
Teacher Readiness and Challenges in Implementing Early Career Transition Programmes for Primary School Students with Special Educational Needs

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Abstract

The Career Transition Program (CTP) for Students with Special Educational Needs at the primary school level is a crucial step in developing self-awareness, social skills, and foundational career skills from the early stages of education. However, the implementation of CTP in primary schools remains limited, relying on teacher initiative and inconsistent systemic support. This study examines teacher readiness and the challenges in implementing the Early Career Transition Program (CTP) for primary school students with Special Educational Needs (SEN), an area that remains underexplored despite its importance in fostering early career awareness and life skills, with a focus on teachers' level of readiness, identifying implementation challenges, and exploring the roles of parental support and industry collaboration. A qualitative case study approach was employed, involving five special education teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that while teachers demonstrate positive attitudes towards CTP, their knowledge and practical skills are moderate, particularly due to limited training and a lack of structured guidelines. Key challenges include time constraints, heavy workload, and insufficient teaching modules, while parental involvement and industry collaboration remain minimal, resulting in activities that are predominantly simulation-based. The study highlights that effective early CTP implementation requires integrated support from teachers, schools, parents, and policymakers. It concludes by recommending targeted teacher training, the development of appropriate CTP modules, and the gradual integration of career transition elements into the curriculum and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to enhance early career development among SEN students.

Keywords: *Career Transition Program; Primary Education; Special Educational Needs; Teacher Readiness; Implementation Challenges*

I. INTRODUCTION

Special education at the primary school level plays a crucial role in establishing the foundation for self-development, social skills, and life skills for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Beyond focusing on academic and behavioural growth, SEN students need early exposure to career concepts. This exposure helps them understand their roles, responsibilities, and potential within the context of adult life. In this light, the Career Transition Program (CTP) is regarded as a strategic initiative that fosters the development of fundamental career skills through experiential learning activities, simulations, and contextual exposure[1], [2].

Career transition programmes are often associated with implementation at the secondary school level; however, recent literature indicates that career development is a phased process that should ideally begin as early as primary school. Early exposure to self-management skills, social skills, and career awareness can help students with special needs cultivate self-confidence, foster a positive

attitude toward learning, and develop the ability to adapt to the broader social environment[3], [4]. At the primary school level, these programs provide an introductory and foundational experience, covering activities such as life skills training, simple job simulations, and exposure to various work roles within the community. Nevertheless, the implementation of such programmes remains insufficiently structured and depends heavily on the initiative of individual schools and teachers, particularly in the realm of special education.

Previous studies have demonstrated that the effectiveness of the Career Transition Program (CTP) implementation is significantly influenced by teachers' readiness in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as the support provided by the school system and other stakeholders. While most teachers exhibit a positive attitude towards the implementation of the CTP, challenges such as insufficient specific training, a lack of structured modules, and the absence of implementation guidelines tailored for the primary school context

have been identified[5], [6]. Moreover, parental involvement and collaboration with external parties, including industry and the local community, also play a crucial role in the effectiveness of transition programmes. However, this aspect remains insufficiently addressed in the actual practices of primary schools[7], [8].

The significance of Career Transition Programmes is increasingly acknowledged within the realm of special education; however, the majority of existing research tends to concentrate on their implementation at secondary and post-school levels. This emphasis creates a noticeable research gap regarding the early implementation of career transition programmes in primary schools, particularly concerning teacher readiness, implementation challenges, and stakeholder support. The scarcity of empirical studies in this area underscores the necessity for more comprehensive research to better understand the dynamics of early Career Transition Program (CTP) implementation in primary education, especially within special education contexts.

To address this gap, the present study was conducted to investigate the implementation of the Early Career Transition Program for students with special educational needs at the primary school level. Specifically, this research aims to assess the level of teacher readiness for implementing the Early Career Transition Program, identify the obstacles faced in its execution at primary schools, and explore the roles of parental support and industry collaboration in facilitating the implementation of the program for special needs students. The findings from this study are anticipated to enhance pedagogical practices, inform the development of professional training for teachers, and improve special education policies related to early career transitions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Transition to Career Program (CTP) for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) is an educational initiative designed to cultivate essential career skills, social abilities, and self-efficacy through experiential learning, job simulations, and integrated activities. This program serves as an early bridge between the school environment and long-term career preparation for individuals with SEN[1], [2]. Research conducted by Zainun et al.[9] indicates that student participation in transition programmes enhances employability, bolsters self-confidence, and fosters adaptability in social and workplace settings. Nevertheless, at the primary school level, the implementation of the CTP remains basic and introductory, focusing on activities such as small-scale industrial visits, life skills demonstrations, and early exposure to work concepts[23]. This scenario highlights that the systematic and empirical investigation of CTP in primary schools is still in its

infancy, particularly regarding teacher readiness and the challenges of implementation, creating a pressing need for more comprehensive studies in this area.

A. Teachers' Readiness in Implementing Early Career Transition Programmes

Teacher readiness is a vital factor in determining the effectiveness of implementing the Transition to Career Program in primary schools. This readiness includes not only knowledge of career transition concepts but also pedagogical and practical skills necessary for executing related activities, as well as teachers' attitudes and commitment to the program's success. Although previous studies consistently report positive teacher attitudes towards career transition initiatives, findings remain mixed regarding teachers' pedagogical readiness and confidence, particularly in primary special education settings. For instance, a recent study found that despite positive attitudes among teachers toward early career transition initiatives, gaps in specialized preparation and instructional confidence persisted, suggesting the need for targeted professional development in early career transition pedagogy[10]. This observation aligns with the findings of Tajuddin and Shaffeei[5], who reported that, despite a high level of overall readiness, teachers still required ongoing training support to enhance the efficiency of implementation. Furthermore, Mohd Yusof and Khairuddin[6] highlight that exposure to specialized training, professional development courses, and hands-on experience in career transition programmes significantly boosts teachers' confidence and readiness. Rahman[11] also underscores the importance of in-service training and career transition-focused workshops as essential mechanisms for empowering teachers to better support the early career development of students with special needs.

B. Challenges in Implementing the Transition to Career Program at the Primary School Level

The implementation of the Career Transition Program (CTP) at the primary school level encounters several challenges that are structural, pedagogical, and organizational in nature. One of the primary obstacles identified is the issue of time constraints due to an already packed curriculum, which makes it difficult for teachers to consistently plan and execute transition activities[12]. Furthermore, recent studies have highlighted additional barriers, including insufficient facilities, limited vocational infrastructure, and gaps in teacher training[2], which impede systematic CTP delivery in special education settings. This challenge is further heightened by the diverse abilities and skill levels of students with special needs, making it difficult for teachers to engage all students effectively in practical activities. Moreover, the

considerable workload of teachers, including teaching responsibilities, student management, and documentation, restricts teachers' initial capacity to implement supplementary programmes such as the CTP[13]. Collectively, these challenges underscore the necessity for robust support from school administrators and policymakers to ensure the successful implementation of the CTP at the primary school level.

C. Parental and Industry Support in Career Transition Programmes

Parental and industry support are critical components in enhancing the implementation of the Transition to Career Program for students with special educational needs (SEN). Parents provide a natural support network that significantly influences students' attitudes, motivation, and self-development beyond the school environment[7]. However, research indicates that many parents have a limited understanding of the concepts and significance of the Career Transition Program, which hinders their ability to engage actively in supporting it. Additionally, collaboration with industry partners is vital for delivering authentic learning experiences, practical training, and early exposure to the realities of the workplace[14], [8].

The absence of a robust cooperative network between schools and industry creates challenges for teachers in providing contextual and meaningful learning experiences for SEN students, particularly at the primary school level.

D. Research Gaps in Early Career Transition Programmes for SEN Students

The significance of the Transition to Career Program (CTP) has been extensively highlighted in special education literature; however, most prior research has concentrated on its implementation at secondary and post-school levels. As a result, the primary school level has received comparatively less attention in empirical studies related to CTP[2], [5]. This gap in research surrounding teacher preparedness and the challenges associated with early CTP implementation in primary schools underscores a need for further investigation. Thus, this study aims to thoroughly examine the readiness of teachers and the obstacles faced in implementing the Early Career Transition Program for students with special educational needs at the primary level, ultimately contributing to the advancement of more inclusive and effective practices and policies in special education.

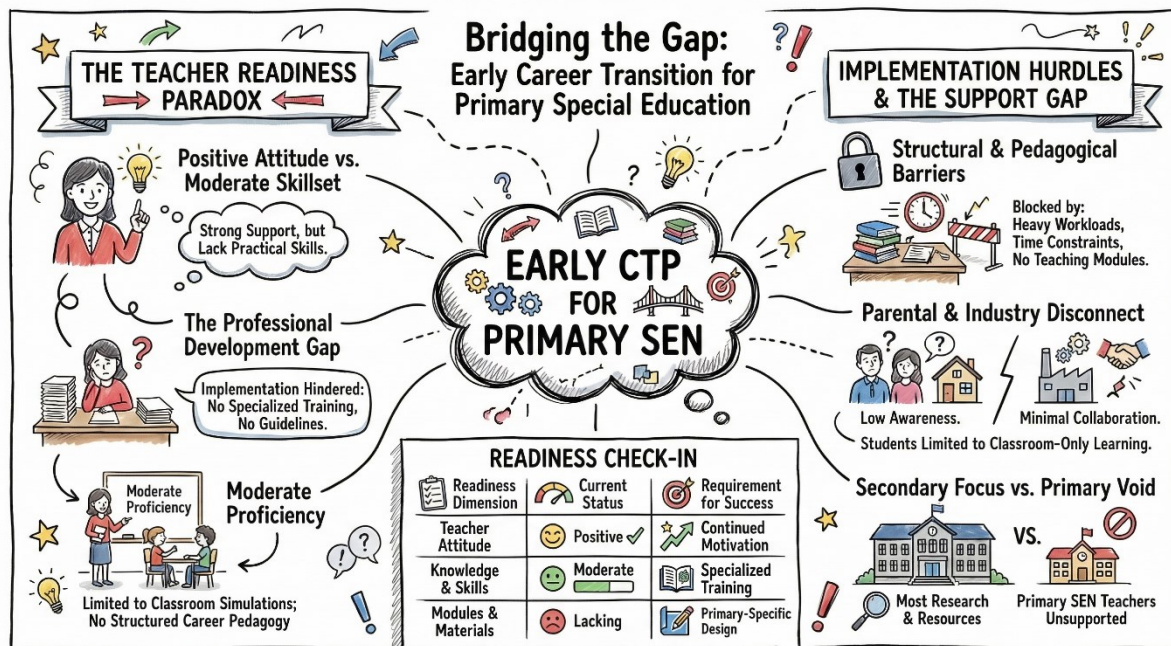


Figure 1 Bridging the Gap of Early Career Transition for Primary Special Education

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design, aligning with the goal of closely examining the experiences, perceptions, and realities surrounding the early implementation of the Career Transition Program (CTP) for Special Educational Needs (SEN) students at the primary school level. A qualitative approach is particularly effective for understanding social and educational phenomena within real-world contexts, especially when addressing pedagogical practices, attitudes, and implementation challenges that are both contextual and complex[15]. The case study design is particularly appropriate as it facilitates an in-depth exploration of the specific context of early CTP implementation in primary schools, without the intent of statistical generalization.

The study involved five special education teachers from primary schools who were actively engaged in teaching and managing students with special needs. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a common method in qualitative research that intentionally identifies individuals with significant knowledge or experience regarding the phenomena being studied[16]. The selection criteria included substantial teaching experience in special education, as well as active participation, both formal and informal, in activities related to life skills development or early career exposure for students.

The number of participants was determined by the principle of data saturation, which refers to the point at which additional interviews yield increasingly redundant information and do not reveal new themes. This principle ensures depth and richness in understanding the phenomenon[17]. Utilizing data saturation as a stopping criterion enables researchers to gather rich, meaningful, and contextually grounded data from individuals whose experiences are directly pertinent to the study's focus. Therefore, this approach ensures depth and richness in understanding the phenomenon and is widely acknowledged as essential for qualitative rigor, since saturation enhances credibility and the completeness of research findings[18], [19].

The primary data collection method employed in this study was semi-structured interviews, which enabled the researcher to flexibly delve into teachers' perspectives while maintaining alignment with the study's objectives. An interview guide was crafted based on the literature review and the aims of the study, addressing key areas such as teacher readiness, implementation challenges, parental support, and external collaboration. The interviews were conducted either in person or online, recorded with the participants' consent, and fully transcribed for analysis. This approach allows researchers to gather in-depth and genuine narrative data regarding teachers' real-life experiences in

implementing the initial Career Transition Program (CTP) in primary schools.

Data analysis was performed using thematic analysis, following the methodology outlined by Braun and Clarke[20]. The analysis process involved multiple readings of interview transcripts, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and naming those themes, and crafting narratives that represent the study findings. Thematic analysis enables researchers to uncover significant patterns and meanings within qualitative data, thereby establishing a direct connection to the study's objectives and theoretical frameworks related to career transitions. To enhance the reliability and validity of the study, various strategies were employed, including peer reviews of the identified codes and themes, as well as incorporating direct quotes from interviews to substantiate the findings. A detailed description of the study context and participant profiles is provided, allowing readers to evaluate the applicability of the findings in comparable settings. Overall, the methodological approach is well-aligned with the study objectives and is particularly suitable for investigating the nuanced and contextual implementation of initial Career Transition Programmes (CTP) in primary schools. The choice of a case study design, interview methods, thematic analysis, and relevant participants enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of teacher readiness, implementation challenges, and the role of stakeholder support in the early career development of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to investigate (i) the level of readiness among teachers, (ii) the challenges encountered during implementation, and (iii) the influence of parental support and industry collaboration in executing the Early Career Transition Program (CTP) for Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in primary schools. The discussion of the study findings is structured according to the research objectives to maintain alignment between the study focus and the empirical evidence gathered.

Regarding the first objective, which sought to assess teachers' readiness for implementing the CTP, the findings reveal that special education teachers in primary schools generally possess positive attitude and acknowledge the significance of the CTP as a means to foster early self-skills, social skills, and career awareness among students with special needs. However, their level of conceptual knowledge and practical skills was identified as moderate, particularly in planning and executing CTP activities that are suitable for the developmental stage of primary school students. Teachers exhibited moderate proficiency, especially

in designing structured transition activities. As one participant explained, “I understand the importance of early career exposure for SEN students, but I am not fully confident in designing structured transition activities because we were never formally trained for this at the primary level” (T1). This highlights a gap between conceptual understanding and practical implementation[11], [24]. The absence of specialized training and structured guidance has caused teachers to depend on their individual creativity and initiative for program implementation. These findings underscore the point that a positive attitude alone is inadequate for ensuring the effectiveness of the CTP. This is consistent with the conclusions of Tajuddin and Shaffeei[5] and Mohd Yusof and Khairuddin[6], who highlighted the necessity for ongoing professional development to enhance teachers' competencies in executing the transition programme.

For the second objective of this study, which aimed to identify the challenges associated with early Career Transition Program (CTP) implementation in primary schools, it was found that the program faced numerous systemic and pedagogical constraints. Among the primary challenges identified were time limitations due to a dense curriculum, a scarcity of specific teaching modules and materials tailored to the primary school level, and difficulties in adapting activities to accommodate the diverse ability levels of students with special educational needs (SEN). Academic pressures and the increased workload on teachers often result in the CTP being implemented in a limited and inconsistent manner. These findings align with the research conducted by Ng and

Ong[12] and Alsuhaymi et al.[13], which highlight that structural and institutional constraints, particularly teachers' workload and limited systemic support, significantly hinder the effective implementation of supplementary programmes such as the CTP. Hasriadi et al.[25] also reported that the lack of specialised and differentiated teaching materials tailored to students with special educational needs poses a significant challenge to effective instructional delivery. From a broader perspective, UNESCO underscores the importance of curriculum flexibility and a phased approach for the successful implementation of early transition programmes, particularly for students with special needs who are in the early stages of developing essential skills[4].

In relation to the third objective of the study, which examined the role of parental support and industry collaboration in CTP implementation, the findings indicate that parental involvement remains limited, primarily due to limited awareness of the Career Transition Program's concepts and objectives. This lack of engagement impacts the continuity of support for student learning beyond the school environment and detracts from the overall effectiveness of the program. These results support the research by Musfirah and Alias[7], which highlights that parents' understanding of special education programmes directly affects their level of involvement. Moreover, UNESCO emphasizes that collaboration between schools and families is a fundamental component of inclusive education and critical for the development of life skills among students with special needs[21].

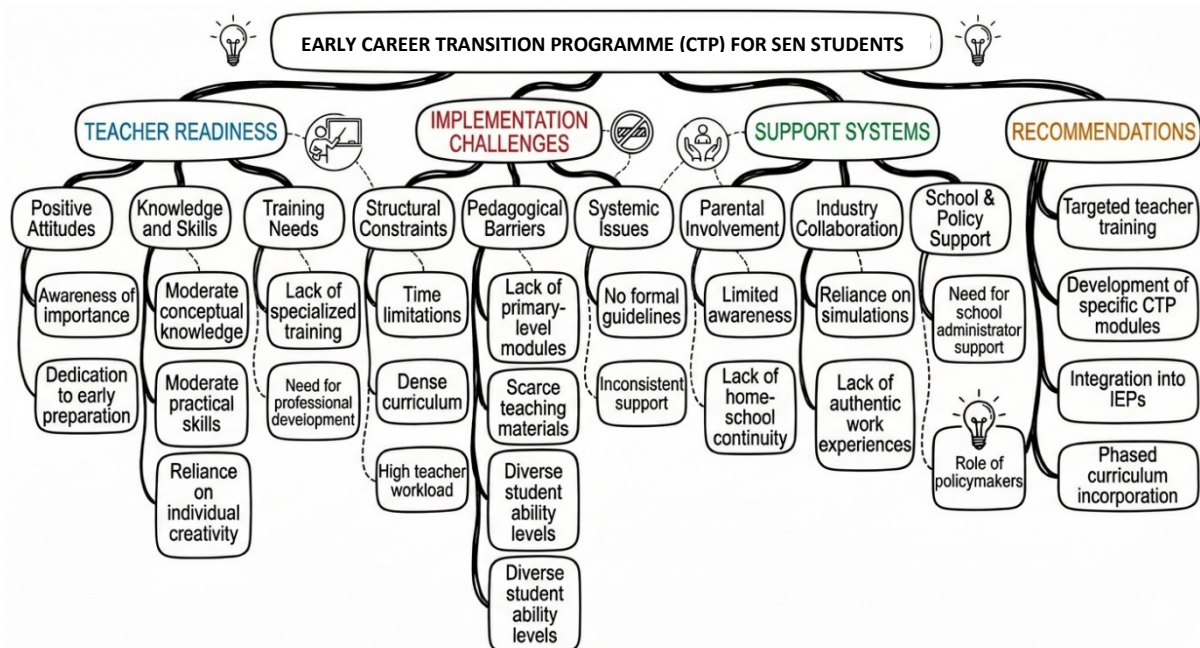


Figure 2 Early Career Transition Programme (CTP) for SEN Students

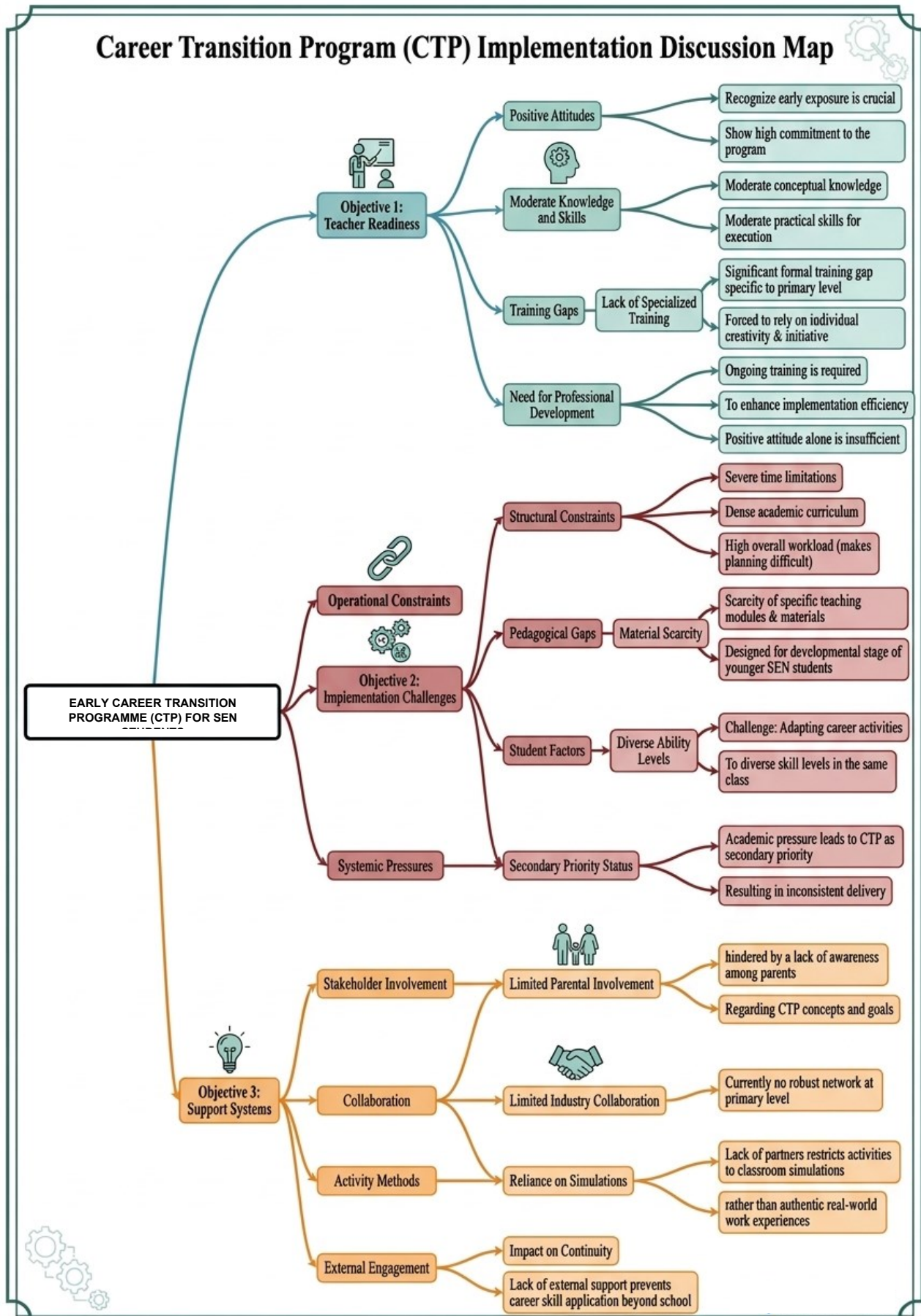


Figure 3 Tri-Objective Analysis of Early Career Transition for SEN Students

The findings of this study reveal that collaboration with industry partners in implementing Career Transition Programmes (CTP) in primary schools remains limited. Consequently, most activities are conducted through simulations and classroom-based exercises. While this method is appropriate for the developmental stage of primary school students, the absence of authentic learning experiences restricts their exposure to real-world work environments. These results are consistent with the research conducted by Jamaludin et al.[8] and Smith and Lee[22], which highlight that limited access to real workplace experiences and insufficient collaboration with external stakeholders constrain the effectiveness of career transition initiatives. The OECD further underscores that effective career development necessitates an integrated support ecosystem that encompasses schools, families, and external partners[3].

Overall, the achievement of the objectives of the Early Career Transition Program objectives for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in primary schools is influenced by a complex interplay of factors, including teacher preparedness, school system support, parental involvement, and external collaboration. These findings align with international career development frameworks that advocate a phased approach to career development beginning in early schooling. This process includes building self-awareness, initiating early exploration, and developing fundamental skills[3], [4]. Therefore, this study highlights the necessity for a more adaptive, contextual, and phased implementation of CTP in primary schools, tailored to the developmental needs of SEN students and the realities of the educational environment.

Table 1 Summary of Themes, Subthemes, Participant Evidence, and Supporting Literature

Research Objective	Theme	Subtheme	Sample Evidence from Participants	Supporting Literature
To explore teachers' readiness in implementing the Early Career Transition Program	Positive Attitudes toward CTP	Awareness of importance	"I understand that early exposure is important for students with special needs, even at primary level." (T2)	[5], [6]
	Moderate Knowledge and Skills	Limited formal training	"I understand the importance of early career exposure for students, but I am not fully confident in designing structured transition activities because we were never formally trained for this at the primary level" (T1).	[10], [24]
To identify challenges in implementing the Early Career Transition Program	Structural Constraints	Time and curriculum pressure	"The timetable is already full, so it is difficult to plan additional transition activities." (T3)	[12], [13]
	Pedagogical Challenges	Lack of suitable modules	"There are no modules designed for younger students with special needs." (T4)	[2], [25]
To examine support systems in Early Career Transition implementation	Limited Parental Involvement	Lack of awareness	"Parents are not really aware of this program, so support from home is limited." (T5)	[7]
	Limited Industry Collaboration	Reliance on simulation	"Most activities are simulations because we do not have industry partners." (T2)	[8], [22]

V. CONCLUSION

This study examined teacher readiness and the challenges associated with the early implementation of the Career Transition Program (CTP) for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) at the primary school level. The findings indicate that while teachers demonstrate positive attitudes and awareness of the importance of early career transition, their practical readiness remains moderate due to limited training, lack of structured guidelines, and insufficient exposure to career-related pedagogical practices.

The implementation of CTP is further constrained by systemic factors, including teachers' knowledge and readiness, time constraints, and workload, as well as the degree of parental involvement and external collaboration. The absence of specific guidelines and formal training concerning CTP at the primary school level also hampers the uniformity and effectiveness of program implementation. These findings underscore that the early success of CTP relies not only on teacher initiative but also on integrated support from the school, parents, and policymakers. The study highlights the necessity of providing targeted training for teachers, along with the development of modules and implementation guides for the CTP tailored specifically for primary schools. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of fostering a learning environment that nurtures self-management and vocational skills for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Based on these insights, the study recommends that schools enhance collaboration with parents and industry stakeholders while gradually integrating career transition components into the curriculum and students' Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the needs and realities involved in the early implementation of the Career Transition Programme within the realm of primary school special education. The results underscore the significance of systematically introducing career transition elements from the early stages of schooling to ensure that students with special needs are better equipped for subsequent educational phases and a more independent adult life.

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