

# DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF A CUSTOMIZED VOCATIONAL PROGRAM FOR ADULTS WITH MILD INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

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## Abstract

The study focused on the development and validation of a customized vocational program for adults with mild intellectual disabilities to prepare them for independent and gainful living. The program was based on basic vocational skills such as grooming, social skills, cleaning, frying, sorting, selling, money changing and washing dishes, and other related skills in physical, intellectual and socio-emotional present among the participants. It consisted of pre-referral / evaluation, orientation, workplace readiness training and job shadows of internship. This was evaluated by Special Education (SPED) and Technological and Livelihood Education (TLE) teachers to assess the attainability of objectives, congruence of activities to objectives, adequacy of activities to objectives, appropriateness of resources and appropriateness of the success indicators. After the assessment, the customized vocational program was piloted with ten adults with mild intellectual disabilities who were aged eighteen and above. The program developed was found to be appropriate for adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher recommends the program be extended to all public schools with special education classes so that children with special needs, regardless of their economic status, will have the opportunity to be trained and have the chance of being independent and productive; and that the qualified adults with intellectual disabilities be given continuous upgrading to provide opportunities for professional development to build competence and instill confidence among them.

**Keywords:** Customized Vocational Program, Intellectual Disabilities, Transition Program

## Introduction

Intellectual disability (ID), formerly called *Mental Retardation*, is a term used for a person who has certain limitations in mental functioning such as reasoning, learning, and problem solving, and in skills such as communicating, taking care of him or herself, and social skills. These limitations will cause a person to learn and develop more slowly than a typical person. According to the DSM-5 (Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fifth edition, 2013), limitations of these persons must be evident in comparison to other people of the same age, gender, and social-cultural background.

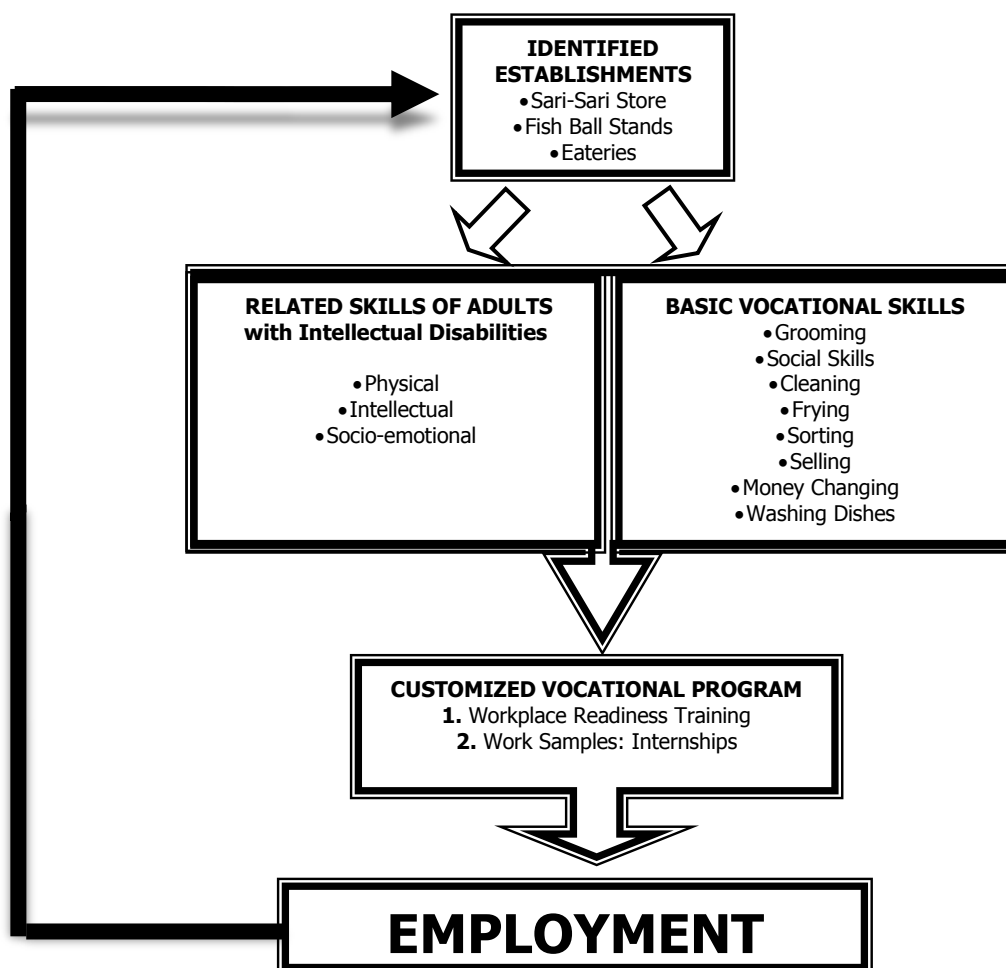
Intellectual disability may vary from mild to profound. Persons with mild intellectual disability have deficits in adaptive behavior, consistently demonstrates general intellectual functioning that is determined to be 1.5 standard deviations or more below the mean of the

general population, on the basis of a comprehensive developmental evaluation which includes psychological, physical, and social evaluations (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2005). They may exhibit behavior problems, be immature, display some obsessive/compulsive behaviors and lack the understanding of verbal/non-verbal clues and will often have difficulty following rules and routines. These people may also be clumsy, use simple language with short sentences, have minimal organization skills and will need reminders about hygiene such as washing hands and brushing teeth. They also demonstrate weak confidence. These people are easily frustrated and require opportunities to improve self-esteem. Different types of support in accordance to their needs will be needed to ensure that they try new things and take risks in learning.

In the United States, a powerful law was enacted in 1975. This was Public Law 94-142 or the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, which was, now codified as IDEA or the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This was endorsed in order to receive federal funds, to develop and implement policies that assure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all children with disabilities. The major provision of this law states that all children with disabilities who are between the ages of 3 and 21, regardless of the type of severity of their disabilities shall receive free, appropriate public education or FAPE. Each one will be given an individualized education program or IEP (Heward, 2003 *in* Inciong et al, 2007). After this age, they are set free to face the world of work. Unfortunately, countries like the Philippines, which also aim to reach this ideal where children with disabilities receive FAPE and have IEPs, find it difficult to attain it. People with intellectual disabilities and the like are not yet capable of handling themselves independently at the age of 21. One of the probable reasons could be failure to enroll at an early age due to lack of financial and parental support. As mentioned in the Profile of Out-of-School Children in the Philippines (2012), poverty also weighs significantly on the decision to enter, delay, or drop out of school, and it also affects academic performance. The routes of influence of poverty are rather numerous, including indirect effects in terms or overall pressures on the resources and time of parents who are poor. This results in a more complicated approach in teaching since they are of mature age to learn basic and adaptive skills. They then become adults in the Special Education program, inept at acquiring a job. In this adult stage, they still rely on others for support, thus failing to achieve the Special Education goal of achieving self-sufficiency. This was the rationale for the study. These individuals or adults who cannot possibly enter high school, college, or workplace are the focus of the study. Development of a vocational program was deemed necessary to prepare them for work.

The customized vocational training program was designed to serve as a transition program from school to work but having such a program may not assure employment. According to Reschley (2002), persons with intellectual disabilities are usually associated with unemployment. In the event of economic depression, this group will be among those severely affected. A vocational program is consequently embedded to focus on those establishments where employment for these adults is possible. Goldstein (1982) points out that this school-to-work transition is particularly difficult for mildly handicapped individuals for three reasons: (1) recent technological advances have dramatically reduced the number of unskilled and semiskilled jobs that have typically been held in the past by mildly disabled individuals; (2) academic, behavioral, and social handicaps place disabled workers at a particular disadvantage during times of high unemployment; and (3) the "invisibility" of mild handicaps often causes employers to develop unrealistic expectations of mildly handicapped workers.

In view of the aforementioned reasons, the author undertook this study aiming to develop a customized vocational program suitable for adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Below is the conceptual framework of the study:



The related skills and basic vocational skills of adults with mild intellectual disabilities were assessed first. These skills were determined to be parallel to industry demands, which were situated in the school premises. Skills in money changing, cleaning and sorting were needed in the three identified establishments where as frying is only needed in the fish ball stands establishment.

The establishments, as evaluated by experts, were sari-sari stores, fish ball stands and eateries. Sari-sari stores are convenience stores where variety of items were found, fish ball stands are carts where fish balls are sold and eateries are small restaurants where people can be served food. These were the only establishments recommended because these indicate a higher possibility of employment for the participants. Skills needed for employment as per validation were grooming, social skills, cleaning, frying, sorting, selling, money changing and washing dishes.

The customized vocational program was based on the three above-mentioned components: the related skills of adults with mild intellectual disabilities, their basic vocational skills and the establishments identified that can be manned by people with such qualifications. This is divided into two dimensions of transition namely: (a) Workplace Readiness Training and (b) Work Samples: Internships.

The Customized Vocational Program contains set of activities, which will develop the vocational skills of the adults with intellectual disabilities appropriate to the demands of the identified establishments.

## Objectives

The main purpose of the study was to develop and validate a customized vocational program for adults with mild intellectual disabilities. Specifically, it sought to attain the following objectives:

*describe the profile of the participants in terms of:*

- age and gender
- basic vocational skills
- related vocational skills
- vocational and related skill needs

*prepare the customized vocational program for adults with mild intellectual disabilities.*

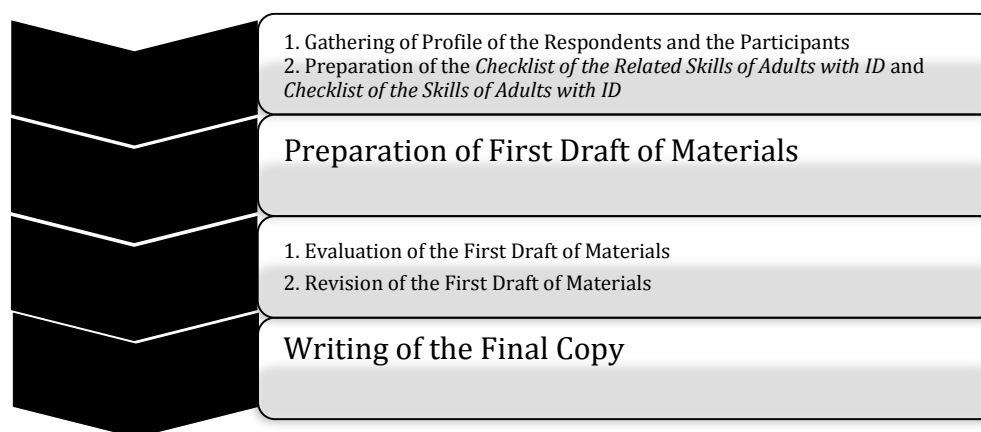
*validate the customized vocational program through consultation with:*

- Special Education teachers
- Experts in teaching persons with mild intellectual disabilities
- Adults with mild intellectual disabilities in actual work station

*revise the customized vocational program based on the evaluation and try-out results.*

## Materials and methods

The research design of this study followed four phases of development: Phase I-Preliminary Preparation; Phase II-Preparation of First Draft; Phase III-Evaluation; and Phase IV-Final Preparation. Figure 1 shows the procedures which make the study possible.



### Phase I – Planning

This phase involved gathering basic information about the profile of the participants. There were equal numbers of males and females (five each) that participated in this study. At the time of the study they were already in the adulthood stage aged 18 years and above, and were enrolled in the Transition-Vocational class of Legarda Elementary School Special Education Department.

The initial phase started through the assessment of the participants' present vocational and related skills.

### Phase II – Preparation of First Draft

Based on the identified basic vocational skills establishments where adults with mild intellectual disabilities can possibly work, a customized vocational program was prepared. The program was divided into three components: Orientation, Workplace Readiness Training and Work Samples. The first component involved Career Learning, Exploration Activities, and Punctuality and Attendance. In the Workplace Readiness Training, activities in grooming, social skills, sorting, cleaning, money changing, washing dishes and frying were given

emphasis. The third component was an application of skills learned for Work Samples. Each prepared activity consisted of objectives, pre-requisite skills needed, materials or equipment, suggested activities and evaluation. Each component had five parts, namely objectives, pre-requisite skills, materials, suggested activities, and evaluation.

### **Phase III – Evaluation**

Experts subjected the revised customized vocational program for evaluation. There were five evaluators for each instrument. The first instrument, the *Checklist of the skills of adults with Intellectual Disabilities*, had four evaluators who gained BSEd and Master of Education units in Special Education, and another one who had Ed.D and MA Special Education units. All of them had more than five years of teaching experience in Special Education.

On the second instrument, the *Checklist of the Related Skills of Adults with Intellectual Disabilities*, three evaluators had bachelor's degrees in Education, Certificate of Teaching Program (CTP) units and SPED units. The other evaluator had a Bachelor of Education in Elementary Education degree and MA SPED units. The last evaluator had a Doctorate degree in developmental psychology. All of them had more than five years of teaching experience in handling students with intellectual disabilities.

The last instrument was the *Customized Vocational Program*. Two of the five evaluators had completed a Bachelor of Elementary Education and taken a Master of Arts in Special Education. Both had five years of teaching experience in Special Education, handling students with intellectual disabilities. The other evaluator had a Doctoral degree in Developmental Psychology and a Master of Arts in SPED. She had five years of teaching experience in handling people with intellectual disabilities. The other evaluator has a bachelor's degree, Certificate of Teaching Program and units in SPED. She had a long experience of handling students with intellectual disabilities for fifteen years. Finally, the last evaluator had 26 years of teaching experience. She earned her Ph.D in Developmental Psychology and experienced teaching in SPED and in Livelihood Education programs. All fifteen evaluators were chosen to evaluate the instruments of this study because of their expertise in handling students with intellectual disabilities. Their educational backgrounds and work experience qualified them to evaluate the program.

### **Evaluation of Customized Vocational Program by Experts Teaching Vocational Programs**

The first component of the customized vocational program was *Orientation*. This garnered mean scores ranging from 3.26 to 4.00 interpreted as *very much* attainable, *very much* congruent to its objectives, *very much* adequate, resources were *very much* appropriate and success indicators were *very much* appropriate. This meant that the above-mentioned components were parallel to all activities indicated in Activity 1 or the Orientation Phase.

The second component was the *Workplace Readiness Training*. This contains seven activities in grooming, social skills, sorting, cleaning, money changing, washing dishes and frying. All of which have activities, objectives, resources and success indicators that are appropriate and attainable in relation to the skills of adults with mild intellectual disability.

The last component of the customized vocational program was the *Work Samples: Job Shadows of Internship*. This final division has appropriate resources and success indicators, which were seen on the weighted means ranging from 3.26 to 4.00. Furthermore, all vocational activities developed were appropriate to all components. As per evaluators, a well-

planned customized vocational program was implemented which made all these activities retained in the instrument.

### **Tryout Results**

Upon finishing the customized vocational program, the activities were tried out starting from the orientation. The participants were introduced to the different workplaces along the premise of the school where they were enrolled. These were sari-sari store, eateries and fish ball stands which were identified as establishments where they could find work.

### **Phase IV – Writing the Final Copy**

With the aim of further improving the customized vocational program, a representative sample of the activities for students with mild intellectual disabilities at the Legarda Elementary School – Special Education program was tried out. Based on the results of the evaluation and the try-out activity, the final copy of the Customized Vocational Program was prepared. At this stage of the program writing, the comments and suggestions offered by the researcher's advisers, experts, as well as the SPED and TLE teachers' feedback served as basis for the refinement of the program.

### **Findings**

Based on the analysis of data, the following findings were revealed:

#### *Profile of the Participants*

The participants were ten adults with mild intellectual disabilities whose age ranged from eighteen and above. They were enrolled in Legarda Elementary School under the vocational-transition class of Special Education program.

#### *Identified Vocational and Related Skills*

The identified basic vocational skills and other related skills of the adults with mild intellectual disabilities were postulated through the mean score of each vocational skill. Based on the evaluation of experts the following are skills needed to be improved:

**Grooming Skills:** Wearing of clean clothes all the time, Keeping fingernails short and clean, Using handkerchief or tissue to cover mouth when sneezing, and Using mouthwash and or dental floss appropriately.

**2.3 Social Skills:** Asking customers' orders and payments politely, Retaining orders in mind, so as not to forget it, Giving food orders to right customers, Expressing thoughts or ideas clearly and Saying polite expressions like "thank you", "po", "opo", "please", "excuse me" and "you're welcome".

**Cleaning Skills:** Recognizing when to replace commonly used items (tissue, utensils, and condiments), Working independently without being told, Removing trash and taking the filled garbage cans out for collection, Setting the table before and after the customer arrives and Arranging condiments and table napkins properly.

**Frying Skills:** Plugging and unplugging electric equipment before and after use, Opening jars and bottles safely, Recognizing reading skills like symbols, pictures and word labels, Observing safety rules and standards, Preparing cooked food on a paper plate, after cooking and Distinguishing sweet from sour sauce.

Sorting Skills: Naming different items found on the store, Distinguishing left from right, and Identifying simple shapes.

Money Changing: Familiarizing with different coins e.g., P5, P10 and denominations of money, Separating the coins into piles of common coinage, Understanding basic math operations like addition and subtraction, Using calculator if needed, Counting coins and bills correctly, Returning change correctly, if there's any, and Selecting appropriate bill and coin values in order as change is given to a customer.

Washing Dishes: Identifying cupboards, sinks and others is the only skill to be strengthened.

These identified vocational skills that needed to be improved served as the bases for the development of the customized vocational program for adults with intellectual disabilities.

### *Customized Vocational Program*

The customized vocational program for adults with intellectual disabilities helped them prepare for independent living, which is one of the aims of Special Education for children with special needs. Its vision is to provide comprehensive vocational training and support services to adults with intellectual disabilities to employment. Its mission is to establish a vocational program for adults with intellectual disabilities and train them with skills that will pave the way for their equal rights to employment opportunities.

The customized vocational program developed by the researcher contains the following:

- Overview of the Program
- Guidelines in Using the Program
- Program of Activities
- Specific Plans
- Component 1: Orientation
- Component 2: Workplace Readiness Training
- Component 3: Work-Samples: Job Shadows

### *Discussion*

The following is a part of the customized vocational program created by the researcher:

### **Customized vocational program for adults with mild intellectual disabilities**

#### **Goals**

This presents the skills expected to be acquired by adults at the end of the activity.

#### **Pre-requisite skills**

This contains the skills that the adults should have acquired prior to the activity.

#### **Materials**

This contains the materials that will aid in presenting the activities.

#### **Suggested activities**

This contains the activities that may be conducted with the use of the materials.

### Initial activity

These are the activities that will facilitate a review of past activity and reinforce the pre-requisite skills.

### Activity development

These are the activities that will motivate the pupils, present the current activity and facilitate mastery of skills

### Evaluation

This contains an activity, response or actual product that will help teachers determine if the objectives have been achieved.

Each activity will have materials, which are to be used by the adults individually with the teacher's guidance. A group of learners may also use them by taking turns. The teacher can guide each learner on the proper use of the materials or demonstrate each step of the procedures. Each lesson may be finished or not in one activity. The teacher must be sensitive enough to the learners' needs and adjust the lesson or add another related activity if necessary.

PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES					
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	COMPONENT /ACTIVITY / STRATEGY	RESOURCES		Time Frame	Success Indicators
		Human	Non Human		
1. ORIENTATION					
• Become aware of objectives and activities of the program • Enumerate different tasks of the program • State the importance of training under a vocational program	1. The SPED teacher will start to check the attendance and parents will be given their seat as they listen to the orientation. The teacher will ask her students to recite the guidelines in listening and behaving inside the classroom.	• The SPED teacher	• Laptop	1 day (3 hours)	Evaluation of the participants
	2. The teacher will show pictures of adults with mild intellectual disabilities who are already employed and living independently. Discuss that this will not be possible without undergoing into a vocational program.	• Adults with Mild intellectual disabilities (Participants)	• Projector		
	3. The teacher will show a video presentation of a person with a disability working in a known establishment.	• Parents / Guardians	• Speakers		
	4. The teacher will then present the customized vocational program through a PowerPoint presentation. Parents will also be given a copy of the program. The teacher will enumerate the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the customized vocational program.		• Copy of the Customized Vocational Program		
	5. The teacher will also explain the three divisions of the customized vocational program: The Orientation, Workplace Readiness Training and Work Samples. Each division will be explained briefly.		• Evaluation of Entry Skills (Vocational Skills)		



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6. The teacher will also take the opportunity to solicit support from the parents as they extend the lesson taught in the school to their homes. Reminders will also be given to them.
  7. Questions from the parents (if there are any) will then be answered by the SPED teacher.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	COMPONENT /ACTIVITY / STRATEGY	RESOURCES Human	Non Human	Time Frame	Success Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Construct a paper lip</li> <li>Learn a new song "Sing a Song of Brushing"</li> <li>Follow proper way of brushing the teeth</li> <li>Discuss the importance of brushing teeth</li> </ul>	<b>2.1.1 GROOMING:</b>				
	<b>Brushing Teeth</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The employees will sign the daily time sheet.</li> <li>The teacher will explain that they will have a 14-day course entitled "Proper Grooming". This course will make the students understand proper grooming for work. A certificate will be given to them once they have acquired the skills in grooming.</li> <li>Teach the employees a new song: Sing a Song of Brushing</li> <li>Name the materials placed on the table.</li> <li>Have each employee cut out two red construction paper lips (Make a pattern for the students to trace and cut out) and lots of white construction paper teeth (square pieces).</li> <li>Have each student glue the lips and the teeth to a piece of blue construction paper.</li> <li>Through the constructed paper lip, teach the task analysis for brushing teeth: Through the constructed paper lip, teach the <i>task analysis</i> for brushing teeth: (while demonstrating it with the use of the paper lip).</li> <li>Follow the task analysis, but this time, let one teacher aide demonstrate it while the teacher explains the task. (Pictures of each step are also presented) <i>Brushing the teeth will become a routine activity after taking meals.</i></li> <li>Continue the task until employees work independently without prompts or assistance.</li> <li>Discuss the importance of brushing teeth each night before bed, plaque forms on our teeth, which can cause</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The SPED teacher</li> <li>Adults with Mild intellectual disabilities (Participants)</li> <li>1 teacher aide</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>blue, white, red construction paper (size can vary)</li> <li>paper lips pattern</li> <li>scissors</li> <li>glue</li> <li>white paint</li> <li>paint brushes</li> <li>yellow marker</li> <li>toothbrush</li> <li>toothpaste</li> <li>dental floss, mouthwash</li> <li>Task analysis pictures</li> </ul>	3 days (4 hours per day)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain the reasons for brushing the teeth</li> <li>Well constructed paper lips with paper teeth</li> <li>Solo demonstration of the proper way of brushing teeth</li> <li>Evaluation form of employees in Brushing Teeth signed by the teacher</li> </ul>

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- cavities, or areas of decay.
11. After the students leave for the day, use a yellow marker to color some teeth on each student's project.
  12. The next day, explain to the students that the teeth on their projects didn't get brushed and plaque has formed on them.
  13. Sing the song taught to them while showing the proper way of brushing the teeth.
  14. Have each student "brush away" the plaque with a toothbrush and toothpaste (paint brushes and white paint).
  15. The employees sign out on the daily time sheet.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES	COMPONENT /ACTIVITY / STRATEGY	RESOURCES Human Non Human	Time Frame	Success Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Witness an up-close look at what a "real job" is like</li> <li>• Perceive the connection between what they learn in the classroom and what they will need to achieve in their goals</li> <li>• See that they have choices in life</li> </ul>	<b>3.1 WORK SAMPLES: JOB SHADOWS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Properly groomed employees ready for work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher-made exercises</li> <li>• Coins</li> <li>• Peso bills</li> <li>• Sari-sari store items</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents' permit</li> </ul>
	<p>Internships</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explain to the employees that they are about to have their internship through job shadowing. <i>Job shadowing</i> is a work experience option where students learn about a job by walking through the work day as the shadow of a competent worker. The job shadowing work experience is a temporary, unpaid exposure to the workplace in an occupational area of interest to the student. Students witness first hand the work environment, employability and occupational skills in practice, the value of professional training and potential career options. Job shadowing is designed to increase career awareness, help model student behavior through examples and reinforce in the student the link between classroom learning and work requirements.</li> <li>2. The employees will be divided into three groups that will be rotated after a month in the following establishments:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sari-Sari Stores</li> <li>• Eateries</li> <li>• Fish ball stands</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. All of the establishments are found inside the school premises.</li> <li>4. As a requirement: The parents or guardians of the adults must sign an</li> </ol>			

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agreement between them  
and the school's Special  
Education Department.

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### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings, the developed **customized vocational program** was capable of supporting adults with intellectual disabilities to improve their vocational skills in grooming, social skills, cleaning, frying, sorting, selling, money changing and washing dishes. Aside from these skills, they can also be trained to develop their physical, intellectual and socio-emotional skills through their participation in the customized vocational program. All vocational activities were attainable, adequate and congruent with the objectives. The resources and success indicators were also appropriate.

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