

Education for Sustainable Development for Person with Disabilities (PwD)

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Introduction

An estimated 1 billion people have some kind of disability and, in our lifetime, every one of us will probably be temporarily or permanently impaired, especially in ageing societies (WHO, 2011). This group experiences greater challenges than others in coping with transitions, lower participation in education and skills development (EC, 2010; Kett, 2012; EADSNE, 2013). The Incheon Declaration: Education 2030 (2015) also recognises education as essential to guarantee the realisation of the other human rights, and highlights the importance of inclusion and lifelong learning for all.

Within Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 4, there are specific targets regarding technical and vocational education and training (TVET). Education and training are also essential for the achievement of the other Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 8 'Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all'. Under SDG 8, one target is 'by 2030 to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value'. Internationally, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is increasingly seen as part of a lifelong learning approach to the development of education and training system.

TVET for Special Educational Needs

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) are steadily moving up the ranks at the global debates and government priorities for education and national development agendas. (Marope et al., 2015). In the Southeast Asian context, SEAMEO (the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation) have placed TVET as a priority agenda (SEAMEO Seven Priority Areas 2015 -2035). TVET for Special Educational Needs (SEN) students or individual with disabilities is major importance for sustainability and to enable these students to lead independent lives.

TVET does not only prepares a person for work, but it is also a preparation for life. The purpose of TVET is to provide knowledge and skills required in the world of work and a means to support one's economic income. Therefore, it is important to make TVET accessible to all (UNESCO, 2013). To realise its potential to impact development, however, TVET systems need sustained transformation and revitalization (UNESCO, 2012).

SEN students or people with disabilities often faced challenges, discrimination and rejection in seeking employment due to stigmatization and being underestimated in terms of capability to learn and acquire occupational skills. Lack of inclusion in education and skills development initiatives for young people with disabilities foreshadows a lifetime of employment and marginal employment amongst a population eager to work ("Putting Education to Work", 2012).

The similar situation reported in schools where most SEN students leaving schools without being equipped with appropriate technical and vocational skills required for employment (Wehman et al., 2014). This particular group of students must be given skills that are appropriate to the local labour market. This would necessitate a change in the education system by providing skills and knowledge to students with disabilities during schooling years that can be transitioned to post-school education.

Special Education teachers play an important role in delivering effective teaching approach to their students. Often programs initiated by parties who do not directly engage with these students faced slow progress and challenges (Vanitha & Ramaa, 2013). Majority of vocational programmes mobilized in schools are initiatives by teachers based on their personal experience and understanding. The teaching and learning context for students with disabilities are very much dictated by the student's abilities and progress. Their source of knowledge and skills would have to be delivered by those who are trained to adopt and adapt to their learning needs.

Key Element – TVET for Special Educational Needs

The aim of this article aimed to explore the key elements of TVET training program for SEN students with a feasible connection to employment opportunities.

Figure 1 shows the three (3) fundamental elements and how they contribute to achieving the program’s overall aim, i.e. providing successful TVET training program and transition to employment for SEN students. The policy level, represented by the outer circle, may impact upon the factors within the elements. Recommendations for the policy level need to ensure that policies appropriately align the relevant factors so that each element makes the optimum contribution towards the TVET training program’s aim.



Figure 1

School / Institution Management

School / institution management needs to develop and instil an inclusive policy, where differences among students are considered a 'normal' part of the educational culture, and to create an atmosphere of motivation and commitment. Effective school / institution management is required to look ahead and be flexible, as well as to change the structure and duration of the TVET training program to match the students' needs. This will also include the offer for professional development opportunities to all teachers and staff, to ensure quality in education. Effective school / institution management should also be able to create a flexible atmosphere to allow teachers to contribute to the development and implementation of individualised and flexible curriculum for students, to match the student's needs. This will ensure that support is provided to teachers as well to the students during the transition phase into the labour market.

School / institution management also must part away from a traditional 'top-down' approach and should adopt a multi-disciplinary team approach with clear roles and cooperate with a high level of internal communication (peer coaching, informal discussions, collaborative problem solving, etc.) and external communication with other services.

Proper planning and focus for knowledge management for maintaining and further developing teachers' knowledge and experience must be set in place. This could involve setting up program or activity such as teacher training and re-training program, seminars or conferences, sharing session on best practice or any program that could help the teachers to be well equipped with adequate knowledge and skills in order to prepare their students for employment.

Student-centred Approach

Student-centred approaches concerning to planning, goal setting and curriculum design need to be used in the TVET training program learning process, so that the curriculum, pedagogical methods, learning materials, assessment methods and goals are tailored to individual needs.

The learning process needs to use a flexible setting or atmosphere which allow for the development and implementation of a student-centred approach. Students are involved from the beginning of the individual planning process and their voices are heard throughout.

The student-centred approach requires a suitable teacher–learner ratio, a suitable support teacher-students ratio and flexibility in TVET training program to allow progress from one level to another. This approach will also contribute towards maintaining a good balance between theoretical subjects and practical training, the focus on student’s capabilities and the use of hands-on/practical. The use of individual plans impacts on the adaptation of pedagogical methods and techniques, on supervised practical training in companies and on the support of students and employers during the transition phase and beyond to maintain student’s employment in companies.

On the outcome side, the student-centred approach contributes to matching between work opportunities and student’s expectations and also the compatibility between job skills requirements with the student’s skills. This will also contribute to increasing the student’s confidence that challenges can be managed and strive to successful TVET training program and transition in the open labour market.

Work Transition Support

In order to establish connections with local employers/companies, co-operative structures must be properly outlined for practical training and/or employment after graduation. Providing follow-up activities to maintain student’s employment in companies require staff and resources to be permanently available throughout the transition and into work. Supporting students and employers during the transition phase in the labour market will requires staff such as job coaches, career counsellors or mentors, and resources that are permanently available throughout the transition into work period.

Adapted pedagogical methods and techniques at schools and the use of individual plans are also required. Follow-up activities can build upon connections with local employers/companies for practical training and job opportunities, the provision of supervised practical training in companies and supported employment models that offer a gradual reduction in the intensity of support.

Follow-up activities also will contribute to the development of social skills and student's well-being, the establishment of formalised partnerships, and the re-evaluation of correlation between job skills requirements and the student's skills.

Positive experiences of a successful work transition program to the open labour market also contribute to and reinforce these connections and contribute to the establishment of formalised partnerships, co-operation and networking opportunities.

Conclusion

The world is moving in a fast-changing environment that requires every individual to develop their knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout life with education and TVET. TVET can play an important role in the development and utilization of skills and capabilities and learning pathways, especially for persons with disabilities who are vulnerable to lack of job security or jobs/careers for life.

There is a lot of scope for improvement in initial and continuous TVET for people with disabilities, including in apprenticeships and work-based learning. It is important to achieve the right balance between the flexibility and the standardisation of programmes and procedures. While too much flexibility can result in unpredictability and a reduction in the quality of provision, overly rigid standardisation may fail to address SEN student's needs.

TVET improvements are possible and do occur, with some key success factors being recognized across countries, and giving evidence that what is good and efficient practice for people with disabilities is, will be a good practice for all learners (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2013). This will require support and commitment from all relevant stakeholders and parties involved to ensure that TVET fulfils its potential contribution to Agenda 2030, including SDG 4 and SDG 8, as well as being in line with the fundamental principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

The goal of TVET education for students with disabilities is to improve their life prospects, for themselves and future generations, by becoming active members of society. Better awareness, access, and investment are essential to achieving this goal. With TVET skills, students with disabilities will be allowed to build their career, and to develop an interest in their abilities and skills. They are able to lead a sustainable living by earning independent financial strength, contribute to society and ultimately will empower them to live a dignified, respected and living independently.

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