

## REORIENTATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN IMPROVING SELF HELP OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEED

Yasmin Hussain<sup>a</sup>, Mazmi Maarof<sup>b</sup>

<sup>ab</sup>SEAMEO SEN, Regional Center for Special Education, Malaysia  
E-mail: mazmi@seameosen.org

**Abstract:** Effective special educational delivery for children with special needs is very crucial and pertinent for the development of the children's growth, knowledge and living skills. Special Education is indeed a volatile and changeable field and very dynamic as it constantly needs to change and reorient to cater the needs of special children. In anticipation of the global changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, educating children with special needs is no longer confined within the four walls but is an education that needs and must prepare these children towards independence and able to contribute and support to the community as individuals with self-respect. This paper explicates the importance of employability for children with special needs as means of self-help by changing the landscape of education aspects from academic based education setting towards vocational and self-reliance settings through programs that enhanced and expounded on the children's knowledge and living skills. This is a necessary orientation of Special Education field that is important to help children to become independent adults with strong foundation of Special Education received in their schooling lives.

**Keywords:** reorientation, special education, self-help, children with special needs

The future of children with Special Education depends on the intervention and the quality of education service that they receive. Quality education not only impacts the children's educational experience but also on their holistic growth as a person. The education that the child receives is important not only for his academic achievement but also towards improving their self help thus contributing towards their independent living. The Global Education 2030 Agenda clearly frames this in its aims for the need to provide education from early childhood to youth and adult educational training, emphasizing on the acquisition of skills for work, underlining the importance of citizenship in the plural and interdependent world where the education focuses on inclusion, equity and gender equality (UNESCO: 2016). To ensure that children with special needs are given the opportunity for self help and enhanced independent living, all forms of marginalization, discrimination and stigmatization must be reduced in all aspects; education, training, community acceptance, employment, health and other forms of life. This addressed the need to reorient special education services that are tangible, flexible and able to equip and educate children with special needs to a more meaningful and respected live. One of the strategic approaches would be re-orienting the education services towards preparing the children with employability skills and vocational training and an educational approach that diverts from the emphasis on educational attainment to an educational system that prepare our children for employment and independence of living.

## DISCUSSION

### *Employability of Students with Special Needs*

One of the main issues for children with disabilities is the issue of employability for independent living. For students with special educational needs, the ability to secure a job, being able to contribute to his own well-being and contributing to the economy is indeed a freedom. It is also a form of respect to himself and being respected by people in his community. According to Dunn (in Levinson and Palmer: 2005), compared to their nondisabled peers, students with disabilities are more likely to experience unemployment or underemployment, lower pay and job dissatisfaction. This is a grave concern that must be addressed and tackled to reduce barriers, increase opportunities and ease their transition into adulthood and is crucial to the development of their self-esteem and self-advocacy. The current employment environment is competitive and challenging thus, the education system must be able to provide the students with appropriate education and training which would enable them to be eligible for employment thus empower them with dignity and sustainable income to support them. This empowerment is as stated in the preamble of the UNITED NATION's Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that recognize the value of contributions made by people with disabilities to their communities and acknowledging their participation "will result in their enhanced sense of belonging and in

significant advances in the human, social and economic development of society and the eradication of poverty” (United Nation: 2006). Being employed and also given the chance to have the opportunity is also the rights of persons with disabilities as stated in the article 27: Work and Employment of the Convention which stated that:

“States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation, to, inter alia: (a) Prohibit the discrimination on the basis of disability with regard to all matters concerning all forms of employment, including conditions of recruitment, hiring and employment, continuance of employment, career advancement and safe and healthy working conditions; (b) Protect the rights of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to just and favourable conditions of work, including equal opportunities and equal remuneration for work of equal value, safe and healthy working conditions, including protection from harassment, and the redress of grievances; (c) Ensure that persons with disabilities are able to exercise their labour and trade union rights on an equal basis with others; (d) Enable persons with disabilities to have effective access to general technical and vocational guidance programmes, placement services and vocational and continuing training; (e) Promote employment opportunities and career advancement for persons with disabilities in the labour market, as well as assistance in finding, obtaining, maintaining and returning to employment; (f) Promote opportunities for self-employment, entrepreneurship, the development of cooperatives and starting one’s own business; (g) employ persons with disabilities in the public sector; (h) Promote the employment of persons with disabilities in the private sector through appropriate policies and measures, which may include affirmative action programmes, incentives and other measures; (i) Ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities in the workplace; (j) Promote the acquisition by persons with disabilities of work experience in the open labour market; (k) Promote vocational and professional rehabilitation, job retention and return-to-work programmes for persons with disabilities.

(UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: 2006)

The conventions clearly accounted the responsibility of state holders to support and provide opportunities for employment, promote vocational and professional rehabilitation. Most importantly, reasonable accommodation is provided in the work place. However, the foundation of working skills, communication and daily living skills must be catered and equipped for students with special educational needs before they can enter the workforce. It is therefore crucial for the education system provider to prepare and teach the living skills needed for students with special educational needs to prepare them for employment.

According to Brolin in Goodship (1990) students with special educational needs would need to master life skills that are crucial for them to engage in meaningful employment as well as preparing them for independent living. These life skills are; managing personal finances, selecting and managing household, caring for personal needs, safety awareness, preparing and consuming food, buying and caring for clothing, exhibiting responsible citizenship, using recreational facilities and engaging in leisure activities and getting around. Apart from these skills, it is also necessary for students with disabilities to acquire personal and social skills in order to maintain a job and relationship. These skills are; achieving self-awareness, acquiring self-confidence, maintaining good interpersonal skills, achieving socially responsible behavior, achieving problem solving skills and communicating with others. Other skills that are equally needed include occupational skills such as knowing and exploring occupational options, selecting and planning occupational choices, exhibiting appropriate work habits and behavior, maintaining employment and obtaining specific occupational skills (Brolin in Goodship:1990). These are important skills that are needed to enable the students with special educational needs to achieve fulfilling lives.

However, mastery of these skills would have to be complemented with an environment that allows the students to practice and strengthen these skills in the real occupational world. As stated in the UN’s Conventions of the Rights of People with Disabilities, state parties must ensure that equality in terms of opportunities remuneration safety and healthy working conditions which include protection from harassment and the redress of grievances must be attained and created for people with disabilities (United Nation: 2006). To address this, the education system catering for students with special educational needs must be supported in order to prepare them for the competitive workforce. Students who are well trained should be prepared for the working environment, should be able to perform and be productive such as other typical workers if given sufficient opportunities (Tuin Ling Ta et.el in Anizam Mohamed Yusof, Manisah Mohd Ali and Amla Mohd Salleh: 2014).

In ensuring that students with special educational needs would be given the opportunity to develop as competent worker, entrepreneurs and to be able to sustain independence lifestyle, initiatives and supported training programs must be incorporated and to prepare students with disabilities for workforce. Schools is therefore the best place to “engage and support these students by helping identify their strengths and interests and providing them with the skills (or a plan for gaining them) they need to succeed in the workplace” (Levinson and Palmer 2005). Compounding on the role of schools as the initial training job centers for students with disabilities, it is also equally important to recognize the responsibilities of parents, non-governmental organizations, public and private sectors as the agencies to support the system that the schools have prepared for students with disabilities. There has to be a matching of requirement and perspective between schools and industrial sectors. This is to ensure continuity of skills trained in schools and skills needed in the actual workforce. If this criteria is unmet, students with disabilities would have difficulty when it comes to competing in the labour market which could affect the quality of jobs to match them (Maite A Blazquez and Miguel A. Malo in Anizam Mohamed Yusof, Manisah Mohd Ali and Amla Mohd Salleh: 2014).

In the efforts to address the issue of increasing the rates of employability for students with disabilities a number of initiatives and train program have been carried out.

#### *Transition focused education program*

Transition program according to Shogren and Plotner (in Aliza Alias: 2013), is a coordinated set of activities for special needs students and it is a designed as an outcome oriented process that promotes movement from school to out-of-school activities. The goal of this program is to design a specialized transition program for students with disabilities aiming at developing successful post school outcomes such as economic empowerment, community participation and a better quality of life. An effective transition focusing on education program will ensure students with disabilities receive adequate education (Loh and Sharifah Zaniyah Syed Yahya: 2013) especially if is initiated during secondary education. Transition programs for students with disabilities are very important because without career guidance, support post secondary students especially with special learning needs have significant difficulty in achieving successful employment, independent living and social relationship upon leaving the educational system (Brolin in Loh and Sharifah Zaniyah Syed Yahya: 2013). Without a career plan, students with disabilities would also be working in working sectors that could

be very difficult for them to find and maintain a job due to lack of knowledge and skills necessary. (Levinson and Palmer 2005).

One of the major factor to ensure that a transition program would benefit a student’s potential and capabilities to secure a job that is satisfying and lead to personal growth and enhancement is transdisciplinary assessment that integrates a broad range of experts schools and community agencies and personnel in the assessment process (Levinson and Palmer: 2005). This assessment is crucial to match the skills needed for the students to develop and master with his future career that is based on his abilities and interest. The data for assessment can be obtained through direct interview and by observing the student and encompasses these areas; academic skills, daily living skills, personal and social skills and occupational and vocational skills (Levinson and Palmer:2005). Once the result of assessment is analysed, then the training skills that would be designed for a specific student will be focused on the skills needed and coordinated activities must be based by students’ needs, preferences and interests and most importantly, the learning process and training must be based on the aim, vision and interest of the students (Aliza Alias: 2013).

The major components of transition focused education program are based on the focus to equipped students’ with skills that would not only develop their knowledge and hands on mastery skills training but a program that would ease the transition from school to work. The program components must be holistic and able to support the development of self-worth and incorporate the ability to make decisions independently. In a case study conducted by Loh Sau Cheong and Sharifah Zainiyah Syed Yahya on “Effective Transitional Plan from Secondary Education to Employment for Individuals with Learning Disabilities” the findings suggested that one of the important components that transitional program needs are self-advocacy skills training, counseling, career guidance and addressing issues on sexuality and relationships (Loh and Sharifah Zainiyah Syed Yahya: 2013). Self-advocacy will increase the students’ well awareness of their own strength and weaknesses and give them a realistic expectation of their own capabilities. Career guidance would expose the students the awareness of career options, their own job preferences and skills they acquired, work habits and attitudes. Sexuality issues are important for students as it would help them to transit from adolescence to adulthood and maintaining relationship especially in work place (Loh and Sharifah Zainiyah Syed Yahya: 2013). Equally important is the training to teach students to cope with the constant changes of work environment and establishing positive interactions with colleague that would lead to valuable mentoring

relationship and would then lead to career advancement (Lindstrom et.al in Aliza Alias: 2013).

The roles of educators are very important as they are the closest person to the students. Principals need to build the capacity of the teachers and staff to help students and their parents accurately determined the vocational training and skills needed that are appropriate for the students to master and to ensure that school programs supported the initiative( Levinson and Palmer: 2005). Specifically the role of the teachers are very tailored to each student as they the ones who would identify the students' strength, suitable jobs, challenges and strategies, develop action plan, follow up develop vocational skills and experience such as interviews, negotiation and placement (Nietupski, Warth, Winslow, Johnson, Douglas, Johnson & Cilek in Aliza Alias 2013).

### *Technical and Vocational Education*

One of the important components in Transition Program is Technical and Vocational Education (TVET) for students with special needs. TVET can be defined as the "...educational process involving in additional to general education the study of technologies and relayed sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding of knowledge relating to various sectors of economic life" (UNESCO:2016)

Most persons disabilities are discriminated due to lack of awareness among employers to take them in as employee as the employers were not convinced that persons with disabilities would perform their tasks properly and also the negative perceptions that their customers will have when seeing a disabled person in the business premises (McMillin & Shuey in Aliza Alias:2013). To combat this perceptions and to inject confidence in employers and to increase their awareness in terms of hiring persons with disabilities, there is a need for advocacy and the removal of negative perceptions. By opening training centers and emphasizing on TVET policies and programs, the negative perceptions on disabled employee can be reduced and thus increased the opportunity of for disabled people to secure a job or career that can lead to attainment and self-respect.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has listed strategic programs to upgrade the lives of persons with disabilities through; opening access of existing TVET programs to special needs group; adapting curricula, facilities and pedagogical material; providing a safe learning environment and making communities aware of the important role of people with disabilities can play in society and at work (UNESCO: 2016). In order to strengthen these programs, UNESO's

Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education 2001, a normative instrument, has been disseminated among member states as a basis in the planning and policies for TVET programs for people with disabilities.

Under the article V (Technical and Vocational Education as a preparation for occupational field) no. 29 it is stated that: "Given the necessity of integrating people who are disadvantaged due to physical and intellectual disabilities into society and its occupations, the same educational opportunities should be made available to them as to those without disabilities in order that they may achieve qualification for an occupation to realize their potential and optimize their participation in the work force; special measures or special institutions maybe required" (UNESCO:2001).

Given this mandated instrument, TVET is considered as the means to reduce stigmatization and discrimination by means of empowering persons with disabilities with building confidence, and changing perceptions both for the disabled and those around him or her. The ability to master a technical or professional skills such as carpentry, computing or veterinary work will demonstrate that indeed disabled people are as capable as non-disabled people of plying such trade (ILO in Murgor, Chnaga'ch, Keter: 2014).

TVET training can be undertaken in various places and dimensions. In Kenya, TVET training is conducted in TVET institutions in North Rift Region. In Malaysia, there are boarding vocational schools for Special Needs students and also some secondary schools and training centers run by organizations. In Brunei Pre Vocational Programs lead by Special Education Unit under the Ministry of Education Brunei has been implemented since 1999 in secondary schools The program consisted development of language and communication skills, personal management and social skills, development of practical knowledge, work related skills and work attachment experience (Adanan Musim & Pengiran Sarimah bt Pengiran Hj Ahmad :2014). This program is one of the examples of TVET programs which are school based and supported by the Ministry of Education. However, much work still needs to be done and implemented to support TVET programs for students with disabilities.

### *Job Coach*

The Job Coach program that is conducted in Malaysia is a national level project a collaboration between Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development of Malaysia and Japan International Agency (JICA) and the Job Coach Network Malaysia was formed in 2006. Job coaches are the main person in Supported Employment which is a concept and approach to promote employment for persons with

disabilities (Hiroshi Ogawa, Daisuke Sakai, Yeo Swee Lan & Kenji Kuno: 2012). The work and roles of Job Coach is varied. He is a person who values the persons with disabilities' work in the society, carefully links people and work, makes negotiations to enable disabled persons to earn reasonable income and supports companies to enhance their capacity to employ persons with disabilities (Hiroshi Ogawa, Daisuke Sakai, Yeo Swee Lan & Kenji Kuno: 2012). Supported employment is an initiative to place persons with disabilities in employment sector with the guidance of job coaches. Without this approach persons with disabilities may not be able to adjust with their working conditions and skills required from them. A job coach role is more varied and they are trained to train persons with disabilities and they also understand the needs of the persons with disabilities in terms what the employers expect from the persons with disabilities at their workplace.

### *SEAMEO SEN'S Initiatives*

The Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organization Regional Center for Special Education (SEAMEO SEN) is committed to improve the lives of children with special needs by increasing the quality of Special Education in the Southeast Asia region. The center main role is to enhance the capacity of Special Education Teachers through short training courses, seminars, workshop and conferences that would enhance the knowledge of the teachers. The center also conducted research in Special Education on the four main areas; hearing impairment, vision impairment, learning difficulties and gifted and talented.

Training concept for SEAMEO SEN is based on Best Practices theme. The context of teacher training and capacity building for SEAMEO SEN in this region is uniquely special needs as well. Given the broad range of expertise, skills, experience, exposure and nature of the teachers and students, best practice concept fits the current scenario and educational agenda in this plan. SEAMEO SEN's training division consists of training coordinators who design and coordinate training based on availability of resource persons and thematic content of the courses conducted. Best practice in Special Needs Education results effective teaching and learning for teachers to carry out in class. Implementing best practices can motivate, engage and prompt students to learn and achieve.

These best practices must be shared and disseminated among teachers of Special Educational needs. Best practices would: a) Assist teachers in developing teaching strategies and resources for classroom practice and evaluation so as to meet the learner's diverse needs; b) Optimize the supporting

system of pedagogical approach in supporting students with Special Educational needs; c) Enhance teachers' competency in catering for students' diversity through professional dialogues, resource sharing and knowledge transfer; and d) Present effective measures and strategies to cater for learners' diversity. (Public Schools of North Carolina, Department of Public Instruction: Elementary Division: 2006)

Since its operation in May 2013, SEAMEO SEN has conducted training in the areas of sexuality, nutrition and food technology, co-curricular, technical and vocational education, mathematics, best practices in teaching of students with autism and visual impairment and research in Special Education. SEAMEO SEN works collaboratively with local and international agencies and the Ministries of Education of the Southeast Asia region to conduct programs.

To assist the Ministers of Education of the Southeast Asia region to enhance the capacities of special education teachers to deliver educational services that can optimize the potential of children with special needs, SEAMEO SEN will conduct courses in TVET and vocational skills for teachers whom can then transfer the knowledge to the children with special needs. SEAMEO SEN would also include the theme of TVET in the International Conference of Special Needs in 2017 as a platform to share best practices in TVET practices and sharing of the experts of TVET.

### **CONCLUSION**

To ensure the lives of children with special needs obtain independent life and being dignified, special education must enable and develop their employability skills. These skills are very important for them to master to help them live a meaningful and respected life in the society. Without proper employment, the lives of the children will be discriminated and this will lead to low self-esteem and depression as adults. Education services that nurture their abilities and one that enhanced their self-development by equipping them with the necessary skills for them to earn a living and being employed is very pertinent and crucial. The Education Agenda 2030 specifically address this by focusing towards education for all that is current and suited in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, the reorienting of special education system that is catered towards the children self-development and employment will drastically change their lives and the outlook of the society towards inclusivity and acceptance of our special needs children.

## REFERENCES

- Aliza Alias. (2013). The Issues in Implementing Transition Program for Special Needs students. *Journal of Special Education*. 9 (16):9-14. Canadian Center of Science and Education.
- Anizam Mohamed Yusof, Manisah Mohd Ali & Amla Mohd Salleh, (2014). Employability of Vocational School Leavers with Disability. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Science* 112. 1064-1069. Elsevier Ltd.
- Anizam Mohamed Yusof, Manisah Mohd Ali & Amla Mohd Salleh, (2015). Youth Worker with Disabilities: The views of Employers in Malaysia. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Science* .204 105-113. Elsevier Ltd.
- Goodship, Joan M. (1990). Life Skills Mastery for Students with Special Needs. *ERIC Digest #E469*. Retrieved December 1<sup>st</sup> from <http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-9216/life.htm>
- Hiroshi Ogawa, Daisuke Sakai, Yeo Swee Lan & Kenji Kuno. (2012) *An Introduction to Job Coach: Promoting Sustainable Employment of Persons with Disabilities*. MPH: Malaysia
- Levinson, E.M., & Palmer, E.J., (2005). Preparing Students with Disabilities for School-to-work Transition and Post school Life. Retrieved December 1<sup>st</sup> from <https://my.vanderbilt.edu/specialeducationinduction/files/2011/09/Transition-Planning1.pdf>
- Loh Sau Cheong, & Sharifah Zainiyah Syed Yahya (2013). Effective Transitional Plan from Secondary Education to Employment for Individuals with learning Disabilities: *A case study*. *Journal of Special Education* 2(1):104-117. Canadian Center of Science and Education
- Malle, A., Pirttimaa, R., & Saloviita, T. (2015). Inclusion of students with disabilities in formal vocational education programs in Ethiopia. *International Journal of Special Education*, 30 (2). Retrieved November 21<sup>st</sup> from <http://www.internationaljournalofspecialed.com/docs/Inclusion%20of%20S...>
- National Network of Business and Industry Association. (2014). *Employability Skills: A foundation for Success in the Workplace: The Skills All Employees Need, No matter Where They Work*. Retrieved December 2<sup>nd</sup> from [http://businessroundtable.org/sites/default/files/Common%20Employability\\_asingle\\_fm.pdf](http://businessroundtable.org/sites/default/files/Common%20Employability_asingle_fm.pdf)
- Pengiran Sarimah bt Pengiran Haji Ahmad & Adanan Musim .(2014). Prevocational Program for Special Needs in Brunei Darussalam. *Special Education Unit Ministry of Education Brunei*. Unpublished paper.
- Public Schools of North Carolina, Department of Public Instruction: Elementary Division. (2006). *BEST PRACTICES: A Resource for Teachers*. Retrieved October 21<sup>st</sup> from <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/bpractices2.pdf>
- Titus Kiptoo Murgor, John Kosgei Changa'ch, Julius & Kipkogei Keter. (2014). Accessibility of Technical And Vocational Training Among Disabled People: Survey Of TVET Institutions In North Rift Region, Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 5 (3). Retrieved November 21<sup>st</sup> from <http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/10732>
- UNESCO New Delhi Office. (2016) *Technical Vocational Education and Training*. Retrieved November 23<sup>rd</sup> from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/newdelhi/areas-of-action/education/technical-vocational-education-and-training-tvet/>
- UNESCO. (2016). Education: Technical and Vocational Education. Retrieved November 23<sup>rd</sup> from [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=34371&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=34371&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- UNESCO. (2016). *Leading the Global Education 2030 Agenda*. Retrieved December 5<sup>th</sup> from <http://en.unesco.org/education2030-sdg4>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization .(2001). *Revised Recommendation Concerning Technical and Vocational Education*. Retrieved December 2<sup>nd</sup> from [http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=49355&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=49355&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)
- United Nations. (2006). *Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Retrieved November 3<sup>rd</sup> from <http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>