Methods of Applying Employability Skills to Students with Special Education Needs in Shah Alam Vocational Special Education Secondary School

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Abstract

The qualitative case study presents how to implement employability soft skills among special education needs students at Shah Alam Vocational Special Education Secondary School. This study explores how teachers implement employability skills for Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). This study uses a qualitative case study to examine the application of the employability skills of SEN at Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary Schools. Conducted with the approval of the Information Management Division & Education Policy Planning and Research Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, Special Education Division, Shah Alam Vocational Special Education Secondary School and teachers who teach at Shah Alam Vocational Special Education High School. This research involved in-depth interviews and observations with teachers to gain insight into applying SEN employability skills. The research results suggest that providing SEN with cooperative learning, democratic classrooms, and motivational strategies is better for acquiring the skills needed for future employment. The study underlines the urgency of implementing hands-on and experiential learning or internships to make SEN job-ready. As a result, the study adds new knowledge about what works in education to build employability skills for students with special educational needs.

1. Introduction

Wawasan Kemakmuran Bersama (WKB) 2030 was introduced to help the country's economy be restructured in a more progressive, vibrant and sustainable direction. In the strategic core of WKB 2030, human capital transformation, strengthening the labour market, and increasing work compensation are emphasised. To achieve WKB 2030, practices in the workplace have changed drastically. Globalisation and technological advancements today have changed work practices by ensuring that the skills available to employees meet the needs of employers. Employees who do not have or meet the skills required by the employer will cause the employer to suffer losses, and the work produced likely will not meet the specified specifications. (Bessen J. E, 2019) This is supported by discussing how a mismatch in skills can lead to inefficiency and losses for employers. This aligns with the assertion that a lack of required skills can affect the quality of work and organisational performance. Such a challenge is ensuring an appropriate balance of employability and academic skills for use in the workplace. The government has the need and decided to ensure that schools and educational institutions can involve students in active learning.

For students with special educational needs (SEN), employability skills may need to be more practised, impacting employment and employment in the future (Halim et al., 2019). Because employers need and prioritise employees who can think more creatively and critically, this is a matter of concern for SEN. Therefore, SEN must demonstrate employability skills because the employer will see that the individual will make their company more successful and profitable. To form the employability skills required by the industry nowadays, focusing on the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the classroom depends on the teacher's mastery of pedagogical knowledge of the content of a subject, which also plays an important role. The study emphasises the importance of understanding how different strategies impact student learning outcomes, which is crucial for educators aiming to enhance teaching effectiveness. (Hattie and Donoghue, 2021). This matter should not be taken lightly because every matter teacher apply to SEN must have information and accurate and interesting delivery techniques to help apply employability skills to SEN (Supena et al., 2021). The skills preparation emphasis SEN in SEN is a holistic approach from knowledge, skills and attitudes towards developing employability skills (Ornellas et al., 2019).

In launching the teaching and learning process, not all learning techniques are suitable for use in all circumstances. As an educator, you need to be wise in choosing an effective delivery method (Suminar, 2019). The real purpose of selecting an exciting teaching delivery method is to help SEN understand information more clearly about what has been learned and to provide exposure to employability skills that can help students be more prepared to enter the world of work. A study by (Kurniati, Nugroho, & Rohman, 2021) shows interactive teaching methods have been shown to enhance engagement and understanding for SEN students by making learning more accessible and motivating. Therefore, SEN will better understand the employability skills their teachers are trying to apply. It can instil continuous interest in SEN due to the role of teachers who choose appropriate teaching materials and techniques. To realise the core of Human Capital Transformation, Strengthening the Labor Market, and Increasing Employee Compensation, the government also needs to ensure that SEN and exceptional education graduates can master employability skills to ensure the success of WKB 2030. This is because human capital transformation also needs to focus on SEN, an essential human capital to steer our country in the future.

2. Literature

Applying marketability skills to students with special educational needs is critical to inclusive education. Through cooperative learning, democratic classrooms, and motivation, educators can effectively equip students with the skills needed to prepare them for the workforce.

Cooperative learning has been identified as a valuable approach to improving the employability skills of students with special educational needs. In a study by (Johnson et al., 2019), researchers found that cooperative learning strategies improve academic results and foster teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills among students with special needs. Similarly, (Smith & Brown, 2021) emphasises SEN on the positive effects of cooperative learning on the social and vocational skills of students with special needs, highlighting the importance of collaborative activities in preparing them for future employment.

Establishing democratic classrooms has been linked to cultivating employability skills among students with special educational needs. A study (Lee & Johnson, 2022) showed that democratic classroom practices, such as shared decision-making and active participation, have improved employability skills like self-advocacy and leadership in SEN students. Additionally, research conducted by (Patel et al., 2020) outlines the role of the democratic classroom in promoting autonomy and decision-making abilities, which are essential for successful employment outcomes for individuals with special educational needs.

Motivation is essential in developing employability skills for students with special educational needs. A study (Lee & Kim, 2022) emphasised the importance of intrinsic motivation in fostering resilience, adaptability and self-management skills among students with special needs. Furthermore, (Chen et al., 2019) emphasised the impact of motivational strategies, such as goal setting and positive reinforcement, in improving the employability skills of students with special educational needs, preparing them for a successful transition into the workforce.

Using cooperative learning, democratic classrooms, and motivation offers a comprehensive approach to developing employability skills among SENs. This educational strategy ensures that SEN meets the workforce's needs by fostering teamwork, communication, self-management, and responsibility. Future research should continue to explore and refine these approaches to ensure they are successful and meet the skills of future work needs.

3. Methodology

In the current study, we employ a qualitative case study design. The above research employs semi-structured interviews and observation. The qualitative method is based on the belief that the definition or existence of a phenomenon is created by those involved in (and thus studied) that phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2021). They perform most in situ interviews, which usually give you more of a holistic, multi-dimensional and dynamic meaning or knowledge that reflects the complexity of the thing or phenomenon under study (Flick, 2022). The

study design enables the researcher to explore the intricacies of a phenomenon, leading to a richer appreciation of social realities (Moser & Korstjens, 2023). Qualitative research is often practised in a varied and non-standardised way by stakeholders. Dwell on this flexibility of qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2021), that proposes researchers adjust the methods that they employ depending on study contexts.

3.1 Participants

The study participants comprised nine teachers at Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School. (Nelson and Johnson, 2022) argue that interview sample sizes of between 4 and 10 participants are sufficient to achieve data saturation in qualitative studies, ensuring comprehensive and meaningful data collection. The selection of research participants in this interview study is based on two main criteria: having teaching experience at Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School for at least five years and the research participants agreeing to cooperate. According to (Ritchie and Lewis, 2021), effective participant selection in qualitative research, including case studies, relies on the participants' unique characteristics and expertise, which enhance the richness of the data collected.

3.2 Study Procedures

This study uses a qualitative research methodology and a case study design to explore students with special educational needs (SEN) marketability skills in Malaysian educational institutions. This research was conducted with the permission of the Information Management Division & Education Policy Planning and Research Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia, Special Education Division, Shah Alam Vocational Special Education High School and teachers who teach at Shah Alam Vocational Special Education High School.

A systematic data collection process involves several critical steps to ensure ethical compliance and comprehensive data collection. Initially, the researcher obtained approval from the Information Management Division and the Education Policy Planning and Research Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, which allowed the research and permission to conduct the study. Following this, a request was submitted to the Special Education Division of the Ministry of Education Malaysia to ensure access to specific resources related to SEN education.

After obtaining the necessary approval, the researcher applied for permission to conduct the study at Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School by clearly outlining the objectives and methodology of the study. Engaging with principals is essential to establishing a supportive relationship and facilitating collaboration with the school and staff.

Teachers at the school were approached for participation and those who agreed to complete a voluntary participation form to ensure informed consent. Building rapport with participants is essential, and researchers introduce themselves while explaining the purpose of the study to foster a comfortable environment for sharing insights.

Data collection methods included interviews and in-depth observation, allowing for a rich exploration of participants' experiences. The researcher was the primary instrument for data collection, using audio recordings and field notes to capture comprehensive data. Triangulation of this method increases the validity and reliability of the findings. Overall, this qualitative research methodology provides a robust framework for understanding the employability skills of SEN students, offering valuable insights that can inform educational practice and policy in Malaysia.

3.3 Data Analysis

One of the reasons this study's data collection was valid and reliable is that it was based on multiple data sources. (Flick, 2021) reveals collecting data from various sources enhances the accuracy of research and allows the researcher to affirm findings through triangulation. Data collection techniques involved various in-depth interviews and observations, both inside and outside the classroom, which increased the data validity and reliability. In this study, the researcher collected information from the teacher interview supported by observational data. Another reason that provides valid and reliable data results is that the researcher describes, analyses, interprets, categories, and builds concepts from various sources, all supported by multiple methods.

After the interview, the researcher made up a transcript from the interview session. Next, the researcher analysed the data using thematic analysis, divided into three parts: open or initial coding, axial coding, and theme building. After finding a theme, the researcher started to make a report in the discussion chapter and a recommendation and conclusion for this study. According to (Yin, 2021), the case study has elevated the accuracy and validity of data as it is embedded in various news sources, patterns, and so forth. The findings of this qualitative data were also obtained with field study notes and transcripts of interview data. (Merriam and Tisdell, 2020) Elaborate on the importance of thorough analysis in qualitative research, and (Flick,2022) add that using multiple data sources can ensure reliability and provide a complete view.

4. Results

Research findings through interview and observation methods show that three main themes explain the technique of applying employability skills to SEN.

4.1 Cooperative Learning

The teachers at Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School use the cooperative learning method to increase the understanding of SEN during the teaching and learning sessions. Three sub-themes are found: theoretical learning, practical learning, and drill learning. SEN will first be taught theoretically through practical, theoretical teaching. After they understand, the teachers only carry out sensible drills to test the level of understanding of SEN related to the topics being taught.

Theory

The interviews found that the first sub-theme of the cooperative learning theme is theory. Study participants three and six stated that applying theory allows SEN to understand the concept before doing practical training.

"... teach this theory, we cannot do it like before. Write on the whiteboard, copy notes... now we do group work. Tell them to present. Distribute the group, then they understand the theory better..." (G3)

"... I always ask people to make a presentation. If no one sleeps. Hahhh, I gave people markers with mahjong paper and asked them to present what they understood. It is up to you to make notes on the mind map... follow people's creativity..." (G6)

Practice

Much emphasis is placed on the practical activities for the next sub-theme. He feels that this practice can help SEN succeed in the industrial world. In addition, learning through practice can be implemented in various forms.

"... This practice is not only for students from automotive workshops to furniture workshops... even science subjects also have practical. Like science, we do science experiments. For the batik course, we have batik art practice. We should not limit our thoughts. Do practice only for technical courses, motors, and furniture. So, do not all batik courses need to be practical? Do you not need work experience near the industry? We should not limit the activities of these students. Later, they will not know what the working situation near the industry is like..." (G8)

Drill

The last sub-theme of the cooperative learning theme is a drill. G4 and G5's drill methods were further reinforced through observation during teaching and learning, during which he constantly questioned his students about what they had learned.

"...I will make sure they remember what they learned yesterday. After entering the class and greeting everyone, I will ask what we learned yesterday. See if they can answer. If possible, they remember. That is good. If they do not remember, we ask a friend to help them. Share what you learned yesterday. So, when he remembers, they refresh again. Do a recap with the student. until they remember what they learned..." (G4)

"... every step.. follow. Go to the next step; if they cannot go to the first step, they cannot go to the next step. In the meantime, I will do it until it happens. It means repeat, repeat.. repeat. It is like practice. Yes.. practice..." (G5)

4.2 Democratic Classroom

The second theme involves applying employability skills to SEN in a democratic classroom by providing opportunities for SEN to participate actively in the teaching and learning process. Based on the themes that emerged from the interviews and observations during teaching and learning, it was found that teachers use several methods to teach SEN, namely group projects and technology and entrepreneurship programs.

Group project

The first sub-theme of the democratic classroom theme is group projects. In group projects, students are free to participate in making decisions about lessons, solving problems, and managing their group projects.

"... when we mention group work, we want the students to know to make decisions together; students cannot make decisions individually because they are now doing group work. So, whether it is like it or not, everyone must participate. Do it together in a group..." (G1)

"... in addition to presenting group work, we can do it by solving problems. We give students a problem, and we see what solution they have for that problem. From there, we see them talking to each other to find an answer or a solution..." (G2)

Use of technology

The use of technology is one of the sub-themes of the democratic classroom theme. An online learning platform such as Google Classroom allows SEN to access learning materials, conduct interactive activities, and submit assignments online. This gives students the flexibility to study anywhere and anytime.

"It is like during the MCO period, right? Classes were online, and we used Google Classroom to teach students. Using Google Classroom, we put the material we want to teach. From there, our students can learn about today's technology..." (G9)

"... we take them to the computer lab. These students enjoy going to the computer lab because they can use it. So sometimes when studying, I take them there. Play Kahoot to Quiziz to watch the video..." (G4)

Entrepreneurship program

The entrepreneurship program is conducted at VOCATIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION SECONDARY SCHOOL Shah Alam to give SEN students career preparation experience. Findings from the meeting with the teachers show project sales done by SEN students at Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School.

"... we are promoting the salon near teacher female We apply the concept how to do business..." (G5)

"... it is like they prepare the food, before this they cook and eat.. but only recently they also cook and sell.. the students also profit when they sell the food..." (G1)

"... there is that before cooking they take the order from the teacher and their friends.. then they cook it.. decorate the food. So, while they learn about the syllabus, they also learn to sell. What you need to have when you want to do business is to keep sales records. So how can people trace their sales?..." (G1)

4.3 Motivation

Through regular motivation, SEN can make career choices that are interesting and appropriate to each other's abilities. Based on the themes obtained, three sub-themes in aspects of motivation are a visit to the industry, a talk about career, and the organisation of an exhibition.

Tour to industry

Touring the industry is one activity that nurtures motivation among SEN at Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School. Through activity visits, SEN revealed that the situation is natural in nature jobs, and they can see their job opportunities based on the skills they have learned at school.

"... usually every.. usually every year, the counsellor will set up a power of attorney with some teachers who will help the counsellor find a place for our students to visit. We will plan to visit the industry based on their course..." (G1)

"... through this student's visit, they get the exposure to see the real thing for themselves, because special education students if we tell them, we do not show them they cannot imagine it, but if we take them on tour, they can imagine this kind of work like this. Only then will they know what function they learn at school..." (G7)

"... We go and take the students to this site visit, to show that the workplace situation is different from the workshop at this school.. we expose people to the real reality..." (G9)

Career talk

Career talks are one activity that educates SEN about suitable careers for each potential employee. Research shows that some teachers at Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School have implemented career talks for SEN.

"... Before this, I, along with the teachers and also our alumni, will do a career week program, like before you call it job orientation, but it is more like a career week; during that time, I will call these alumni to give a talk to the 5th-grade students who will finish SKM to give students motivation. Motivation and self-identity for the students of form 5..." (G9)

"... At that time, I took the students out because level 3 was only one class. We did a kind of motivational program for the students; we held a motivational program outside of school, so there we did activities.. other than me giving talks and slides, they also did activities related to the title.. we showed what careers are suitable for people's fields, expose people and their parents about the career direction of our students." (G8)

Exhibition

The last sub-theme for theme motivation is an exhibition. The Exhibition intended for exhibit results works them to all people. In addition to exhibiting results work, SEN can increase confidence in interacting with the crowd.

"After the students have made their project results, we will have an exhibition to show appreciation for the results of our students' projects. After the exhibition, we have a sales session to train our students in business. There is nothing to lose   " (G6)

"We apply the true nature of entrepreneurship that is not in the actual syllabus, and we will ask students to advance. For example, if we say there is a sale, we will prepare a sale. For example, suppose the batik exhibition is

a school representative to demonstrate with the community around the Klang Valley. In that case, we will make an exhibition so our school students can stand out. " (G1)

5. Discussion

Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School study examined teachers' application methods for cultivating employability skills among SEN students. The techniques used were cooperative learning, democratic classrooms, and motivation.

Cooperative learning is an essential strategy for involving SEN in mastering employability skills. Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School teachers have used drills and repetition to help SEN remember and fully understand their learning. The findings reinforce the importance of repetition for low-achieving students, highlighting the necessity of practice and reinforcement to enhance memory and understanding. (Hattie and Donoghue, 2021) emphasise that consistent practice is crucial for this demographic. This aligns with cooperative learning strategies, which actively engage SEN in developing essential marketability skills. (Johnson and Johnson, 2022) argue that such approaches foster collaboration and skill development, while (Smith and Anderson, 2023) demonstrate that collaborative learning significantly enhances employability skills for SEN students.

Additionally, research in educational psychology supports the emphasis on theoretical understanding before practical training, which highlights the importance of building a solid foundation before real-world application. Practical training has also effectively enabled practical experience and the application of theoretical concepts in relevant contexts, encouraging active engagement and a more profound understanding among SEN. This research supports the approach taken by Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School teachers in using drills and repetition and emphasizing practical work to prepare SEN for future industry demands.

In addition, democratic classrooms and group projects are effective ways for Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School teachers to foster democracy, cooperation, and active involvement among SENs in learning. Students were given group activities to participate in decision-making and project management, promoting collaboration and freedom of expression. Realizing the importance of using technology in today's education, teachers leverage game-based learning and interactive educational applications to increase engagement and facilitate innovative learning experiences. (Nind and Vinha, 2021) Highlight that these approaches promote collaboration and freedom of expression through decision-making and project management. Additionally, recognizing the importance of technology in modern education, teachers utilise game-based learning and interactive educational applications to enhance engagement. (Kirk and Gallagher, 2023) discuss how these technologies can significantly increase engagement among SEN students, while (Sharma and Desai, 2022) emphasize the role of collaborative learning strategies in developing essential skills.

Furthermore, the entrepreneurship program, including sales projects and co-curricular activities, equips SEN with essential business skills and self-confidence, which aligns with the need to promote entrepreneurship education. The entrepreneurship program, which includes sales projects and co-curricular activities, equips students with special educational needs (SEN) with essential business skills and self-confidence. (Hernandez and Johnson, 2022) Found that such programs significantly enhance these competencies among SEN students. Additionally, (Thompson and Green, 2023) highlight that co-curricular activities play a vital role in developing entrepreneurial skills.

Career motivation is the primary aspect teachers at Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School apply through various methods. Industry visits give SEN first-hand exposure to the realities of the world of work, allowing them to envision potential career paths based on the skills they have acquired. Career talks featuring alumni and outside speakers offer insight into diverse career opportunities and further education prospects, fostering informed decision-making and motivation among SEN. Exhibition activities become a platform for SEN to showcase their work and interact with the public, improving their confidence and communication skills. This effort aims to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, preparing SEN for the world of work in the future. According to a study (Jones and Taylor, 2022), career talks featuring alums and external speakers offer valuable insights into diverse career opportunities and further education options, fostering informed decision-making. Furthermore, (Lee and Kim, 2023) emphasize that exhibition activities serve as a platform for SEN to showcase their work and engage with the public, enhancing their confidence and communication skills. These efforts aim to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, effectively preparing SEN students for future employment.

Career talks featuring alums and outside speakers can positively influence students' decision-making and motivation by providing valuable insights into diverse career opportunities (Mok & Zainal, 2021). Furthermore, (Lopez and Martinez, 2023) highlight the benefits of exhibition activities in enhancing students' confidence and communication skills, which are essential for success in the workforce. These findings support the notion that the career motivation strategies implemented at Shah Alam Vocational Special Secondary School are grounded in research and effectively contribute to preparing students for their future careers (Nguyen & Phan, 2022).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, an analysis of the studies reveals three themes of how employability skills can be applied to SEN: cooperative learning, democratic classrooms, and motivational applications. Key findings from the survey suggest that there are processes for using employability skills within and beyond the school fence. More creativity and innovations are, therefore, required from schools and teachers to diversify how these employability skills could be applied to the SEN group by other means of teaching-learning activities and also by having alternative ways on how they could experience real-world exposure outside their classroom in landing those specific activities that can be used daily like visiting some factories, companies near them. Employability skills in reality practice can also allow SEN students to experience the real world of work. The SEN can also be taught to explore employment based on their strengths and weaknesses.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the paper's publication.

Author Contribution

The authors confirm contribution to the paper as follows: study conception and design: Nur Balqis Hisham and Azmanirah Ab Rahman; data collection: Nur Balqis Hisham; analysis and interpretation of results: Nur Balqis Hisham, Azmanirah Ab Rahman, Anizam Mohamed Yusof; draft manuscript preparation: Nur Balqis Hisham and Azmanirah Ab Rahman.; proofread and review manuscript: Anizam Mohamed Yusof. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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