

Research Article:

Developing Work Aspiration in Students with Learning Disabilities in Malaysia

Pang Jee Ching^{1,2*}, Lee Fong Yee³, Chin Li Hoong⁴, Ng Phek Lan⁵ and Te See Yin⁶

¹Faculty of Education, Languages, Psychology and Music, SEGi University, 9, Jalan Teknologi, PJU 5, Kota Damansara, 47810 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia

²Nilai University, Persiaran Universiti, Putra Nilai, 1, Persiaran Kolej Bbn, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia

³Faculty of Computing and Informatics, Multimedia University, Persiaran Multimedia, 63100 Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia

⁴SMK Teluk Gadong, Jalan Serampang 3, Off Jalan Teluk Pulau, 41100 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia

⁵SMK Puchong Permai, Persiaran Puchong Permai, Taman Puchong Prima, 47100 Puchong, Selangor, Malaysia

⁶SMK Puchong, Jalan Puchong Batu 14, Bandar Puchong Utama, 47100 Puchong, Selangor, Malaysia

*Corresponding author: pajcjajo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Students with learning disabilities (SLDs) aspire to work after they completed their secondary school education and many of them do not know what to expect which leads to inability to be employed in the employment. The aim of this study was to explore and develop work aspiration of SLDs in Malaysia through a series of 10 workshops by developing skills, interests, preferences and support needed for their prospective workplaces. Data was collected through online workshops for 32 SLDs with the support from their parents at home, teachers and practitioners. Qualitative research was conducted to explore the work aspiration in SLDs and findings were triangulated with observations, focus group interviews and documents analysis by the participants, parents and special education practitioners. Research questions highlighted the importance and the impact of developing work aspirations in SLDs. Findings indicated that intentional conversations about work and personalised teaching and learning materials have contributed to the development of work aspirations in SLDs. SLDs displayed increased knowledge about work and enhanced self-determination skills throughout the programme. This study implies the importance of maximising the learning opportunity and collaboration between special education teachers, practitioners and families in providing support for SLDs to aspire for work which has provided a glimpse of hope for the families. This study has impacted the lives of SLDs who are commonly marginalised and unheard of by instilling the aspiration for work as mental readiness for employment. It contributes to the education ecosystem and the disabled community in bridging the unemployment gap.

Keywords: Work aspiration, school to work transition, learning disabilities, special education

Published: 10 June 2025

To cite this article: Pang, J. C., Lee, F. Y., Chin, L. H., Ng, P. L., & Te, S. Y. (2025). Developing work aspiration in students with learning disabilities in Malaysia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Educators and Education*, 40(1), 299–316. <https://doi.org/10.21315/apjee2025.40.1.15>

INTRODUCTION

Many students with disabilities leave secondary school each year having secured neither employment nor placement in post-secondary education. Unlike students without disabilities who further their studies in colleges and universities, post-school outcomes of students with disabilities, particularly learning disabilities remain a startling disparity (Domin et al., 2020; Haber et al., 2016; Izam & Mohamed, 2020). In this study, students with learning disabilities consist of students with Autism, Down Syndrome, Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder, Global Developmental Disorder, Intellectual Disabilities and Specific Learning Disabilities as defined as one of the categories of persons with disabilities in Malaysia (Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat, 2025). According to Bialik and Mhiri (2022), students with learning disabilities (SLDs) often show the lowest rate of employment. This has caused worries and doubts in parents in term of working on their child's transition and career planning. Lack of self-determination skill is noted as the barrier for achieving a better work aspiration as the goal of the students beyond their secondary education (Andres-Garriz et al., 2024). In this study, transition training with the elements of developing self-determination skills and work aspiration is well-noted as essential and critical for SLDs for preparing for their future employment (Georgiadou et al., 2020). Work aspiration refers to the career outcome expectations (Chao et al., 2022) or desired worked related goals of the SLDs; these goals reflect their work engagement, perceived working opportunities, hopes and interests (Anderson et al., 2021; Rustad & Kassah, 2020). These aspirations are crucial as it is closely related to their academic achievement, self-efficacy and strategic career planning. However, SLDs find it challenging particularly due to society's prejudice, individual cognitive and physical disabilities which collectively limit themselves for career exploration (Lindsay et al., 2021). Schools and families are often viewed as being responsible for preparing SLDs with skills and knowledge relevant to the industry to reduce the unemployment issues commonly experienced by SLDs (Abdullah & Ibrahim, 2021; Melissa & Pang, 2022; Zainoriza et al., 2020).

The Setting and Development of Transition Programme

In Malaysia, the SLDs who registered for the Special Education Integrated Programme under the Ministry of Education (MoE) has been increasing every year, with a total number of 94,237 registered students in 2023 as per MoE record (Ministry of Education, 2024). The zero-reject policy implemented since 2019 has witnessed an increased number of students with special education needs. This is expected to grow the need for career transition programmes in the schools before employment. Under the school curriculum, this transition programme is designed to cater for students aged from 16 to 19. It is always a career concern for these students and their families when they are completing the programme in the school. For instance, many find it challenging to find a job upon their graduation (Izam & Mohamed, 2020). This indicates the importance of transition planning for SLDs. As asserted by Zainoriza et al. (2020), many of these students graduated without a work transition plan. This affects their employment status when they transited to local

sheltered workshops, day training programmes, community-based rehabilitation centres and social enterprises, performing manual and menial tasks. Often, in these organisations, they need to pay an amount of fee to attend the programme. Some received a decent amount of allowance besides getting allowance from the government. They would gain some work-based learning from the vocational programmes they attended (Anizam et al., 2013). Some managed to transit to employment whilst most remained in the workshops or at home. According to Bialik and Mhiri (2022), such a scenario is referred to as violating Article 27 of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) where the rights of persons with disabilities to access open, inclusive and accessible workplaces are not upheld.

This raised a question of the role of the school to be proactive in carrying out the work transition programme that can prepare these students for career readiness. This should include the commitment of the special education teachers in executing the programme. Yaakub and Hamzah (2020) highlighted the average commitment of special education teachers which should provide avenue for improvement specifically in getting a work transition plan. The argument is that many do not have the right job skills and aptitudes to meet the needs of employers in an integrated competitive employment setting (Zainal & Hashim, 2019; Mohd Syazwan et al., 2021). The job-seeking and employment issues are compounded with poor self-esteem and dilemmas of self-determination commonly found in SLDs (Andres-Garriz et al., 2024; Estrapala & Reed, 2019; Pacha, 2013; Pang et al., 2016). Estrapala and Reed (2019) relate it to the role of the family in preparing their children with disabilities towards employment underpinning the development of self-determination and goal setting. Bialik and Mhiri (2022) highlighted the stigma and negative perception of the abilities of SLDs are the main barriers to accessing employment besides issues such as unfair pay, gender discrimination, safety and security support for their child. As such, the barriers to access employment should implicate family involvement and inter-agency collaboration to make an impact in the effective deliverance of any transition programme for these SLDs (Bialik & Mhiri, 2022; Mohd Syazwan et al., 2021; Zainoriza et al., 2020).

The development of supported employment and the Job Coach Service Programme in Malaysia since 2005 has witnessed the commitment of our government to sustain gainful employment for persons with disabilities in Malaysia (Yeo et al., 2019). Such development has increased the awareness of employing persons with disabilities, to work towards an inclusive workplace by developing job coaches to provide job placement and employment for persons with disabilities. It is noted that progressive periodical monitoring and evaluation are needed to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability whilst the transition training programme plays a critical role as the implication for gainful employment. Moreover, to improve the quality of life of SLD, the Malaysian government has granted them equal access to educational rights under Section 28 of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 (Othman & Rahmat, 2020). This act helps to increase the job opportunities for SLDs to participate and enjoy free employment transition training that is provided by government secondary schools.

Transition programme for SLDs encompasses a broad-based knowledge which commonly includes academic skills, communication skills, social and interpersonal skills, and occupational and vocational skills. In Malaysia, the transition model has six components, namely daily living skills, self-advocacy skills, adult living skills, career skills, career preparation and supported employment (Ministry of Education, n.d). This model aims to ensure that students with disabilities are well-prepared for employment after school. Self-determination is argued to be the fundamental skill for SLDs in the school to progress well academically, and eventually for a successful transition to employment (Chao et al., 2019; Lei & Russell, 2021; Parker et al., 2021). With self-determination skills being demonstrated in SLDs, they would be able to make personal choices and develop goal setting, self-advocacy and problem-solving skills which shall facilitate a better work aspiration during transition training (Chao et al., 2022; Melissa & Pang, 2022). Subsequently, it helps to enhance SLDs' quality of life as an autonomous motivation when they progress into employment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, 'Let Me Grow Up[®]' transition training was implemented to build work aspiration in SLDs as an enhancement to the current transition programme in the school curriculum. This programme adapted the curriculum of 'When I Grow Up' developed by The Foundation of Learning Disabilities UK (Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2017). This training was conducted in three inquiry cycles of action research to answer two research questions:

1. What are the key factors that contribute to the successful development of work aspirations for SLDs?
2. How did the "Let Me Grow Up[®] Transition Program" impact the development of work aspirations among SLDs?

The first and second cycles focused on the content knowledge and pedagogy of the training materials whilst developing SLDs' work aspiration. The third cycle was conducted to assess the relevance of the content knowledge given the work aspiration being built in the earlier cycles. The repeated reviewing of the curriculum, teaching and delivery is a form of continuous quality improvement (CQI). The guiding research questions were built around the practitioners' intention to impart work aspiration and support needed by SLDs throughout the online training sessions.

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed as qualitative research in the form of action research because the method is suitable to answer the research questions that require exploration of work aspiration given the programme and work prospects for students with learning disabilities, their parents, teachers and practitioners. The action research employed various data collection methods in this study which include observations, interviews and documents analysis. Training sessions were delivered to SLDs with assigned tasks for each session whilst focus groups interviews were conducted with the parents and teachers respectively

after the training. Teachers were required to conduct observations during the course delivery.

Participants

To study the learning experiences of SLDs in the online classroom, purposive sampling was conducted in collaboration with a selected local organisation and school. Participants consisted of SLDs, parents and special education practitioners and teachers. The inclusion criteria are:

1. Age between 17 to 20 years old (only for SLDs), no age restriction for parents and practitioners.
2. Attending any special education services.
3. Living with parents or guardians (only for SLDs).
4. Able to join all 10 sessions of the workshop.

The rationale of the criteria was set by the research team believing on the basic personal skills SLDs have gained from any special education services for transition to work. The ability to join all 10 sessions is believed to provide findings to the study. The project information sheet was sent to the organisation and school to recruit the participants for the study. A total of 32 SLDs signed the consent form with support from their parents. Table 1 shows the demographics of SLDs by types of learning disabilities and gender.

Table 1. Demographic of SLDs by types of learning disabilities and gender

Types of learning disabilities	Male	Female	Total
Autism	14	3	17
Global Developmental Delay	5	1	6
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	2	0	2
Dyslexia	3	0	3
Down Syndrome	1	1	2
Cerebral Palsy	2	0	2
Total	27	5	32

The consent form was prepared bilingual in Bahasa Malaysia and English to meet the diverse needs of the participants. Visual aid was included in the form to ensure all participants understood the content. SLDs and their parents were given a briefing session, and details of the workshop were explained to them in the first workshop to ensure that they understand the key elements of the study and their roles of participation throughout the sessions.

A total of 32 parents consented to their child as participants in the study. They attended focus group discussions to share their observations on the child's development before and after the workshops.

A total of 17 special education practitioners and teachers (15 female and 2 male) from the selected organisation and school volunteered and consented to provide support by attending the workshops with different assigned tasks such as planning the workshops, observing the participants, reflecting on their learning process and providing their comments to improve the relevance of the content knowledge.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality was granted in safeguarding the participants throughout the programme. All participants were informed about the overall purpose of the project. An easy-to-read consent form, prepared in both English and Bahasa Malaysia, was explained to all participants before the project commenced. Participants' anonymity and personal information were protected. There was no risk involved during the programme as it was conducted via a closed online platform.

Data Collection and Research Instruments

This study has been carried out in collaboration between a university and a selected local organisation and a school which supports and prepares SLDs for the workforce. The Let Me Grow Up[®] programme adapts the 'When I Grow Up' curriculum to foster self-determination skills in SLDs for the school-to-work transition within the Malaysian context. The adaptations for the Malaysian context include cultural and contextual relevance, particularly in addressing local workplaces and industry settings. The program uses bilingual materials in Bahasa Malaysia and English, incorporates family facilitation to support SLDs, and employs an online delivery mode to enhance the work aspiration transition process. Upon feedback from the observations and focus group interviews, improvement on handbook was made to enhance the content knowledge for a better learning achievement such as using dyslexic-friendly font and additional visuals. Other adaptations during delivery included the use of gamification. There are 10 workshops of school-to-work transition programme run on Zoom video conferencing meetings. Data was collected and triangulated using documents, online video recordings and observation notes for SLDs, semi-structured interviews for parents and reflective notes for teachers and practitioners. The research inquiry cycles involved planning, implementation, sharing and evaluation and taking action to improve, develop and enhance the content knowledge on work aspiration, as shown in Figure 1.

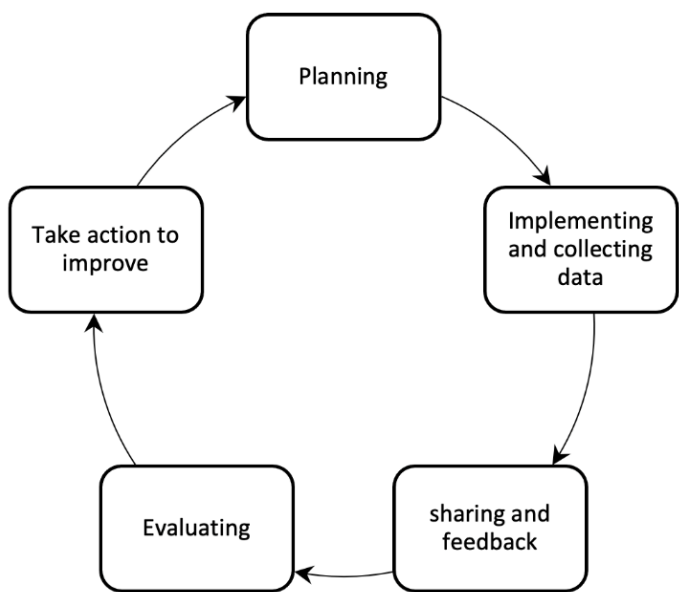


Figure 1. Research inquiry cycle

Planning started with content knowledge development by creating an easy-to-read handbook and adapting it with contextualised visual aids. Observations were made on the response of participants to evaluate the relevance of content knowledge on transition for SLDs in Malaysia. SLDs were required to complete the related task based on the topic in the handbook by the end of the workshop. The tasks provided and completed by SLDs at the end of each topic contributed as documents to answer the research questions. Video recordings were taken during the workshops. Differentiated instructions and personalised support were provided to SLDs. This has supplemented the observation data. Semi-structured interview questions were designed to collect data during focus group discussions by the teachers and practitioners after each workshop. Focus group discussions for parents were conducted via pre- and post-workshops aiming to gauge their readiness for the school-to-work transition and employment. SLDs were divided into different groups based on their understanding and learning abilities by the researchers. For SLDs with high support needs, a small teacher-student ratio was planned as compared to those with low support needs.

Online observational fieldwork and documents analysis

Thirty-two students were divided into three groups and attended online workshops from home. The students used their laptops to attend Zoom meetings and attempted lesson-

related games with their tablets or mobile phones. During the workshop, participants were arranged into breakout rooms for small group discussions to assess the relevance of the content knowledge delivered. For SLDs, more personalised feedback, quality time and attention were given aiming to provide more prompts and helpful guidance to complete the tasks given. SLDs were required to submit their completed tasks. This enhanced the learners' progress with the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and skills throughout the discussions and submitted work.

The content knowledge of Let Me Grow Up[®] aims to develop the work aspirations of SLDs progressively. This includes taking more initiative and commitment to learn by the homework during the course. SLDs' performance and understanding were assessed through their participation and homework given for each workshop. SLDs were asked to understand their strengths, and their local context and build their portfolio for future employment. Performing their work profile at the final session has proven to increase understanding about work as the content knowledge.

Furthermore, observations were done to observe participants' responses, facial expressions, body language and behaviours without interfering with the learning process. Observation notes were taken from the practitioners in every online lesson. The notes contain the list of items of the lesson, responses, behaviours, guidance from parents, feedback and suggestions for improvement.

Semi-structured interview, focus group discussion and reflection notes

Six parents' focus group discussions were conducted to share their observations at home throughout the workshop sessions. Semi-structured interviews were held immediately after every workshop for teachers and practitioners to discuss the workshop session and to improve the online curriculum and teaching as part of the data collection process. Teachers kept their reflective journals to continually improve instructional strategies, teaching styles, approaches, and methods. The reflective journal helped the teachers to reflect on the online workshop experience of those enjoyable moments, engaging sessions, effective teaching strategies as well as the challenges they faced.

FINDINGS

The content knowledge of the training was well-received by SLDs. Findings for Research Question 1 indicated that intentional conversation about work in their daily lives is found to enhance their work knowledge as SLDs transit to work. Moreover, personalised teaching and learning materials with interactive course content and pre-planned delivery contribute to the successful development of work aspirations for SLDs. For Research Question 2, the impact of Let Me Grow Up[®] Transition Program is depicted in SLDs when increased knowledge about work and enhanced self-determination skills were evident in the findings.

Intentional conversations about work

Parents were invited to cultivate conversation about work in the pre workshop. In post workshop, parents were encouraged to witness their child start to think about work from the study. Teachers and practitioners observed the change in SLDs when they discussed their prospective work after the training. This has provided hope for the parents to be able to start planning for their child's future work by sustaining their work aspiration. The outcomes of the post-workshop are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Outcomes of intentional conversations about work with SLDs

Source (Participant category)	Key observation/Quotes
K, Q (Parents)	"He is more motivated to enter his work life and started to think about his future career."
S, M (Parents)	"I had never seen him so happy with the course... we started to talk about work."
P, R (Parents)	"The course has helped me to know what support he needs, what kind of training he needs for his future job..."
T (Practitioner)	"We need to constantly ask them about work even after the training has ended... it is important to keep their knowledge about work..."
Mn (Practitioner)	"I will relate my conversation about work with them in my classroom..."

Personalised teaching and learning materials

Content knowledge was adapted and explicitly taught based on the participant's learning needs using easy-to-read texts and visual aids. For instance, dyslexia-friendly colours were used as background in the presentation and worksheets to improve the readability of participants with dyslexia. Limited numbers of words and relevant pictures were used to enhance the relevance of developing work aspirations in the presentations and worksheets. Throughout the workshops, with reasonable accommodation, SLDs could understand the topics on employment. Case studies were discussed revolving around their daily life events with families and friends. They were excited and motivated in game-based lessons. Moreover, for participants with low support needs, higher-order thinking tasks were given with less prompt. The outcomes of personalised teaching and learning are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3. Outcomes of personalised teaching and learning for SLDs

Source (Participant category)	Key observations/Quotes
Mx, B, J (SLDs)	"...I can understand..."; "...I see the pictures and choose my answer...I like to play games during class..."; "...I like the breakout rooms because I can share my own life..."
C (Parent)	"The design of the program allows ample opportunity for everyone to share their thoughts and experiences. Homework was given to help participants to reflect on what they had learned and then discover how to relate them in daily life."
S (Parent)	...the online classes were practical with different activities...my child didn't feel bored... he always looks forward for the next class...
N (Practitioner)	"The teaching materials prepared by us were indeed very personalised for individual needs. I found it was very challenging at first but later I managed to adapt the teaching and delivery of the workshop. It has totally changed my perspective towards education, it is no longer a "One size fits all" education approach... After trying different online activities, software and teaching approaches, the students were more responsive and enjoyed the sessions."
T (Practitioner)	"Let me grow up program has a very good impact on students with special needs even though it is conducted online, a lot of new knowledge is learned by students, especially in handling the use of gadgets and, the internet. It can be used as a platform for students with special needs to guide them into the world of work later."

Increased knowledge about work

Content knowledge on work aspirations was adapted and improved based on the needs of SLDs in the research inquiry. It encompasses the prospective work skills, work qualities, work preferences and support needs for work. The work transition programme was deemed effective as there was positive feedback given by the SLDs and parents. They were able to think about work, beyond thinking about their future career as part of the assessment of the content knowledge formed. The outcomes of increased knowledge about work are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Outcomes of increased knowledge about work of SLDs

Source (Participant category)	Key observations/Quotes
A, Mx, Y (SLDs)	"I understand more about job aspects..."; "What I need to prepare for work..."; "Understand my own work preference, work skills and qualities."
E, L (Parents)	"He understands that people need to work..."
D (Parent)	"He will get paid for his work."
L (Parent)	"...how to work with other colleagues or people..."
Jo (Parent)	"Getting to understand the point of work and preparedness."
F (Parent)	"Now he knows that running a business is not easy...He thinks more about his future."
H (Parent)	"He becomes more mature."
K (Parent)	"He learned to do his resume for job application..."
Lx (Practitioner)	"M & B enjoyed the games, and they can understand the concept of work."
Cx (Practitioner)	"M seems to lack confidence in the beginning, but his presentation has shown he is confident and has learned about work."
T (Practitioner)	"S was very quiet in school, but he could share about himself and what he wanted to work on in the small group discussion."
N (Practitioner)	"Based on the homework submission, we can see M and H can understand what is work... more guidance is needed to help them... the small group discussion helped them to understand."

Enhanced self-determination skills

Throughout the workshops, with reasonable accommodation, SLDs could understand the topics on employment. Case studies were discussed revolving around their daily life events with families and friends. This has enhanced their self-determination skills such as being able to make choices, knowing their preferences, strengths and weaknesses; being more initiative in their daily lives. By the end of the workshop, every student presented their work profile as the learning outcome of the workshop. All participants presented with improved self-confidence and work aspiration. Parents were encouraged to note the progress of their children and gained knowledge in guiding their children in their work prospects. The outcomes of enhanced self-determination skills are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Outcomes of enhanced self-determination skills of SLDs

Source (Participant category)	Key observations/Quotes
B, Mx, Ms, J (SLDs)	“What makes a good life...”; “I know what I can do and cannot do.”; “I like to play games.”; “Would like to have more challenging activities e.g., more quiz/test...”
C (Parent)	“Work awareness”
G (Parent)	“To choose a suitable job for himself”
H (Parent)	“...managed to have some ideas and knowledge on how to further train/guide my child.”
K (Parent)	“...knowing his strengths and limitations.”
P (Parent)	“Need to give my son confidence.”
Bs (Parent)	“I was amazed that he did his own presentation just now... I saw he is more confident after attending this course...”
N (Practitioner)	“After trying different online activities, software and teaching approaches, the students were more responsive and enjoyed the sessions.”
Mn (Practitioner)	“I noticed the students were learning fast in the ten workshops, their presentation was a platform for them to show their confidence.”
Px (Practitioner)	“I never expected them to do so well in the presentation.”

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to develop work aspirations on SLDs during the pandemic. This study is believed to be applicable in post-pandemic learning in a physical setting where the pedagogy could be adapted to any local setting and participants’ learning profile. Personalised and easy-to-understand learning materials were developed to accommodate the different learning support needs of SLDs (Georgiadou et al., 2020). Insightful data was gained and triangulated from the research inquiry cycles of observation and document analysis of the participants, interview and focus group discussions of parents and practitioners.

Intentional conversations about work should guide parents and teachers to promote self-determination in SLDs with incremental steps of progress to attain the goal of getting a real job as a means for their support for work (Curryer et. al, 2019; Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013). Findings show that parents and teachers became more confident in providing support based

on their child's strength and aspiration for work when they were involved and empowered. This implies the importance of the roles of parents and teachers in working around the strengths of their child by intentionally discussing work as they transition to employment together with other stakeholders such as the future employers (Abdullah & Ibrahim, 2021; Anderson et al., 2021; Bialik & Mhiri, 2022; DeLeo, 2017). It is an intentional plan with lifelong support as parents and teachers take the initiative to guide SLDs into making decisions for employment that best match them.

Personalised teaching and materials in the training has provided SLDs more opportunities in making choices in their learning. SLDs were granted the autonomy toward independence underpinning their basic psychological needs (Melissa & Pang, 2022). This implies that when SLDs are given more opportunities to make choices about their daily lives, education and career, they are more likely to be engaged and motivated in their learning (Howard et. al. 2021; Vasconcellos et. al. 2020). This is because they feel more ownership over their learning and are more likely to be interested in the topics they are studying. It is critical to note the personalised easy-to-read teaching and learning materials used to achieve learning outcomes for this study. This includes self-management, employment knowledge and teamwork skills to enhance their self-esteem and employment awareness before joining the workforce (Alias, 2014). Some suggestions for transition programme may include choice board which offers SLDs variety of options to choose for their learning. The choice boards can be formed for different subjects, problem-solving activities or levels of difficulty. The key to learning activity is to provide student-led learning by giving SLDs more control over their own learning. Teachers can support student-led learning by providing students with opportunities to choose their own topics, design their own learning activities, and assess their own progress.

The work transition programme has boosted the self-confidence and work aspiration of SLDs, they have been encouraged to engage in the lesson activities; the programme has provided an avenue for them to grow and speak up with aspiration and confidence. This can be seen through their use of computers and related technology; they were able to attend online meetings, interactive participation, use software, apps and employability skills underpinning self-determination skills (Andres-Garriz et al., 2024; Crockett-Love, 2016; Estrapala & Reed, 2019; Vicente et al., 2020). By learning to identify their strengths in the content knowledge, many of them have started thinking about work and preparing for work. Findings show that conversation about work provides SLDs with a chance to share their views and perspectives on their future plans. This has maximised their learning opportunity and affirmed their goals and expectations for work which is hoped to drive their future career choices (Chao et al., 2022; Domin et al, 2020). Displays of persons at work who have grown better off economically, autonomous, and capable of choosing what to do with their income indicate that people with learning disabilities can work with appropriate understanding and support. Findings have shown that self-determination has been cultivated for SLDs growth to progress into gainful employment and to achieve quality of life. With self-determination and intentional goal setting towards employment in students with learning disabilities, their future employers need to provide reasonable accommodation in the workplace where stigma could be reduced against their abilities.

In addition to the classroom, here are some suggestions for SLDs to enhance enhanced self-determination skills within the home environment. Parents can provide opportunities for their SLDs to make choices about their daily routines, such as selecting outfits, deciding meals, and choosing activities to engage in. Parents can also teach self-determination skills explicitly, such as how to set goals, solve problems, and advocate for themselves. Additionally, parents can provide support and encouragement to their children as they develop their self-determination skills (Abdullah & Ibrahim, 2021). Besides, parents and family members must understand the complexities of adolescence and attempt to assist the child in overcoming obstacles beyond their own doubts and expectations. Bialik and Mhiri (2022) highlighted the differences between SLDs and other disabilities, where SLDs need a unique form of reassurance, support and transition planning. Therefore, the transition programme has planned an activity that builds self-determination to help SLDs decide on work based on their capabilities and self-awareness. Family engagement is highlighted as the key to success as it is believed that families know best about their children (Abdullah & Ibrahim, 2021; Mohd Syazwan et al., 2021).

The findings imply that the “Let Me Grow Up[®] Transition Programme” curriculum was used as a training procedure to improve workplace inclusion abilities. According to Runshe (2012), there are several core abilities that students with disabilities can learn about the workplace which are working productively, communicating clearly in the workplace, acting responsibly and working cooperatively. However, as mentioned earlier, self-determination such as goal setting, decision-making and problem-solving are valuable abilities that serve as a significant impact on SLDs (Estrapala & Reed, 2019; Vicente et al., 2020). Mumbardó-Adam et al. (2016) urged the school to provide more opportunities and emphasis to practice self-determination skills in SLDs than at home. As discussed by Pang (2013) on the positive experiences gained from employing a person with learning disabilities, it is important for the teachers, practitioners and community to understand each person in a holistic manner underpinning value and worth. Collaborative efforts amongst the stakeholders, such as teachers, parents and family members are vital in improving the self-determination skills and quality of life of SLDs with ongoing assessment and monitoring. As a result, more comprehensive transition planning and support for SLDs would enhance work aspiration when the needs of students are taken into consideration for gainful employment.

LIMITATION

There were several times that the online communication between the teachers and students was not effective as some students had been switching their cameras on and off. Thus, the teachers were disconnected from the students, and they were not able to gauge their responses and read facial and lip expressions. The students were frustrated whenever they faced technical issues such as experiencing slowness of Internet connection and microphone problems. When they noticed their voices were not heard due to a microphone problem, they felt demotivated and immediately lost interest in the topic. These limitations are well-noted for physical training to be conducted.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has impacted on the lives of SLDs who are commonly marginalised and unheard of by instilling the aspiration for work upon their completion of study in the school setting. Increased knowledge about work and enhanced self-determination skills are critical to path the way towards employment for SLDs. Parents have gained hope in seeing potential in their child for a progressive transition planning to take place. A transdisciplinary approach collaboration is recommended as the way forward between SLDs, parents, teachers and other professionals to develop an effective transition plan underpinning the strengths of SLDs. On the education eco-system and community of disabilities, it is recommended that to produce a digital curriculum and printed practitioner manual for the teachers and practitioners to be used in the local community (government schools, private learning and transition centres, NGOs) as part of the existing transition training. As asserted by Haber et al. (2016), a well-developed and structured transition intervention is important to ensure postsecondary outcomes for students with learning disabilities. An ongoing transition workshop should be conducted for all stakeholders to understand the progression. The sharing of resources from this transition training is believed to create a bigger impact for the community. As the resources are being utilised, upscaling the curriculum to match the current needs shall be ongoing to achieve the sustainability and relevance of bridging the gap of unemployment amongst SLDs. Moreover, it is believed that efforts put in could be recognised as an advocacy tool for SLDs highlighting their rights to quality education, and rights to employment underpinning the need for transition to the workforce. The study advocates for social change when SLDs work towards gainful employment with pride. For the betterment of the lived experience of SLDs and their allies, positive collaboration and partnership with stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, schools, employers and other local organisations should be ongoing to sustain the eco-system for the disabled.

REFERENCES

- Abdullah, N., & Ibrahim, R. (2021). Parents involvement in implementation of career transition for students with learning disabilities from a teacher's perspective in Malaysia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(8), 1047–1059. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v11-i8/10418>
- Alias, A. (2014). Transition program: The challenges faced by special needs students in gaining work experience. *International Education Studies*, 7(13), 192–196. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v7n13p192>
- Anderson, C., Butt, C., & Sarsony, C. (2021). Young adults on the autism spectrum and early employment-related experiences: Aspirations and obstacles. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 51(1), 88–105. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04513-4>
- Andres-Garriz, C., Mumbardo-Adam, C., Farriols Hernando, N., Gomes Hinojosa, A. M., & Pretel-Luque, T. (2024). Building tailored interventions to promote self-determination in young adults with autism: The TEAM_YOUNG ADULTS program. *International Journal of Developmental Disabilities* (Early view). <https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2024.2414313>

- Anizam, M. Y., Manisah, M. A., & Amla, M. S. (2013). Pendidikan vokasional pelajar berkeperluan khas ke arah memenuhi pasaran pekerjaan [Paper presentation]. Proceeding of the International Conference on Social Science Research, ICSSR 2013, Penang, 4–5 June, 1189–1196.
- Bialik, K., & Mhiri, M. (2022). Barriers to employment for people with intellectual disabilities in low- and middle-income countries: Self-advocate and family perspective. *Journal of International Development*, 34(5), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3659>
- Chao, P., Chou, Y., & Cheng, S. (2019). Self-determination and transition outcomes of youth with disabilities: Findings from the Special Needs Education longitudinal study. *Advances in Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, 3(2), 129–137. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41252-019-00105-1>
- Chao, S. Y., Chen, R., Grizzell, S., Wilson, K., & Lewis, T. (2022). Factors influencing the career decision self-efficacy and outcome expectations of college students with disabilities. *Rehabilitation Research, Policy, and Education*, 36(3), 197 – 212. <https://doi.org/10.1891/RE-21-30>
- Crockett-Love, E. M. (2016). *Planning for transition in special education*. All Capstone Projects. <https://opus.govst.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1223&context=capstones>
- Curryer, B., Standcliffe, R., Wiese, M., & Dew, A. (2019). The experience of mothers supporting self-determination of adult sons and daughters with intellectual disability. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 33(3), 373–385. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12680>
- DeLeo, C. B. S. (2017). *Transitioning students with autism spectrum disorder from school to society*. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection. <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=4541&context=dissertations>
- Domin, D., Taylor, A. B., Haines, K. A., Papay, C. K., & Grigal, M. (2020). “It’s not just about a paycheck”: Perspectives on employment preparation of students with intellectual disability in federally funded higher education programs. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 58, 328–347. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-58.4.328>
- Estrapala, S., & Reed, D. K. (2019). Goal-setting instruction: A step-by-step guide for high school students. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 55(5), 286–293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451219881717>
- Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities. (2017). When I grow up. <https://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/learning-disabilities/our-work/employment-education/when-i-grow-up/#:~:text=When%20I%20Grow%20Up%20%28WIGU%29%20was%20a%20four-year,Berkshire%2C%20Kent%20and%20the%20London%20Borough%20of%20Redbridge>
- Georgiadou, I., Vlachou, A., & Stavroussi, P. (2020). Development of the “special-vocational-education-service-quality scale”: Listening to the voices of students with intellectual disability. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 28(2), 89–103. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QAE-07-2019-0067>
- Haber, M. G., Mazzotti, V. L., Mustian, A. L., Rowe, D. A., Bartholomew, A. L., Test, D. W., & Fowler, C. H. (2016). What works, when, for whom: A meta-analytic review of predictors of postsecondary success for students with disabilities. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(1), 123–162. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315583135>
- Howard, J. L., Bureau, J., Guay, F., Chong, J. X. Y., & Ryan, R. M. (2021). Student motivation and associated outcomes: A meta-analysis from self-determination theory. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(6), 1300–1323. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620966789>
- Izam, S., & Mohamed, W. A. W. (2020). The unemployment of special needs with learning disability people in Malaysia: Reality or fantasy. *Journal of Economic Info*, 7(2), 141–150. <https://doi.org/10.31580/jei.v7i2.1442>
- Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat. (2025, February). Pendaftaran Orang Kurang Upaya (OKU). <https://www.jkm.gov.my/main/article/pendaftaran-orang-kurang-upaya-oku>
- Lei, J., & Russell, A. (2021). Understanding the role of self-determination in shaping university experiences for autistic and typically developing students in the United Kingdom. *Autism*, 25(5), 1262–1278. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361320984897>
- Lindsay, S., Cagliostro, E., Leck, J., & Stinson, J. (2021). Career aspirations and workplace expectations among youth with physical disabilities. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 43(12), 1657–1668. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2019.1671505>

- Melissa, W. Y. E., & Pang, J. C. (2022). Parents' perception on the capacity of self-determination in students with disabilities. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Business, Humanities & Education*, 7(1), 20–40. <https://apjbhe.segi.edu.my/index.php/segi/article/view/49/42>
- Ministry of Education. (n.d.). Garis panduan program transisi ke kerjaya murid berkeperluan khas (MBK). <https://www.moe.gov.my/pekeliling/3249-garis-panduan-program-transisi-ke-kerjaya-murid-berkeperluan-khas-mbk/file>
- Ministry of Education. (2024). Data Pendidikan Khas 2023. <https://www.moe.gov.my/muat-turun/pendidikan-khas/buku-data-pendidikan-khas/5570-buku-data-pendidikan-khas-tahun-2023/file>
- Mohd Syazwan, Z., Wan Ahmad, M. W. P., & Muhammad Sofwan, M. (2021). Internship program for students with disabilities: Are Malaysian family ready? *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government*, 27(1), 2754–2761.
- Mumbardó-Adam, C., Shogren, K. A., Guàrdia-olmos, J., & Giné, C. (2016). Contextual predictors of self-determined actions in students with and without intellectual disability. *Psychology in the Schools*, 54(2), 183–195. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.21987>
- Othman, M. F., & Rahmat, N. E. (2020). The effectiveness of law relating to educational right of children with disabilities in Malaysia. *Environment-Behaviour Proceedings Journal*, 5(15), 275–280. <https://doi.org/10.21834/ebpj.v5i15.2484>
- Pacha, J. K. (2013). The effects of structured work experience on the work readiness skills of students with disabilities. <https://oaktrust.library.tamu.edu/bitstream/handle/1969.1/149382/PACHA-DISSERTATION-2013.pdf?sequence=1>
- Pang, J. C. (2013). The experiences of employers in employing persons with learning disabilities in Malaysia. *Journal of Special Needs Education*, 3, 50–64. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2431100>
- Pang, J. C., Loh, S. C., & Ahmad Zabidi, A. R. (2016). Self-advocacy movement in Malaysia: Issues, importance and future directions. *Journal of Special Needs Education*, 6, 23–35.
- Parker, J., Parris, L., Lau, M., Dobbins, A., Shatz, L., Porush, S., & Wilkins, B. (2021). Perceived teacher autonomy support and self-determination skill expression: Predictors of student engagement among African American high school students. *Journal of Black Psychology*, 47(6), 445–475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00957984211009190>
- Rustad, M., & Kassah, K. A. (2020). Learning disability and work inclusion: On the experiences, aspirations and empowerment of sheltered employment workers in Norway. *Disability & Society*, 36(3), 399–419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1749564>
- Runshe, D. D. (2012). Core abilities: Essential workplace skills learned in the classroom. Vincennes University: Kathleen Gabriel's Teaching Unprepared Students Workshop. Retrieved 20 February 2022, from <https://vulearninordertoserve.wordpress.com/2012/01/07/core-abilities-essential-workplace-skills-learned-in-the-classroom/>
- Vasconcellos, D., Parker, P. D., Hilland, T., Cinelli, R., Owen, K. B., Kapsal, N., Lee, J., Antczak, D., Ntoumanis N., Ryan, R. M., & Lonsdale, C. (2020). Self-determination theory applied to physical education: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 112(7), 1444–1469.
- Vicente, E., Mumbardó-Adam, C., Guillén, V. M., Coma-Roselló, T., Bravo-Álvarez, M., & Sánchez, S. (2020). Self-determination in people with intellectual disability: The mediating role of opportunities. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(17), 6201. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17176201>
- Wehmeyer, M., & Abery, B. (2013). Self-determination and choice. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 51(5), 399–411. <https://doi.org/10.1352/1934-9556-51.5.399>
- Yaakub, M. Y., & Hamzah, M. I. M. (2020) Komitmen guru Pendidikan Khas terhadap pelaksanaan program transisi kerjaya dan hubungannya dengan kepimpinan distributif pentadbir [Paper presentation]. Special Education International Conference (SEIC), Marriott Hotel, Putrajaya, 25–27 September.
- Yeo, S. L., Ogawa, H., Grace, G. W. C., Sharifah Hafizah, S. H., & Pang, J. C. (2019). Development of support employment in Malaysia. *International Journal of Human Cultural Studies*, 29, 837–844. <https://doi.org/10.9748/hcs.2019.837>

- Zainal, M., & Hashim, H. (2019). The implementation of transition programme for students with learning disabilities in Malaysia. *Creative Education*, 10, 1802–1812. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2019.108129>
- Zainoriza, Z., Abdul Rahim, R., Arasinah, K., & Kway, E. H. (2020). The implementation of industrial training for students with a disability: The role of adaptability in enhancing their workplace well-being. *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change*. 12(7), 221–235. <https://doi.org/10.53333/IJICC2013/12718>