

TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING (TVET) FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: IMPLEMENTATION IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

All children are unique and are influenced by cultural, linguistic, intellectual, psychological, medical, social and economic factors. These factors create a need for a varied educational environment that provides for, and accommodates, each child's strengths and areas of needed improvement. Students classified as having a learning difficulty are a heterogeneous group and have a wide variety of characteristics, ranging from academic difficulties to cognitive and social-emotional problems (Kraayenord and Elkins, 1990). They face barriers in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Institution. Community College in Malaysia offers Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) courses to post-secondary students and provide lifelong learning to individuals and local communities to improve the quality of life. The core function of Community College in Malaysia is to provide pre-employment training or pre-employment education to school leavers who can contribute to the development of the country. TVET for Students with Learning Disabilities in Malaysia Community College faces several challenges since majority of the content of the courses are practical-based. The main purpose of this paper is to review best practices in the implementation of Special Skills Certificate in teaching and learning as well as to carry out research on its effectiveness in Community College that integrates the students, environment and lecturers who have expertise in TVET. The study carried out in 7 Community Colleges in Malaysia that offer Special Skills Certificates. The target population of the study consisted of the lecturers who are teaching this programme. Observation and interview were used as the instruments for data collection. Results showed that the environment variable, lecturers and students themselves play an important role in the success of the Special Skills Certificate in community colleges. Findings also indicated the challenges in delivery techniques for students with learning disabilities. Therefore, this paper recommends adding the number of lecturers or well-trained persons with disabilities to the Special Program Certificates and also to provide assistance to students. There is also the need for Community Colleges to upgrade the facilities and increase the number of Special Skills Certificate in community colleges

throughout the country so that these opportunities can be enjoyed by all students with learning disabilities.

Keywords: TVET, Learning Disabilities, Community Colleges in Malaysia

Introduction

Malaysia is working hard in upgrading the country's status towards being a developed nation in the year 2020. In RMK-10 (the 10th Malaysia Plan), the government has aimed at bringing technical and vocational education and training to its prime in order to make the nation's high income, a reality. This aim will be achieved only if the work skill, particularly of the school leavers, is high when they venture into the job market.

In directly it is seen as the responsibility of Community Colleges to upgrade the level of education in order to improve the standard of skill and competency among graduates towards complying with the needs of the industries. Special attention should be given to the human capital in globalizing TVET and to make the high income economy, a reality. In terms of holistic human development, community college education should focus in embedding noble values in the curriculum as well as student activities.

Community College provides alternative path compared to the formal education to the secondary school graduates, for them to acquire education and training in technical and vocational fields. Community College empowerment phase is a process to upgrade the achievement of community college as the main TVET providing institution as well as to make it the hub of lifelong learning where TVET is widen to its prime as to uplift the image of community colleges among the community.

Based on the college community empowerment programme, ministry of higher learning agenda can be implemented in a more strategic manner, more focused and create a community which is competitive and outstanding. Hence, the community will have the potential to put Malaysia in the limelight of the world. (Dato' Seri Mohamed Khaled Bin Nordin, 2012). Community Colleges, produce trained and knowledgeable human capital, creating a holistic personality among the students who will in return be able to upgrade the nation's socio-economy status. Continuous commitment and well maintained cooperation among the citizens of community colleges will strengthen the relevancy as well as the practical system in community colleges. (Dato' Amir Bin Md Noor, 2012).

The citizens with disability (OKU) are those who had never been left out in the nation building and its development. The contribution made by the citizens with disability towards the development and the generation of the nation's economy as does the contribution of the abled, has never been denied. In the job market, the citizens with disability are categorized as reserved work force, having the potential to be employed in the government and private sectors. The special consideration by the government towards the welfare of the citizens with disability can be seen through a few schemes that the government has offered to them. Among the schemes is the Disabled Entrepreneur Scheme (SBGP-OKU) in order to develop their economic sector. This scheme is made available through grants to help the disabled young entrepreneurs to develop their small scale businesses, thus creating job opportunity for many among them. For this an allocation of RM22 million has been given through the 9th Malaysia

plan, as the initial capital for them to enhance their businesses. Besides that a scheme known as the Disabled Education Scheme (SPOKU) has been launched by the Department of Human Resource in line with Section 29, Disabled Act 2008 and the Disabled Human Rights Convention(Act 685) where the citizens with disability have the rights and opportunity to be employed as would the abled (The Human Resource Department Official Website Peninsula Malaysia, 2011).

The success at educational level gives a strong life-long impact on the capability of independency to the citizens with disability. Through higher education these people are able to upgrade their knowledge, widen their social skills, acquire academic qualification and generate their power of mind. All these experiences are important in empowering themselves(Hurst, 1996).

Community College Special Skill Certificate (Sijil Kemahiran Khas di Kolej Komuniti)

In order to fulfill the new economy model which emphasises on the collectiveness of the whole community, community colleges take the initiative to offer Special Skills Certificate. This programme has been developed based on the needs of the slow learners who need knowledge as well as skills for their living. This approach is able to enable them to be more independent and increase their household income. Besides that this approach helps in identifying the true potential of the disabled ones.

There are 7 Special Skill programmes conducted in a few community colleges in Malaysia:

- Certificate in Basic Culinary
- Certificate in Basic Creative Needlework
- Certificate in Basic Information Technology
- Certificate in Basic Photography
- Certificate in Basic Food Processing
- Certificate in Basic Pastry
- Certificate in Basic Landscape

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities refer to a number of conditions that might affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual disabilities.(Learning Disabilities Association of Canada and the BC Association of School Psychologists.)

LDAofKY has defined learning disability as a neurobiological disorder in which a person's brain works or is structured differently. These differences interfere with a person's ability to think and remember. Learning disabilities can affect a person's ability to speak, listen, read, write, spell, reason, recall, organize information, and do mathematics.

A learning disability can't be cured or fixed. With the right support and intervention, however, children with learning disabilities can succeed in school and go on to successful, often distinguished careers later in life. Parents can help children with learning disabilities achieve such success by encouraging their strengths, knowing their

weaknesses, understanding the educational system, working with professionals and learning about their strategies for dealing with specific difficulties.

To improve understanding of learning disabilities, researchers at the NICHD and other institutions are studying areas of the brain and how they function. Scientists have found that learning disabilities are related to areas of the brain that deal with language and have used imaging studies to show that the brain of a dyslexic person develops and functions differently from a typical brain. Factors that affect a developing fetus, such as alcohol or drug use, can lead to a learning disability. Other factors in an infant's environment may play a role as well. In addition, children who do not receive the support necessary to promote their intellectual development early on may show signs of learning disabilities once they start school. (Eunice Kennedy Shriver, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development).

Common Learning Disabilities

Dyslexia - a language based disability, in which a person has trouble understanding words, sentences, or paragraphs.

Dyscalculia - a mathematical disability in which a person has a difficult time solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts.

Dysgraphia - a writing disability in which a person finds it hard to form letters or write within a defined space.

Auditory and Visual Processing Disabilities - sensory disability in which a person has difficulty understanding language despite normal hearing and vision.

Attention Deficit Disorder - is an inability to control behavior as a result of difficulty in processing sensory stimuli.

Research Objective

This research is conducted to identify the effect of TVET among the students with learning disabilities in community colleges.

To identify the relation between the lecturers and the teaching and learning of TVET among the students with learning disabilities in community colleges.

To identify the effect of environment factors and the teaching and learning of TVET among the students with learning disabilities in community colleges.

To identify the effect of factors related to students with learning disabilities towards teaching and learning of TVET among the students with learning disabilities in community colleges.

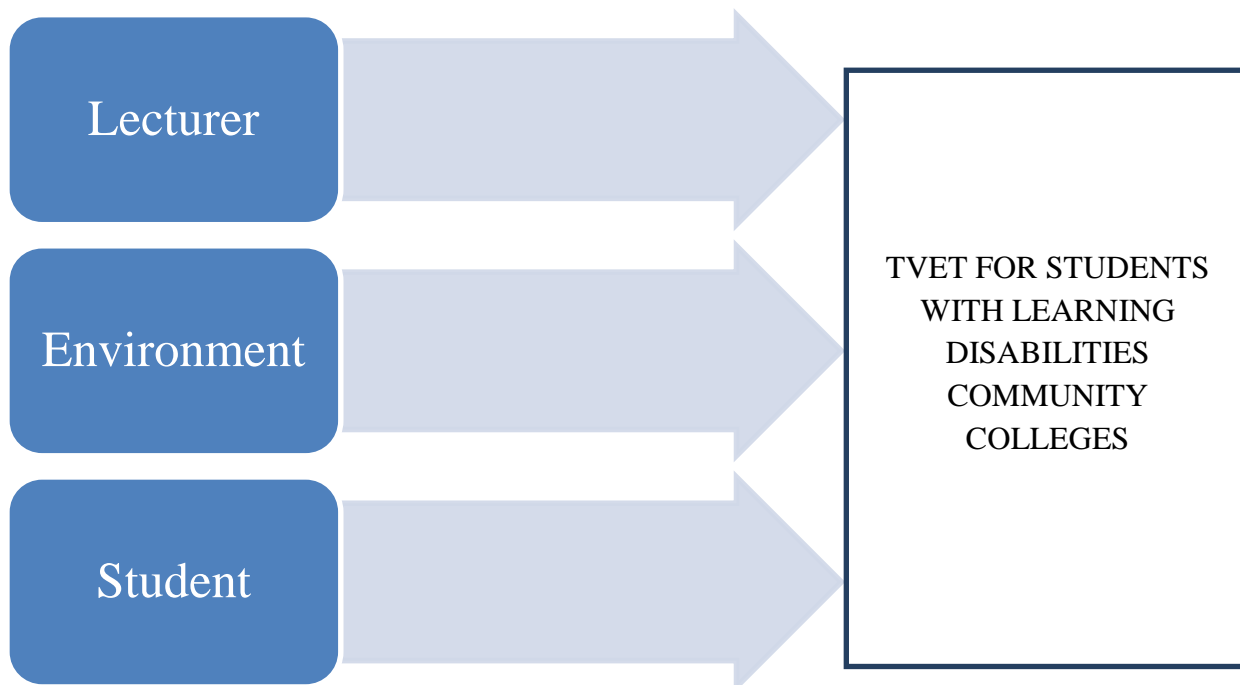
Research Question

Is there a relation between the lecturers and the teaching and learning of TVET among the students with learning disabilities in community colleges?

Do environment factors have effect on the teaching and learning of TVET among the students with learning disabilities in community colleges?

Do factors related to students with learning disabilities students have effect on the teaching and learning of TVET among the students with learning disabilities students in community colleges?

Contextual Framework



Literature Review

A report by the Disability Rights Task Force stated that high quality education that fulfills the needs of the less able students is needed at this era where so many challenges are meet day in and day out (Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People, 1978). This shows that the government has been taking initiative to increase the educational facilities for these special people in our nation. This is because Education Act 1996 (chapter 8) states a number of rules and regulations related to this issue. The same applies to the awareness and attitude towards the need of such special education in our country, particularly so by the government, has been very positive. This initiative is seen through the setting up of special units in 1964 and 1995 to bear the responsibility of educational development for the special people (Wong Huey Slew & Sandiyao Sebestian, 2002). Besides that the aims of SENDA 2001 is to ensure that the needs of the special children are immediately indentified so that steps are taken to help in cultivating their potentials to the maximum (Tie Fatt Hee, 2006).

However, a few factors should be taken into consideration in providing educational opportunities to these less able people. Tinklin dan Hall (1999) have identified four obstacles among the less able Higher Learning Institution students. They are resources in physical environment, enrollment process in the higher learning institutions, information access during learning process and the level of awareness among the academic as well as non-academic staffs in the institutions.

Konur (2000), in his research related to the civil rights of the less able students in the United Kingdom found that these students face discrimination at every level of learning, including the intake process, enrollment process, service channel and placement after graduation.

Students with learning disabilities interacted with the teacher, other students, and classroom activities at much lower rates than did students without such disabilities (McIntosh et al., 1993). Hence, this requires the service of trained and skilled tutors to deliver and guide students with Learning Disabilities. This has also been stated by Candace S. Bos & Sharon Vaughn, 1994 as students whose learning and behavior problems are so severe that they warrant special assistance may be involved in a range of support services. These support services include remedial reading or maths, counseling, individualized instruction with a teaching assistant and special education.

Teaching staff should be able to master special skills including language and visual presentation in teaching and learning process. Gerbeer, 1993, in relation to this issue stated that students with learning and behavior problems generally have vocabularies that are more limited, and their word meaning are generally more concrete and less flexible. The use of visual representations or pictures may be particularly salient for students with learning and behavior problems (Candace S. Bos & Sharon Vaughn, 1994).

Methodology

Research design

The research design is descriptive and it explores the Special Skill Certificate lecturers' perception towards the effect of teaching and learning of TVET. This is a qualitative research using interview approach.

Research Sample and population

This research involves 7 lecturers from 7 different community colleges which conduct 7 different Special Skill Certificate programmes. The programmes conducted are: Basic Culinary in Selayang Community College, Certificate in Basic Creative Needlework in Kuching Community College, Certificate in Basic Information Technology in Sungai Siput Community College, Certificate in Basic Photography di Paya Besar Community College, Certificate in Basic Food Processing Jelebu Community College, Certificate in Basic Pastry in Bayan Baru Community College and Certificate in Basic Landscape in Masjid Tanah Community College.

Research Instrument

The researcher uses interview as the main instrument in the collection of data. The research is conducted based on 3 variables:

Table 1 – Variables and items used in interview

Variable	Item
Lecturer	Special Skill Teaching Experience Number of lecturers (in ratio to the students) Teaching and learning method used Evaluation method used
Environment	Basic facilities such as toilet, wheelchair path and others

Students	Teaching aids Special tools in Teaching and Learning sessions Discipline Interest Attitude Examination Results Disabled allowances
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Research Findings

Lecturer

The research shows that lecturers play an important role in the implementation and the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The lecturers involved in teaching and learning of this programme have Special Education Certificates. Selayang Community College also enrolls students with speech and hearing defects besides the students with Learning Disabilities. Lecturers handling these programmes too have sign language as an additional skill. There are no any special criteria set on the selection of lecturers to teach this programme. Community Colleges that conduct this programme, announce an open offer to the lecturers who are interested to teach Special Skill Certificate courses. This approach is aimed at reducing the burden of handling such courses. This is because the lecturers who teach such courses are seen as having interest in teaching the students with learning disabilities as well as to manage these students. There are also community colleges which set experience as criteria among the lecturers to teach these special education programmes. The lecturers who are assigned to teach the special education programmes are then sent for Trainer of Trainer for special programmes or special education certificate courses before they teach the special programmes. The normal lecturer to student ratio for such programmes is 1 to 4. Hence, 2 lecturers are needed to teach one class of around 10 students. Community Colleges too set teaching guidance as to have a maximum of 14 students to a class at any time. Teaching and learning method for these programmes is to apply the demonstration and visual presentation approach before the students carry out practical sessions, either individually or in groups. The personal approach is also used to guide the students who are really left out in their learning process. In terms of evaluation, a 100% practical sessions are carried out for technical courses whereas theory component is used to evaluate general studies (the Malay Language, English Language, Islamic Studies and Moral subjects as well as entrepreneurship).

Environment

Although students with learning disabilities are not included within the category of students with physical defects, there are Community Colleges that provide special facilities such as toilets, for them. Since till now there is no wheelchair path or ramp, community colleges have set rules to enroll students with Learning Disabilities who do not have physical defects.

In terms of teaching aids there are certain programmes that need more teaching materials than the normal or typical students. Among the programmes which need more teaching materials are The Basics of Creative Needlework. For this course, the topic on sewing measurement, real mattress is needed for the measurement of bed sheet and a real window pane or panel for measuring curtains. For other programmes no such added material is needed because these students are able to handle the teaching and learning materials provided for them as would the typical learners. For Basics of Creative

Needlework programme students do not use heavy duty machines. They use the portable sewing machine and domestic sewing machines like the one they use at home. This is done with the aim of enabling the students to identify the sewing machines at home.

Students

Majority of the students with Learning Disabilities are well disciplined when it comes to punctuality. Most of them attend class on time for the in line with every schedule. The percentage of attendance is high. The reason for any absent cases is normally to do with health. Besides listening to instructions, putting focus in the classroom, respecting lecturers, being cautious in handling the learning materials, they too have much interest in the programme that they enroll into. These students are able to pay attention to the teaching and learning process for nearly 8 hours. Nevertheless, lecturers should be creative in every teaching and learning activity they plan and carry out. Through this the students will not feel bored or tired and loose focus, they will also not take much time going out of the class without purpose.

The examination and evaluation results are also within the high percentage. All the students passed all the subjects that they set for. The practical components in the examination and evaluation help students to pass since the early stage of evaluation. Before the students begin to answer any examination, the lecturer will do a demonstration as guidance in answering the questions. There were students from Selayang Community College who scored a CGPA of 4.0 for the evaluation in Basic Culinary Certificate course. This shows that even the students with learning disabilities can excel in academic fields.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Being the citizen of Malaysia, even the students with learning disabilities have the social right for access and equity in education the promise of access and equity in education for them is the most important approach for the empowerment of the disabled in the country. They are not like the other students who do not have any defects, these students with learning disabilities need a loving and caring environment and support services from the lecturers in order to achieve optimum education. In reference to the source from Ministry of Women, Family and Social Development, among the implementation of policy for the disabled persons is accessibility that is to provide an environment free from barrier, including those within and outside the working area, housing areas as well as public places. Education is another major policy whereby the disabled should have an increased the accessibility to education at all levels, including life-long learning.

The research results show that the environment, lecturer and student variables play important roles in the success of Special Skill Certificates in community colleges. All these three factors contribute towards the effectiveness of TVET implementation among the students with learning disabilities. Lecturers who have interest as well as experience in managing the students with learning disabilities are the main factors in the success of teaching and learning special skills such as Sign Language skills, and special education skills. These are also seen as the value added skills. The environment factors too are seen as important in the effectiveness of teaching and learning TVET among the students with learning disabilities in community colleges. This is done through providing basic facilities, teaching aids including visuals. All the respondents stated that

students with Learning Difficulties are more interested in visual presentations for all subjects. Factors related to the deep interest, discipline, and good attitude among the less able students to contribute to the success of special programmes.

Special programme enrollment statistic for the students with learning disabilities shows a high percentage and indicates an excellent intake status. Based on the norms of intake set at 14 students per class community colleges involved in such programmes take steps weed out the student intake through interview. This is to ensure that only the students who fulfill the intake criteria get the chance to enroll. Among the selection criteria are: competency in Writing, Reading and Mathematics (3M) besides a reasonable achievement in sports. There is a high demand by the students with learning disabilities to enroll in TVET programmes. This shows that such programmes are relevant and of high quality.

The researchers suggest that the number of lecturers handling Special Skill Programmes is increased. Assistant lecturers, as seen in the Special Education schools, should also be provided. Besides that, infrastructure to suit the disabled students should be increased. In addition, more programme providers (that is more community colleges) should be instructed to cater for the high demand of Special Skill Programmes so that more students from this category could enjoy the benefit of Special Skill Programmes. In line with the proposal by Deputy Director General of Education (School Division), Azizah Abd Gani (2007) being the citizen of Malaysia, the special students should also be given the right to enjoy the development of the nation and that they too be given equal rights in every field, including education.

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