

Career Transition for Special Needs Students: A Significant Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Transitioning from special education to post-school life presents unique challenges for students with disabilities. It is a phase marked by increased independence, decision-making, and the pursuit of further employment. However, students with disabilities often face barriers that can impede a smooth transition, including limited access to comprehensive transition programs and insufficient support in navigating this critical period. This systematic literature review explores the landscape of transition programs designed to bridge the gap between special education and post-school life. This study used the PRISMA approach. The systematic search of academic data using Scopus and Web of Science provides a comprehensive selection of studies, reviews, and articles related to the transition program for special education students. After applying advanced searching, the final data identifies three themes: 1) best practices for facilitating successful career transitions, 2) challenges faced by both teachers and parents in ensuring program success, and 3) the overall effectiveness of transition programs and support services. In conclusion, the systematic literature review highlights the importance of transition programs for special education students as a means to bridge the gap between their educational experience and the realities of adult life. By addressing the critical need for effective transition programs, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders can contribute to the improved post-school outcomes and overall well-being of students with disabilities. This review underscores the necessity for ongoing research and the development of evidence-based practices in the field of special education transition programs.

Keywords: Career Transition, Special Needs Student, Special Education

Introduction

This systematic review, titled "Career Transition for Special Education Students," provides a comprehensive exploration of the key aspects and hurdles associated with this significant life transition. Navigating the transition from school to the workforce is a critical phase for every individual, but it poses unique challenges for special education students. The research underscores that the difficulties in this process are influenced by evolving social structures and adapting to diverse learning environments (Richter et al., 2019). Special education

encompasses a diverse group of students with varying exceptionalities, including emotional or behavioral disorders, physical impairments, developmental delays, and learning difficulties (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2014). As these students approach the completion of their formal education, recognizing and addressing their needs in terms of career transition becomes imperative. Encouraging gainful employment for special education students has the potential to reduce their long-term reliance on social support services, enhance their self-worth, and foster a workforce characterized by diversity and inclusion.

Through a systematic review, this study intends to offer a comprehensive synthesis of current literature on career transition for special education students. The analysis will delve into best practices for facilitating successful career transitions, challenges faced by both teachers and parents in ensuring program success, and the overall effectiveness of transition programs and support services. This review seeks to contribute insights that will empower special education students during their journey from education to employment. By gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities and unique challenges associated with their career transition, the aim is to develop inclusive and effective strategies that enable these students to pursue meaningful and sustainable careers.

Literature Review

The transition process for students with disabilities is a pivotal stage marked by challenges and obstacles, shaping aspirations and goals (Schels & Wöhrer, 2022a). Amid academic, behavioral, and social challenges, these students navigate transitions between grade levels toward post-school outcomes (Schutz & Travers, 2023). Essential abilities for this transition include social, academic, self-sufficiency, and self-regulation (Viezel et al., 2022). Collaboration is vital, involving classroom teachers, school psychologists, personnel, families, the community, and students (Bakken, 2019). Teachers' role in developing workforce-relevant skills is crucial, supported by educational institutions aligning practices with workforce demands (Goldman et al., 2020). The collaborative effort between educators and industry experts is emphasized for a successful career transition.

The collaboration between general education and special education staff is essential for comprehensive support to students with disabilities in career development, fostering an inclusive environment (Schutz & Travers, 2023). Vocational rehabilitation counselors focus on promoting work experience and self-advocacy among transition-age clients (Oertle & O'Leary, 2017). Vocational Education and Training (VET) trainers shape apprentices' perceptions, influencing motivations and career aspirations, crucial for further training (Hofmann et al., 2021). Occupational therapists motivate special needs students through interactions, family support, and fostering positive attitudes toward work (Sukegawa & Ito, 2023). This collaborative approach aims to promote a supportive environment for the overall well-being and successful engagement of students with special needs in vocational education.

Efforts to enhance the success of transition programs vary globally. In Germany and Austria, the employment-centered transition is characterized by high standardization, segregation, and a robust (VET) system (Schels & Wöhrer, 2022b). England's Career and Technical Education (CTE) provides disabled students with opportunities to prepare for the workforce by encouraging specific career pathways (Lombardi et al., 2018). Saudi Arabian schools effectively collaborate with businesses, implementing best practices for transition planning, skills provision, and assessment, facilitating a smooth transition to employment (Almalky &

Alqahtani, 2021). Wisconsin's Let's Get to Work (LGTW) project outlines promising practices for improving employment outcomes for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including coaching, access to general education, community engagement, discouraging subminimum wage employment, and early work experiences (Molfenter et al., 2017).

Material and Methods

Identification

The process of conducting a systematic review to select pertinent papers for this report includes three main stages. Firstly, it encompasses the identification of keywords and associated terms by utilizing resources such as thesauri, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and prior research. After determining the relevant keywords, search strings were formulated for the Scopus and Web of Science (WoS) databases (see Table 1). In the initial phase of the systematic review, a combined total of 180 papers was successfully retrieved from both databases, showcasing the depth of career transition for special needs students.

Table 1

The Search Strings

Scopus	WOS
TITLE-ABS-KEY (transition AND special AND needs AND student) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOC")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Employment") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Transition") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Special Education") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Article"))	Results for transition AND "special needs" (Title) and Preprint Citation Index (Exclude – Database)
TITLE-ABS-KEY (transition AND special AND needs AND student) AND PUBYEAR > 2018 AND PUBYEAR < 2024 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOC")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE , "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Employment") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Transition") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Special Education") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Article"))	Results for transition AND "special needs" (Title) and Preprint Citation Index (Exclude – Database) and 2023 or 2022 or 2021 or 2020 or 2019 (Publication Years) and Web of Science Core Collection or ProQuest™ Dissertations & Theses Citation Index or KCI-Korean Journal Database (Database) and English (Languages)

Screening

The initial screening process should exclude duplicate papers. One hundred twenty-nine papers were excluded in the first phase, and 51 publications were examined in the second

phase using a variety of inclusion and exclusion criteria formed by the researchers. The first criterion was literature, or research publications, as they are the main source of useful knowledge. It also involves the omission of articles, reviews, meta-analyses, syntheses, and systematic reviews from the current study. Moreover, the review focused solely on English-language papers. It is imperative to highlight that the schedule was selected with a five-year timeframe in mind (2019–2023).

Eligibility

Fifty-one articles have been prepared for the eligibility step, which is the third stage. Currently, every article's title and significant content underwent meticulous scrutiny to confirm that they adhered to the inclusion criteria and aligned with the objectives of the present study involving family involvement. Thirty-four reports were excluded since empirical data did not support them. Lastly, Table 2 indicates that seventeen articles are accessible for examination.

Table 2

The selection criterion is searching

CRITERION	INCLUSION	EXCLUSION
LANGUAGE	English	Non-English
TIMELINE	2019 – 2023	< 2019
LITERATURE TYPE	Journal (Article)	Conference, Book, Review
SUBJECT AREA	Social science	Besides Computer and Engineering/Others

Data Abstraction and Analysis

In this research, a comprehensive analysis was conducted by researchers focusing on identifying related subjects and subtopics. The data collection phase involved a meticulous examination of 17 papers to extract statements or information related to the research questions. The subsequent phase involved a collaborative assessment by the authors and experts to group and organize the findings related to career transition for special needs students. Three key themes emerged: 1) best practices for facilitating successful career transition, 2) challenges faced by teachers and parents in ensuring program success, and 3) the effectiveness of transition programs and support services in preparing students for the workforce. The authors ensured the interconnectedness and relevance of these themes, collaborating to address any disparities and fine-tuning the themes for logical flow and consistency. Expert validation, conducted by Ts. Dr. Rozniza Zaharudin, from USM, played a crucial role in establishing the clarity, significance, and sufficiency of each sub-theme, ensuring domain validity. Adjustments were made based on feedback and input from experts, enhancing the overall quality of the research.

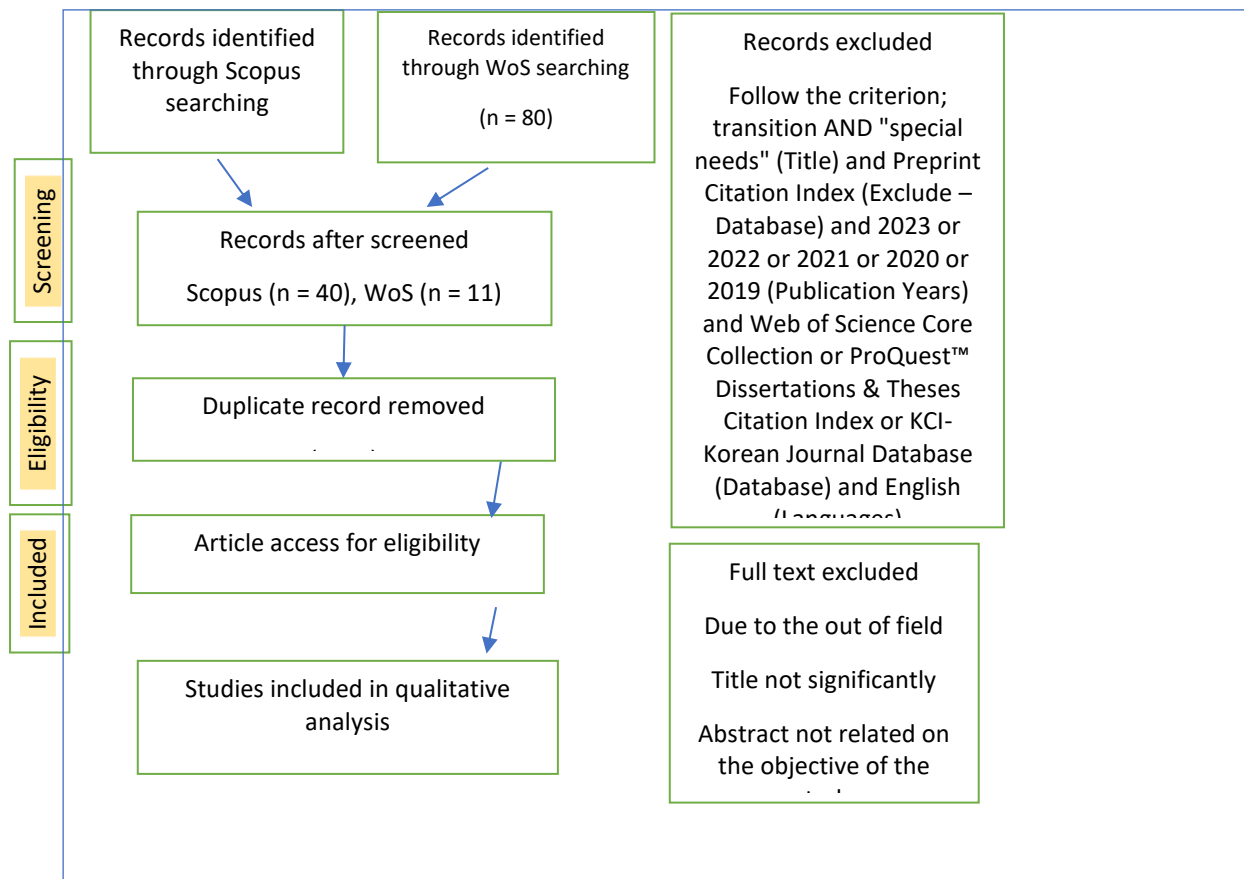


Figure 1: PRISMA

Result and Finding

Best Practices for Facilitating a Successful Career Transition

Title & Author	Aim	Finding
The Transition to Employment in Wales and the Canary Islands for People with Intellectual Disabilities: Supported Employment (Peña-Quintana & Santana-Vega, 2022)	Explore the transition process to employment and investigate the current landscape of Supported Employment programs.	The transition to employment faces common barriers, and providing support emerges as a pivotal element in ensuring equal opportunities and nurturing a more inclusive and sustainable society.
Employable: Transition Program to Improve Employment Outcomes for Students with Disabilities - Needs Assessment & Current Constraints (Goodman et al., 2020)	Improve employment outcomes for students with disabilities.	The obtained results serve as the foundation for crafting an innovative and evidence-based program model named EmployABLE.
Special Education Transition Services for Students with Extensive Support Needs (Carlson et al., 2019)	Challenges and disparities experienced in attaining personally significant post-school experiences.	The post-school outcomes are influenced by various factors, including their transition planning, access

Title & Author	Aim	Finding
		to resources, societal attitudes, and support networks.
Special Education Transition Services for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (Bouck & Park, 2019)	Specific focus on the transition from high school to adult life.	Current transition practices and outcomes: examining evidence-based practices designed to support their transition to post-school settings.
From school to work: Long-term employment outcomes for former special educational needs students (Båtevik, 2019)	How qualifications and specific life courses change employment in their adult lives.	The probability of being long-term employed is quite low among former SEN students, especially women.
Self-determination and Transition Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities: Findings from the Special Needs Education Longitudinal Study (Chao et al., 2019)	Investigate self-determination and associated transition could predict their transition outcomes.	Even if students are able to complete high school and go on to college or work, their achievement of self-determination skills may still be insufficient, which could have an effect on how well they function in postsecondary outcomes.

Challenges Faced by Teachers and Parents in Ensuring the Success of the Career Transition Program

Title & Author	Aim	Finding
Special Education Teachers Preservice Experience With Inclusive Postsecondary Education Programs: Impact on Professional Practices and Dispositions for Secondary Transition Professionals (Plotner et al., 2023)	Perceptions of Teachers Preservice regarding their experience in working with an inclusive postsecondary education program (IPSE).	Building rapport with students, advocating for students, and facilitating inclusive outcomes had an impact on them as professionals.
Teacher Perceptions of Barriers to Providing Work-Based Learning Experiences (Rooney-Kron & Dymond, 2021)	Teacher's perceptions of barriers to planning and organizing work-based learning experiences (WBLEs).	Barriers: limited opportunities, resources, stakeholder support, time constraints, and student support.

Title & Author	Aim	Finding
Teacher perceptions of implementation practices to support secondary students in special education (Cavendish et al., 2020)	Perceptions of special education teachers related to assessment, progress monitoring, and transition mandates in a large urban district.	Teachers identify student needs, offer support and services, and navigate the implementation through collaboration and partnerships.
Being a mother of children with special needs during educational transitions: positioning when 'fighting against a superpower' (Roth & Faldet, 2020)	How mothers of children with special needs understand themselves in educational contexts.	The absence of trust between the teachers and schools had a significant impact on her ability to fully support her son's schooling.
What are the issues about the inclusion of students with special educational needs in French higher education? (Sivilotti, 2020)	Impact of health issues.	A mediator needs to be hired as a potential strategy to handle the challenges presented by students with serious and chronic diseases and suit their unique demands.
When disability becomes an ability to navigate the transition to higher education: a comparison of students with and without disabilities (Dangoisse et al., 2020)	Identify specific challenges, requirements, and potential areas of support unique to students with disabilities during the transition process.	This insight highlights the role of ongoing disability management in facilitating a smoother transition process, and the results have been examined in the context of various transition theories.

Effectiveness of Transition Programs and Support Services in Preparing Students for the Workforce

Title & Author	Aim	Finding
Investigating the opportunities provided for young adults with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) to prepare for adulthood in a city in England (Malkani, 2021)	The focus is on identifying, prioritizing, and proficiently developing, coordinating, and monitoring services and support.	Evaluating the effectiveness of current support structures for planning and implementing the strategic direction of services that aid the transition.
States Decrease Their Required Secondary Transition Planning Age: Federal Policy Must Change (Suk et al., 2020)	Find out when the states and territories need to start transition planning.	A review of special education law, an overview of research-based transition models, references to pertinent data-based

Title & Author	Aim	Finding
		studies, and a summary of significant position statements.
College and Career Transition: A Bridge to Postsecondary Success for High School Special Needs Students (Glover, 2019)	Attitudes of educators, counselors, and administrators that could support or undermine students capacity to manage the transition from high school to employment.	Teacher preparation is required in order to foster the self-advocacy skills needed for bridge students to navigate this transition.
How far can social role valorization theory help in transition planning for a school-leaver with significant special needs? (Connaughton & Cline, 2021)	How the Social Role Valorization (SRV) theory might be used to help students with moderate intellectual disabilities transition.	The theory is useful in guiding the transition process. It may need to be adapted in the field of disability, such as the Social Model of Disability and Inclusion.
It's not just about a paycheck: Perspectives on employment preparation of students with intellectual disability in federally funded higher education programs (Domin et al., 2020)	Preparing students who have intellectual disabilities for postsecondary education that earns funding from the government.	Professionals highlight partnerships, outreach, increased campus visibility, and greater accessibility to career resources as crucial tactics for successful student employment programs.

Discussion and Conclusion

Successful career transitions for individuals with disabilities involve recognizing and addressing common barriers through robust support systems, fostering equal opportunities, and contributing to a more inclusive society. Strategies include assisting students in navigating their physical environment, fostering positive teacher relationships, and leveraging additional support from special needs staff. The study, which uses the EmployABLE model, emphasizes evidence-based practices to improve post-school outcomes for youth with significant support needs (Goodman et al., 2020). Overall, research demonstrates best practice in successful transition programs is the importance of tailored support and evidence-based practices in facilitating successful career transitions for individuals with disabilities (Bouck & Park, 2019). Teachers and parents face several challenges and obstacles in ensuring the success of the career transition program. Some of the challenges involve building strong relationships with students, advocating for students' rights and needs, and ensuring the success of inclusive outcomes (Plotner et al., 2023). Teachers and parents may also face challenges related to the planning and maintenance of Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs), including constraints on opportunities, resources, stakeholder support, time constraints, and support for students. A lack of trust between teachers and schools can also have a significant impact on their ability to fully support their child's learning process (Roth & Faldet, 2020). Therefore, continuous research and improvement in career transition programs is essential to overcome these challenges and ensure students' success in their careers. The effectiveness of transition

programs and support services in preparing these students for the workforce is important to evaluate the success of their preparation for the world of work. Transition programs need to provide students with the skills and knowledge needed to enter the job market. This includes job skills development, career training, and guidance to help them integrate into the work environment, (Malkani, 2021; Connaughton & Cline, 2021) . Support services are also important to provide assistance to students with special needs or particular challenges, ensuring that they have adequate support to succeed in their careers (Domin et al., 2020). The effectiveness of this program can be evaluated through the assessment of the student's job performance after the end of the program, the employment rate, and their level of satisfaction with the support received .

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