

**Developing the Competent Self from Secondary Education to Adult World: An  
Experiential Learning of Adolescents with Special Needs**

**Sau Cheong Loh, PhD  
Haslee Sharil Lim Abdullah, PhD  
Farrah Dina Yusop, PhD  
University of Malaya  
Malaysia**

**Sheau Tsuey Chong, PhD  
National University of Malaysia  
Malaysia**

**Abstract**

Post-secondary education and training is important to prepare individuals with special needs for independence in the adult world. In the Malaysian context, parents have difficulty in finding post-secondary placement for their children as soon as they complete secondary education. In addition, individuals with special needs are often homebound, having low self-esteem, and lacking in goal setting and determination skill, which adds on to their inability to have access to education or employment after school. The purpose of this study is to explore how a transition-to-post secondary program can assist in the development of self-esteem and self-determination among a group of high functioning adolescents with special needs who have high interest in learning. The research utilises the phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of the respondents in order to find out how the experiences from the program make sense and give meaning to them. Among the sessions involved were 'Understand Myself', 'Let's Speak Up', 'How to Develop Self-Esteem', 'How to Be Confident', 'Personal Success Sharing', and 'My Dreamboard'. The findings show that respondents felt that they had learned a lot from the program, which includes goal setting, and self-determination and as well as they were more confident and enjoyed the program very much. The findings for this study are being discussed and implications are drawn.

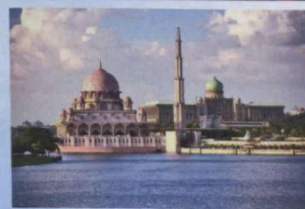
**Keywords:** Competent self, transition to post-secondary education, adolescents with special needs



**Developing the Competent Self from  
Secondary to Post Secondary Education:  
An Experiential Learning of  
Adolescents with Special Needs**

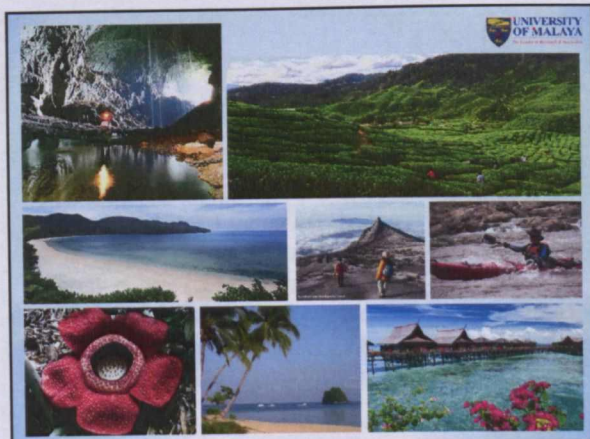
By  
Loh Sau Cheong, Ph.D  
Associate Professor  
Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling  
Faculty of Education  
University of Malaya  
Malaysia


lohsch@um.edu.my




**Malaysia**


- Situated between Thailand and Singapore
- Population: 30 million
  - Malay and Bumiputras: 62.2%
  - Chinese: 22%
  - Indian: 6.7%
  - Others: 0.9%
  - Non-Malaysian Citizen: 8.1%
- Official Religion: Islam
- National Language: Malay language





 UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA


**DO-IT MALAYSIA TEAM MEMBERS**  
(Disabilities Opportunities through Internetworking and Technology)  
*A project funded by the Fundamental Research Grant Scheme from Ministry of Education, Malaysia*

  
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Loh Sau Cheong  
(Project Leader)

  
Dr. Haslee Sharil Lim Abdullah  
(Team Member)


  
Dr. Farah Dina Yusop  
(Team Member)


  
Dr. Chong Sheau Tsuey  
(Team Member)

 UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

## Background


Post-secondary education and training is important to prepare individuals with special needs for independence in the adult world.




 UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

## Literature

Transition programme assist students with special needs to capture the skills which enable them to develop their self-esteem, and self-determination skills in order to assist them to achieve high-skill jobs (Burgstahlar, 2001).

 UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

Transitional needs of individuals with special needs includes collaborative support system, job coaching, self-advocacy skills training, career guidance and transition assessment, vocational training, trained transition personnel and transition services (Loh & Sharifah Zainiyah, 2013).



### Issues Faced by Parents who have Children with Special Needs

Parents have difficulty in finding post-secondary placement for their children as soon as they complete secondary education.

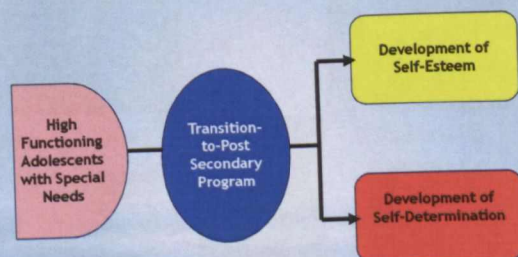


### Issues Faced by Individuals with Special Needs

- often homebound
- low self-esteem
- lacking in goal setting
- lacking in determination skill
- have less access to education or employment after school



### Purpose of the Study



### Design of the Study

The research utilizes the phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of the respondents in order to find out how these experiences from the transition-to-post secondary program make sense and give meaning to them.





### Who Participated in the Study?

Ten (10) high functioning adolescents with special needs:

- Aged between 17 - 21 years old
- Two (2) with visual impairment
- Three (3) with learning disabilities
- Five (5) with hearing impairment



### Transition-to-Post Secondary Program

The program was conducted in the form of Holiday Camp

- In the campus of University of Malaya
- Duration: five days
- Time: 7.00am - 10.00pm
- Various sessions



Understand Myself



Speaking Up



Build Your Self-Esteem



Personal Success Story



**Visit to University of Malaya Botanical Garden**





**Teambuilding Activities**






**Having Fun in the Campus**





**Art Therapy**





**How to Enhance My Creativity**


**Journal Writing**

*"I am doing well in activities about game and for fun. I feel and think the participants are awesome, especially during teamwork." (Participant 4)*

*"I feel happy as I met a lot of friends from the University of Malaya. My ambition is to become an excellent lawyer." (Participant 9)*

*"Today I learn important tips from Dr. Wong about how to build up confidence and progress in life to be more successful." (Participant 3)*

*"I feel happy because I managed to build my confidence especially in communication." (Participant 8)*



**Journal Writing - Cont'**

*"I am very glad of Harvard Choo (one of the speakers) because he is very awesome. I like his interesting talk on self-esteem, so I am trying to better myself for the future." (Participant 2)*

*"I feel fun when visiting the botanical garden. With explanation given to me, I acquired a lot of knowledge. I also feel happy as I managed to learn different characters in sign language from friends" (Participant 10)*

*"I feel most happy today as I managed to learn about creativity...and was given the opportunity to form the octopus and butterfly...with friends' help." (Participant 8)*



## Conclusion

As there are a huge population of individuals with disabilities requiring access to post secondary education and employment, more resources and attention should be given to meet their challenges and needs.



## References

1. Burgstahler, S., & Bellman, S. (2009). Perceived benefits of internships for subgroups of students with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 31(3), 155-165.
2. Kirsch, N. L., Shenton, M., Spiri, E., Rowan, J., Simpson, R., Schreckenghost, D., & LoPresti, E. F. (2004). [Web-Based assistive technology interventions for cognitive impairments after traumatic brain injury: A selective review and two case studies](#). *Rehabilitation Psychology*, 49(3), 200-212.
3. Leake, D., Burgstahler, S., & Izzo, M. (2011). [Promoting transition success for culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities: The value of mentoring](#). *Creative Education*, 2(2), 121-129.
4. Loh, S. C., & Sharifah Zainiyah Syed Yahya. (2013). Effective Transitional Plan from Secondary Education to Employment for Individuals with Learning Disabilities: A Case Study. *Journal of Education and Learning*, by Canadian Center of Science and Education, 2(1), 104-117.



*Thank you for listening*