

# *What Teachers Understand and Their Perception Towards Implementing an Effective Career Transition Program*

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**Abstract**—This paper discusses the Special Education Teachers' understanding on the implementation of the Career Transition Program. Sixty-four Special Education Teachers of six Special Education Integrated Programme (SEIP) in Johor, Malaysia were selected using the cluster sampling method. This study used a quantitative descriptive analysis of the data collected from a 1 to 5 Likert scale questionnaires. The findings showed that the effectiveness of a Career Transition Program relies on the collaboration and support from all stakeholders including schools, communities, industries, government agencies and teachers. In addition, teacher's attentiveness during the implementation of a Career Transition Program would most likely assist the students to overcome the challenges faced by students in the program. The factors determining an effective Career Transition Program are discussed.

**Keywords**—career transition program; teacher perception; teacher understanding

## I. INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of special needs graduate leaving schools knowing the fact that they will not be offered employment. [1] highlighted that transition from school to career is an opportunity for special needs students to gain working experience. A Career Transition Program has long been discussed to be a process of preparing special needs students, especially the higher functioning special needs students to step into employment.

In Malaysia, most Career Transition Program is carried out individually by teachers without structured planning. Despite a number of successful transition programs being recorded, majority of special needs students in the Special Education Integrated Program (SEIP) in Malaysia are still struggling to produce a 'marketable graduates'.

A Career Transition Program is a step-by-step series of skill's training processes and its success requires the coordination and supporting roles of various parties including teachers, families and industries [2]. Teachers are seen as the most important role-model to special needs students in achieving success in a transition program. Most teachers who initiated a Career Transition Programs in schools contemplated on whether they should involve stakeholders outside of their school environment. Teachers without clear understanding on

transition program tend to highlight more on academics which eventually will affect the successful implementation of the transition program [3].

## II. LITERATURE

### A. Special Needs Students in Malaysia

Special needs students generally refer to students who have difficulties acquiring skills of which may lead them to challenges and hinder participation in the real world after school.

According to the Federal Government Gazette under the Education Regulations (Special Education) 2013, Ministry of Education Malaysia, special needs students refer to students who have been certified by medical practitioners, opticians, audiologists or psychiatrists from government or non-governmental services diagnosed with visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech disorder, physical disabilities, learning disabilities, or any combination of disabilities as listed. This group is recognized internationally by the Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Under the Malaysian Law, special needs students are also govern by the Persons of Disabilities Act, 2008 which defines persons of disabilities includes those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments with various interaction barriers which may hinder their full and effective participation in society. These acts and regulations intended to remove barriers and allow people with long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments to fully and effectively participate in society. The Federal Constitution of Malaysia, Article 8 (1) mentioned each individual is treated equally under the Malaysian law and shall be given protection.

### B. Special Education Teachers

In Malaysia, a Career Transition Program is implemented by special education teachers [1]. There are two types of teachers of special education, first teachers with specialized special education backgrounds and second, teachers who converted to special education from mainstream. [4] stated in his studies that effective teachers are the core of a student's excellence which is also supported by Nougaret, Scruggs & Mastropieri [5]. The role of special education teachers in

executing a Career Transition Program is very important as they are the primary source of knowledge and skills including acting as an agent for special needs students. [6] highlighted that special education teachers are well recognized for their roles and motivations in guiding special needs students.

### C. Special Education Programme in Malaysia

Ministry of Education, Malaysia practices three types of programmes for special needs students.

- Higher functioning special needs students, depending on teacher assessment may be placed in an Inclusive Education Program together with mainstream students and will learn the KSSR and KSSM national curriculum.
- There are also specialize schools, such as the Primary Special Education Schools (SKPK), Secondary Special Education Schools (SMPK) and Secondary Vocational Special Education Schools (SMPKV) of which only enrolled by special needs students.
- The Special Education Integrated Program (SEIP) adopts an integration model of which having special education classes in mainstream primary and secondary schools. PPKI model promotes partial inclusion as preparation for special needs students to meet challenges in life after school [7].

In some models (Figure 1), both SEIP and Inclusive Education Program are offered to special needs students within the same school. This model allows teachers to introduce inclusive environment for a student in certain subjects of their strength, while still maintaining them in the SEIP settings to reinforce their positive behaviors.

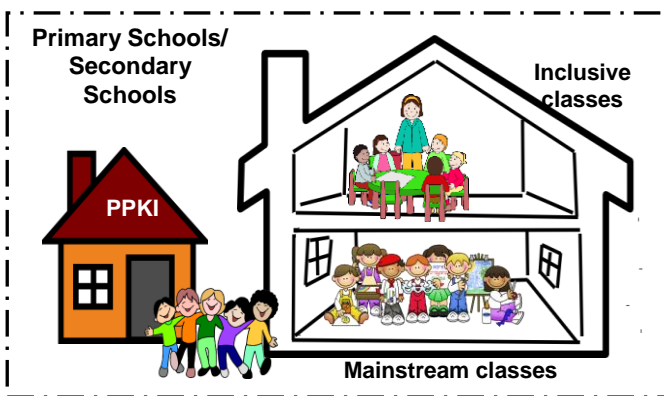


Fig. 1. Special Education Integrated Model

### D. Career Transition Program

According to Mohd Yusof, Mohd Yasin, Bari, Mohd Zain, Karli and Hassan (2014), the concept of transition was first introduced by Madeline Will from the Federal Emergency and Special Education Office (OSERS). OSERS emphasizes special needs students to make preparation from school lifestyle to socializing with the community in both tertiary environment and work. As an effort to help special needs students to be more independent after school and accepted by the community, the implementation of Career Transition Program is seen to be very appropriate. A career transition program refers to a structured transition process of a special needed student's journey starting with on-the-job training in school until the workplace [8]; [9]; [10].

### III. METHODOLOGY

Research data were obtained from the distributions of Likert 1 to 5 scale questionnaires using the cluster sampling methods. The question items were carefully divided into two sections focusing on five research aspects which are demography; teacher's understanding; teacher's preparedness; teacher's collaboration with industry and teacher's perceptions towards the effectiveness of a Career Transition Programme. The respondents were 64 Special Education Teachers selected from six Special Education Integrated Programme (SEIP) schools within the state of Johor, Malaysia. The collected data were processed using quantitative descriptive analysis to record frequencies and percentages.

### IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The analyzed data showed 60.93% of the respondents possessed a Bachelor Degree and 48.4% respondents have experience in teaching special needs students between 6 to 10 years (Figure 2 and Figure 3).

The respondents were given 10 questions for each sections relating to their understanding on the implementation of a Career Transition Program (Table 1) and their perceptions towards implementing an effective Career Transition Program (Table 2).

Only 26.6% teachers answered that they strongly understood the concept of a Career Transition Program. 62.5% teachers responded that they somewhat understood while the remaining 10.9% teachers clearly struggling to understand the whole meaning of a Career Transition Program. A high number of teachers (42.2%) strongly agreed that a Career Transition Program is an initiative to increase students' marketability and placement in employment.

A range of answers were recorded (3.1%-strongly disagree, 9.4%-disagree, 18.8%-neutral, 45.3%-agree, 23.5%-strongly agrees) showing a mixed opinion of the level of functionality of special needs students that are suitable to be placed in a Career Transition Program.

On the effectiveness of a Career Transition Program, majority (96.9% and 87.5%) of the respondents agreed that the entry age for students should be as early as 10 to 12 years old respectively. Three areas of industries recorded a high percentage to be the most suitable for special needs students, 92.2%-Agriculture, 90.6%-services and 93.8%-food and beverages. In supporting a special needs students in a Career Transition Program, the respondents agreed family played the most important roles (92.2%), followed by communities (90.6%) and schools (87.5%). In terms of program supports, teachers (96.9%) are the most important implementers, followed by 93.8%- school administrators, 93.8%-families, 93.8%-industries and 87.5%-transition officer.

**TABLE 1: TEACHERS UNDERSTADING TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CAREER TRANSITION PROGRAM**

| No. | Question  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|-----|---|-------------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|
| 1.  | I understand the meaning of a Career Transition Program   | -                 | -        | 10.9%   | 62.5% | 26.6%          |
| 2.  | I believe teacher can work together in assisting special needs students through Career Transition Program                       | -                 | -        | 3.1%    | 73.4% | 23.3%          |
| 3.  | Career Transition Program offers opportunity to special needs student without discriminating his/her disabilities               | -                 | 1.6%     | 4.7%    | 59.4% | 34.4%          |
| 4.  | A Career Transition Program is supported by school, teacher, family, community and employer                                     | -                 | -        | 4.7%    | 54.7% | 40.6%          |
| 5.  | A Career Transition Program is an initiatives to increase special needs students marketability and placement in employment      | -                 | -        | 3.1%    | 54.7% | 42.2%          |
| 6.  | Individual Education Plan (IEP) is an important aspect of a Career Transition Program   | -                 | 1.6%     | 12.5%   | 57.8% | 28.1%          |
| 7.  | The future of a special needs students is more secure after completing a Career Transition Program                              | -                 | -        | 6.3%    | 60.9% | 32.8%          |
| 8.  | A special education teacher can still deliver a good academic classroom teaching despite involve in a Career Transition Program | 1.6%              | 3.1%     | 29.7%   | 54.7% | 10.9%          |
| 9.  | A Cereer Transition Program allows special needs students to participate in community and contribute to the country             | -                 | -        | 1.6%    | 59.4% | 39.1%          |
| 10. | A Career Transition Program is only suitable to students with mild disabilities and are able to respond to instructions         | 3.1%              | 9.4%     | 18.8%   | 45.3% | 23.5%          |

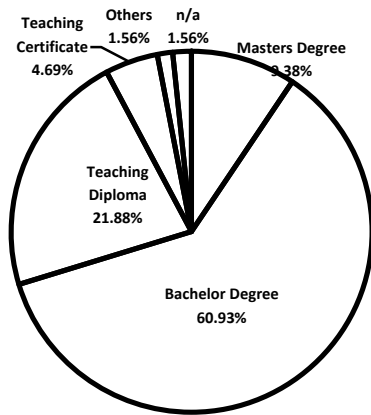


Fig. 2: Academic Background

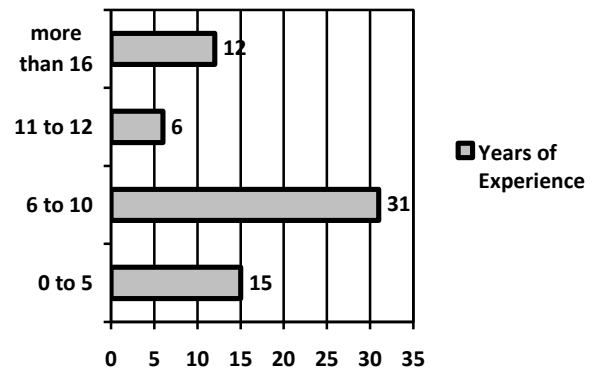


Fig. 3: Teaching Experience

**TABLE 2: TEACHERS PERCEPTION TOWARDS IMPLEMENTING AND EFFECTIVE CAREER TRANSITION PROGRAM (MULTIPLE SELECTIONS)**

| No. | Question  | Percentage "Agree/(Disagree)" |                       |
|-----|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1.  | Career Transition Program requires collaboration from various stakeholders            | 96.9%                         | Schools               |
|     |   | 95.3%                         | Communities           |
|     |   | 96.9%                         | Industries            |
|     |   | 89.1%                         | Government Agencies   |
|     |   | 90.6%                         | Teachers              |
| 2.  | An effective Career Transition Program requires the support from various stakeholders | 96.9%                         | Teachers              |
|     |   | 93.8%                         | School Administrators |
|     |   | 87.5%                         | Transition Officer    |
|     |   | 93.8%                         | Families              |
|     |   | 93.8%                         | Industries            |
| 3.  | Starting age of special needs students in a   | 96.9%                         | 10 years old          |
|     |   | 87.5%                         | 12 years old          |

| No. | Question   | Percentage "Agree/(Disagree)" |                             |
|-----|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|     | Career Transition Program  | (87.5%)                       | 13 years old                |
|     |  | (51.6%)                       | 15 years old                |
|     |  | 64.1%                         | 16 years old                |
| 4.  | Suitable industries for special needs students   | 68.8%                         | Repairing                   |
|     |  | 92.2%                         | Agriculture                 |
|     |  | 90.6%                         | Services                    |
|     |  | 93.8%                         | Food & Beverages            |
| 5.  | Industry's role towards assisting a Career Transition Program for Special Needs Students | 78.1%                         | Handicraft                  |
|     |  | 67.2%                         | Preparing financial support |
|     |  | 93.8%                         | Preparing facilities        |
|     |  | 98.4%                         | Preparing trainers          |

| No. | Question   | Percentage "Agree/(Disagree)" |   |
|-----|--|-------------------------------|---|
|     |  | Percentage                    | Response  |
|     |  | 93.8%                         | Preparing career path   |
|     |  | 82.2%                         | Preparing on-the-job equipment in schools   |
| 6.  | School's role towards assisting a Career Transition Program for Special Needs Students             | 90.6%                         | Intermediaries between special needs students and industries                      |
|     |  | (60.9%)                       | Industry's partner  |
|     |  | 87.5%                         | Allow special needs student to get training outside schools                       |
|     |  | 84.4%                         | Intermediaries between special needs students and community                       |
|     |  | 82.2%                         | To provide Career Transition Program training to Special Education Teachers       |
| 7.  | Teacher's role towards assisting a Career Transition Program for Special Needs Students            | 84.4%                         | Source for placement in industries/ companies                                     |
|     |  | 84.4%                         | Guiding special needs students throughout the period of Career Transition Program |
|     |  | 92.2%                         | To seek students' family support  |
|     |  | 75%                           | To acquire skills needed for Career Transition Program                            |
|     |  | 87.5%                         | To give motivation to special needs students                                      |
| 8.  | Family's roles towards assisting a Career Transition Program for Special Needs Students            | 92.2%                         | Supporting Career Transition Program in school                                    |
|     |  | 95.3%                         | To give motivation to their children  |
|     |  | 82.8%                         | Guiding special needs students throughout the period of Career Transition Program |
|     |  | 85.9%                         | To provide financial support to children  |
|     |  | 71.9%                         | To first acquire skills needed for Career Transition Program                      |
| 9.  | Community's roles towards assisting a Career Transition Program for Special Needs Students         | 90.6%                         | Supporting Career Transition Program in school                                    |
|     |  | 89.1%                         | To give motivation to their children  |
|     |  | 93.8%                         | To provide disable friendly facilities in the community                           |
|     |  | 89.1%                         | To initiate collaboration with school   |
|     |  | 73.4%                         | To provide financial support for special needs children                           |
| 10. | Government Agency's roles towards assisting a Career Transition Program for Special Needs Students | 90.6%                         | To encourage schools and industries to initiate collaborations                    |
|     |  | 92.2%                         | To build transition-related equipment in schools                                  |
|     |  | 92.2%                         | To introduce policies which encourage employment for special needs students       |

| No. | Question | Percentage "Agree/(Disagree)" |  |
|-----|----------|-------------------------------|--|
|     |          | Percentage                    | Response   |
|     |          | 82.8%                         | To provide financial aids to schools in acquiring transition equipment         |
|     |          | 79.7%                         | To assemble a team to monitor and support Career Transition Program in schools |

**V. DISCUSSION**

This study highlights the understanding of Special Education Teachers in implementing a Career Transition Program. Majority of the respondents have basic understandings which are sufficient to initiate a Career Transition Program for their students. Data analysis indicated that Special Education Teachers at their own initiatives have started to engage with industries/companies to seek placement as well as learning the skills required to train students. In a study by Mohd Nassir (2015), a teacher of special needs students will always seek opportunities to look for suitable employment for their students in the industries.

There is a mixed opinion of whether teachers can manage both teaching in classroom and managing a Career Transition Program. This will closely be influenced by the support from school administrators and stakeholders. Advancing to a higher impact transition program, teachers need to collectively work with various stakeholders which will act as supporting pillars to the program. Networking with industries would be an added advantage to the program.

According to teacher's perception, higher functioning students would be able to participate better in a Career Transition Program compared to their lower functioning peers. Students between the ages of 10 to 12 years old will adapt quickly and need lesser time to adapt to a new environment.

In designing a Career Transition Program, teachers need to take into account the ability, strength and interest of their special needs students. These considerations will assist in the preparation of the content structure and time frame to complete the program.

Despite having a good Career Transition Program, [8] mentioned in her studies that it is still a challenge for a Special Education Teacher to find employment for his/her students. However, with continuing determination and external supports, employers will be more receptive to allow placement.

**VI. CONCLUSIONS**

Since the questionnaires were only distributed to Special Education Teachers from the Special Education Integrated Program (SEIP), these findings do not necessarily wholly represent other special education programmes in Malaysia.

Teachers are the prominent support system of an effective Career transition Program. The understanding of special education teachers in implementing a Career Transition Program is the real element of this program's success. Their attentiveness towards the needs of special needs students during training in schools and on-the-job placement will reduce the challenges while maintaining the

momentum of the program. In addition, teachers' determination to the implementation of Career Transition Program should be promoted and supported by teachers, family, school administrators, industries and government agencies.

An in-depth study focusing on the workplace challenges is suggested to provide better insights for special education teachers to prepare their students for employment.

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