

May 2021

## Self-Determination Beyond Graduation

Sara Alotaibi

Riyadh Education Department, dr.sara.alosaimi@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo>

---

### Repository Citation

Alotaibi, S. (2021). Self-Determination Beyond Graduation. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 20 (2). Retrieved from <https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/taboo/vol20/iss2/10>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Scholarship@UNLV with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Article in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Article has been accepted for inclusion in Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact [digitalscholarship@unlv.edu](mailto:digitalscholarship@unlv.edu).

## Self-Determination Beyond Graduation

Sara Alotaibi

### Abstract

This article explores how teaching transition services will impact special needs students beyond the classroom. In a broader context, it also explores how providing these services supports the educational goals of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030. A review of the literature found that the teaching of transition services ensures that students will have access to full participation in post-secondary education and employment according to their skills and personal decisions (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, 2017). From her time in the United States (U.S.), the author saw the impact that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) had on education for students with disabilities. Schools worked to create transition plans in students' individual education plans (IEP) that helped them to be independent, successful students and then later successful citizens who exercised self-determination. The author proposes the development of a comprehensive training program in KSA that is similar to successful transition services plans observed in the U.S. public school system.

### Self-Determination

I had a unique experience with someone who has special needs and a special talent. While working on a project that integrated students of intellectual disabilities with female students of the year, I noticed a very special secondary student in this program. She had a mental disability; however, her drawings defied her mental age and made me question her categorization as a student with special needs. After noticing her and asking her teacher and other students about her,

---

*Sara Alotaibi is a teacher at the Riyadh Education Department. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Email address: dr.sara.alosaimi@gmail.com*

© 2021 by Caddo Gap Press.

I discovered that she was talented in drawing and lives in a world of her own, which she expresses in her drawings. My curiosity led me to go to her elementary school, where I met her teacher, and saw many of her impressive drawings. In these, and even in her early years, she was dealing with health and social issues such as obesity, and later, during secondary school, she tried to use her art to help others understand the plight of orphans.

The fact that she produced art that dealt with social matters surprised and interested me the most. I thought to myself, “How can this girl with special needs address these issues?” As a result of this experience, I volunteered to work with her in order to help her reach her full potential. I wanted to enter into the depths of her thinking, so I collaborated with her in writing a story, and she drew a picture of the whole story with exquisite details. When she handed it over to me, she read it in its final form. I realized then that any skill with students, especially their favorite skills, must be trained, developed, and turned into a passion. This idea is especially true for those with special needs who have skills, creativity, and talents. Training and cooperation between the family, the teacher, the specialists, and the entire team must be shown to identify and develop the talents they have.

After working with this student, she received a national award from the Ministry of Education for her talents and skills. This experience inspired me to continue observing special needs students, working with them, and writing articles about their talents and progress. Working with students in what is called transitional services, specifically in terms of special education, relates directly to the Vision 2030. Transitional services for special needs students relate to Saudi 2030 vision because the vision seeks to build a stimulating, attractive, and desirable learning environment in every school and is designed to link to an integrated and supportive system of services. Vision 2030 works to build a comprehensive educational plan based on culture and health.

Also, in this initiative, education is important because it represents the axis of progress and development in thought, capabilities, and skills of the Saudi youth. This axis remains vital to manage the economy in the future. It also aims to develop a comprehensive plan to reimagine the curriculum and teacher performance assessments, improve school environments to stimulate development and creativity, and focus on developing teaching methods that provide multiple possibilities for teachers. Vision 2030 includes developing methods of teaching for students with special needs so that they can benefit from social and cultural changes in KSA. The nation also plans to care for persons with disabilities in a manner that guarantees access to their rights related to disability and enhances the services provided to them, with the necessary means of rehabilitation. It has done this through a set of medical, psychological, social, educational, and informational procedures. It also provides comprehensive care services to everyone who needs care by virtue of their health conditions and degree of disability. In addition, it is important for them to help the disabled in achieving the maximum degree of

functional effectiveness, with the aim of enabling them to conform to the requirements of their natural and social environments, and develop their capabilities to be independent in order so that they may be productive citizens.

In order to ensure this plan, KSA must upgrade teaching methods that make the learner the focus, in order to build the student's skills, cultivate personality, enhance confidence, and inspire creativity. The goal is to build a school environment that is stimulating, attractive, and desirable for learning, linked to an integrated support services system. I observed in the U.S. that there is a special department for the follow-up of the disabled called the "Professional Rehabilitation Administration." It specializes in following up with professional rehabilitation of persons with physical, sensory, or mental disabilities. This organization also helps transition people with disabilities into the workforce so that they can be productive individuals who are able to interact with and adapt to society.

Clark (2019) maintains that

the employment gap between persons with disabilities and persons without disabilities must be closed. This can be done by making use of strategies to improve student employment outcomes after graduation. Teachers and therapists should cooperate to develop the transitional plan by focusing on students' strengths, addressing weaknesses, and requesting expert assistance from occupational therapists to teach students the skill of self-determination. (p. 2)

If teachers and counselors collaborate in this way, it will give special needs students more job opportunities and additional possibilities of success. Scholars also say that while special education teachers and students work to achieve the IEP goals related to transition, teachers will have the opportunity to closely monitor the progress of the student. Progress monitoring provides the teacher and the rest of the IEP team with information regarding the effectiveness of the transition plan and if changes are needed (Kellems et al., 2015). Moreover, scholars also say that a transition services plan must identify the skills, behaviors and knowledge that are needed to achieve success in the areas of post-secondary transition, independent living and employment (Bruno, 2018). That is where courses and curricula for Transition Programming for Youth with Disabilities or transition services become important. The teacher should focus on the basic skills necessary for post-secondary education, such as student-centered planning, student development, interagency cooperation, and family participation (Bruno, 2018). Scholars also say while psychologists and special education teachers play a role in transition services, students can as well. Reeves (2020) believes involving students in the process of assessment and making transition service plans can help them to develop self-advocacy and the ability to communicate their strengths and interests. Students' awareness of their performance will allow them to understand their accomplishments and needs and communicate them to their audience; they will also be able to identify transition skills that work for them (Reeves, 2020).

Furthermore, scholars also say part of a successful transition service includes

the teacher writing the transition IEP in collaboration with student so that students can engage in self-determination: “Self-determination is a concept reflecting the belief that all individuals have a right to direct their own lives” (Schoeller, Kachgal, & Bremer, 2003, p. 3). Finally, the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition says evaluation of students with disabilities as they finish high school requires that school psychologists know what students can do. With these abilities in mind, the psychologists help these students “make high school graduation decisions based on meaningful indicators of students’ learning and skills and clarify the implications of different diploma options for students with disabilities.” (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, 2017, pg. 3)

After my school immersion experience in the U.S., I learned that the United States of America has enacted laws that seek to make education available to all citizens, including students with disabilities, or those we call People of Determination. One of these laws is the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA provides legislation that ensures that students with disabilities are provided individual education plans (IEPs) in schools. Schools then must meet the needs of disabled students and take into account the achievement of students’ educational goals. IDEA requires that there be a transition plan for students with disabilities when they reach the age of 16, before they leave high school. The law stipulates in the transition plan that the students’ preferences, needs, and interests be taken into consideration. Furthermore, these plans are reviewed annually, along with feedback from the students themselves and their parents. I also learned the ultimate goal of transportation services is to prepare students with special needs through their transportation, their participation in society in work commensurate with their capabilities, and using their skills to achieve positive and psychological effects that make them feel their participation in the society.

In my experience in American schools, I learned that the skill of self-determination is one of the main factors needed for a transition plan to be successful. Self-determination can be defined as encompassing concepts such as free will, civil and human rights, freedom of choice, independence, personal agency, self-direction and individual responsibility. Additionally, I learned that teachers should help their students develop academic and independence skills that would support independence and professional goals. Through the transition plan, students must learn the skill of self-determination with training from psychologists. In fact, psychologists and special education teachers should collaborate using post-secondary planning strategies. Research indicates that additional cooperation between the family and the agencies in the society is one of the most important reasons for the success of the transitional plan.

Finally, I saw the teacher use formal and informal measures to assess students’ abilities in relation to specific skills, strengths, and areas of needs. Not only the use of assessments but also teachers’ observations can be utilized to help design the transition plan. In the transition plan, the teacher focuses on several

aspects such as providing instruction and different activities such academic skills, self-care, communication and social skills. Those activities must consider the individual student's needs, strengths, preferences and interests.

When I return to Saudi Arabia, I will write a clear policy for a transition plan that will include a definition, regulatory statements, age requirements, and progress monitoring requirements. I believe having these policy statements will help formalize and standardize transition plans in Saudi Arabia and make them more consistent. In addition, I will train my students in skills that will improve their self-determination, self-reliance, and independence. I will write their transition goals with their aspirations and desires in mind, as well as their current level of skills. Other skills that I recommend for transition planning involve problem-solving and self-advocacy skills. These are lifelong, vital skills, which are critical for success in the real world and therefore must be addressed in transition planning. I will develop and deliver workshops for parents on how to help their children learn the skills of independence and self-determination. I plan to follow-up these workshops with monthly meetings. I hope to personally visit and follow-up with parents twice per year to ask them how their child is doing, if they need help and support, and to find out if their child was able to get a job. I will document these meetings and collect data for use in further studies. I will work with the Training Department, Education Management, directors, supervisors, teachers, psychologists, as well as parents and students themselves to create transition plans that best suit students with special needs. Any difficulty I might encounter will be how to decide how much money we need for my program. It will be necessary to gain approval from my principal in order to get my funding from the government so that I have a budget. Finally, educators in the United States can learn how other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, are trying to improve resources for special education students in order to improve their quality of life.

## References

- Bruno, L. P. (2018). *The role of professional development on secondary special educators self-efficacy regarding the use of evidence-based transition practices* (Publication No. 5578) [Doctoral dissertation, Virginia Commonwealth University]. VCU Theses and Dissertations.
- Clark, A. M. (2019). *Transition to employment for people with disabilities: Closing the employment gap* (Publication No. 197 ) [Bachelor's Thesis, Messiah College]. Honors Projects and Presentations: Undergraduate.
- Kellems, R. O., Springer, B., Wilkins, M. K., & Anderson, C. (2015). Collaboration in transition assessment: School psychologists and special educators working together to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 60(3), 215–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988x.2015.1075465>
- Ministry of Education. (2019). *Education and vision 2030*. Accessed 2 August 2020 from

- <https://www.moe.gov.sa/en/Pages/vision2030.aspx>
- National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, (2017). *A guide for teachers/educators for collaborating with vocational rehabilitation services for youth with disabilities*. Retrieved March, 02, 2020, from [https://transitionta.org/sites/default/files/news/TeachersGuide\\_VR\\_FINAL\\_November17.pdf](https://transitionta.org/sites/default/files/news/TeachersGuide_VR_FINAL_November17.pdf)
- Reeves, J. (2020). *Educator perceptions of transition programming for youth with disabilities* (Publication No. 7951) [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies.
- Schoeller, K., Kachgal, M., & Bremer, C. (2003). *Self-determination: Supporting successful transition (NCSET Research to Practice Brief)*. University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration, National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET). Retrieved on March 03, 2020, from the University of Minnesota Digital Conservancy, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/17298>
- United States Department of Education & Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2017). *A transition guide to post-secondary education and employment for students and youth with disabilities*. Retrieved March 03, 2020, from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/transition/products/postsecondary-transition-guide-2017.pdf>