

Assessing the Job Roles of School-to-Work Transition Coordinators for College Students with Disabilities in Japan

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ABSTRACT

The lack of communication between transition coordinators and vocational rehabilitation (VR) staff is preventing the effective transition for students with disabilities (SWDs). The purpose of this study was to assess the job roles of school-to-work transition coordinators at colleges and universities in Japan, using the Transition from School to Work for College Students with Disabilities (TSW-College) developed by the present authors. The sample consisted of 100 transition coordinators at 100 Japanese colleges and universities. Exploratory factor analysis found that the transition roles could be broken into three categories, namely; Needs-based Collaborative Interagency support (NCI), Job Matching support with companies (JM), and Individualized Job Seeking support (IJS). The overall Cronbach's alpha was 0.97, indicating the TSW-College was internally consistent and could be used to examine the roles of transition coordinators at colleges and universities. The TSW-College could be used as an assessment tool to identify the gap between the perceived roles and expected roles between the college personnel who provide school-to-work transition for their SWDs and the VR staff who expect those college personnel to provide transition support for their clients. Discussions included some strategies to achieve the best practice for a smooth transition from school to work for college SWDs.

Keywords: University, Employment, School to work transition, Students with disabilities, Transition coordinators, Job roles and Vocational rehabilitation.

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INTRODUCTION

In Japan, the number of college students with disabilities (SWDs) has increased every year for the past 12 years: today the number of SWDs is more than 6 times what it was in 2006. The Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) found that in 2018 there were more than 30,000 college SWDs (JASSO, 2019); this number accounts for almost 1% of the total number of Japanese university students. About 85% of Japanese universities and colleges accept SWDs (JASSO, 2019). While a decade ago most SWDs had physical disability, today more than 40% of SWDs have psychiatric or developmental disabilities (JASSO, 2019). The rapid increase of college students with psychiatric and developmental disabilities means that universities must hire effective transition coordinators, or personnel with the professional knowledge and skills to help students gain employment

after graduation. However, little studies have been done regarding the specific knowledge and skills necessary for transition coordinators to be successful. Findings remain general: transition coordinators must know enough about the nature of developmental disabilities to develop individualized transition plans (Sato and Tokunaga, 2006) and SWDs should receive vocational counseling and on-the-job training (OJT) early in their college careers (Umenaga, 2011). However, despite the recognition that transition coordinators offer vital services to university SWDs, it is not always easy for students with developmental disabilities to receive individual vocational counseling and OJT while simultaneously maintaining academic requirements. In addition, the school to work transition may differ for students with developmental disabilities than for students with physical

disabilities. Because the employment rate of SWDs has not significantly improved since 2011 (JASSO, 2017), both Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (2017) and JASSO (2017) have emphasized the need for transition coordinators to collaborate with vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies and to increase their education and experience. Japan's National Institute of Vocational Rehabilitation (NIVR, 2009) has proposed that all universities receive professional consultations from VR agencies. Such professional cooperation between special educators and VR agency staff will foster a smooth transition for SWDs (Oertle and Seader, 2015; Scheef and Mahfouz, 2020; Wehman et al., 1985).

In any multi-sector social welfare collaboration, each organization must understand their role and be able to explain the differences in role between their specialty and others' (Matsuoka, 2009). Thus, in order for universities to cooperate with VR agencies in this way, it is imperative that both organizations must understand their roles and functions to work together effectively (Fukuyama, 2009). However, insufficient knowledge and a lack of specific roles for special needs education teachers (Fujii and Ochiai, 2011) and university personnel (Yamamoto et al., 2015) stand in the way of professional cooperation. This plus the knowledge gap between school and VR staff preventing a smooth transition from school to work for SWDs (NIVR, 2012). However, few studies have focused on the specific roles of transition coordinators for college students with disabilities. The role clarification can provide a potential guide for education curricula pre-service and in-service training of qualified transition coordinators. As the number of such transition coordinators increases, the chance of quality transition services being delivered to SWDs should also increase. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to identify the role of school-to-work transition coordinators presently employed by Japanese colleges and universities. To this end, we develop a cross-sectional study that includes both a questionnaire mail survey and factor analytic approaches.

METHODOLOGY

Measures

We developed an initial list of 40 transition coordinator job tasks by referring to previous studies on the role of both VR and special needs educators (Beardsley and Rubin, 1988; China, 2008, 2015; Defur and Taymans, 1995; Fujii, 2011; Fujii and Ochiai, 2011; Fujii et al., 2012; Leahy et al., 2003; McCain et al., 2004; Yaeda, 2003), which we referred to as the Transition from School to Work for College Students with Disabilities (TSW-College). Then, we asked 15 experts to validate the 40-item TSW-College (12 responded). These experts were involved in employment support for SWDs and included VR counselors for individuals with disabilities, transition

coordinators, and researchers specializing in work transition support for persons with disabilities. We distributed a web survey using SurveyMonkey to these experts and asked them to evaluate whether each item was "valid," "inappropriate," or should be "modified." They were also asked to add new items they thought appropriate. We adopted items that 85% or more felt were "valid" or should be "modified." As a result, we deleted four items from the original 40 and added 6 for a final 42-item TSW-College (Table 1). These included the following: "plan and provide seminars on communication skills and business etiquette for SWDs" and "provide intake interviews with SWDs regarding the job they desire."

Procedure

We sent the final questionnaire with a cover letter and a self-addressed stamped envelope to 342 college staff members at different colleges, each of whom was in charge of providing transition services to SWDs. We chose the 342 colleges based on those classified by Hayashida (2014) as disclosing information regarding their support for SWDs and those that partners with Japan's Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD-Japan) and Postsecondary Education Programs Network (PEP-Net Japan). The questionnaire included items on demographic information, such as employment settings, the number of SWDs they served, and the percentage of daily time spent on employment support. Respondents were asked to score the 42-item TSW-College by using the 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (not conscious at all) to 5 (very conscious). The questionnaire was sent out on May 28, 2018. We included all responses received by August 21, 2018 in our data analysis.

Data Analysis

We calculated the mean and standard deviation of each item on the TSW-College to see if there were any distortions or ceiling or floor effects of data variation. We then performed an exploratory factor analysis of the 42-item TSW-College using the principal factors method of extraction. We carried out a Promax rotation as well since the factors were expected to be correlated. We tentatively determined the number of factors using Kaiser-Guttman's eigenvalues greater than one criteria and Cattell's scree test. After performing a series of factor analyses, 2 items with factor loadings of .40 or lower were eliminated, resulting in 3 factors considered structurally and conceptually most appropriate. Internal consistency was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and each factor representing a group of items was named as a common factor.

The current study was approved by our Institutional Review Board. Each respondent received a cover letter containing information on the purpose and methods of the survey along with the survey itself. Responding to the questionnaire was regarded as informed

Table 1. The transition from school to work for college student with disabilities (TSW-College).

| S/no | Job Tasks |
|------|--|
| 1. | Follow up SWDs and companies after the internship on the job. |
| 2. | Provide intake interviews with SWDs regarding the job they desire. |
| 3. | Provide necessary consultation and follow-up services after SWDs get employed for a certain period of time. |
| 4. | Provide technical advice on the job performance of SWDs and building the sound human relationships on the job. |
| 5. | Plan and provide job-seeking guidance, job seminars by the college seniors of SWDs, and job opening sessions by the companies. |
| 6. | Provide individual counseling for the long-term career of SWDs. |
| 7. | Accompany with the SWDs to search jobs at one-stop career centers. |
| 8. | Instruct SWDs in interview techniques. |
| 9. | Conduct research on school-to-work transition of SWDs. |
| 10. | Share necessary information of the particular SWDs with other departments in the university or college. |
| 11. | Provide information on various working styles including competitive employment and welfare-based work activities. |
| 12. | Assess the service needs of the particular family concerning the employment of their child with disabilities. |
| 13. | Consult with professional agencies, such as vocational rehabilitation centers, to obtain technical assistance, such as vocational evaluation of a particular client. |
| 14. | Plan and provide seminars on communication skills and business etiquette for SWDs. |
| 15. | Coordinate meetings for scheduling, staffing, and job accommodations prior to the actual internship by SWDs. |
| 16. | Correct SWDs' job application documents. |
| 17. | Provide workers with disabilities with emotional support when the conflict arises on the job. |
| 18. | Consult with work support centers for better job retention and workplace adjustment among SWDs after graduation. |
| 19. | Give technical advice on scheduling the job search by SWDs. |
| 20. | Explain specific characteristics of SWDs for the companies that hired them. |
| 21. | Open case conferences including family members of SWDs and relevant support agencies. |
| 22. | Provide follow-up and job accommodation during internship for SWDs. |
| 23. | Get other departments involved in the employment of SWDs by public awareness campaign. |
| 24. | Assess the specific characteristics of SWDs. |
| 25. | Assess the need for obtaining the disability ID certificate. |
| 26. | Participate in some academic conferences on school-to-work transition of SWDs. |
| 27. | Advise private companies on disability management for SWDs. |
| 28. | Provide psychological support for SWDs when the conflict arises during the job hunting. |
| 29. | Advise on selection of workplace according to the characteristics of SWDs. |
| 30. | Attend case conferences on SWDs held by other agencies or institutions. |
| 31. | Based on needs of SWDs, consult with organizations and medical institutions to issue the disability ID certificate. |
| 32. | Refer VR center to obtain general advice on strategies of getting jobs for SWDs. |
| 33. | Conduct program evaluation on school- to-work transition services for SWDs. |
| 34. | Provide recruitment information to SWDs. |
| 35. | Advise SWDs to find proper accommodation at a given workplace. |
| 36. | Make sure that other university departments such as a health center and counseling office know the specific needs of SWDs. |
| 37. | Conduct job development for SWDs for internship at specific workplaces by collaborating with one-stop career centers to search for available job. |
| 38. | Provide work adjustment support for SWDs who have started their jobs for a certain period of time. |
| 39. | Provide public seminars to raise the awareness of transition services for SWDs. |
| 40. | Ask work support agencies and vocational training schools to support SWDs after graduation. |
| 41. | Provide technical advice with SWDs to learn appropriate manners when applying for a job through telephone, letters, and/or e-mail. |
| 42. | Cooperate with family members of SWDs as necessary. |

consent. All data were analyzed after digitization; individuals were not identified when publishing the results.

RESULTS

Demographic Information

The total number of responses was 100 (29.2% of the 342 surveys sent out). Of these, 9 were inapplicable or inappropriate, resulting in 91 usable responses (26.6%). We included all responses where more than 60% of the

total questionnaire items were complete in our analysis (Tables 2 and 3). Each university had 0 to 18 staff whose primary job was to support employment for SWDs, with the average being 1.6 ($SD = 2.82$). Respondents' mean years of supporting SWDs was 4.0 ($SD = 3.62$). And, their average week of work was 44.0 h ($SD = 9.12$). The average number of SWDs provided with employment support in a year was 9.2 ($SD = 29.31$).

Factor Analysis

We calculated the average value and standard deviation of each survey item, and the ceiling effect (the mean

Table 2. Demographic information on respondents' employment settings.

| Variable | Total (n=91) | |
|-----------------------|--------------|------|
| | n | % |
| Type of universities | | |
| Private | 54 | 59.3 |
| National | 19 | 20.9 |
| Public | 18 | 19.8 |
| Number of departments | | |
| 1 | 21 | 23.1 |
| 2-4 | 35 | 38.5 |
| 5-7 | 19 | 20.9 |
| 8 or more | 16 | 17.6 |
| Number of SWDs | | |
| 0 | 1 | 1.1 |
| 1-5 | 8 | 8.8 |
| 6-10 | 16 | 17.6 |
| 11-20 | 12 | 13.2 |
| 21-50 | 11 | 12.1 |
| 51-100 | 8 | 8.8 |
| 101 or more | 14 | 15.4 |
| Not applicable | 21 | 23.1 |

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of respondents.

| Variable | Total (n=91) | |
|--|--------------|------|
| | n | % |
| Employment settings | | |
| Employment support office | 70 | 76.9 |
| Office of students with disabilities | 14 | 15.4 |
| Teaching positions | 2 | 2.2 |
| Others | 5 | 5.5 |
| Educational background | | |
| High school degree | 3 | 3.3 |
| Associate degree | 2 | 2.2 |
| Bachelor's degree | 64 | 70.3 |
| Master's degree | 16 | 17.6 |
| Doctoral degree | 4 | 4.4 |
| Other training/education | 2 | 2.2 |
| Qualifications (multiple choices) | | |
| Career consultant | 29 | 31.9 |
| Industrial counselor | 12 | 13.2 |
| High school teacher | 8 | 8.8 |
| Junior high school teacher | 6 | 6.6 |
| Special support school teacher | 5 | 5.5 |
| Social worker | 5 | 5.5 |
| Psychiatric social worker | 4 | 4.4 |
| Clinical psychologist | 3 | 3.3 |
| Nurse | 1 | 1.1 |
| Other | 5 | 5.5 |
| No qualification | 44 | 48.4 |
| Employment status | | |
| Full-time | 79 | 86.8 |
| Part-time | 12 | 13.2 |
| Percent of daily time spent on employment support for SWDs | | |
| Less than 10% | 76 | 83.5 |
| 10-25% | 10 | 11.0 |
| 25-50% | 1 | 1.1 |
| More than 50% | 4 | 4.4 |

value +1SD exceeds the maximum value) was observed in 5 items: "Share necessary information of the particular

SWDs with other departments in the university or college"; "Provide information on various working styles,

including competitive employment and welfare-based work activities"; "Correct SWDs' job application documents"; "Provide recruitment information to SWDs"; and "Provide technical advice with SWDs to learn appropriate manners when applying for a job through telephone, letters, and/or e-mail." The floor effect (the mean value $-1SD$ is less than the minimum) was observed in 4 items: "Provide technical advice on the job performance of SWDs and building the sound human relationships on the job"; "Conduct research on school-to-work transition of SWDs"; "Conduct program evaluation on school-to-work transition services for SWDs"; and "Provide public seminars to raise the awareness of transition services for SWDs." The validity of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy indicated the strength of the relationships among variables ($KMO = .91$), thus it was acceptable to proceed with the analysis. Kaiser-Guttman's eigenvalues greater than one criterion and Cattell's scree test were used to determine the number of factors to retain. Promax rotation was performed, since factors were expected to be correlated. We excluded 9 items due to the ceiling and floor effect. We then performed exploratory factor analysis on the remaining 33 items. An additional 2 items were excluded due to the factor loading being less than .40: "Provide workers with disabilities with emotional support when conflict arises on the job" and "Get other departments involved in the employment of SWDs by public awareness campaign." These measures resulted in three categories of transition role consisting of 31 specific transition job tasks. The alpha coefficient of all 31 items was .97, and the alpha of each factor ranged from .92 to .95, which was within an acceptable range. The Guttman's half-split coefficient was .96.

The first factor consisted of 14 items with higher factor loadings, including "Consult with work support centers for better job retention and workplace adjustment among SWDs after graduation"; "Attend case conferences on SWDs held by other agencies or institutions"; and "Based on SWDs' needs, consult with organizations and medical institutions to issue the disability ID certificate." These were all tasks related to confirming SWDs' support needs and collaborating with other institutions. Therefore, we called this factor "Needs-Based Collaborative Interagency Support" ($\alpha = .95$). The second factor consisted of 10 items and included: "Follow up with SWDs and companies after internships on the job"; "Plan and conduct the job-seeking guidance, job seminars by the college seniors of SWDs, and job opening sessions by the companies"; and "Explain specific characteristics of SWDs for the companies that hired them." These tasks were related to matching SWDs with companies; Therefore, we named it "Job Matching Support with Companies" ($\alpha = .93$). The third factor consisted of 7 items and included "Provide psychological support for SWDs when the conflict arises during the job hunting" and "Give technical advice on scheduling the job search by SWDs." These all involved solving problems through

individual interviews. Therefore, we called it "Individualized Job Seeking Support" ($\alpha = .92$) (Tables 4 and 5).

DISCUSSION

The resulting 3 categories of job roles (Needs-Based Collaborative Interagency Support, Job Matching Support with Companies, and Individualized Job Seeking Support), consisting of 31 specific transition tasks, were the comprehensive roles for transition coordinators to play in order to provide quality services for their college SWDs.

The first category, Needs-Based Collaborative Interagency Support, is a fundamental job role of transition coordinators because one of their major roles is to become the "bridge" between college and work. Interagency collaboration between university departments and other agencies such as VR centers and work support centers for individuals with disabilities has been long sought by special needs coordinators and VR counselors (Yaeda, 2006). However, due to the separate service provision and law enforcement of transition from school to work for SWDs in Japan, special needs education teachers have very limited opportunities to collaborate with VR counselors in face to face, they have no choice but to make the individualized transition plan by themselves. Virtually no input has been made by VR counselors to develop an individualized transition plan for a specific student with disability at college. The Needs-based Collaborative Interagency Support by the transition coordinators should involve VR counselors, SWDs themselves, and their family members or significant others as team members so that more specific, hidden transition support needs are met. The second category, "Job Matching Support with Companies," includes a job role of providing internship opportunities with the students applying for the job or providing ongoing follow-up services after employment. The transition coordinators could play the role of a business consultant who negotiates with human resource managers that SWDs have specific proficiencies that would benefit their business. They could also advise on disability management for the company. The third category, "Individualized Job Seeking Support," includes a job role of providing psychological support with the SWDs who feel anxious about the job interviews. The transition coordinators must be able to listen attentively to their students' hopes and worries and to provide informal vocational counseling. China (2008) conducted a similar study to understand the role of guidance teachers in special needs schools. The study found the 5 categories: "Assessment," "Public information/communication," "Intermediate for support teams," "Job placement support /workplace development," and "Leading coordinator of career support area." The first two have much in common with Category 1 in our study, while the fourth ("Job placement support/workplace development")

Table 4. Factor loadings of exploratory factor analysis with the transition from school to work for college student with disabilities (TSW-College).

| 3 Factors (Cronbach's α) and 39 Items | | F1 | F2 | F3 |
|---|-------------|-------|-------------|-------------|
| Factor 1: Needs-Based Collaborative Interagency Support ($\alpha=.95$) | | | | |
| 18. Consult with the work support centers for the better job retention and workplace adjustment of SWDs after graduation. | .940 | -.191 | .114 | |
| 26. Participate in some academic conferences on school-to-work transition of SWDs. | .887 | -.124 | -.074 | |
| 30. Attend case conferences on SWDs held by other agencies or institutions. | .870 | -.208 | .072 | |
| 21. Open case conferences including family members of SWDs and relevant support agencies. | .834 | .317 | -.321 | |
| 31. Based on needs of SWDs, consult with organizations and medical institutions to issue the disability ID certificate. | .765 | -.071 | .106 | |
| 42. Cooperate with family members of SWDs as necessary. | .732 | -.073 | .168 | |
| 7. Accompany with the SWDs to search jobs at one-stop career centers. | .668 | .237 | -.158 | |
| 13. Consult with professional agencies such as vocational rehabilitation centers to obtain technical assistance such as vocational evaluation on the particular client. | .660 | .188 | .015 | |
| 32. Refer VR center to obtain general advice on strategies of getting jobs for SWDs. | .632 | .095 | .107 | |
| 12. Assess the service needs of the particular family concerning the employment of their child with disabilities. | .616 | .280 | .032 | |
| 25. Assess the needs for obtaining the disability ID certificate. | .616 | -.011 | .213 | |
| 24. Assess the specific characteristics of SWDs. | .614 | .198 | -.003 | |
| 40. Ask work support agencies and vocational training schools to support for SWDs after graduation. | .596 | .106 | .066 | |
| 36. Make sure that other university departments such as a health center and counseling office know the specific needs of SWDs. | .510 | .079 | .147 | |
| Factor 2: Job Matching Support with Companies to be Employed ($\alpha=.92$) | | | | |
| 1. Follow up SWDs and companies after the internship on the job. | | -.165 | .896 | .069 |
| 5. Plan and provide job-seeking guidance, job seminars by the college seniors of SWDs, and job opening sessions by the companies. | | -.164 | .846 | .023 |
| 14. Plan and provide seminars on communication skills and business etiquette for SWDs. | | -.014 | .744 | -.086 |
| 15. Coordinate meetings for scheduling, staffing, and job accommodation prior to the actual internship by SWDs. | | .003 | .722 | .086 |
| 22. Provide follow-up and job accommodation during internship for SWDs. | | .173 | .668 | .001 |
| 38. Provide work adjustment support for SWDs who have started their jobs for a certain period of time. | | .127 | .579 | -.081 |
| 20. Explain specific characteristics of SWDs for the companies that hired them. | | .204 | .547 | .183 |
| 27. Advise private companies on disability management for SWDs. | | .325 | .497 | .098 |
| 3. Provide necessary consultation and follow-up services after SWDs get employed for a certain period of time. | | .199 | .465 | .046 |
| 37. Conduct job development for SWDs for internship at specific workplaces by collaborating with one-stop career centers to search for available jobs. | | .340 | .414 | -.019 |
| Factor 3: Individualized Job Seeking Support ($\alpha=.93$) | | | | |
| 29. Advise on selection of workplace according to the characteristics of SWDs. | | -.061 | .056 | .893 |
| 28. Provide psychological support for SWDs when the conflict arises during the job hunting. | | .025 | -.118 | .822 |
| 19. Give technical advice on scheduling the job search by SWDs. | | .222 | -.125 | .715 |
| 2. Provide intake interviews with SWDs regarding the job they desire. | | -.059 | .192 | .661 |
| 6. Provide individual counseling for the long-term career of SWDs. | | .274 | .007 | .635 |
| 8. Instruct SWDs on job interview techniques. | | -.155 | .430 | .592 |
| 35. Advise SWDs to find proper accommodation at a given workplace. | | .066 | .411 | .437 |

Note: Factor loadings $>.35$ are in boldface. Extraction method: principal factor method.

Table 5. Correlations, means, and standard deviations of the 3 factors.

| Factors | 1 | 2 | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|---|-----|-----|----------|-----------|
| 1. Needs-based collaborative interagency support | | | 2.35 | 1.40 |
| 2. Job matching support with companies to be employed | .72 | | 2.28 | 1.32 |
| 3. Individualized job seeking support | .68 | .70 | 3.33 | 1.36 |

Note: *M* = means; *SD* = standard deviations.

is very similar to our Category 2. Both Categories 1 and 2 are the overall transition job roles expected by the stakeholders of special needs schools and colleges. On the other hand, Category 3 exclusively consisted of the transition job roles expected by colleges. Since special

needs education teachers are expected to collaborate with class teachers, career guidance counselors, and VR agency staff, they must play a leading role as transition coordinators for SWDs in high schools. In contrast, transition services by the college teachers are expected

to play the career counseling roles that would enhance more autonomous behavior by SWDs in colleges and universities.

CONCLUSION

We found that duties include three main categories: "Needs-Based Collaborative Interagency Support," "Job Matching Support with Companies to be Employed," and "Individualized Job Seeking Support." The third is unique to university staff and does not occur among teachers or guidance counselors at special needs schools. Generalization of the results may be limited due to the low response rate. Fewer questionnaire items may be more desirable for the respondents to answer, which may increase the response rate. Therefore, developing a short-version of TSW-College is encouraged. Another limitation of the study is the difficulty in reaching the "transition coordinators" who have not been operationally defined in Japanese legislations. The significance of the study was to clarify the diverse roles of the college staff who provide transition services for SWDs and to categorized into 3 groups of their essential job roles, which are different from the traditional job roles of teachers at special needs schools. The 3 job role categories can be the basis for the future curriculum development. Further studies are needed to validate the TSW-College as an effective measurement of job performance among university staff providing transition services at various postsecondary educational settings.

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