

CONSULTATION ON JOB MARKETABILITY FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEED AND THEIR FAMILIES

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ABSTRACT

Consultation for job marketability or career strategy is delivery of information to students and parents (family) in planning career appropriately according to the students' capabilities and abilities. Knowledge requirements and career information and work among families of special education students are still lacking in terms of being considered for study in Malaysia. This study aimed to explore the marketability consultation process among the students which was carried out by students of special education for students and families of students with special educational needs. The qualitative study was conducted with 11 special education students and their families. The consultation process had 2 phases whereby for phase 1, consultations were conducted by special education students. For the second phase, consultation and collaborative process involved students and special education undergraduate students from education guidance and counseling. Analysis of data from verbatim of reflection and consultation with special education students was analyzed using N vivo 11. The results from the two-phase consultation process has shown that the family are lacking in terms of knowledge in work marketability and challenges in getting proper education and training for their children. The results also show the marketability of consultation work carried out has provide experience to coach special education teacher trainees to be more empathetic towards special education students and their families.

Keywords: Students with Special Educational Need; Job Marketability, Special Education Teacher Trainees

INTRODUCTION

Consultation in school have done at school by school counsellor as early as the 1960s, with parents, teachers, and administrators was considered an important service of effective school counselling program (Hoskins et al., 2007). Consultation is an activity offered in variety work setting which set as a professional supportive relationship process with individuals or group. Consultation is defined as problem solving process that is done collaboratively between two or more consultants and consultations in the effort to benefit to an individual or clients in carrying out responsibilities in a two way interaction (Hammack, 1994). Consultation in schools helps teachers attempting to implement social and emotional learning programs to students (a) by having a caring relationships form the foundation for lasting learning, (b) with emotions which affect how learning takes place and what is learned, and (c) with goal setting and problem solving which provide direction and energy for learning (Maurice & Leverett, 2008). Currently consultation is expanding in schools that focus on the increasing students' achievement in academic, discipline, social, psychology and skills. According to Coyne (2006), consultation with children and their parents at schools is no longer a common issue but it is becoming a major point to be considered which has been actively acknowledged and promoted by NGO in the West. Perera-Diltz (2011) found out that 79% of consultations that were carried out by counsellors also involved the principal, parents and teachers. Her study also suggested that the consultation in schools can use the model consultation of interdisciplinary approach. It means that the consultations in

schools do not only involved normal students, but also for disabled students or also known as students with special educational needs.

Consultation with students of special educational needs can help to tighten the bond between parents and the school system (Hoskins, 2007). Hoskins writes that various models of consultations should be practiced by the counsellors and teachers so that the consultations are beneficial for all the students in schools including students with special educational needs. These special students should be given the power to act as agents of change in their own lives. They will decide what they want to be by being actively involved in making decisions as whether they want to go to school or go to work and care for their own lives within their community. Parents, educators and other professionals are central to the support system for these students especially in developing skills for these students while they are at primary or secondary schools and even at institutions of higher learning (Izzoa & Lamb, 2003).

Job marketability is known as work opportunities or individuals' capability to get a job. There are many studies on job marketability conducted in Malaysia but the focus is on normal students rather than students of special educational needs. According to Lau, Ahmad and Chew (2011) job offers for these special students are very limited in the government and private sectors. Although there are employment policies these special students in the government sector, such opportunities are very limited when comparing the number of jobs with the actual figure of disabled people in Malaysia. Therefore these researchers suggested that close kin of these special students such as parents and family members should participate in the career counselling process. Thus the consultation of job marketability involving special education teacher trainees as consultant, the parents or family members as consultee can help these special students (the clients) to function effectively in job marketability skills. They will realize the various alternatives offered in job marketability and they will increase their potential in job marketability for future plan.

Job opportunities among disabled people are still low in Malaysia. Several studies and surveys carried out in universities and related government agencies showed that many factors and obstacles were faced by these disabled people in getting a job, although they have similar academic qualification as normal people (Lau, Ahmad, & Chew, 2011). A study carried out by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development highlights 11 findings that show disabled people really need awareness in job marketability that covers training, skills, workshops and employers' acceptance. In this study, 90.8% of family members of disabled people thought that more trainings and services were needed in order to improve the lives of disabled people in terms of training, job preparation, daily care and recreation. Moreover, the study showed that family members also need support in terms of training, workshop, counselling and moral support.

Studies on the level of awareness towards issues related to disabled people such as issues of adults with intellect deficiency were carried out by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. This study was conducted with the aim to observe five objectives. (1) To understand and assess the situation for disabled people with intellectual challenges. (2) To identify the services that they need. (3) To identify the support that families need. (4) To know the work situation for them. (5) To know the needs and attitude of the employers. The study shows that these disabled people lacked awareness of the working world that demands adaptation to the social surrounding. A study done by Zainudin, Norani and Ramlee (2009) suggests two skills for students of special educational needs with learning disabilities. They should learn internal vocational skills like craft, agriculture, entrepreneurship and cooking as well as vocational skills like sewing, carpentry, fixing engines, food services and housekeeping.

Government interest towards disabled people has increased throughout the years. Government agencies are keen to offer job opportunities for disabled people. A lot of effort has been done such as offering them more suitable jobs in government agencies, related organizations and corporate bodies. In addition, there is more focus on oriented training in order to help them to obtain skilled jobs. Financial support in the budget by the Malaysian government for the disabled people has increased over the years to help them get proper training.

Sarimah and Norshahril (2012) conducted a study on obstacles faced by disabled people (hearing impaired) in getting a job. In the study, the researcher suggested several ideas. (1) All employers must have basic facilities for disabled people. (2) Counselling and guidance teachers should give them motivational exercises before they end their schooling so that they will be more motivated. (3) Students with special educational needs must be independent and confident in deciding on their career. (4) Exposure should be given to the families of disabled children in order for them to have a positive outlook in raising their children to have a better future. Therefore, in this study the researchers explored the process in consulting job marketability between special education teacher trainees at the National University of Malaysia and the parents of students

with special educational needs at secondary schools. Through this study the researchers observed the present knowledge of parents in job marketability which involved the skills needed by their children for their future work.

The purpose of the study was to explore the consultation process for job marketability conducted by special education teacher trainees for students with special educational needs and their families based on the learning outcomes in class. The objectives of the study were:

- i. To explore the knowledge on job marketability among parents of students with special educational needs
- ii. To explore the challenges faced by parents of students with special educational needs in job marketability

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using qualitative approach with case study design. There were 33 special education teacher trainees of semester 5 from the interpersonal communication, counseling and consultation class involve in this research. The students were divided into 11 groups where each group will give consultation to a family of students with special educational needs. The study was done in 2 phases whereby in the first phase the students were exposed with consultation strategies in class for 2 weeks. The students attended a career workshop in increasing their knowledge for suitable jobs at school. Exercises and discussions as part of the consultation are carried out for 3 hours in order for the students to understand the process of consultation which will be carried out for the students and their families at school. In this study eleven families which have special need children determined by purposive sampling. The consultation was carried out for 3 hours based on the manual consultation prepared by the researchers.

The second phase was done through 2 meetings. In the first meeting, the teacher trainees (3 in a group) provided consultation for the students and their parents. The sessions were recorded in audio form and video based on the readiness of the students and their families. The second consultation was conducted after 2 weeks of the first meeting. The second meeting consultation, eleven students from undergraduate education majoring in guidance and counseling semester 2 participated in the second consultation as they have more knowledge in career. The second consultation is a collaborative consultation with the purpose to increase the knowledge of the parents. All the consultations were conducted at a family house.

The consultation process was presented by the students in a workshop for 2 days. In the workshop all the students presented their reflections and feelings while in the consultation with their parents. Their reflections in the workshop were recorded and documented in written report so will be findings of the study. Recordings of the consultation in audio form and video were transferred into verbatim to be main research findings. Both data were analysed using N vivo in order to create themes related to the objectives of the study. The themes were created deductively and inductively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The research findings answer two research questions. (1) What is the knowledge on job marketability among parents of the students with special educational needs? (2) What are the challenges faced by parents of students with special educational needs in job marketability? For the first research question, both parents and families admitted that they did not have the necessary knowledge on the skills needed by their children in order for them to work as normal children and only for families had such knowledge. As for the second question, four themes were identified. (1) Physical facilities and logistics, (2) Health problems, (3) Social economic status of the families, (4) School and community support.

Exploring The Knowledge on Job Marketability Among Parents of Students with Special Educational Needs

In the study, out of 11 families only four families admitted that they had some knowledge on job marketability suited to their children's abilities and skills. One of them chose Giat Mara as a skill training center for his child.

Actually both parents knew the fields offered by Giat Mara..towards skills..more on skills...

All four families chose skill training for their children so that their children could have some level of job marketability. Such parents were aware that giving their children proper skill trainings could help them in getting a job in the future. There were even parents who had a close relationship with the special education teachers to the extent that the special students were able to gain knowledge about the skills needed to train with the corporate sector.

Father did say that he is looking for extra information to send Nisa to community centres like interesting school program that she told us...every Thursday the special students will go to Tesco to arrange items on the racks, which the skill can be related to the special students.....

In the study there were parents who always relied on the special education teachers to convey information that were related to the training and skills which could provide job opportunities for their children. Thus, teachers who are involved with special education with knowledge in managing students for job marketability are important since such knowledge can reduce the emotional burden of the parents.

His father likes to seek the teacher if he wants any information....

Meanwhile, the seven families in the study admitted that they did not have any knowledge on job marketability. The parents only relied on the teachers and school because they did not have any clue on how to get the required information to plan their children's job marketability. They did not have a clear vision on what to do and expected the school and the government to help them by giving information and guidance.

In the second meeting..the mother admitted..I don't have any information and we don't know how to get info. Any information that we get..is from school but the teachers did not give much info....

Low economic status among the parents resulted in a lack of knowledge on job marketability. Too busy with working in order to support their family, both parents, particularly the father, did not have time to look for information on job marketability to plan for their children's future..

Looking at the statement..actually his parents do not have much time with kids. The father works from morning till night, then the mother works from evening till morning..the father is a lorry driver..so time...time

Throughout the study, only four families had knowledge on job marketability while the remaining seven families did not have such knowledge. Those with such knowledge were able to guide and provide motivation and support by going to school and training centers. Moreover, they always cooperated with teachers and schools in skill based activities organized by them.

Physical Facilities and Logistics

The data analysis revealed that the physical facilities and logistics proved to be a challenge for parents who were unable to motivate their children in getting skill training whether in school or training centers provided by the government. Physical facilities like wheelchair are needed for special children to go to school or training centers. However, there are some children who do not use such facilities like wheelchairs because their sick parents need the wheelchair more than they do. In the study there were children who received free wheelchairs from the government or from an NGO. However, these children were unable to use the wheelchairs because they were shared with other family members, which caused them to not attend school.

She has only one wheelchair but her father uses it, her father had a stroke. After that Emi does not go to school, just sitting at home

Besides that, transportation was a main problem for parents of special needs children. The parents felt hopeless when it came to solving their children's transportation problems to go to school or training centers on a daily basis. According to the parents, this problem had been reported to the responsible parties, but until now no feedback or action to help them in this matter was reported.

about JKM and everything..he does not know..about transportation he really hopes a lot because he said that he tries to find transportation for his child to go to school

Physical problem of students with special educational needs contribute to logistics challenge for school and training centers. Having big and heavy physique causes these children to seek help from their parents and others to move around their home and outside.

He is a bit overweight, has to be carried by others

From capability side, his movement is quite limited. Emm.. as for transportation he has to find someone who can carry his child to the car

Transportation or logistics proved to be a challenge faced by many families of special students. Transportation was the most needed facility by students to go to and from school or training centers.

Family Health Problems

In the study, three families out of 11 had chronic health problems. Chronic illnesses of the parents were cancer, diabetes, stroke, and heart problem.

We are very sympathetic with this family..the mother has cancer, the father has heart problem

Due to the parents' health problems, special students were unable to get the skill training needed for job marketability according to their skills and capabilities. These health problems also caused financial issues that prevented them from pursuing the required skill training.

Social Economic Status

Social economic status of the families was the third challenge faced by the families in the study. Out of 11 families, only two families did not have any financial difficulties in managing the educational and training needs of their special children. Most of these families were categorized as poor families who were unable to pay for the daily transportation of their special children to go to school.

For us this family is very poor and needs help

Although they receive financial assistance through Zakat and social welfare, it was not enough to sustain the transportation cost to school or training centers. The financial support was not enough as the parents did not have a monthly fixed income. Furthermore, some families had more than one special child and this increased their cost of living. Adding to the financial burden, some families stayed in rental houses which required them to pay house rental fees. Thus, financial status has stunted the commitment of these special students in school.

he only gets help from JKM and Encik Abdul Rahim with the help from PERKESO and no monthly income, and he stays in rented house one family, including help from JKM, zakat. Emmm..the help from JKM, he said that in one family only one get the support. It means that if there are three people who are in need, only one will get

The financial situation faced by almost all families with children in this study is something that should not be underestimated by the various parties associated with the child's special education. Families with children of special educational require financial assistance in accordance with their actual needs. These include the number of special education children in a family, the parents' income and the location of residence. Financial assistance should take into account the number of dependent parents, the location of residence, the status of their dwellings (lease or freehold) and the management costs of special education children.

School and Community Support

In the study, school and community support was identified as the challenge described by the parents who need emotional support through information given by school, their neighborhood and the community of their surroundings. One of the families informed that their neighbors did not care about the problems faced by

their special children.

Aa..very rural. So he said that the neighbors do not care about him

According to the parents in the study, any information about skill training by the school must be clear and accurate. This is because they want to know what has been done by their special children at the training centers so that they will not be worried.

when his father send him to Tesco Kajang, his father did not know what he is doing there in Kajang. After that he will get a briefing from the officer in charge

Therefore the parents were hoping that information on job marketability or any relevant information would be conveyed to them either in primary or secondary school. In the study, there were parents who suggested that the teachers could spend some time visiting the special students at home to convey the information if they were unable to go to school.

his mother said to us that when he was in primary school the teacher never go to their home so it was difficult for his mother to get info and had to go to school often to get info about his child

The four challenges faced by the parents in job marketability for their children with special educational needs are not easy and to be taken lightly. Thus, action from relevant parties especially the government needs to be carried out to help the parents who face these challenges. This is because the help given can provide equality in job marketability for these special students.

The findings show that knowledge on job marketability can help the parents plan their special children's job marketability. According to Kalssen (2007) students with learning disability are able to plan and make decision in their career if continuous social skill and job trainings are given to them. In the study, consultations on job marketability carried out by the teacher trainees to parents managed to give them some insights on job marketability. The information also helped them in playing an active role in choosing the right training center for their special children. Therefore by having such knowledge the parents were able to plan and act accordingly in sending their special children for training at suitable institutions. With the knowledge and skills, the parents had a better understanding of their children's values, attitude and emotions (Othman, 2006).

Career information that are well suited to the students' abilities and capabilities can be channeled properly through the teacher trainees for students with special educational needs and their families while in school. At school special education teachers are the closest figures with their parents and families. Parents and families have high expectations on special education teachers to give them the support required for their special children to join the job market after they finish secondary school. Job information and skill can be delivered through workshop or can be learnt in courses at universities. In the study, special education teacher trainees are exposed to the job information and skills suitable for students with special educational needs. Zainudin, Norani and Ramlee (2009) suggest that two skills should be given to students with special educational needs: internal vocational skills (art, agriculture, service, entrepreneurship and cooking) and vocational skills (sewing, carpentry, fixing engines, food services and housekeeping)

Research findings support findings from the survey conducted by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and by Sarimah and Norshahril (2012) who mentioned that basic facilities like transportation are vital in providing training for special students so they can get the necessary skills. In the study, almost half of the families were living in flats and shop houses without any lift. They need physical facilities like wheelchair ramps so they can use their wheelchairs with ease. Because of the absence of ramps, their movement was quite limited which caused difficulties to go to school and training centers. Thus, they became dependent on their parents and families to go up and down from their homes every day. Piškur and friends (2014) defined transportation needs as a required criterion by special students so that they could go to school and training centers. According to Hewitt-Taylor (2009) families need transportation for their special children not only to go to school, but also to buy family needs and to go out for recreational activities. He adds that transportation problem cause negative side effects for special children and their families, which triggers the feeling of being unwanted, unappreciated and discomforts.

Parents' good health and wellbeing are important in giving support for students with special educational needs. Parents with long term illness, chronic diseases and high medical expenses will cause their special children to be absent in school or training centers. DuPaul, Carson, and Qiong (2013) suggest that health screening of parents should be done because it will influence the wellbeing of their special children. Many studies report that parents with health issues are a cause of disturbance in the development of their special education (Christiansen, Anding, Schrott, & Röhrle, 2015; Bogosian, Hadwin, Hankins, & Moss-Morris, 2016).

Finance is a main challenge for students with special educational needs especially for parents who have no stable income or no income at all. More financial assistance is needed when the family has more than one child with special educational needs. Ministries or relevant agencies should do well to consider giving assistance so that financial matters will not hinder these special students from getting information on job marketability when they fail to attend school and training centers. If the families have enough financial assistance, the school, corporate bodies and community are able to convey the relevant information on job marketability to these special students. Strong collaboration and commitment between families, school, corporate bodies and community can create special students who can fulfill the needs of job market and to be independent financially.

CONCLUSION

Collaborative consultation between the special education teachers and parents will help the students with special educational needs when they finish secondary school or education at institutions of higher learning. Sharing information, knowledge and skills with special education teachers and the readiness and commitment of the parents who have knowledge of their children's potential will be able to guide and help the students groomed with job marketability values in various fields. If consultation on job marketability between parents and special education teachers can be carried out continuously, the plan will be a reality for special students to be individuals who can contribute to our nation.

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