)

- Pupils create a self-concept and self-aware quality
- Pupils are beginning to realize the kind of jobs that exist and learn the duties of an employee and the value of a job.
- Students identify jobs that can be done by gender or appropriate.
- Students develop positive attitudes that lead to efficiency, collaboration and achievements □ Recognizing Ability Rating (13-14 years)
- Young people are beginning to realize the value and their ability
- Youth development planning, decision making and problem solving
- Teens are aware not all work the same, there are differences in the requirements, tasks and salaries between jobs
- Adolescents become more mature and take responsibility for their career choice

#### Exposure Stage (15-17 years)

- Young people are beginning to realize the aspirations of yourself
- Adolescents identify opportunities and set goals while
- Youth work trying to interest and their career goals
- Transition (18-21 years)
- Teens make job choices
- Teens learn the skills needed to qualify for admission to employment
- Experiment (22-24 years)
- Teenagers get a job of their choice

### **Career Development Model and School Based Educational Transition**

There are a variety of career education curriculum for students with learning disabilities. One interesting model is the model developed by Clark and Kolstoe (1995). This model is a schoolbased career education model that emphasizes job skills but also involve other life skills. The model gave instructions directly to the four principles, namely:

i. **Values, Attitudes and Habits:** The value of an individual is the basis of what they find desirable for themselves and others. The values include codes of behavior, preferences, beliefs, ideas and meanings decide. Values that take advantage of specific individuals and groups success in life as brave, honest, cooperative, respectful, polite, competent, confident, and so should be taught and emphasized.

ii. **Humanitarian Affairs:** Human relationship refers to the behavior that is required for acceptance of others which include personality characteristics, social, skills and abilities. Rapport and mixing capabilities related to the acceptance and flopped, like fighting and hostility associated with rejection. The results showed that children who are more clever and creative are more easily accepted while the less intelligent students and students with disabilities are less accepted by peers.

iii. **Job description:** The information includes knowledge of all aspects of the world of work needs to be recognized by an individual. Information includes the role of work, vocabulary work, alternative employment and basic information of the real working world.

iv. **Acquisition Work and Daily Living Skills:** Skills in daily life should receive equal emphasis with job acquisition skills. Job skills and Daily life skills in a lot of things overlap. For example, the basic skills required to read recipes to cook at home is the same as reading recipes to work in a restaurant. The acquisition of competence in daily life associated with success or failure in the world of employment. Mastery of skills to efficiently can help disabled workers present themselves in daily life and at the work environment.

The Domains mentioned above is to provide some vocational or career choice either in school or in adult life. What is real in Clark's model is the concept of career in education is better than education at work. Priority should be given to introduce students to topics related to the existence and demand of adulthood life that must be faced by them.

### **Best Practices in the Implementation of the Transitional Program:**

There is a lot of information on best practices in the development of the transition, (Simmons, Luft, & Baer, 2005; Brolin & Loyd, 2004; Wehman, 2001; Patton & Dunn, 1999). Although there is no concrete evidence, but there are signs of authenticity for best practices in the transition program, (Clark & Kolestoe, 1995). In summary it can be concluded that the findings were consistent from studies conducted in identifying best practices in transition. Components identified included:

**Student-Focused Planning:** The practice of student-focused design is the creation of objective assessment of students with relevant information as a basis for planning, student participation in planning and decision making as well as the evaluation of progress towards the goal in the (McAfee & Greenwalt, 2001 : Kohler, 1996). In planning activities the students strengthen their selfdetermination skills through practice and application. At the level of primary and secondary schools, teachers act as mentors during the process.

The most important aspect in the design is the selection of student-focused educational goals, direction and interest of students. After that, the students set goals through individual education plans (IEP) in collaboration with his family, (National Council on Disability 2000 Sands & Wehmeyer 1996). The best transition practices require students to work with various parties during the planning process of education. School psychologist, special teachers, school administrators, staff of non-governmental agencies and parents were among the parties directly involved. To be actively involved, students must practice self-determination skills to express their self-consciousness to others. In the student-focused planning, they also need to do selfreflection. Both of these elements namely determination and self-reflection is an important component in the design of student-focused, (The U.S. Department of Education, 2002; Hoffman & Field, 1995).

Overall, the student-focused planning is a very important matter to be taken into account during the formation of a transitional program for them. Students as the main object in this program must have the attitude and self-motivation and determination to succeed and work and engage in social environment with care.

### **Development of pupils**

The practice includes the development of pupils focus on their life, work and progress through the learning experience by schools and workplaces. It also involves an assessment and adjustment of students is the determination and assessment of learning experience to ensure successful transition programs. Through the development of this activity, students develop and use academic skills such as self-determination, life, social,

employment skills, career awareness and work behavior. Outcome of the school leavers related to character and positive behaviors, (Turlow, 2002; Wehmeyer & Swartz, 1997).

To help students to achieve maximum benefits and uses all their skills, the experience, must have on both the environment, the school and the community. The most important part of this process is to identify facilities or support needed by students in order to achieve a career in both these environments. Effective development practice among students will increase their knowledge and skills of pupils in addition to providing guidance and opportunities for them to use those skills. The studies also support the importance of the development of the students in preparing special need students live as independent adults.

Linthium, (Cole, & D'Alonzo, 1991) found that work experience, academic skills, social skills and improve job search skills of school leavers in getting job. De Bettencourt, 2002 and Smith & Patton 1999 found that work experience and career goals of students completing the transition by fully associated with work. Colley & Jamison (1998) found that work experience, education, career and academic specialization help individuals with disabilities to find job.

Farley and Johnson (1999) describes that a specific strategy to improve the confidence of students in decision-making, assertiveness choosing a career, job search skills, where all the important things in preparation of vocational students. Kohler and Hood (2000) found that the diversity of programs to improve student skills and the school leavers. It also shows a specific example in providing job training, work experience, educational advancement and other aspects in the development of students.

For example, the development of job skills and work experience with good support will cause the students with learning disabilities in employment consistent in the private sector. Leuk and Fabian (2000) also found that it had a positive impact in the payment of wages for the student's work.

From the findings above, there are some things that help in the development of the pupil to the maximum through experience-based learning, whether school or workplace. During the process of learning takes place in the two environments, the most important process is to identify good support and facilities needed by students to achieve success in both of these environments. Even with this development activity, the students can use life skills such as job skills, career awareness, behavior works to improve their self-confidence of students in preparation for the real working world.

### **Collaborative Services**

Collaborative Practice is intended to facilitate the involvement of the business community, organizations

and agencies of various aspects of the transition program. The service encouraged through collaborative inter-agency agreement that describes the roles, responsibilities, communication strategies and other collaborative actions that will improve the curriculum and program development as well as distribution services, Hatton & Emerson (2003). Through collaborative practice, the parties involved in providing education as well as become institution to address community issues for adults with learning difficulties.

Devliger and Trach (1999) received the support and collaboration of the agencies to the pupil and his family is an important factor and if done properly it will enhance the achievement of the transition. But if it is done with a weak or complacent then the transition will be limited goals and stuck. Hatton and Emerson (2003) states Model Team Community Transition Program is very effective in developing the capacity of schools and communities to provide transition services to better serve students. Collet-Klingenberg (2000) also found that school-based transition team and the community were instrumental in introducing and implementing student-focused transition plan.

Overall, the collaboration between agencies was very helpful in the development of a student's achievement in improving the transition. Collaboration is not only an important element and efforts to solve problems related to learning disabilities, It even can benefit the lives of disable students.

**Family involvement:** Transitional National Longitudinal Study (NLTS2), (Wagner Cameto & Newman, 2003) states that the practice of family involvement is the participation of parents and families in the planning and provision of educational and career transition. The results of a study conducted by NLTS2 from year 1987 to 2001 on youth with disabilities have identified three aspects of this practice, namely: a) the involvement and role, b) the right, and c) training. The practice focuses on the role of the involvement of an organized area where the family involved in the planning and the course of the transition, policy formation and decision-making as well as coach. Whereas the right strategy also includes practices that facilitate parental involvement activities fully in the transition program as a specific method to identify the needs of the family.

Parental involvement has shown improvements in school attendance and performance evaluation scores, and improve the self-confidence of students and reduce the dropout rate (Wagner et al., 2003). Schirmer (2001) states that there is a positive relationship between parents and adolescent autonomy, believed to be a key component of their selfdetermination. Aries (1962) and Havighurst (1953) found that adolescents with disabilities also stated that their family members play an important role in the

development of self-determination and their vision of the future.

Aries (1962) has identified the role of parents in the west such as educating children about the culture, help in getting a job and teach them concerned about the inability of yourself. Turnbull and Turnbull, (1990) stated strategy of direct communication like Conference-face, contact by phone, open house, teacher notes and visits to classes to enhance interaction between teachers and families. Flannery, (2000) found that students and parents are more satisfied with the goals of transition and interaction with teachers after the strategies of future plans discussed with the pupil before use.

There are also suggestions of a family associated with the active involvement strategy. In a study that focuses on improving collaboration conducted by (Bullis & Ferdericks, 2002) parents suggested materials better information, combined training for vocational training, exhibition of resources, individuals who are knowledgeable contact, support groups and opportunities for cooperation can improve the process of transition program and the quality of parental involvement.

De Fur et al., (2001) assuming that the factors identified parents improve their involvement in the transition program is based on personal development more than bureaucratic relationship. The family identified that professional makes them different in the transition program is the involvement of professionals who communicate effectively as well as sharing information, forming a collaborative partnership, linking them with other families, appeared attentive and identify their children sincerely.

On the whole, parental involvement will help improve the quality of education for learning disabilities. For the activities carried out either during teaching and learning or extra activities outside school hours, parents cooperation can help students master the skills they have learned. Parental involvement is central to success in the transition program for students with learning disabilities.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above, we can see the importance of transition programs for special education students. There is a need to deal with it in variety of approaches, namely through legislation and regulation, through the curriculum and through the expansion of educational opportunities.

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