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SELECTION OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION OF SPECIAL NEEDS` STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN MALAYSIA: STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS` PESRPECTIVES

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Abstract
This study aims to identify the tendency of students with special needs learning disabilities in choosing the field of their vocational education. This study also highlights the perceptions of parents and teachers towards the vocational field chosen by the students. A survey method was used in this study which involved 351 special needs` students with learning disabilities, 336 parents, and 248 teachers in the State of Selangor, Malaysia. The findings of the study indicate that there were several constructs namely, realistic, investigative, artistic, social, entrepreneurial, and conventional which determine students with special needs learning disabilities choosing the field of vocational education. Meanwhile, several factors that influence parents' perceptions of their child's choice of vocational education field have been discussed in this study. This study illuminates the phenomena and tendency of difficulties faced by students with special needs learning difficulties in choosing their field of vocational education. In this regards, parents and teachers have an important role in providing support to students with special needs in their learning and vocational choices.

Keywords: selection, special education students, vocational education

Introduction

The current career education program for the Special Needs` Students with Learning Disabilities (SNS LD) is not based on a proper system. The existing career education programs do not have a well-established theory and appropriate activities to help SNS LD make their field of education choices. Worryingly, statistics released by the Special Education Division (2015) showed that there are still SNS LD who dropped out of Special Vocational Education Secondary School (SMPKV) Shah Alam and SMPKV Indahpura before they successfully graduated with a Malaysian Vocational Diploma (DVM). Meanwhile, SMPKV Kuantan, SMPKV Merbok do not have complete data on SNS LD dropouts.

Quenner (2015) suggested that the failure of existing career education programs is due to lack of emphasis on career planning skills while the students were in the secondary school. In fact, his study related to SNS LD career education from 1991 to 2011 found that these phenomena had led to decline of the number of SNS LD who enroll in vocational education for further education. Newman, Madaus and Javitz (2016) also argued that the lack of career planning activities has made SNS LD difficult to identify their own interests, abilities and shortcomings. As a result, they are unable to make realistic choices about the tendencies of the field of vocational education that are in line with themselves.

Wehman, Inge, Brooke, and Paul (2007) have conducted a study related to the acceptance of SNS LD on career education programs using Information and Communication Technology. They found that as many as 50% of SNS LD do not use online career education programs. This finding is in line with the study of Raghavendra, Newman, Grace, and Wood (2013) who found that SNS LD are rarely use online services to explore their learning information due to their own low potential or capability. It is because, as suggested by Ferri and Giannoumis (2014), the current career education program software is not inclusive for SNS LD. As a result, a lot of SNS LD face difficulties in determining the direction of their education.

It is quite alarming because the lack of self-determination skills in career education programs has caused SNS LD to experience crisis and discrimination in their lives (Field, Sarver and Shaw's, 2013). In this regard, Tilson and Simonsen (2013) found that self-determination skills were not included in the SNS LD career education program because it focused more on job placement activities after the students graduated from high school (Bram, 2016). Due to the shortcomings of this program, the SNS LD do not have the opportunity to make decisions or choices of their vocational education field. The situations are even worse because the teachers are unclear about the activities of self-determination skills that should be placed upon the career education program for SNS LD (Kleinert, Harrison, Mills, Dueppen, and Trailor, 2014). As a result, these skills have been neglected. Therefore, it is unsurprising that many of SNS LD are less motivated because they do not know how to make decisions about themselves and have to rely on their parents.

To tackle the problems that we have discussed previously, it is important to develop a comprehensive career education program for SNS LD in secondary schools. This step is one of the initial strategies to give a better and a more prosperous life to SNS LD in the future (Bram & Putra, 2019). Thus, the SNS LD career education program known as e-Jejak was developed. e-Jejak was developed to help the SNS LD plan and make choices about their vocational education field. Making the right choice is very important for the SNS LD because an incorrect selection of vocational fields might cause the SNS LD to drop out from their school, to earn low salaries due to lack of education, or to become unemployment.

In addition, the main components that lead to the selection of vocational fields for students (Bram & Avillanova, 2019) with special needs were identified through a survey of parents and teachers of SNS LD. Perceptual agreement between parents and teachers in designing the education modules for SNS LD is important because they are those who have the in-depth knowledge of the needs and abilities of SNS LD. By doing so, we would also like to address the grasp the

problems identified earlier by Martin, Morehart, Lauzon, and Daviso (2013) who found that among the causes of failure of existing career education modules was due to lack of emphasis on parental perceptions (Bram & Pasaribu, 2020) compared to teachers of SNS LD. To sum up, this study aims to identify the tendency of SNS LD in choosing the field of their vocational education, the perceptions of their parents and teachers regarding the vocational field chosen by the students.

In this research, we followed Gottfredson and Johnstun (2011) suggestion of a theory-ridden approach to career assistance. In their research, the emphasize the importance of John Holland's work in career assistance, particularly his theory of Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1970) which was developed from his seminal work of typology of vocational personalities (1959). Furthermore, Holland developed his theory of vocational personalities and work environment (1997) in which he categorized six work personalities, namely realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional. This theory provides a framework for our research and helps to classify the SNS LD tendencies in making choice of their vocational field. This theory has been used by previous researchers (see e.g. Yunus, Hassan, Kamaruddin, 2018, Ariff, Bakar, and Zamzuri, 2020, Peter, Gitonga, and Kubai, 2021) and has shown a strong contribution in analyzing vocational interest among physically handicapped and normal individuals (Wasif and Ghazal, 2018). By using Holland's theory and following previous researchers, this research aims to provide a better explanation to the phenomena under investigation.

Method

This research is a cross-sectional survey which aims to investigate the perspectives of SNS LD, parents and teachers toward the choices of vocational filed by the students. A cross-sectional design was chosen due to its strength in providing a snapshot of the current condition of the population (Mills and Gay, 2019). A simple random sampling method was used in determining the participants in this study. With a total of population is 3.915, we followed the method suggested by Krejie and Morgan (1970). As a result, 351 students, 346 parents, and 248 teachers in Selangor, Malaysia were selected to participate in this study. The data were obtained by using tests and questionnaire. By using questionnaire, researchers could collect a large amount of data in a relatively short time. Thus, it is an effective way in conducting survey research (Gay and Airasian, 2009).

Findings and Discussion

Students` Preference of Vocational Education

This section identifies the tendencies of choices made by SNS LD regarding their vocational education field. These tendencies are studied and analyzed based on psychological measurement tools based on six constructs, namely Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Entrepreneurial and Conventional (Holland, 1997). The findings are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Tendency of SNS LD in Selecting Vocational Education

No.	Construct	Frequency	Percent
1.	Realistic	50	14.2
2.	Investigative	102	29.0
3.	Artistic	56	15.9
4.	Sosial	52	14.8
5.	Entreprenuer	45	12.8
6.	Convensional	46	13.1

n= 351

Based on Table 1, the majority of SNS LD chose the Investigative construct for their educational field inclinations, which was 102 people (29.0%). Artistic construct is the second highest construct chosen, which is 56 people (15.9%) and followed by Social construct, which is 52 people (14.8%) while Realistic construct is the fourth construct chosen by study participants, which is 50 people (14.2%) and the fifth is the Conventional construct, which is 46 people (13.1%). The construct that was less chosen by the study participants was the Entrepreneurship construct, which was 45 people (12.8%).

The findings in Table 1 are interesting because the highest percentage of the SNS LD choice was investigative. According to Holland's theory (1997), individuals with investigative type tend to have a curiosity and questions everything around them. People in this type are actually love to learn new things but in the same time "they may be perceived by others as intellectual and asocial" (Turner, 2015, p. 6).

The second construct that tend to be chose by SNS LD is artistic. People in this type love to use their imagination. They tend to be creative, innovative, artistic and intuitive (Wasif and Ghazal, 2018). Individuals in this type love to live independently (Turner, 2015). This finding is not surprising as special needs' students tend to enjoy artistic environment in which they could express their skills and abilities as suggested by Sá, Almeida, and Moreira (2014) in their research.

Social construct was the third type that tend to be chosen in this study. Individuals in this type love to work with other people, particularly in helping others (Turner, 2015). However, it should be note that even though these students might have adequate social skills and be able to work with other people (Carman and Capparo, 2012), but there's also risk of bullying from other people around them, including in school setting as suggested by Luciano and Savage (2007).

The next constructs that were chosen by SNS LD are realistic, conventional and entrepreneur. Individuals with realistic types are likely suitable to work in the field that needs mechanical or physical abilities (Turner, 2015). Meanwhile, the conventional types are individuals who suitable to work following other people instruction (Gottfredson and Johnstun, 2009). The least construct chosen by SNS LD is the entrepreneur. It is not surprising because entrepreneur shall be able to influence and lead others for the sake of economic gain that is not really the path that special needs' individuals would like to purse (Wasif and Ghazal, 2018).

As the students involved in this research have learning difficulties problem, the aforementioned findings raise a question whether these students made a realistic choice of their vocational education field. It is possible that they made unrealistic field selection of education. Thus, the perceptions of parents and

teachers on the causes of SNS LD problems in choosing the field of vocational education are studied.

Perceptions of Parents and Teachers on the Causes of Students` Problems in Choosing Vocational Education

Next, a survey was conducted on 336 parents and 248 teachers of SNS LD using Williams (2013) questionnaire. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Causes of vocational education field selection problems for students with special needs learning disabilities

Problem	SP	Mean	Interpretation
Students are less motivated	0.73	4.00	high
Pupils have a hard time making decisions	0.39	4.18	high
Pupils have misconceptions about the field of education	1.16	3.63	high
Pupils have no skills in the process of choosing a field of education	0.70	4.20	high
Pupils have low self -understanding	0.43	4.79	very high
Pupils lack information about alternative areas of education	0.51	4.68	very high
Pupils do not know the source for obtaining information	0.64	4.15	high
Pupils do not know how to use information accurately	0.82	4.10	high
Pupils stereotype a field of education	0.91	4.15	high
Pupils are unable to use information consistently due to conflicting opinions of family and friends	0.75	4.62	very high
Total Mean	0.71	4.25	

n= 584

Based on Table 2, there are three problems that are at a very high level, namely SNS LD have low self-understanding (M = 4.79, SP = 0.43), lack of information about alternative education (M = 4.68, SP = 0.51) and unable to use information consistently due to conflicting opinions of family and friends (M = 4.62, SP = 0.75) compared to 7 other problems, i.e. no skills in the education field selection process (Mean = 4.20, SP = 0.70), difficult to decision making (Mean = 4.18, SP = 0.39), did not know the source to obtain information (Mean = 4.15, SP = 0.64), stereotypes of a particular field of education (Mean = 4.15, SP = 0.91), did not know how to use information accurately (Mean = 4.10, SP = 0.82), lacked motivation (Mean = 4.00, SP = 0.73) and had misconceptions about the field of education (Mean = 3.63, SP = 1.16). Overall, the problem of choosing the field of vocational education among SNS LD is at a very high level (Mean = 4.25, SP = 0.71).

SNS LD are very likely to have low cognitive abilities and motivation in learning (Handrianto, Salleh, & Chedi, 2020; Sideridis, 2003). Hence, most of

these students are unable to understand themselves nor use the information that they acquired (Bram, Prabandari, & Pasaribu, 2020). As a result, these students might not be able to make a rational decision when they chose their vocational fields (Handrianto & Rahman, 2018). For example, the data on Table 1 indicate that most of the students chose investigative construct which requires a lot of intellectual abilities. It is contradictive with the fact that these students are actually facing difficulties in learning due to the lack of academic abilities (Pullen, Lane, Ashworth, & Lovelace, 2017). The findings in this research confirmed that there are problems in the selection of the vocational educational field by SNS LD.

Conclusion

This study indicates that SNS LD in Malaysia faced difficulties in choosing their vocational education field. It is possible that they do not choose those field based on their own abilities and capabilities. These problems were steamed from their learning difficulties that made them unable to make a rational decision, such as low self-understanding, lack of information about alternative education, and inability to use information consistently due to conflicting opinions of family and friends. Therefore, the role of teachers and parents is very important in helping students to make their vocational choices by identifying the root cause of the problem and finding solutions that can be offered to students so that they can succeed in the future.

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