

# The Implementation of Industrial Training for Students with a Disability: The Role of Adaptability in Enhancing Their Workplace Well-Being

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An industrial training program for schools by the Malaysian Ministry of Education has been in place since 2017. The Upper Secondary Industry Apprenticeship program [PIMA] was implemented in vocational schools in 2010 as an extension to the industrial apprenticeship program. This industrial training is a career transition to prepare students for the workforce. In the context of special education students, they are also required to seek relevant knowledge and training so that they could acquire a career. Industrial training should provide an equal opportunity of education for diverse students as stipulated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 to 2025. Industrial training plays an important role in enhancing students' career well-being and helps develop their potential, interests, and skills. The purpose of this paper is to assess the implementation of industrial training for students with disabilities. It is also designed to examine the role of adaptability in enhancing their workplace well-being. The results and implications were discussed critically.

**Key words:** *Industry training, special education, disability, workplace adaptability, workplace well-being.*

## Introduction

Special education students (SES) should be equipped with the necessary knowledge and industrial training to be able to take part in the workplace. Industrial training is a career transition training that prepares students for the workforce. Schools should provide pre-



vocational skills such as food and beverage service, bakery and plant operation skills to SES before they are plunged into industries. Vocational skills programs provide opportunities for SES to acquire knowledge and job-related training (Anizam, Manisah, & Amla, 2013). The combination of these activities taps into students' individual needs, choices and interests, including instruction, community experience, job development and various adult life goals after school years (Williams-Diehm, Lynch, 2007). In addition, according to Sankardas and Rajanahally (2015), the school-to-work transition can be made easier by proper career preparation. This helps young school leavers in attaining employment and enhancing career outcomes. Unfortunately, students with disabilities finish their secondary school without a working transition plan. There is an urgent need for students with special needs to be provided with appropriate skills training and to be given opportunities to apply them in the real working environment to enhance their self-esteem (Nor, Hanafi, & Yasin, 2018). Industrial training is one of the means to prepare SES for entering the workplace.

The Ministry of Education Malaysia (2017) has taken the initiative by designing an integrated Upper Secondary Industry Apprenticeship program. This industrial training is a collaborative program between secondary schools and industries. This is offered to students aged fifteen and above in selected secondary schools. The industry is defined as a skills training provider that manages programs while students, as the apprentice, receive skills training provided by the industry (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). Industrial training aims to provide alternative learning to special needs students of special integration education programs or inclusive programs that belong to the field of skills at secondary schools. Industrial training provides an equal opportunity of education for diverse students, as stipulated in the Malaysia Education Blueprint, 2013-2025 (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013). Hence, industrial training plays a pivotal role in enhancing students' career well-being and developing their potential, interests and skills. This program is a pilot program implemented by the Ministry of Education in selected schools throughout Malaysia. The purpose of this paper is to assess the implementation of industrial training for students with disabilities. It is also designed to examine the role of adaptability in enhancing their workplace well-being.

Based on the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013 to 2025, 1934 students with special needs from vocational special education schools completed Form 5 in 2012. However, there was no standard job placement program provided for them (Mashitah & Suhaida, 2014). Apart from career development, vocational training is a very critical experience for SES. The Malaysian Plan of Action for People with Disabilities 2016-2022, proposed by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (2016), targeted to further increase the number of existing special need students attending the existing career transition program by 10 percent (Ardzulyna, Aznan, Abd Rahim & Hui Min, 2018). Yet, there were also organisations that claim there was a lack of support and attention in initiating and creating employment support systems for SES. Ardzulyna et al. (2018) have suggested that the practice of career transition

amongst students with special needs should not only be seen from the perspective of a practical approach (in terms of student development), but also be viewed in-depth from other perspectives such as student-focused planning, family involvement, inter-agency collaboration and program structure, to ensure an effective career transition program among students with special needs in Malaysia.

In Malaysian education scope, the Special Education Integrated Program (*PPKI*) implemented the Special Education Secondary School Curriculum Standard [*KSSMPK*] in 2017, which was added to the Upper Secondary Industry Apprenticeship program [*PIMA*]. The combination of these programs is helpful in enhancing SES's workplace adaptability. Schools that provide vocational education career preparation industrial training and school-based engagement after school are the starting point towards the achievement of workplace well-being. The combination of vocational education in the school and training industry for students with learning disabilities enables them to adapt easily to the working environment (Abdullah, N., Yasin, M. H. M., & Abdullah, 2015). Vocational education assists students with special needs in obtaining the necessary skills and serves as preparation for them to secure a job in the competitive job market (Lokman, Nurul Qistin, & Mohd Hanafi, 2009; Ramlee, 2000). Thus, the adaptability acquired by SES during the industrial training period enhances their well-being in job placement after school.

This research suggests the application of the life-span theory of control: a major part of development involves the individual adaptively adjusting goals to opportunities and constraints (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995; Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010; Martin, Nejad, Colmar, & Liem, 2013). The theory and research related to subjective adaptability well-being investigates how students with disabilities adapt to positive and negative workplace circumstances in industrial training.

In general, the aim of this paper is to identify the effectiveness of the Upper Secondary Industry Apprenticeship program [*PIMA*] for students with disabilities in developing their potential, interests and skills, and in enhancing students' career well-being. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

- i. To assess the implementation of industrial training for students with disabilities
- ii. To examine the role of adaptability in enhancing their workplace well-being

## Literature Review

This section presents the critical literature on the constructs used in this study, and their relationships with each other, in the following subsections:



### ***Industrial Training for Students with Disabilities***

Industrial training can be defined as a career transition. It is a combination of activities for students with disabilities from school to after-school activities (Nor et al., 2018; Williams-Diehm et al., 2007). Industrial training programs enable SES to learn at school and at the same time gain hands-on experience in building positive attitudes and potential in the transition career field (Mercer, C. D., Mercer & Pullen, 2011; Norfishah, 2016). In Malaysia, researchers have agreed that industrial training for students with disabilities should be emphasised even at school level, especially in education programs that provide skills such as career transition programs (Ardzulyna et al., 2018). Thus, it is vital to have job placement services where SES are selected to attend industrial training in companies (Cheong & Sharifah Zainiyah, 2013). This ensures that SES are assessed in school to determine their skills and interest.

### ***KSSMPK***

The new curriculum system for special education, since 2017, is the Special Education Secondary School Curriculum Standard (KSSMPK). The curriculum was implemented in three phases; First Wave: Preparation phase (2013-2015), Second Wave: Implementation phase (2016-2020), and Third Wave: Phase of Assessment (2021- 2025) (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012), in secondary schools of students with disabilities to provide academic and vocational education. This curriculum was divided into high, medium and low function categories (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2017). Based on the requirements of the National Education Blueprint (2013 to 2025), this curriculum was formulated to improve both content and learning standards, to comply with international standards. It ensures that an appropriate and relevant curriculum is provided for students with special needs. The use of KSSMPK has a positive impact on the future of students with disabilities. The implementation of KSSMPK focuses on vocational skills and career transition. Studies have shown that this curriculum has a great impact on the future of special needs students (Mohd Reduan, Mohd Mokhtar, & Norlena, 2018).

### ***Adaptability***

According to the Cambridge Dictionary and Thesaurus (2019), adaptability refers to the necessary quality in an ever-changing (work) environment and the ability or willingness to change in order to suit different conditions. Although there is currently no consensus for the definition of adaptability, most related kinds of literature explain it as involving a change in behaviour, and how people deal with a change in the environment (Poole, 2018). In this study, individual adaptability is defined as “an individual’s ability, skill, disposition, willingness, and/or motivation to change or fit different tasks, social and environmental

features” (Robert & Paul, 2006). The role of adaptability is a hidden focus in an educational system that is important in non-cognitive and cognitive dimensions of schooling. Despite the lack of adaptability at the workplace, there were issues of the lack of prior workforce participation and experience. Another measure of adaptability is the substitution of less-educated workers for more educated ones, as relative shortages of and rising wages of the latter manifest. If workers have broader skills (including interpersonal and interpersonal skills), there is the possibility of greater substitution of less educated workers replacing ones of higher levels as relative wages change (Levin, 2015). Researches have also associated life satisfaction with broadened cognitive capacity and resources (Fredrickson, 2001), and this broadening of capacity is aligned with the adaptability concept. Building on prior measurement work demonstrates the psychometric properties of adaptability. The present study investigates dispositional predictors (personality, implicit theories) of adaptability and the role of adaptability in predicting academic (motivation, engagement, disengagement) and non-academic (life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of meaning and purpose, emotional instability) outcomes (Martin et al., 2013).

### ***Workplace Well-Being***

In researching teacher assistance, workplace well-being emphasises the importance of effective classroom practices. There are four forms of workplace well-being. Firstly, workplace enjoyment. This refers to the positive evaluations of one’s subjective experience at work (Van Horn, Taris, Schaufeli, & Schreurs, 2004). The second is workplace self-concept, which refers to teacher assistants’ positive appraisals of their effectiveness in their role and in the workplace (Marsh, 2007). The third is workplace participation, referring to the involvement and contribution in activities and tasks at the workplace. Lastly, workplace motivation, refers to the drive and inclination to perform their duties and role in the job (Martin, 2009). Hence, the key outcome variables in work and occupational psychology tap into the aspects of affective well-being (e.g. job satisfaction, commitment and depression), whereas other outcomes measure aspects of the broader conceptualisations of well-being (e.g. motivation, competence, and efficacy) (Van Horn et al., 2004). According to Smith and Bell (2015), the roadmap concept emerged from discussions focused on the complexities of creating an agreement between the project partners on what constitutes inclusive learning and inclusive environments. These complexities form the concept of the roadmap as more than a set of simple instructions and are given to the vocational education institution and/or workplace provider. Another analogy is ‘journey toward inclusion’, upon which all professionals/practitioners and the institutions within which they work must embark in order to ensure that SES learners can attain their potential, both in terms of achievement and their well-being. Potentially, multidimensional approaches in measuring well-being may result in more precise assessments of the relationships among well-being and other concepts than



‘affect-only’ approaches, thus contributing to our understanding of the nature, causes, and consequences of occupational well-being (Van Horn et al., 2004)

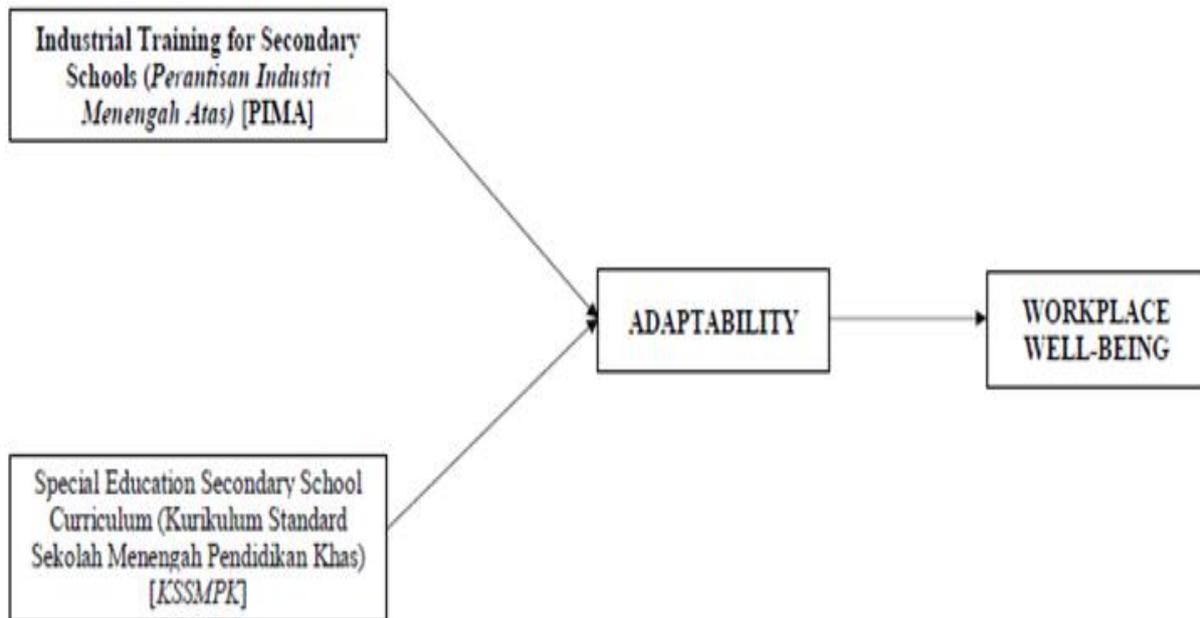
### **Research Methodology**

The research identified the studies published on the industrial training of students with disabilities, the role of adaptability, and workplace well-being. A literature search covering Malaysia and overseas peer-reviewed published articles or book chapters was conducted using all the main databases including Science-Direct, ProQuest, Ebscohost, Eric, Springer, PsycInfo, Sage, and Taylor & Francis Online. These databases include relevant journals in the field, such as the Australian Journal of Career Development, the British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, the Career Development Quarterly, the International Journal of Educational and Vocational Guidance, the Journal of Career Assessment, the Journal of Career Development, and the Journal of Vocational Behaviour. Some journals were not included in these databases. The search specified that all the terms ‘industrial training’, ‘special education’, ‘adaptability’ and ‘workplace well-being’ appeared in the titles, abstracts or keywords. In the first round, all the articles or book chapters that include the exact term “career adaptability” in the title, abstract, or keywords, or a measure of career adaptability were retained, resulting in 47 published pieces. Studies were conducted in a wide range of Asian and European countries, as well as America and other countries such as South Africa, India, Australia, Georgia and the Czech Republic.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The design of the preliminary conceptual framework was formed based on the hypothesis model of adaptability (Martin et al., 2013). This model is relevant in investigating the relationship between the role of adaptability and the workplace well-being of students with disabilities. It also investigates the effectiveness of the implementation of PIMA and KSSMPK towards SES’s adaptability in the workplace. The implementation of industrial training of all PPKI in Malaysia contributes to the construction of this framework. PIMA is the on-going industrial training, and assessment should be carried out to determine the implementation level in regards to the role of the adaptability of students with disabilities in the workplace. The implementation of KSSMPK is also a continuous part of developing education for students with disabilities in transition from school to career. The conceptual framework designed is used to determine the role of adaptability in enhancing workplace well-being. The construction of the framework is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework



## Findings

The findings show the convergent validity of the constructs and the statistics of the findings reveal no issue with convergent validity because all the criteria are fulfilled. Table 1 shows the convergent validity given below:

**Table 1:** Convergent Validity

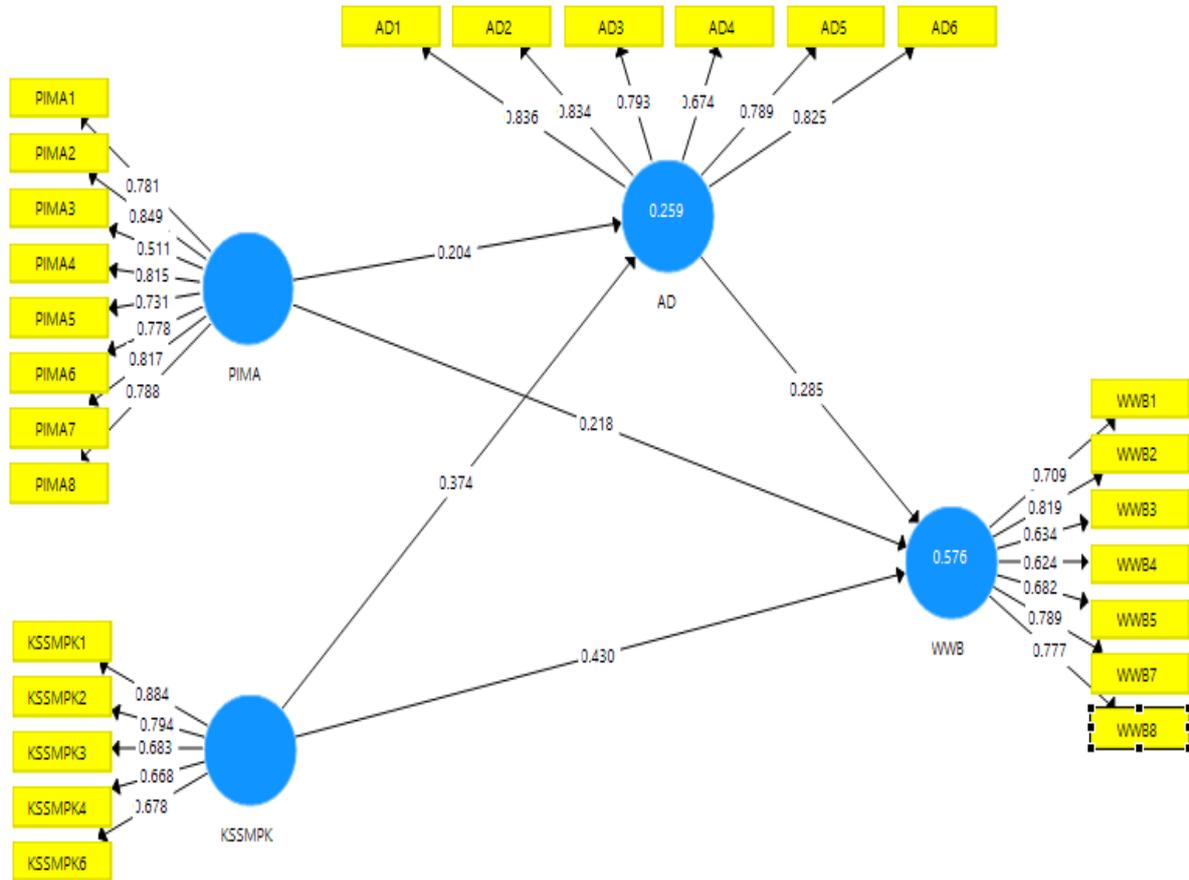
Items	Loadings	Alpha	CR	AVE
AD1	0.836	0.883	0.911	0.630
AD2	0.834			
AD3	0.793			
AD4	0.674			
AD5	0.789			
AD6	0.825			
KSSMPK1	0.884	0.806	0.861	0.557
KSSMPK2	0.794			
KSSMPK3	0.683			
KSSMPK4	0.668			
KSSMPK6	0.678			
PIMA1	0.781	0.896	0.917	0.585
PIMA2	0.849			
PIMA3	0.511			
PIMA4	0.815			
PIMA5	0.731			
PIMA6	0.778			
PIMA7	0.817			
PIMA8	0.788			
WWB1	0.709	0.849	0.884	0.523
WWB2	0.819			
WWB3	0.634			
WWB4	0.624			
WWB5	0.682			
WWB7	0.789			
WWB8	0.777			

The findings show the discriminant validity of the constructs and the statistics of the findings reveal no issue with discriminant validity because all the criteria are fulfilled. Table 2 shows the discriminant validity given below:

**Table 2:** Discriminant Validity

	AD	KSSMPK	PIMA	WWB
AD				
KSSMPK	0.537			
PIMA	0.419	0.545		
WWB	0.636	0.713	0.605	

**Figure 2.** Measurement Model Assessment

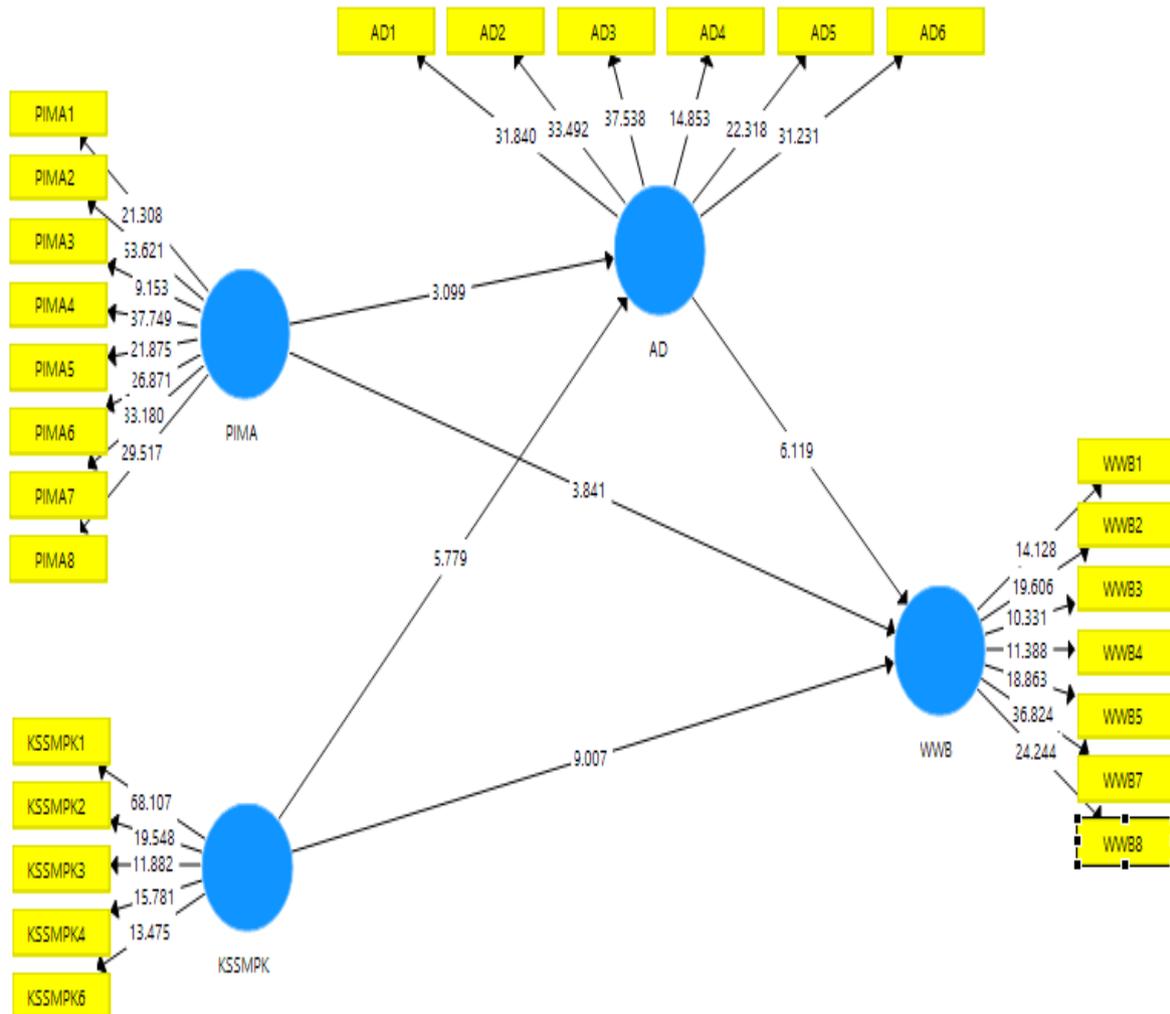


The path analysis has shown a positive linkage among the PIMA, KSSMPK and WWB, because of the positive sign associated with beta. In addition, the relationships are significant because t values are more than 1.64 and p values are less than 0.05. Moreover, AD has positive mediation among the nexus of PIMA and WWB, KSSMPK and WWB. Table 3 given below shows the path analysis of the study.

**Table 3:** Path Analysis

	Beta	S.D.	t-values	p-values	L.L.	U.L.
AD -> WWB	0.285	0.047	6.119	0.000	0.210	0.364
KSSMPK -> AD	0.374	0.065	5.779	0.000	0.271	0.486
KSSMPK -> WWB	0.430	0.048	9.007	0.000	0.353	0.508
PIMA -> AD	0.204	0.066	3.099	0.001	0.096	0.317
PIMA -> WWB	0.218	0.057	3.841	0.000	0.124	0.314
KSSMPK -> AD -> WWB	0.107	0.026	4.032	0.000	0.067	0.154
PIMA -> AD -> WWB	0.058	0.020	2.859	0.002	0.026	0.095

**Figure 3.** Structural Model Assessment



### Discussion and Conclusion

This study explores the transitional needs and subsequently develops an effective transitional plan for Malaysian individuals with special needs transitioning from secondary education to employment. The sample comprises two secondary school special education teachers and four individuals with learning disabilities who are in the workforce. The findings were triangulated among five co-ordinators of non-government organisations, as well as parents for the four individuals with learning disabilities and their employers. The findings revealed that the transitional needs of individuals with special needs include: a collaborative support system, job coaching, self-advocacy skills training, career guidance and transition assessment, vocational training, trained transition personnel and transition services. The transition process is a collaborative process between the government and non-governmental



sectors. Based on the findings, an effective transitional plan from secondary education to employment for students with learning disabilities was drawn (Cheong & Sharifah Zainiyah, 2013).

According to the VIs, 'There has been a significant change of attitude among employers from 1997 to 2013 toward employing people with special educational needs'. Employers are willing to help but do not know how to help young adults with special educational needs adapt to the working pattern of their organisation. The employers do not want special needs employees to be a liability, but rather productive members of the team (Sankardas & Rajanahally, 2015). The findings also proved that the lack of work experience in industry among special need students is a factor that contributes to difficulties in adapting to a new environment, weakness in communication skills (including communication with employers, colleagues and customers, as well as difficulty in understanding direction) and negative behaviour in completing the tasks (Aliza, 2014).

Moreover, the success of enhancing special needs students' workplace well-being also relies on support from the school administration. The schools should provide industrial training with the necessary tools, materials and nearby space for the training sessions. The next hurdle is that teachers have to find places for their students' internships in order to gain work experience. This is necessary because teachers need to make sure that students undergo the adaptability process through the work experience. This would prepare them for the real working world besides guaranteeing them more employment opportunities (Aliza, 2013; Linstrom, Doren, & Miesch, 2011). Parents have to show their support to their children for assuring the success of the implementation of industrial training and to increase the confidence level of students with disabilities. The parent support system ensures that the children are capable to adapt in the social workplace (Aliza, 2013).

The findings reveal that there are many individuals with learning disabilities who are not able to transition successfully because individual transition plans were developed too late. Esther, a mother of a child with Down Syndrome, has revealed that it was only after secondary education that she sent her child to a School-To-Work Transition program run by a non-governmental organisation (Cheong & Sharifah, 2013). Transition planning should begin early due to a lack of career awareness. Prevocational skills and vocational skills require repetitive training to enable effective interpersonal communication, increased self-awareness and the learning of skills that are necessary for employment.

As for future studies, the researcher suggests that the practice of career transition among students with special needs be not only seen from the perspective of the practical approach (in terms of student development) but also be viewed in depth from other aspects like student-focused planning, family involvement, inter-agency collaboration and program



structure to ensure an effective career transition program amongst students with special needs in the country (Arzulyna et al., 2018). Whereas for the students themselves, it is recommended they should strive to be able to survive as a more independent person and be more adaptable and flexible in the workplace. Suggestions also showed that parents' participation and support using varied approaches and mediums can be considered by the industrial training programs provided by the schools (Nor et al., 2018).

Moreover, teachers should collaborate with society and the community to discover the problems faced by students during industrial training, especially in adapting to the workplace. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) prefer to be together with friends of the same fate in any field they are involved in (Safari, A., & Mohd Arief, 2000). The main reasons for them quitting are; not feeling confident, feeling inferior about their own ability, finding it difficult to adapt and communicate with others (Abdullah, N., Yasin, M. H. M., & Abdullah, 2015). This study is important as it can enhance the workplace well-being of students with disabilities in regards to the role of adaptability in industrial training. The implementation of this study would also see the collaboration between schools and local communities involved in promoting workplace well-being enhancement for special education students.



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