

## **CAREER TRANSITION PROGRAMME FOR STUDENT WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: IN EXCELLENT TEACHERS OWN WORDS**

Rohaizat Ibrahim  
Department of Special Education  
Sultan Idris Education University, Perak, Malaysia  
Email: rohaizat82@yahoo.com

Abdul Rahim Razalli  
Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

Nabilah Abdullah  
MARA University of Technology, Malaysia

Marlina, S.Pd., M.Si  
Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Academics, professionals and educators often discuss career transition programs among students with learning disabilities (LD). The discussion is because the lack of teachers' awareness of the importance of career transition programs for LD students. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate the importance of career transition programs for LD students. The data through structured interviews with five outstanding teachers in Malaysia were collected. These five outstanding teachers have extensive knowledge and experience in the field of special education. The study's findings found five (5) themes that arise from the importance of career development programs, namely (i) improving the image, (ii) improving skills, (iii) human resource development, (iv) support inclusive policies and (v) cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset. This study could overview the importance of career transition programs for LD students to systematically help stakeholders plan career transition programs for LD students in the future.*

Key words: Career Transition, Student with Learning Disabilities, Excellent Teacher, Malaysia.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The student with Learning Disabilities (LD) is a child with a neurological problem related to how the brain receives, processes, analyzes, and stores information. They also have confusion in one or more psychological processes involving comprehension and oral or written language. This disorder can affect their ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or count (Special Education Division 2015a). In addition, the Special Education Division also categorizes LD students as children with Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Slow Learner, Autism, Down Syndrome and Mild Mental Retardation. Based on the above statement, it is clear to show that LD students have one or a variety of disabilities but can still be taught and benefit from the national education system.

Therefore, LD students are placed in the Integration Special Education Program or formerly known as the Integration Special Education Program. The Integrated Special Education Program (PPKI) is a special education program specifically for LD students to study in integrated special education classes in government schools or government-aided schools (Special Education Division 2015a). Since establishing this program, the enrollment of LD students who receive education has increased year by year. Currently, the enrollment of LD students in Malaysia is 62 816 (Special Education Division 2019a).

Although LD students have access to education across the country, the lives of LD students are going through a life that is not in line with typical students. Such a thing can be evidenced by the results of studies conducted by Lee and Lai (2016), Lichtinger and Kaplan (2015). They are often associated with deficiencies in academic, social and behavioural. Furthermore, they also experience low self-concept (Pestana 2015), discrimination problems (Hargreaves and Walker 2014), and the most critical problem is to make their career transition programs (Yasin et al. 2016).

Thus, scholars in this field argue that LD students need to be exposed the career transition programs. The existing academic curriculum is incapable of developing their self-potential. Aina (2010) also found that most LD students became beggars, tissue sellers and even street musicians after high school.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Career Transition Programs**

In the late 80s, Madeline Will introduced new terminology to the career education of LD students, namely the career transition program. The concept used is similar to career education. However, this period of transitional service began with LD students in secondary school at the age of 16 years (Brolin and Gysberg 1989). The programs are defined as a program of transition of LD students to further education and employment. The results obtained in career transition programs are disappointing because parents and teachers want LD students to transition to the world of work after high school without considering their needs and wants.

Thus, the taxonomy of LD student career transition programs was constructed by Kohler in 1996. Kohler emphasized five important activities namely (i) student self -development; (ii) parental involvement; (iii) program structure; (iv) collaboration between agencies; and (v) LD student-centred planning. The survey also found that LD students need guidance from people around them, especially teachers, in helping them identify their strengths, needs and interests.

Next, the Center on Secondary Education and Transition (2007) constructs activities in career transition programs more specifically, namely (i) the appropriate age to conduct a career interest test; (ii) desired career goals; (iii) career fields provided for LD students; (iv) positions offered; (v) collaboration with employment agencies; and (vi) develop an LD student planning plan. He added that the planning developed should be centred on LD students by using psychometric tests. Indirectly, this helps identify information related to the LD students. Self, namely academic, social, behavioural, daily life, motivation, and self-advocacy skills, facilitate them to get a job (Kellems and Morningstar 2009).

Kochhar and Greene (2009) have stated that most current transition programs are hybrid to career education. For example, the Life Center Career Education curriculum which used in the career transition curriculum and is known as Life Centered Education. The program aims to prepare LD students for a meaningful life. Aligns with Yasin et al. (2016) view that career transition programs should supply LD students with educational or career information alone and build a positive attitude.

In 2019, the Ministry of Education Malaysia had issued guidelines "MBK Career Transition Program". This program aims to ensure that LD students receive support before and during the transition to the world of work. In addition, the program also provides psychological, emotional and mental support to LD students in adapting to the environment, individuals and communities at school, family, training place and workplace.

**Career Transition Program Options for Students with Learning Disabilities**

Career transition programs often emphasize vocational education to ensure that LD students get employment after graduating from secondary school. In Malaysia, there are three career transition program options available to LD secondary school students, namely:

a. Special Education Vocational Secondary School

To date, there are 4 Special Education Vocational Secondary School (SMPKV) have been established to help LD students deepen skills in vocational education. Among them are SMKPV Indah Pura, SMPKV Shah Alam, SMPKV Kuantan and SMPKV Merbok (Special Education Division 2015). All the school provides vocational education to LD students to meet the national industry workforce. The program also provides opportunities for them to pursue higher studies such as polytechnics and universities.

The Department of Skills Development recognizes all the schools listed, Ministry of Human Resources as Accredited Centers to conduct vocational courses to LD students. As a result, LD students who complete their schooling at SMPKV, will obtain the Malaysian Skills Certificate (SKM). Furthermore, this certification is a recognition from the industry in Malaysia to help them get a job (Department of Skills Development 2014). The courses areas of each school for LD students can see in Table 1.0.

**Table 1: Courses for Special Vocational Education Secondary School**

No.	School	Courses
1.	SMPKV Kuantan, Pahang	Bakery Food Preparation and Production Stamp Batik Maker Screen Batik Maker Hand drawn Batik Artist Landscape Attendant General Workers Poultry Workers Ruminan Agro-Industry
2.	SMPKV Indahpura, Johor	Facial and Hair Dressing

3.	SMPKV Shah Alam, Selangor	Computer Graphic
		Ladies Dressmaking
		Food Preparation
		Hair Dressing
		Air condition Equipment – Installation and Maintenance
		Welding Technology
		Building Constructor
		Furniture Production Operation
		Electrical Technician
		Hand Drawn Batik
		Desktop Publishing
4.	SMPKV Merbok, Kedah	Motorcycle Assembly
		Food Preparation and Production
		Pastry
		Bread
		Food and Beverage Service Operation

Source: Special Education Department (2015b)

In detail, 28 vocational education courses for LD students in Malaysia. This situation indicates that space and opportunities for LD students to gain from career transition programmes are minimal. The Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) acknowledged this situation and efforts to increase the number of vocational training centers through the Buying Seats.

#### b. Buying Seat

This programme is an initiative of the National Key Result Area (NKRA) to build collaboration among the public and the private vocational education institutions and the industry (Special Education Division, 2013:1). The rationale of the collaboration is to open the opportunity for LD students to gain knowledge, career skills and a learning experience in private institutions or industries. It is in line with the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) of the Technical and Vocational Education Division (BPTV).

Subsequently, LD students will explore a career they did not acquire in school and eventually graduate with a proficiency skill certificate. Further, this program can also provide vocational training and job opportunities for them. Table 2 shows the list of courses offered by public and private vocational education institutions and industries.

**Table 2: Courses in Vocational Education Institution and Industries**

No.	College	Courses
1.	Azmida Training Centre	Single Phase Electrical Installation & Maintenance Office Management
2.	Kumpulan Akademik YNS Sdn. Bhd (Ganda Akademik)	Food Preparation  Pastry  Motor Vehicle Technician
3.	Imperia College	F&B Service Operation  Food Preparation  Housekeeping
4.	International College of Yayasan Melaka	Automotive Technician  Single Phase Electrical Installation & Maintenance
5.	Suria College	Food and Beverage Service Operation

6.	Kemahiran YPJ Sdn Bhd	Pastry Preparation and Food Production Housekeeping Motorcycle Technician Refrigeration & Air Conditioning Computer System Technician Food Preparation
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Source: Special Education Department 2013

There are six Vocational Institutions, Public, Private and Industry, recognised as the certified centre by the Department of Skills Development. Among the criteria established by MOE on the selection are, the institutions must, (i) having infrastructure, human resources with skill experiences; (ii) Implementing On Job Training (OJT) for each LD; (iii) providing Apprenticeship program; and (iv) has signed an agreement with MOE to implement the Buying Seats Program (Special Education Division, 2013:3-4).

c. Special Education Integration Program (PPKI) and Inclusive Education Program (PPI)

The career transition program for LD students in the Special Education Integration Program (PPKI) and the Inclusive Education Program (PPI) needs to be carefully planned by the school with the cooperation and consent of parents. The selection of LD students to participate in industrial training depends on the ability and consent of students, parents and the industry, and the course followed in the school.

The LD students career transition program in secondary schools is through the application of six transition components across the curriculum based on the Special Education Secondary School Standard Curriculum (KSSMPK). The national curriculum prescribed by the MOE is providing in Section 18, Education Act 1996 [Act 550]. Refer to Table 3.

**Table 3: Division Components of the Transition to Career Model**

No.	Components of the Transition Model to Career	Form
1.	Life Skills	Form 1
2.	Self Advocacy Skills	Form 2
3.	Cultivating Skills Adult Life	Form 3 and Form 5
4.	Career Skills	Form 4 and Form 5
5.	Career Readiness	Form 3, 4 and 5
6.	Supported Employment	Form 4 and 5

Source: Special Education Department 2019b

**Teachers' Perceptions of Career Transition Programme for Students with Learning Disabilities**

Cobb and Alwell (2009) has conducted interviews with special education teachers of the study related to the career transition of LD students. One of the critical findings obtained in this study is that career transition programs can improve social skills, teamwork skills, and professionals' engagement. These findings prove that career transition programs can enhance the career maturity of LD students.

Conley (2010) stated that teachers who are highly knowledgeable and have good vocational skills could positively impact the career transition program of LD students. Thus, this study proves that the effectiveness of the career transition program is not only focused on LD students but also the teachers involved in the program.

Connor (2012) has conducted a study related to the importance of career transition for LD students. This career transition program helps marketability and determine the educational path for LD students after high school. According to Connor, LD students are often scared and worried about their careers, but this can be overcome if LD students are exposed to career transition programs.

Cheong and Yahya (2013) began to study the best planning for LD students. The study conducted interviews with 24 individuals consisting of NGOs, employees, employers, parents and teachers. The interviews found that the Malaysian government needs to create a career transition support system. They covered aspects of Job Coach, self-advocacy skills, career guidance and career assessment, career training, career placement and sheltered workshops for LD students. Cheong and Sharifah also stressed that the government should increase the number of vocational education centres. They also thought that the academic field was not relevant to the needs of LD students.

Alias (2013) also conducted a study to identify problems in implementing the transition of special education students to careers. The results of interviews conducted with four special education teachers showed that (i) difficulties in training students; (ii) internship problems and employer readiness; and (iii) the difficulty of students in adapting to the work environment is a factor that complicates the implementation of special education student transition programs. The attitude of easily bored students, low self-esteem, lack of understanding of instructions, and difficulties in identifying abilities, interests, and self-efficacy have caused teachers to have difficulty training their careers.

Furthermore, his findings also found that high discrimination among employers also made it difficult for teachers to find career placements for LD students. In addition, LD students also have problems adjusting to their routines and work climate. Special education teachers also suggested that this program involve collaboration between students, parents, teachers, school administrators and employers. The collaboration will ensure the success of the LD students career transition program. In this regard, the involvement and cooperation of various parties play an essential role in the education and career of LD students.

Web et al. (2014) have studied the importance of career planning skills to LD students. They found that these skills had a positive impact on the education and career of LD students. Web and colleagues also suggested that comprehensive planning taught in secondary schools. So, LD students will be aware of the importance of learning plans their relationship to their future careers.

Alnahdi (2014) has conducted a study related to teacher perceptions. The study's findings show that teachers who work in vocational schools have the skills, knowledge, attitudes and experience that can prepare students to work after school. However, there are limitations to the research methods used. There is no description of how the teachers in this school differ from the teachers in the regular school.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The Public Service for People with Disabilities showed that only 1,754 successfully filled jobs in the ministry than 60,000 PWDs who could work (Cheong and Yahya 2013). One of the causes is the lack of teachers' awareness of the importance of career transition programs for LD students. Students were neglected and not getting adequate transition training. The study of Newman et al. (2019) also stated that the same. Lack of teachers' awareness on the importance of career transition programs has made it difficult for LD students to get a job after school. As a result, they earn low salaries and increase unemployment from time to time. Most previous studies have also studied more about the problem than the importance of career transition programs to LD students. So, there is a need to know the importance of career transition programs for LD students based on the views of excellent special education teachers. This step is one of the initial strategies to provide a more prosperous life to LD students in the future.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research design used in this study is a qualitative approach. Structured interviews were conducted, and data collected from the interviews were continuously analysed immediately after collection. Yaser (2018) viewed that the qualitative nature provided teachers with the opportunity to discuss a category of students with which they were not overly familiar.

### **Research Sampling**

According to Gay and Airasian (2000), the main characteristics of sampling are the participants' willingness and readiness to be involved in the study. In line with the view, this research specified that the main selection criteria for the sampling were those who personally agreed and were actively involved in this study. In this study, they must be (i) highly informed on the issues studied, (ii) served at least five years and above with good communication skills.

### **Sampling Selection Criteria**

A total of five excellent teachers having more than 20 years of teaching experience in special education were selected as the sampling. Further, the sampling technique was determined. In the context of this study, purposive sampling is used to determine the importance of the career transition program for LD students. This selection is consistent with Creswell's (2008) that purposive sampling is a method for a qualitative study that facilitates the researcher to determine the sampling characteristics to be selected based on the purpose of the research.

### **Research Instrument**

This study using structured interviews. Before that, refining the structured interview protocol was carried out by three experts who were masters in special education. The format divided into four main sections. The first part was a description of the researcher and the purpose of this study. In contrast, the second part questioned the background, such as age, number of years of service, description of the current position, and the highest education level of the participants. These questions are only to establish the relationship between the researcher and the participants. The questions follow, they focused on the importance of career transition programmes for LD students. All interviews for these questions were recorded and analyzed.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Researchers obtained excellent teachers in special education from the Special Education Division, Ministry of Education Malaysia. Researchers started to focus on teachers with more than 20 years of experience and known as the expert in the area required. Next, the researchers explained the purpose and progress of the study in the invitation letter briefly. Researchers also attached documents such as (i) Letter of Appointment and (ii) Authorization letter from the Planning and Research Division of Education Policy, Ministry of Education Malaysia.

The first meeting was held after obtaining the letter of agreement from the excellent teachers. During the meeting, the reviewers explained (i) the background of the study, (ii) audio recording throughout the interview session and, (iii) establishing a member checking transcript.

Interviews were carried out complying with the interview protocol that has been refined. Each interview took around one to two hours. Further, the researchers transcribed the interview and submitted it to the panel for the checking and verification process. The interview process and members checking of the five excellent teachers continued for nearly three months.

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2008) has listed four key steps in analyzing qualitative data, namely (i) gathering all the information for analysis, (ii) reading the interview transcripts, (iii) data encoding process, and (iv) the establishment of a theme.

Before data encoding, the researchers conducted a reading session to improve understanding, organize the data, and ensure sufficient data was collected. After that, the reviewer started to provide the transcript secured from the interview performed. Next, the data filtering process was performed after the transcription being revised and endorsed by the participants. Every line of the transcriptions is read and scrutinized to ensure only meaningful data were selected.

This meaningful data was labelled and is known as the data encoding process. Zulkifli Osman (2012) has created a data encoding system as follows:

- RA(1)I-20/1( ) where RA = First participant
- (1) = First interview
- I = Interview
- 20/1 = Date of interview conducted
- () = Refers to the numbers of lines of the citation taken

Next, the researcher performed the code analysis by grouping the code into the same group and identifying the existence of the latest code as a result of the interview transcripts. The encoding process ended if three to four themes are produced, as suggested by Creswell (2008).

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**Finding**

**A. Demography**

The demographic findings explained the detail of gender, grade post and experience in special education.

**Participants According To Gender And Grade Post**

From the five participants, three were male and the balance was female. Table 4 shows the detailed analysis of the participants.

**Table 4: Gender and Grade Post**

Item	Particular		Frequency	Percentage
1.	GENDER	Female	2	40
		Male	3	60
2.	GRADE POST	DG48	1	20
		DG52	4	80

### ***Experience and Expert Area Of The Research Participants***

Experience in special education is one of the criteria for participants selection in this study. There was one participant with more than 20 years serving in special education, while the other four participants had between 25 to 30 years of experience. According to Magdeline & Zamri (2014), a participant with experience is important to represent the expertise in the area required in a study. The statistics on the experiences shown proved that the participants involved in this study were the expert area.

The researchers have complied with the research confidentiality rules. Each participant was given a specific code to differentiate one participant from the other. In detail, RA is an expert teacher in an integrated special education high school programme with 25 years of experience as a special education teacher. Highly experienced and is once elected as the leading state coach for career-related subjects. The participant also holds an administrative position as the Assistant Principal for Special Education.

Participant RB is also an expert teacher. He has over 28 years of experience in special education. He is also a career transition teacher for Form 5 and always called by the Examination Board to prepare examination questions for students with learning problems.

Participant RC is also an experienced teacher. 10 years of teaching in primary school and 20 years teaching in high school. RC is an experienced individual in the development of the vocational education curriculum. His highest education is a Bachelor Degree in Special Education from Malaysian National University. He was awarded three times for his excellent services as a special education teacher. Now, he serves as Assistant Principal of Special Education.

Participant RD is the fourth participant for this study. He has been teaching for more than 25 years and won several gold medals for special education innovation competitions at the national level. RD is keen and highly interested in this study and is highly committed to this research despite being one of the busiest participants who is often called by the state Education Department and the ministry to brief on innovation to teachers in Malaysia.

Participant RE is an expert teacher in special education. RE also has more than 25 years of teaching experience committed to official and often contributes to the implementation of career transition programs for LD students. The interview sessions carried out with all the participants contributed to various ideas towards achieving the objectives of this study.

### **B. Excellent Teachers Own Words Towards The Importance Of Career Transition Programme**

Five themes formed the importance of career transition programs for LD students: (i) improving self-image, (ii) improving skills, (iii) developing human resources, (iv) support inclusive policies, and (v) nurturing entrepreneurial mindset. Among the phrases that can be cited for themes to intensify the image of the LD students are:

#### ***Improve Self-Image***

"...this is the program that can help them to get jobs. When there is a job, no one will not look down on anymore..." RA(1)I-31/10(65)

"...can reduce the drop-out problem, unemployment, poverty. Can also improve their lifestyle .." RB(1)I-3/11 (65)

"...sad to think about them. The stigma on them is still high. It is always considered stupid .. Impaired..but if there is career education, they will be able to function effectively in the employment market. Their talents can be further expanded..." RC(1)I-29/10(154)

"...Good. The public do not know. They consider these kids are having mental problems..." RE(1)I-27/11(72)

"After this, they can make their own decisions. There is no need to rely on others anymore..." RD(1)I- 10/11(181)

#### ***Improve Skills***

Besides enhancing LD's self-image, the career transition programmes could also improve proficiency through vocational education. The following are statements of RB and RC from the interview.

"...we see that vocational education for the LD is isolated. No response. However, when we expose these programmes, definitely students will be able to choose the vocational education that matches them..." RB(1)I-3/11 (41)

"...I believe with having these, their vocational skills will be highly regarded..." RC(1)I-29/10 (166)

#### ***Develop Human Resources***

Further, participant RD sees the career transition programmes can contribute to human resource development. Among the phrases from RD are as follows:-

'...through the career transition programme, I believe they can be leaders in human resource development in our country. They can also raise the country's economy. I have to disagree if the government likes to take outsiders...' RD(1)I- 10/11(54)

### ***Support Inclusive Policies***

Participant RE viewed that the career transition programme for LD could also achieve the inclusive policy in Malaysia.

'...Important. Especially for the success of the inclusive policy in this country. Many may not be aware of this matter. Many thought that when inclusive, it must be in the same class as the premier students. To me, the scope of inclusion is wide. When there is progress in the career, their learning opportunity will be exposed to network building with the outsiders. So, from there they will be able to socialize with others, apart from their group...' RE(1)I-27/11 (191)

### ***Nurturing Entrepreneurial Mindset***

The findings from the interview also found that the importance of a career transition programme for LD students is to nurture the entrepreneurial mindset within them. Among the phrases from participant RA are:

'...To me, this program does not only develop potential in LD but also guides the student to become an entrepreneur. Once the potential is discovered, together with the skills, the path to be an entrepreneur is simple...' RA(1)I-31/10(203)

## **DISCUSSION**

This study concluded that five themes emerge from the importance of the career transition programme of the LD students, which are (i) increase the image of the LD students, (ii) improve skills, (iii) nurture entrepreneur mindset, (iv) supporting inclusive policy, and (v) human resource development.

Improving the image of LD is one of the interests in the career transition programme for LD students. However, recent studies in Malaysia have proved that the perception of teachers, parents, and friends towards LD students is at the middle stage (Hannah et al., 2019). However, the fact is that they are still being looked down on by society. All of these expert teachers agreed that a career transition programme is important to enhance the LD students' image and simultaneously enable them to function effectively in Malaysia.

Apart from that, the importance of career transition programmes for LD students is to intensify the skills of LD students through vocational education. Compared to other countries in the region, Malaysia is still low in terms of students' participation in vocational education which is less than 10%. This issue is detrimental to LD students because, by the year 2020 and above, 46% of the job opportunities provided by the National Key Economic Area will need those with a certificate or vocational diploma (MOE 2012). Thus, through the career transition programme, it is expected to increase LD students' skill and add values to vocational in the country.

Career transition programmes are also crucial in fostering an entrepreneurial mindset in LD students. The skills in career transition programmes should focus on a job search, but they also need to create job opportunities. Rodriguez and Lieber (2020) that skills in the career transition programme could form a culture and entrepreneurship interest. As a result, LD students will make entrepreneurs their chosen career in the future.

Furthermore, the career transition programmes for LD students could also be support inclusively in this country. The report released by the MOE (2017) showed that statistics and data implementation on inclusive education in Malaysia had not reached the national target of only 40.54%. Participant RD insisted that career transition programs can fulfil the MOE's intention to produce inclusive students through the network built while studying and obtaining career information. Therefore, researchers concluded that career transition could provide a network in helping LD students to socialize while fostering a caring and understanding community.

Finally, career transition programmes for LD students could also contribute to human resource development. In a broader context, career development programmes that involved vocational education pathways are believed to be one of the key factors in the country's economic development and social stability. This is in line with Jamil and Saidin (2018) views, who stated that career transition programmes play a significant role in creating LD students as human capital for the country.

In summary, career transition programme can enhance the image of LD students, enhance skills through vocational education, foster entrepreneur thinking, support inclusive policy and human resource development. Nevertheless, it is part of an overall process that focuses on personal success and LD student's life.

## **RESEARCH IMPLICATION**

The findings of this study have significant contributions to the practice. All the participants in the study agreed on the importance of career transition programmes for LD students. These findings can contribute to improving the career and life of LD students. Therefore, the implications of this study can be extended directly to MOE, as the policymakers, to implement career transition programmes for LD students in secondary schools.



## RESEARCH SUGGESTIONS

Based on the implications of the study, several suggestions have been proposed. Career transition programmes are significant for LD students. Therefore, it is suggested that the Special Education Division review the possibility of developing a systematic career transition programme for LD students in secondary schools. Also, to propose for the Special Education Section and the excellent teachers of special education to discuss and plan on strategies to build the profile of LD students. This profile is important to ensure that the selection of LD student career is based on the synchronization of personality and the working environment's detriment.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the career transition programme for LD students emphasizes mastering the knowledge and skills to produce high school LD students with a career. The significance of the thinker group from the excellent teachers is also emphasized in developing strategies to achieve the nation's aspirations will be best served. MOE's highest management support and continuous commitment need to be enhanced for schools to implement strategies that are more pre-employment and entrepreneurial. The impact of the LD student career transition programme is of long-term effect on the learning process in producing and developing quality people to contribute to the development of the nation.

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