WORK READINESS SKILLS FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

This research introduces a theoretical structure for addressing the work readiness skills of students with learning disabilities in vocational schools for special education. Individuals with learning disabilities have distinct obstacles in gaining and showcasing the crucial skills desired by employers in today's highly competitive employment market. The paper's conceptual framework seeks to close this gap by offering a systematic strategy to preparing these students for seamless absorption into the workforce. The framework prioritizes certain crucial aspects, such as the cultivation of fundamental talents specifically designed for students with learning difficulties. These abilities encompass communication, adaptability, and self-advocacy. The text underscores the significance of implementing well-organized work experience programmers that provide practical training and exposure to authentic work settings, hence augmenting students' practical skills and employability. In addition, the framework emphasizes the importance of addressing accommodation needs by providing appropriate accommodations and assistive technology, which enables students to efficiently carry out their job responsibilities. The conceptual framework seeks to cultivate a nurturing and all-encompassing learning atmosphere, with the goal of enhancing students' assurance, self-assurance, and ability to bounce back from challenges. Ultimately, this framework intends to equip students with the skills and mindset needed to surmount obstacles to employment and thrive in the professional sphere. By facilitating collaboration among educators, employers, and policymakers, the framework provides a holistic strategy to enhance opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities and promote diversity and inclusion in the labor market.

Keywords: Work Readiness Skills, Students with Learning Disabilities, School to work Transition, Employability

INTRODUCTION

Work readiness skills are crucial for those with learning difficulties in today's highly competitive employment market (Prikshat et al., 2020). The acquisition of these skills, which comprise a diverse set of abilities including effective communication, analytical problem-solving, collaborative cooperation, and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, is essential for obtaining and retaining employment (Dodd et al., 2022; Putri et al., 2022). Students with learning disabilities have specific difficulties in acquiring these skills due to their individualized educational requirements and the obstacles they

encounter in both educational and professional settings (Choiseul-Praslin & McConnell, 2020; Rosli, 2021). Special education vocational schools are crucial in preparing these students for the workforce by offering customized training and support to improve their readiness for work (Shaffeei et al., 2020).

Students who have learning difficulties frequently need specific instructional approaches and materials to cultivate the talents needed for effective employment (Noor et al., 2018). These students may encounter difficulties with conventional educational methods, hence it is crucial for vocational schools to embrace new ways that cater to their distinct learning styles and requirements (Omar et al., 2022; Ta & Leng, 2013). These schools can empower students to overcome their problems and succeed in the workforce by emphasizing individualized education plans (IEPs) and integrating hands-on, practical experiences (Lindsay, 2011; Morwane et al., 2021). In addition, cultivating a nurturing and all-encompassing educational atmosphere aids in developing self-assurance and motivates students to pursue their professional ambitions.

The objective of this conceptual framework is to delineate the fundamental job ready competencies required by employers and to examine the methods through which vocational schools for special education can efficiently foster these competencies in students with learning difficulties. This framework strives to narrow the divide between school and employment for these students by defining the essential skills desired by employers and studying the most effective methods in vocational education. The main objective is to improve their chances of finding employment and ensuring they are adequately equipped to fulfil the requirements of the contemporary job market, therefore fostering increased representation and variety in the workforce.

Work Readiness Skills

From an employer's standpoint, work readiness skills are essential qualities that determine an individual's capacity to operate efficiently in the workplace (Blalock et al., 2006). Employers look for applicants who have both the necessary technical expertise for a position and the soft qualities that enable effective teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability (Borg et al., 2020). Essential talents for being prepared for work include effective communication, collaboration, analytical thinking, efficient time management, and emotional intelligence (Brenner, 2000). These talents guarantee that personnel can effortlessly assimilate into the organizational culture, address issues with inventive solutions, and make valuable contributions towards accomplishing corporate objectives (Casner-Lotto, 2006; Permana et al., 2023).

Employers highly prioritize communication abilities, as the capacity to articulate information clearly and efficiently is essential in almost every employment position (Siddique et al., 2022). Effective communication skills, whether in customer interactions, collaboration with coworkers, or reporting to supervisors, improve productivity and minimize misunderstandings (Mitra, 2021). Moreover, in contemporary work settings, cooperation and collaboration are vital as projects frequently necessitate a synchronized endeavor from numerous team members (İhtiyaroğlu, 2019; Sumaiya et al., 2022). Employers need individuals who possess strong interpersonal skills, comprehend team dynamics, and make constructive contributions towards group objectives (Dolan, 2017; Purwanto et al., 2023).

Employers strongly value critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as they empower individuals to analyze circumstances, identify issues, and create efficient solutions (Estiar et al., 2021). Amidst a swiftly evolving corporate environment, the capacity to adapt and be flexible is essential for effectively navigating unforeseen obstacles and capitalizing on emerging prospects (Indrasiene et al., 2020; Zainal Shah et al., 2022). Effective time management and strong organizational skills are essential for employees to prioritize activities, fulfil deadlines, and sustain a high level of productivity (Adeojo, 2012; Daniel & Santeli, 2020). Emotional intelligence, comprising self-awareness, empathy, and interpersonal abilities, aids individuals in navigating workplace interactions and effectively handling stress (Diah Astuti et al., 2023; Yoel et al., 2023). By cultivating these qualities related to preparedness for work, companies may develop a skilled, adaptable, and versatile group of employees capable of propelling organizational achievement.

Thirty years of research of Weldon Cooper Research Center of University of Virginia generated workplace skills for commonwealth countries. In each decade since the 1980s, hundreds of employers throughout the Commonwealth have been interviewed or surveyed about what they believe are the most essential workplace skills for entry-level workers to possess (Crespin et al., 2019). Weldon Cooper

Research Center identified twenty-one items' list of skills which is called Commonwealth Workplace Readiness Skills which is generated based on the employer feedback (Makki et al., 2016). Commonwealth workplace readiness skills divided these skills in three categories as Personal knowledge and people skills, Professional knowledge and skills and Technology knowledge and skills. These twenty-one items' list of skills is mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1: Commonwealth Work Readiness Skills

Personal qualities and people skills	Professional knowledge and skills	Technology knowledge and skills
- Positive work ethics - Integrity - Teamwork - Self-representation - Diversity awareness - Conflict Resolution - Creativity and resourcefulness	- Speaking & Listening - Reading & writing - Critical thinking and Problem solving - Health and Safety - Organization system and climate - Lifelong learning - Job acquisition and advancement - Time task and resource management Mathematics - Customer services	- Job specific technology - Information technology - Internet use and security - Telecommunication

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students with learning disabilities frequently encounter substantial obstacles when transferring from an educational setting to the professional world (Manaf et al., 2019). Studies have indicated that these pupils generally exhibit poorer levels of work readiness skills in comparison to their neurotypical counterparts (Casner-Lotto, 2006; Choiseul-Praslin & McConnell, 2020). Typical impairments encompass challenges in terms of professional flexibility, adaptability, self-reliance, and interpersonal abilities (Alias, 2013; Nordin & Jelani, 2019). Research has specifically shown that students with minor learning disabilities demonstrate notable strengths in work habits such as attendance and adherence to safety protocols (Adeojo, 2012; Subramaniam et al., 2023). However, they tend to exhibit shortcomings in work style and adaptation to changes in the workplace (Arinushkina et al., 2023; ILO & OECD, 2018). This profile corresponds to the fundamental characteristics of autism, in which the ability to adapt and be flexible poses a significant difficulty (Baxter & Reeves, 2023; Gallardo Montes et al., 2023).

In addition to their particular ability deficiencies, students with disabilities frequently have structural obstacles to obtaining work. Employers frequently lack knowledge and provisions for recruiting and assisting these employees (Alias, 2013; Manaf et al., 2019; Noor et al., 2018). Further investigation is required to explore efficacious vocational rehabilitation solutions that are specifically customized to address the distinctive requirements of this demographic. Evidence suggests that structured work experience programmers implemented during high school can enhance the employability skills of students with impairments. Nevertheless, further intervention research is required to ascertain the most effective methods for implementing such programmes. Providing

workplace education and support to businesses is crucial for improving job outcomes for this group of people.

According to the studies, employers seek the following important skills and requirements from students with learning disabilities:

(i) Housing and Tools for Assistance

Employers are obligated to furnish appropriate accommodations and assistive technologies to ensure that students with disabilities are able to carry out their work responsibilities proficiently (Young, Gabrielle; MacCormack, 2020). These alterations may involve the use of assistive technologies like as screen readers and speech-to-text software, as well as modifications to workplaces and the provision of extra training time (Murphy et al., 2022). These modifications are essential for establishing an inclusive workplace that fosters the success of students with disabilities.

(ii) Effective Communication Skills in the Workplace

Effective communication skills are crucial for children with learning disabilities, as they may have challenges in verbal, writing, or non-verbal communication (Purwanto et al., 2023). Employers must possess the skill of comprehending the requirements of the learner and delivering unambiguous, succinct directives (Ivanova et al., 2023). Efficient communication guarantees that students can understand their assignments and requirements, promoting a more efficient and cohesive work atmosphere.

(iii) Versatility and Resilience

Individuals with learning disabilities frequently have difficulties when it comes to being adaptable and adjusting to changes in the professional environment (Chang et al., 2017). Employers highly appreciate employees that possess the ability to think creatively and find solutions to complex problems, while also being adaptable to new procedures or requirements (Chan, 2010). Exhibiting versatility and adjustability is crucial in contemporary work settings characterized by quick changes in duties and responsibilities.

(iv) The qualities of patience and empathy

Assisting students with learning difficulties necessitates businesses to exhibit tolerance, comprehension, and a sympathetic approach (Madera et al., 2011). Employers should demonstrate a willingness to allocate time towards cultivating connections and fulfilling the unique requirements of individuals (Gentry et al., 2007). This sympathetic demeanor fosters a favorable and all-encompassing work environment, augmenting job contentment and employee retention for individuals with learning difficulties.

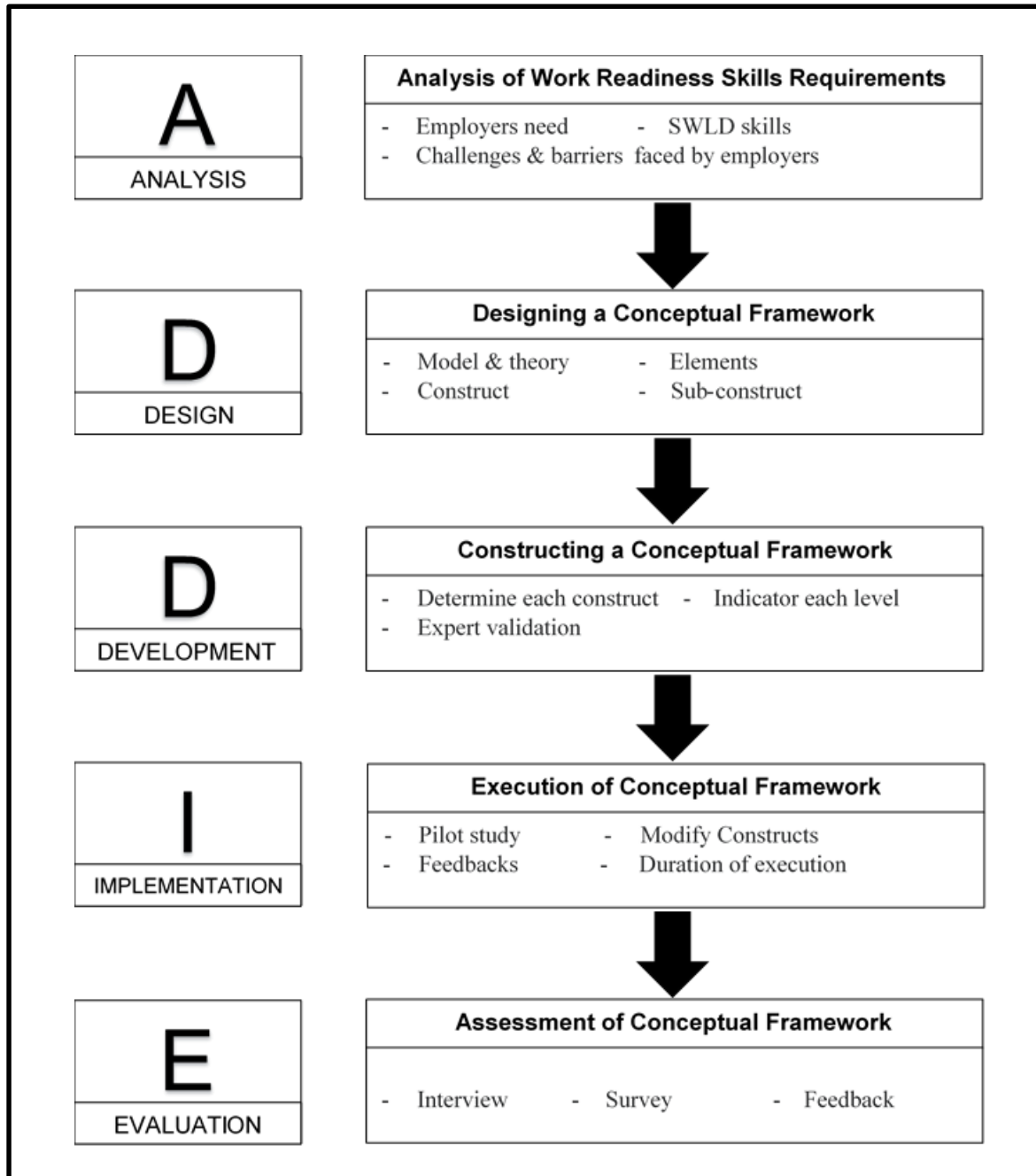**(v) Skills for advocating for oneself**

It is crucial for students to proficiently convey their abilities, restrictions, and requirements for assistance to potential employers. Acquiring robust self-advocacy abilities is essential for obtaining and sustaining employment (Ghanouni & Raphael, 2022). When students are able to clearly express their requirements and desires, it allows employers to offer the necessary assistance, guaranteeing that both the employee and the organisation may gain advantages from their efforts.

Several crucial elements contribute to the most prevalent obstacles to employment for students with learning difficulties. First and foremost, a significant number of students with learning difficulties frequently exhibit a deficiency in crucial talents such as adaptation, communication, independence, work habits, and confidence as compared to their peers. Acquiring these abilities is essential for achieving success in the professional environment, but it might pose a substantial difficulty for this particular group. Furthermore, there is the challenge of revealing infirmities and formally demanding necessary adjustments. A significant number of students face difficulties when it comes to revealing their learning disability to employers and effectively obtaining the modifications they require. The ability to properly accomplish employment obligations might be hindered by the obstacle of knowing when, how, and to whom to reveal information.

METHODOLOGY

This research using a qualitative design by using ADDIE Model. The ADDIE Model is a cyclical process that evolves over time and continues throughout the instructional planning and implementation process (Peterson, 2003). This model consists of five stages: (i) Analysis, (ii) Design, (iii) Development, (iv) Implementation, and (v) Evaluation. Five stages comprise the model, each with its own distinct purpose and function in the progression of conceptual framework design for this research. Figure 1 shows the steps in the ADDIE model for this study.

Figure 1: Step in ADDIE Model

Analysis of Work Readiness Skills Requirements
- Employers need
- SWLD skills
- Challenges & barriers faced by employers

A — ANALYSIS

Designing a Conceptual Framework
- Model & theory
- Elements
- Construct
- Sub-construct

D — DESIGN

Constructing a Conceptual Framework
- Determine each construct
- Indicator each level
- Expert validation

D — DEVELOPMENT

Execution of Conceptual Framework
- Pilot study
- Modify Constructs
- Feedbacks
- Duration of execution

I — IMPLEMENTATION

Assessment of Conceptual Framework
- Interview
- Survey
- Feedback

E — EVALUATION

Data collection

The interview method is used in this study to obtain information about the work readiness skills required by employers for students with learning disabilities. This section will describe the interview process and data processing.

Instruments

The instrument is a semi-structured interview outline. This outline mainly focuses on the interviewees' need from the employment of students with learning disabilities and work readiness quality expectations.

Participants

The participants in this study are employers who hired students with learning disabilities in their company or workplace. Five employers from different field who are volunteered to involved in this study. The participants profile are shown as in Table 2.

Table 2: Participants Profile

Participant	Gender	Age	Field	Experience
P1	Male	42	Food & Beverage	20
P2	Female	48	"Batik" Making	25
P3	Female	44	Dress Making	10
P4	Female	40	Cleaning Service	15
P5	Female	38	Laundry	12

Data analysis

Interviews with employers are conducted face-to-face, and all interview processes are recorded with the subjects' consent. The recorded voice materials are then organized, and these materials are transcribed into written form according to the recordings. The written transcripts are subsequently provided to the respondents for review to prevent any misunderstandings or misinformation from the interviews.

DISCUSSION

The conceptual framework for work readiness skills for students with learning disabilities centers on equipping graduates with the aptitude in skills necessary for employers to carry out their roles efficiently and satisfy customer demands. This approach prioritizes the cultivation of fundamental competencies that empower students with learning disabilities to effectively move into the workforce, tackling the obstacles they may have in obtaining and retaining employment (Choiseul-Praslin & McConnell, 2020). The objective is to reduce the disparity in job prospects between individuals with disabilities and those without, emphasizing the significance of well-organized work experience programmers and customized interventions to improve the employability of students with disabilities (Indrasiene et al., 2020). The framework emphasizes the importance of offering accommodations, promoting the development of soft skills, and establishing supportive environments to empower students with learning challenges for effective integration into the workforce (Mastam & Zaharuddin, 2024).

The conceptual framework for work readiness skills for students with learning disabilities facilitates their integration into the workplace by providing them with various crucial benefits. Firstly, the primary focus is on equipping these students with the necessary skills and competences demanded by employers, including adaptability, communication, independence, work habits, and confidence (Wijaya & Syarifah, 2022). Furthermore, an essential element of the framework is well-organized work experience programmers, which offer practical training and exposure to authentic work settings. This effectively narrows the disparity in employment prospects between those with disabilities and those without. In addition, the framework emphasizes the significance of offering reasonable accommodations and assistive technologies to enable students with disabilities to carry out their job responsibilities efficiently, thus fostering a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

Work experience programmers that are well-organized and planned have a substantial influence on the preparedness of students with learning difficulties for the workforce. Studies have demonstrated that engaging in organized work experience programmers improves the job preparation abilities of students with disabilities, hence reducing the disparity in employment prospects between those with and without disabilities (Lu, Oursler, Herrick, et al., 2022). These programmers have been recognized as the most reliable indicator of employment after leaving school for students with disabilities. Structured work experience programmers are vital for preparing individuals with learning disabilities to successfully integrate into the workforce (Lu, Oursler, Gao, et al., 2022). These programmers provide hands-on training, exposure to real work situations, and opportunity to acquire essential skills. Multiple research have shown that these programmers have positive benefits on the development of work readiness skills (Lu et al., 2023;

Wachsmuth et al., 2023). These studies emphasize the significance of customized treatments and hands-on experiences in improving the employability of students with impairments.

Moreover, the framework seeks to cultivate students' ability to advocate for themselves, empowering them to effectively convey their abilities, limitations, and requirements for accommodations to employers—an essential factor in obtaining and retaining employment. Finally, with its emphasis on cultivating work readiness skills, the framework enhances students' assurance, self-assurance, and capacity to surmount employment obstacles. In summary, this all-encompassing strategy enables students with learning difficulties to effectively assimilate into the labour market by tackling both personal skill enhancement and structural obstacles.

CONCLUSION

Overall, creating and applying a theoretical structure for work ready abilities in students with learning disabilities attending vocational schools for special education holds great potential for improving their integration into the job market. The framework focuses on developing crucial abilities, such as communication, adaptability, and self-advocacy that are specifically customized to the needs of these students. This systematic approach aims to effectively prepare them for success in the job market. Additionally, the framework's emphasis on offering organized work experience, resolving housing requirements, and promoting self-assurance and adaptability adds to establishing a more comprehensive and encouraging work atmosphere.

By collaboratively adopting and improving this conceptual framework, educators, employers, and policymakers can work towards dismantling obstacles to employment and fostering increased possibilities for those with learning disabilities. By acknowledging the distinct aptitudes and capabilities of these students and offering them the essential assistance and resources, we can enable them to realize their maximum potential in the professional sphere. The conceptual framework functions as a guide to promote more inclusion and diversity in the labor market, guaranteeing that every individual, regardless of their abilities, has the chance to prosper and make significant contributions to society.

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