

# **EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH TRANSITION PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

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## **Abstract**

Employability is an additional criterion comprises three main aspects comprises of academic skills, thinking and personality qualities that are valued by employers during the recruitment process. Through the implementation of the transition program for students with special educational needs (SEN), employability skills were applied as a complement to the basic skills of the chosen career. Exposure to career paths are important to enable students with special educational needs to be more independent and confident to face the real working life and able to compete to get a job after completing school. This field study was carried out for seven weeks in a shopping mall, Hypermarket in Selangor to see the progress of an individual student, in term of social, behaviour, self-respect, and the ability to meet and comply with all criteria; basic academic skills, higher-order thinking skills and personal qualities' and analysis tasks in the workplace. Observation and feedback of teachers and parents were analyzed. The student's progress recorded and analysed during the ongoing transition program. The participant of this study was a 16 years old student diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The finding shows that there are positive changes recorded in all aspects. Implication of this study are related to the provision of a wider range of employability skills and attract employers to cooperate in providing guidance and training to students with special needs.

**Keywords:** Transition Program, career, employability.

## **Introduction**

Employability skills are additional technical skills needed to help an individual to get a job, showing good potential in the career and contributing to the success of an organization. There are three categories of skills employability (Jacquelyn P. Robinson: Alabama Coop Exten. Sys., 2000) which include basic academic, thinking skills and personal quality. Basic academic skills focus on speaking, listening, reading, writing and arithmetic meanwhile thinking skills focus on reasoning, thinking creatively, making decision and problem solving. In term of personal quality, it highlight attitude such as confidence, self-restraint, sociable, honest, punctual and responsible. For students with special educational needs (SEN), their social development quite different

from mainstream students, may cause employers reluctant to accept them as trainer or hire them as employee.

The issue that evolved is students with SEN did not meet the criteria ; basic academic skills, higher-order thinking skills and personal qualities' and analysis tasks in the workplace of employability such as students do not follow the instructions, unable to read and speak well, unable to control their emotion and unsure of their abilities. Those are the reasons given by the employer for not providing career opportunities to the students with SEN even though students may be proficient in core skills career endeavour. Discussions were held before conducting career transition program with the Hypermarket management to set the criteria and job skills needed to ensure career transition program designed succeeded in achieving the objectives. Besides, through this meeting, the employers were brief about the potential and abilities of students with special needs who attend Career Transition Program, so that they can compliance with training and field work proposed by the management. Only students who have the potential and meet the criteria established by the employability will be selected following the Career Transition Program. Transition Program students with special needs is one of the skills from school to career.

### **The Transition Program**

This program involves special needs student with learning disabilities from one of the secondary school that offers Special Education Integration Program. The implementation of the Transitional Program is intended to provide exposure to students and help them acquire skills needed during training and implement all aspects of employability according to the criteria that has been set before stepping out into the carrer world. In addition, this transition program was designed to help students with special needs socializing and adapting themselves working with others in community .The implementation of this transition program seen as a complementary to the Philosophy of Education. Transition Program is defined as services provided to help students move into the world of work, education, after-school or independent lives. Thus, various resources-to the world of work is required including the aspects of science that can meet the needs of employee –especially for students with special needs. The modules produced for the training of special needs students include basic skills such as social and communication, behaviour, personal and specific skills in the chosen career field.

The career selection and readiness of the students is also very important to reduce the problem of students with special needs who do not master skills in various aspects such as communication, problem solving, behavioural skills, teamwork, interpersonal, time management, self-management, self-confidence, understanding the instructions, personality and social integration (Hiller et al., 2007; Melissa, Yen, & See, 2011; Shier, Graham, & Jones, 2009; Singley, 2003; Zainudin Mohd. Isa et al., 2009). -Those skills are the skills needed for employability that allows one to get a job. Most employers require workers to master various skills of employability (Ahmad, 2007; Brown, 2002; Callan, 2003). Besides the selection of suitable students and career is important to facilitate the transition program and making sure it can be implemented successfully. Students should not be forced to participate a transition program that is not their choice. Sensitivity and collaboration of teachers and parents of students are important and will help facilitate the career transition program successfully.

Early disclosure in school about the skills needed for employability-make it easier for teachers to select students who actually meet the criteria to participate in the transition program. Although job training provided at the school it is not the same as the actual situation during a transition program but initial assessments can be made to help the selection of suitable students, reducing problems and increase achievement of students in the programs. The effectiveness of the program unanimous with the vocational education that can help students with special needs in obtaining skills needed and serve as a preparation for them to compete in the job market (Krajewski & Callahan, 1998; Mohd Tahir Lokman et al., 2009; Ramlee, 2004).

According to (Aliza, 2013), In Malaysia, there is no actual transition program and support teams in schools that have a special education program integration, especially in secondary schools. Most of the responsibility in this career transition program implemented by special education teachers involved. Therefore, most teachers of special education programs run career transition program with their own initiatives. Their responsibility as to identify the strengths of students according to the work, challenges and strategies, develop action plans, according vocational skills and experience through training such as interviews, negotiations and placements made by the teacher.

### **Implementation of the Transition Program**

Students with special transition program which was implemented in collaboration with one of Hypermarket (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd in Kajang branch for 7 weeks. The training of students with SEN commence from 8.00am until 12.00pm. The students involved were 12 people and they will be accompanied by two teachers as monitors. Students are divided into sections corresponding respectively based on the interest and initial training module transition program conducted in schools. Module transition program conducted in schools which implement the transition program ; such as hygiene maintenance training, food preparation, entrepreneurship and so forth. Transition program carried out in Hypermarket is focused on the training set by the Hypermarket during discussion and look into the suitability of the students involved. They were placed at the fish and seafood, fresh fruits, meats, vegetables and clothing department. However, the study conducted by the researchers focused only on one of the students who has been selected to be the subject of study and will undergo a transition program in the fresh vegetables. Tasks that need to be implemented, such as the maintenance of hygiene, selection of vegetables according to quality, grade and quantity, layout, and affix the label is a task that should be undertaken by the subject.

### **Problem Statement**

Individual with disabilities -facing problems in communication and social relationships, behaviours problems, difficulty in concentrating and listening to instruction, do not attempt to solve the problem is one of the characteristics of students with special needs who may be the initial perception of employers to accept individual with special needs for training or take pupils concerned to work. In fact, many employers prefer to hire foreign workers than participating in transition program and hire students with special needs. The main factors that prevent people with disabilities (PWDs) in getting a job are the negative attitudes and discrimination from society due to lack of awareness of the capabilities of this group (Rohani Ibrahim, 2010). They are still denied the right and questioned their ability to cause many people who still do not have a job even if it be in school until the maximum age allowed. Career development of disabled people's limited only to certain skills and the development of inconsistency alleged are the cause

employers to deny their rights. In fact, only 50-70 percent of disabled people who do not have jobs in which they are closely related to the behaviour of some people who show prejudice the ability of the disabled to work (Zinaida, 2006). Although various attempts have been made to encourage the recruitment of the disabled to work includes providing tax relief to employers but these efforts are still not enough without the implementation of a transition program that provides students with special needs work based on their interests and abilities of particular students. Program evaluation suggesting transition should be given to students with special needs as a guide to their respective jobs. Hypermarket, for example, agreed to issue a certificate of appreciation and participation as evidence of the students who successfully completed the training skills while providing students opportunities and expectations with respect to employers' confidence. In fact, students with special needs is one of the country's assets that are not exempt from contributing to the country's economic growth is rapidly towards becoming a developed country.

### **Goals and Objectives**

The main goal of this program is to train students with special needs with variety of skills and experience includes employability so as to be independent and successful in their lives. The rationale is of special needs students who take the program also has the right to be given the opportunity to prove that they are able to be independent like anyone else. The main objective of this career transition program is to identify employability skills through programs such as career transition;

1. Basic academic skills
2. Higher order thinking skills
3. Personnel qualities

### **Methodology**

This case study was conducted with an observation on the subject, who is a special needs boy with ADHD 16 years old. In addition to subjects with ADHD also have emotional and behavioural problems such as irritability and sensitivity to criticism. Observations carried out during seven weeks in a note on the forms provided to record all aspects and skills that have been studied; it is intended to look at the progress of students throughout the program starts. Interviews were also conducted for the purpose of getting feedback parents, co-workers and supervisors on duty in respect of student.

### *Sample*

The sample was one of the students with Special Needs from Special Education Integration Program in one of the schools in the Kajang areas. The sample is a male aged 16 years old and suffering from ADHD.

### *Location Study*

The study was conducted at Hypermarket Kajang. The sample is assigned to work on sale of fresh vegetables.

### *Instruments*

Checklist has been developed based on modules produced. The effectiveness of a program can be identified by assessing prior, during and after the program was run. I wish to reiterate that, researchers have drawn up a few items that are calculated

according to the extent to which the development of the subject during a session this transition. Among the items found were related Evaluation of Ethics and should be followed by students and the frequency is done during work. Researchers mark either yet Master (NM), Mastering the Medium (MM), Master of the Good (MG), or any Dominate with Distinction (MD) on each working day.

Item in the module design covered at Figure-1: -

### Employability skills

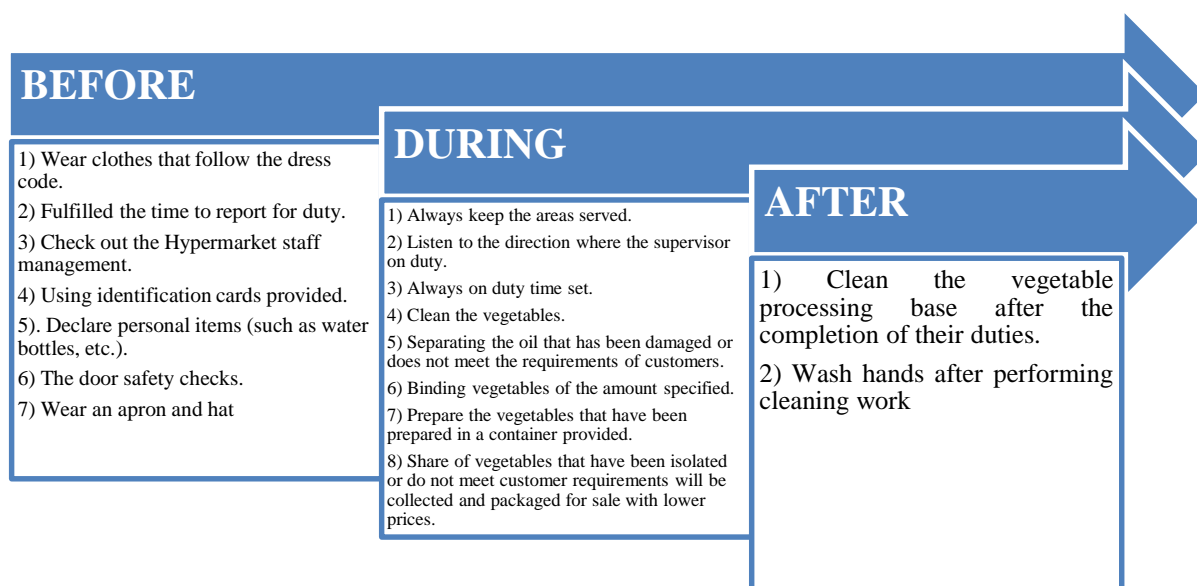


Figure 1 - Employability Skills

Data analysis performed on each record observations were collected during seven weeks manually to identify weaknesses and level of employability respect in every aspect of students surveyed. Interviews conducted in this study to get a response from the parents, supervisors, and colleagues conducted during the program. It aims to look at the overall development of the sample in a transition program that has been carried out. According to social cognitive career theory are in social psychology theory which focuses that an individual is formed by experience and the environment. This theory is also known as the theory of the development of vocational aspirations and was raised as a theory that suggests the influence in describing the development of an individual's career aspirations. The resulting theory by expanding social cognitive theory, which was introduced by Bandura and developed by Lent, Brown and Beckett, which include academic and career (Smith, 2002).

### Analysis of findings

The results showed that the subjects were able to successfully undergo a transition program. The subjects were successfully carried out the task with distinction in four consecutive weeks. In addition, the study also found to do the job well in three of seven weeks on assignment as below. The actual record evaluation form the subject of the task is shown in the following Table-1:

*Table 1 - Evaluation Form*

No	Assignment	W1	W2	W3	W4	W5	W6	W7	Remark
1	Separating the vegetable yellowish and not fresh.								
2	Estimate the amount of oil to be tied up								
3	Cut the base of the vegetable neatly and carefully.								
4	Arrange the vegetables before neatly tied up.								
5	Binding vegetable neatly as appropriate.								
6	Prepare the vegetables that have been prepared on the premises provided.								
7	Incorporate vegetables into plastic are not good to be weighed.								
8	Updating all the tools that have been used								
9	Take out the trash in the container provided.								

*\*W1: week 1*

### **Findings**

The findings can also be analysed through the completion of two aspects, namely before and after the transition program. Development of pupils involved assessed from the point of view of social development that include one aspect of the employability of the quality of personality. Employability affecting the quality personality can be seen clearly the difference when students are at a real workout. Especially for aspects of emotional development, the subject seems uncomfortable with a situation and the condition of vegetable wet and sandy, which often do not focus on tasks with any neat and easy to complain and avoid tasks like cleaning the vegetable process. Because the subject is not in compliance with the instructions given, the subject often reprimanded by the supervisor. Behaviour of students is also very significant as difficult to hear directions, does not focus at work and avoid tasks like cleaning the place. This occurs because of a change of place and environment through which the students concerned. Therefore, as training supervisors not only assess reliability in terms of job skills but also evaluating the quality of the personality of the subject. Supervisors also provide advice, criticism and guidance that can affect positive change in the students' self-respect. It is the students have become accustomed during training conducted school students only receive instruction from teachers and interact with friends who have known. Compared with the current situation of training, students must receive instructions from supervisors and communicate with people is around. This makes students feel less depressed and began to show an undesirable attitude. Similarly to the situation skill set, during the actual training given to vegetables are cleaned, sorted according to quality and quantity is more challenging, but the students did not experience the reality of respect during training.

However, after a transition program is run, the three factors of social, emotional and behaviour also changed towards the better. After 7 weeks of the transition program, subject seem more confident to communicate with supervisors in a friendly manner and

more willing subjects to ask for help from the staff and can recognize some of the names of the other staff. Besides, there also appears to be no longer subject to complain and express conscientious attitude to work more either in repairing mistakes. For behavioural aspects, it was found that students can carry out his duties with the instructions; focus on improving work primarily involves matters which are of interest and can perform more regularly. It shows the transition program has successfully trained students with special needs to a more positive, self-reliant and motivated to progress in the future. According to Table 2 below, the following is employability skills acquired through a career transition program;

*Table 2 - Employability Skills*

<b>BASIC ACADEMIC SKILLS</b>	<b>HIGHER-ORDER THINKING SKILLS</b>	<b>PERSONELQUALITIES</b>
<b>Writing</b>	Learning	Responsible
<b>Science</b>	Reasoning	Self Confidence
<b>Mathematics</b>	Thinking Creatively	Self-Control
<b>Oral Communication</b>	Decisions Making	Social Skills
<b>Listening</b>	Problem Solving	Honest
		Have Integrity
		Adaptable and Flexible
		Team Spirit
		Punctual and Efficient
		Self-Directed
		Good Work Attitude
		Well Groomed
		Cooperative
		Self-Motivated
		Self-Management

*1. Basic Academic Skills*

Students have the basic skills of writing, counting and reading. Students can calculate the amount of oil that has been in the band, arranging vegetables by type in the space provided and read and post a vegetable label name correctly. Students can respond verbally when asked by supervisors and customers.

*2. Higher-Order thinking Skills*

Students are able to solve the problem according to the situation. Based on observations, students are able to perform a given task without instruction supervisor. For example, after a basket full of vegetables and it does not look empty basket that will prepare students to become vegetables that have been completed in the space provided in kind. After carrying out the assignment, students resume other tasks.

*3. Personnel Qualities*

Have self-confidence when dealing with clients after training. students have a sense of cooperation in working groups. Based on the observations, the students are willing to lend a hand to help other colleagues after assignments that have been granted. Students are more motivated to come to training career, although he was reprimanded by the supervisor training.

A finding also clearly shows this transition program can be seen to open the minds of people towards students with special abilities. These students become more self-confident, independent, trustworthy and responsible and help them to become a member of the community is more beneficial for our country. The program also helps to reduce the anxiety and concern of parents / guardians for the future of their children. In addition, it can create a more harmonious society and compassionate.

The success of this transition program can be proved by researchers who interviewed the contentions of some people who are directly involved in this program. For example, employers that self-management Tesco said the Tesco ready to accept students with special needs work after the end of school. They are always positive and often advise students involved. This proves the Tesco can receive trainees with special needs well. Colleagues also the subject of an opinion that the subject is a quiet, shy and less focus on the task at first. The subjects have shown positive changes and progress in the skills assessed after 7 weeks of transition. In addition, subjects showed a good potential and believes even more introverted and rarely communicate with colleagues.

Supervisor also believes that on-going training would be subject brighter. Subject parents desperately hoping transition program can be continued. The subject can now help his mother when choosing vegetable hypermarkets and cheerful every time to go home from undergoing a transition program. The response from the parents stating the subject they feel proud of the positive changes shown by subjects Customers themselves are not exempt hypermarket reacted positively and was impressed with the abilities of students and teachers who are planning this transition program. The subject was also expressed enthusiasm after this transition program. He also added another subject, he is happy to work with friends and also new staff recognized even at first he did not like.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

Change the subject to adapt the learning modules that have been conducted show that transition is a progression to be proud of. Motivational support and guidance is one factor that also contributed to the success of the programs. Thus collaboration among parents, teachers, peers and supervisors are important for the success of the transition program although there are studies that show people with disabilities harder to be train supported a study by Zinaida (2006), found that vocational training institutions to train special needs are not able to provide the students with the skills necessary employability.

Career development is important in order to produce competent students, resourceful and have aspirations in their lives, especially in secondary schools. But for students with special needs, careful planning must be implemented in advance to instruct teachers and parents regarding student's career direction. The main approaches can be seen as a measure to implement the transition program is through observation and assessment of students' interest level and particularly in education involving skills such as gardening, cooking, producing handicrafts and so on. This is an important step to prevent students do not do the exercises in the program with a good transition. Even that would be cause for concern is the perception and discrimination that arise from caring attitude of our own. Career aspirations because it is an important variable for understanding the self, career and it is related to behavior, social perception, the future of education, career choices and also the achievements of an individual (Rojewski, 2005). Efforts such as the implementation of the Special Education Program for special needs students at the



Polytechnic impaired Malaysia began in early June 2000 and to date only five polytechnics that offer special education program of the Polytechnic Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah, Shah Alam, Polytechnic Ungku Omar, Perak, Johor Polytechnic Bharu, Johor, Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin Polytechnic and Polytechnic Kota Kinabalu. This is one business that provides continuing education to a higher level.

In addition, the success of a career transition program also depends on the support of the school administration. Schools and the administration should support this program by providing the necessary tools, materials and a place for practical training sessions. However, the most challenging issue of teachers have to deal with employers to find a place for training their students to get work experience; such as work experience will expose the students and prepare them for the real working world. In addition, it will give them more opportunities for employment (Lindstrom et al.,2011, Aliza Alias.,2013).

Special education teachers also showed unwavering commitment to train students and find suitable working environment even though they were rejected by employers who do not want to accept students with special needs to work a few times. These teachers believe that work experience is a key element of the success of the transition from school to career and not just vocational skills acquired by students with special needs but also social and emotional skills in the work environment. Furthermore, teachers are grateful and appreciative of the support of various parties in understanding the level of ability of their children to work in labour and employers in their willingness to accept and assist students with special needs is to gain work experience.

### **Conclusion**

Efforts to raise the level of skills in the career of students with special needs is an effort to human development an asset to the country's economic development Most individuals with special needs can also perform and be productive like other typical workers if given a chance (Tiun Ling Ta, Lee Lay Wah, & Khoo Suet Leng, 2011). Thus, employment opportunities should be given to those students with special abilities and capabilities so that they can enjoy as a result of education received.

If the government expects the provision of vocational education to students with special needs will enable them to penetrate the job market. Schools and related strategies also need to set the direction of his career to help students with special needs that are not in vocational areas. The school, which has yet to take steps to implement the transition program should take example and spirit even generate new ideas to implement the transition program that can meet the demands of the labor market. Therefore, not only the needs of employers for workers with special needs should be considered in order to meet their expectations and hopes, but also a transition program to prepare students who really interest and meeting the criteria to undergo a transition program that will have an impact. By understanding the needs of employers, it can create compatibility employability skills implemented by teachers with the skills required by employer's employability. Therefore, students with special needs can acquire and develop skills to cope with life's challenges and be able to make them successful in the individual areas of expertise.

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