

**IMPACT OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (VEP)
ON STUDENT CAREER SUCCESS****Nelly E. Ofoegbu**

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The Vocational Education Program (VEP) was established by the special education department in the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) in an effort to assist students with disabilities to graduate from high school and be gainfully employed. This study investigated the impact of VEP on students' careers success after graduation. The participants included eighty-one graduates between 2004-2007 schools years. Manual computation and descriptive analysis using the SPSS® Software was used to determine the job acquisition and job retention rate of participants. Results indicated that 67% of participants in the 2004-2006 school years were able to acquire and retain employment, while 57% of graduates in 2006-2007 school year acquired a job and 53% retained their employment. The study implications indicate that there is a significant relationship between students' career success and participation in the VEP. The VEP design and method of service delivery supports the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, focusing on meeting the Individualized Transition needs of students. The data collected in this research will provide meaningful information that educators can use during transition planning and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. Educators can also use the information to make relational predictions about student career outcome and participation in a transition program, thereby ensuring that students are engaged in programs and activities that will best serve their needs, while recognizing and considering their individual preferences and abilities.

Students classified as Seriously Emotionally Disturbed (SED) and those who are Learning Disabled (LD) experience a high rate of academic failure, social adaptation challenges, as well as high drop out rates, and a disposition toward high incarceration rates either before or after high school graduation (Al-Yagon & Michal, 2007, Boreson, 2006). These students won't likely engage in any career activities and as a consequence, they have low employment opportunity, poor employment histories, and a high rate of involvement with the judicial system (US Department of Education, 2006; Wagner, 2006.) After high school, these students are also less likely than their peers to participate in any form of adult learning or continuing education (Levine & Edger, 1995; Zigmond & Miller, 1992 as cited in Zigmond, 2006). Both school districts and health care providers are mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 to provide assistance with transitions and other necessary interventions to help these students. In an effort to fulfill the legal mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) established the Vocational Education Program (VEP). The primary objective of this program was to assist students with disabilities to perform on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers in an integrated setting. Students with Emotional Disabilities (ED) and Learning Disabilities (LD) are one of the target populations for the Transition and Intervention Program. The program's implementation is also a collaborative effort with Long Beach City College, the Department of Rehabilitation Center, and the Harbor Regional Center in the transitional process of Seriously Emotionally Disturbed and Learning Disabled students who had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) in the K-12 school setting.

This study was conducted in order to determine the effectiveness of VEP program in assisting students with acquiring and retaining a job after high school graduation. The investigation addressed two research questions. The research questions are:

1. What is the job acquisition rate of students who received Vocational Education Program intervention after high school graduation?
2. What is the job retention rate of students who received Vocational Education Program intervention after high school graduation?

Researchers (Armstrong, Dedrick, & Greenbaum, 2003; Boreson, 2003; Cameto, Levine, & Wagner, 2004; Wagner, 2006) have conducted studies on academic and behavior intervention in the K-12 setting. Most of the research on interventions and transitions such as the ones conducted by Paul, Michael and Reid (2003); Quinn and McDougal, (1998); Reddy and Richardson, (2006); Reschly and Christenson, (2006); and Wagner, (2006) focused on elementary, middle, and high school curricular and behavior interventions. Review of the current literature also reveals that limited research has been conducted in determining generalizations of the learned intervention strategies by the students in relation to post high school career outcome.

This research is important and unique when compared to other research such as *An analysis by gender of long-term post school outcomes for youths with disabilities* a study conducted by Levin and Edger in 1995. In this study the authors focused on analyzing the post high school outcome of students with disabilities by gender, without relating the outcome to any transition program. Another study *Effective programs for students with emotional behavioral disabilities* conducted by Boreson in 2006, discussed transition strategies and the importance of developing an effective intervention programs for students with emotional disabilities, but the current study concentrated on establishing a direct relationship between students post high school outcome and participation in a transition or intervention program. The data collected in this study helped establish a relationship or a direct correlation between students post high school outcome and participation in (The Vocational Education Program) a transition program for students with disabilities. The data will also provide meaningful information pertaining to possible relational predictions about student success in post high school career achievement; the acquired information will then be used during Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings to develop an appropriate Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) and procedures for students with disabilities (see appendix A)

Review of Literature

Approximately 470,000 American youths are receiving special education and related services under the eligibility or category of emotional disturbance and that number is growing (US Department of Education, 2006). Statistical figures indicate two percent increase from 2000 the previous year and a 20% increase from ten years ago (US Department of Education, 2002). Since the passage of public law 94 – 142 known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), millions of school age children and adolescents with SED and LD have been served.

Over the years, studies by Armstrong et al. (2003); Boreson, (2003); Cameto et al., (2004); Wagner, (2006) have shown that children and adolescents under the category of SED function a year or more below their grade level across all subject areas and risk failing to master basic academic skills (Kauffman, 2005). These students often encounter academic and social difficulties. Academic difficulties include lower grades, failing grades, greater retention rates, and a greater likelihood of dropping out of school (Sinclair, Christenson & Thurlow, 2005; Wagner, 1995). About 73% or more of students with SED drop out of school and do not attend or aspire to attend college or vocational training institutions. This leads to high levels of unemployment, poor employment histories, and involvement with the judicial system (US Department of Education, 2002). Bender and Wall (1994), states that students with LD also display more behavioral problems, somatic problems, and solitary behaviors than their peers who don't suffer these impairments. These authors also indicates that LD may cause students with average or above average intelligence to experience difficulty in listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, and or math.

Learning disability has been defined by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD, 2006) as a varied group of disorders of presumed neurological origin manifested differently and to varying degrees during the life span of an individual. The NJCLD indicated that these disorders are developmental, are exhibited prior to kindergarten, and continue into adulthood. Delays in speech and language development are early indicators, as are motor skills coordination, perception reasoning, and social interactions that are prerequisites to academic achievement and other areas relevant to meeting educational goals (NJCLD, 2006). According to Al-Yagon(2007), internal neurological factors such as information-processing disorders, impulsivity, performance, and production deficits, all of

which affect the academic skills of these children, may also affect their social and emotional understanding and interpretations. And these impaired interpretations may affect their social, emotional, and behavioral skills (Bender & Wall 1994). Researchers (Polloway, Smith, & Patton, 1984; White, 1992) revealed that students with LD who are preparing for post secondary education are more likely than their non-disabled peers to exhibit: (a) lack of study skills such as note-taking, comprehension, and test preparation (b) lack of organizational skills (c) below grade level performance in academic areas such as reading and writing (d) low self-esteem (e) a high dropout rate. In an effort to protect the educational rights of these students, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act were enacted.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997; a law protecting the rights of students with disabilities was re-authorized in 2004 and is currently known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (Grigorenko, 2008). School districts and mental health care providers are mandated by this law to have a transition plan included in an IEP for students classified SED, LD, as well as other categories of disabilities starting from age fourteen to sixteen and continuing annually thereafter (Grigorenko, 2008). The objective of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 is to reduce the number of students with disabilities who drop out of school. Another objective is to work with students and their families to plan for a post secondary education, career and life afterwards by engaging the students in transition programs that will help them to acquire and utilize pre-requisite skills needed for a successful transition to life after high school. The law requires that the student be invited to IEP meetings that include transition planning. If for any reason the student does not attend, provisions must be made to ensure their interests and preferences are considered.

Transition

In 1990, United States Congress emphasized the promotion and enhanced transition from school to adult life for students with disabilities. This emphasis brought about the enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) (P.L 105-17) and the Act of 2004, which stipulates that a transition plan should not only provide academic knowledge, but also teach skills that prepares students with disabilities for transition from school to adult life or post secondary education. Research suggested that the degree of success in adult life for these students is determined by the quality of education and training received during elementary, middle and high school years (Dowdy & Evers, 1996).

Halpern (1994) defines transition as a change in one's status, from being and behaving like a student to assuming the roles of an adult in the society. These roles include employment, postsecondary education participation, maintaining a living accommodation, being positively involved in the community and experiencing satisfactory interpersonal relationships. Over the past couple of years researchers have established that young adults with disabilities have experienced school failure which translates into unemployment, underemployment, isolation, and often trouble with the criminal justice system occurring during or after high school (Armstrong et al., 2003; Boreson, 2003; Cameto et al., 2004; Wagner, 2006; Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, Hebbler & Newman, 1993).

Barclay and Cobbs (2001), also state that adult life starts right after the completion of high school. This is the time where free and appropriate entitlement to public education ends and disabled youths and their families have difficult decisions to make about the future. Assistance through intervention programs are offered by schools and other governmental agencies. The assistance is comprised of modules and strategies that may include all or a combination of the following (a) pursuit of postsecondary education, (b) vocational training, (c) employment, and (d) independent living.

Levine and Edgar (1995) collected interview data from youths with SED/EBD at six-month intervals following high school for two years. The first interview showed more than half of the youths with SED/EBD were employed with one fifth of them earning the minimum wage or higher. Eighteen months after the initial six-month interviews, none of the youth who were employed reported earnings at that same level. As well, the number of those not involved in any formal school or work related activities increased from 10% at six months to 30% at two years. Neel, Meadow, Levine and Edgar (1988), as cited in Zigmond (2006), reported those in a comparison group without disabilities were significantly more likely to be enrolled in post secondary training and to be employed than their SED/EBD counterparts. Studies also reveal that 33% of the youths with SED/EBD were neither in

school or employed compared with a lower 10% that described their non-disabled peers (NLTS-1). The same study also indicated that within three years of leaving high school, only half of the youths with SED/EBD were employed while nearly two thirds of youth with learning disabilities were employed. Only 29% of youth with SED/EBD compared to 37% of youths with LD had a post secondary education. Youths with SED/EBD were also found less likely to complete their chosen course of study (Wagner et al., 1993). The post school outcome of these students has been discouraging and to ensure a more positive outcome for the students a transition intervention program should be initiated and properly implemented.

Transition intervention implementation is comprised of the following components: vocational education, career development, postsecondary education, work adjustment and independent living skills (Bullis & Cheney, 1999; Will, 1984; Zetlin & Turner, 1985). The knowledge that an efficient and effective transition program and or services could assist students with special needs make a smooth transition to postsecondary activities resulted in advocacy for amendments and changes in the special education laws (McAfee & Mann, 1982). Transition planning involves a long term coordinated effort and process. Transition is accomplished by the participation of school personnel, caregivers, families and students. The ultimate goal is to make plans and preparations from high school to adult life. The major components of a transition plan are goals and objectives that are geared towards the areas that the student is expected to function in after leaving school.

According to Dee, Byers, Hayhoe, and Maudslay (2002), planning for students' transition from high school to adult life will enhance the quality of life for these youths. Hagner, Cheney and Mallory (1999), also emphasized that if transition from high school to adult life is not well planned and well implemented, many youths and adults with learning disabilities will experience limited or no opportunities for inclusion in the community. This knowledge led to the implementation of the Vocational Education Program by the Long Beach Unified School District.

Vocational Education Program (VEP) Description

In 1985 the Long Beach Unified School District Special Education Department established the VEP in an effort to ensure a smooth transition to a career and productive life after high school graduation. The implementation of VEP is also in response to the Individualized Education Act of 2004 requiring schools to develop and implement a transition plan for students with disabilities starting at age 14. The Special Education Vocational Education Program provides designated instruction and services (DIS) to students with disabilities. These services are provided so that students can make progress in their vocational education program. The Special Day Class (SDC) teacher and or the Resource Specialist Program (RSP) teacher are the case coordinator for students receiving the services.

Vocational education instruction is usually initiated by parents and or the special educator when they suspect or establish that a student is not able to benefit from the general education vocational options even with program modifications and accommodations. The next step to this process is to conduct a vocational assessment. The individual vocational assessment report is discussed at the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The IEP team makes a decision concerning the provision of the needed services for the student. Currently at the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) there are seven career transition specialists. One is assigned to each high school, and the seventh one is assigned to the Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC).

The Career Transition Specialist's (CTS) duties include the following: (a) provision of career education curriculum ideas to special education teachers, (b) assisting Special education, Regional Occupation Program (ROP) and Vocational Education (Voc Ed) teachers to modify their lessons, (c) provision of an hour per week of modified related assignments to work experience for SDC students, (d) provision of vocational skills instructions to students on – campus, (e) training and supervising Para-educators and college aides who work with Voc Ed students, (f) conducting assessments and monitoring students who are enrolled in the ROP and Voc Ed classes and writing reports about their progress, (g) connecting students to outside agencies such as the Department of Rehabilitation, Regional Center, Social Security Administration, local colleges, and job corp., and (h) referring students to the LBUSD Adult Community Transition Program Options. This research work concentrated on two options, (1) Project Workability I and (2) Rehabilitation Transition Partnership Program (TPP).

(1) Project Workability I is a federally funded employment preparation program for students with disabilities ages 14-21 who require subsidized and/or unsubsidized on-the-job development. The

program is a coordinated effort between the student, parent, teacher and employer. Once a student begins working, the coordinating classroom teacher may also enroll the student in the General Work Experience-SDC class. The CTS provides one hour of related assignments weekly, and college student aides serve as job coaches who assist students with job and mobility training.

(2) Department of Rehabilitation Transition Partnership Program (TPP) serves 30 seniors or Adult Community Transition students in their final year who desire to enter the competitive workforce after exiting LBUSD. The focus of this program is to train the student for competitive employment and orchestrate a smooth transition from school to the world of work by the time the student exits high school. The student is mandated to meet specific Department of Rehabilitation criteria to be accepted into this program. The CTS and Job Developer will assist each applicant with the formal intake procedure. Regional Center Clients are not allowed to enroll in the program. The student may participate in on-the-job training at the Veteran's Affairs Medical Center. The student is assigned to a job developer who helps them find a job matching their skill level and area of interest. The student may access follow-up services for two years. Parental participation is a needed criterion for success.

Previous research such as: (a) status of the trend in academic intervention research for students with emotional disabilities conducted by Paul, Michael and Reid (2003); (b) a mile wide and a mile deep: comprehensive intervention research for students with emotional disturbance by Quinn and McDougal (1998); and (c) school-based prevention and intervention programs for children with emotional disturbances by Reddy and Richardson, (2006), all focused on elementary, middle, and high school curricular interventions, behavior intervention, and effective teaching modalities that will help students to succeed in school, graduate and not drop out from school. While research such as: (a) prediction of dropout rate among students with mild disabilities, conducted by Reschly and Christenson, (2006); (b) predictors of post-high school employment for youths identified as severely emotionally disturbed by Rylance, (1998); (c) the mismatch between the transition goals and school programs of youth with emotional disturbances by Wagner, (2006); and (d) an analysis by gender of long term post school outcomes for youths with disabilities conducted by Levine Edgar (1995), based their studies on collecting data about students' post high school outcome and the importance of creating a reasonable and useful match between school program and transition goals for students, without specifically connecting students outcome to any intervention program.

The present study was designed to investigate the impact of the transition program on students' career outcome. This research tried to make a clear connection between the students' career outcome and participation in the transition program. The study helped determine if students were able to generalize the learned intervention strategies, this was measured by the students' ability to gain and retain employment two to three years after high school graduation. The data collected in this research will provide meaningful information pertaining to possible relational predictions about student success in post high school career achievement and how that relates to the intervention received by these students from the Vocational Education Program (VEP). The study will also provide pertinent information and knowledge about improving the career outcome of students with disabilities.

Significance of the Study

Selingo (2006), states that education provides avenues for personal growth and promotes individual self-worth. There are many benefits of education to society as a whole. This is especially true of higher education. Selingo continues to emphasize how it has become an important prerequisite for most professional and skilled occupations. However, students with special needs have been unable to gain access to higher education or a career without support. Various interventions and transitional processes provide these supports. If this is so, the emphasis must be placed on the effectiveness of these interventions and therefore the best practices need to be determined.

This study is significant because educational institutions, families, and youths with special needs will find the determination of effective transitional and intervention procedures helpful. The results from the research will assist them in making choices of interventions that best suit them or work best for their educational or career goals. The data collected here will be used to design comprehensive educational and vocational services programs for students with disabilities. The data will also be used to establish a predictor and criteria variable between the students and available services. Therefore, more appropriate or better matched services will be provided to the students.

Method*Participants*

The target population for the study consisted of students who received special education services under the eligibility categories of Serious Emotional Disability (SED) and Learning Disability (LD). These target population also graduated from the Long Beach Unified School District in Long Beach California within the 2004-2005, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. The participants had an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP), an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and received transition

Sample

The sample population included the contact and graduation information of students who participated in the transition intervention program at LBUSD. The sample was limited to students who graduated between the 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007 school years.

Data Collection Instrument

Data was collected through oral interview, questionnaire and students' job acquisition records. The researcher made contacts with participants through the Long Beach Unified School district's Career Transition Specialist (CTS), conducted oral interviews via the telephone and distributed questionnaire through the United Postal services. The questionnaire and interview addressed questions relating to students' job acquisition, job retention. The names and information of participants were kept confidential.

Manual computation of data was used to determine the job acquisition and job retention rate of participants. A descriptive statistical calculation using SPSS® Version 15.0.1 Software was used to conduct a secondary analysis of both research questions (SPSS Inc., 2006). The data from students' job acquisition, job retention, job advancement records, and survey instruments were also analyzed to determine the effectiveness of VEP in assisting students with special needs in their transitions into independent working adults.

*Procedure**General Procedures*

Six procedures were utilized in the evaluation of the effectiveness of VEP and its impact on students' post high school career success. First, there was a review of relevant and current literatures on programs that included published peer-reviewed journals, ERIC documents, electronic articles, survey instruments, questionnaire instruments, and periodicals. A review of the standard or operating procedures of the transition assistance and intervention procedures was also conducted.

Second, the researcher scheduled a meeting with the Assistant Superintendent of Research, Planning and Evaluation, Assistant Superintendent of School Support Services: office of Special Education, Administrative Coordinator: Vocational Education Program, Career Transition Coordinators (CTS) at the Long Beach Unified School District. At the meeting, the researcher requested for information pertaining to student's graduation and contact information.

Third, the researcher used the acquired information to develop follow-up plans. The researcher implemented the plans to make contacts with participants, conduct oral interviews via the telephone and distribute the questionnaire. The questionnaire and interview addressed questions relating to students' job acquisition, and job retention rate. The names and information of participants were kept confidential, locked in the researcher's personal cabinet and were returned to the district and school personnel six months after the completion of this study.

Fourth, information was gathered using interviews, surveys, and a review of the documents. An analysis of the collected data was used to determine whether students' participation in the VEP alone had any impact in their graduation, job acquisition and job retention outcome. Response to interviews and the questionnaire was used to determine the rate of employment acquisition and retention that is attributed to the skills acquired through the program.

Fifth, following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals (Long Beach Unified School District and the Argosy University), graduation and participants contact information from 2004/2005, 2005/2006, 2006/2007 school years was used to distribute the survey and conduct phone interviews. All information collected remained confidential and was only reported as group data with no identifying information. The researcher rented a post office private mailbox for a period of one year.

All correspondences with participants were directed to the private mailbox. All the information gathered from the study was kept in a secure location and only those directly involved with the research had access to them. Lastly, data from the surveys and interviews was accumulated, analyzed and conclusions were made. Results from the study were also used to make recommendations for possible further studies.

Results

Findings and Interpretation

Results from the First Research Question

The results from the first research question, *What is the job acquisition rate of students who received Vocational Education Program intervention after high school graduation?* was manually counted, computed and analyzed. The researcher was able to make contact, conduct interviews and distribute questionnaires to eighty-one of the students who participated in the VEP during the 2004-2005, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. Nine participants from the 2004/2005 school year were contacted; twenty-one participants from the 2005-2006 school year were contacted; fifty-one participants from the 2006/2007 school years were contacted. Out of the participants from the 2004-2005 school years, six participants (67%) acquired employment after high school graduation, while three participants (33%) did not acquire employment. From the 2005-2006 school years, fourteen participants (67%) were able to get a job after high school graduation; seven participants (33%) did not get a job. Twenty-nine participants (57%) from the 2006/2007 were able to gain employment after high school graduation, while twenty-two (43%) reported not being employed. During the investigation enrollment records revealed that some of the participants that were enrolled in the 2006-2007 school year were still enrolled in school. The current school enrollment status of the students resulted to a low level in the job acquisition rate of that group. Data also showed that some of the participants in the study, who indicated that they are not currently working, were enrolled at Long Beach City College.

The manual computational results are presented in Table B1. The table gives the results from the survey about the number of students that were able to acquire a job after high school graduation. A pie chart representation of the results is presented in Appendix D.

Table B1

What is the job acquisition rate of students who received Vocational Education Program intervention after high school?

Year of Participation	Total Number of contacts made	Job acquisition in numbers	Job acquisition in percent (%)
2004/2005	9	6	67 %
2005/2006	21	14	67 %
2006/2007	51	29	57%

Results from the Second Research Question

For the second research question, *What is the job retention rate of students who received Vocational Education Program intervention after high school graduation?* the researcher conducted a manual count of the number of students who were able to retain employment one year after graduation, two years after graduation, and three years after high school graduation.

Eighty-one students who participated in the VEP during the 2004-2005, 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school year were contacted. The researcher conducted phone interviews with some participants and distributed questionnaires through the CTS to some participants who were still currently enrolled in school. Nine participants from the 2004-2005 school years were contacted, twenty-one participants from the 2005-2006 school year were contacted, and fifty-one participants from the 2006-2007 school year were also contacted. Of participants from the 2004-2005 school year, six participants (67%) retained employment three years after high school graduation, while three participants (33%) were not able to retain employment after high school graduation. The participants from the 2005/2006 school year, which is two years after high school graduation, thirteen participants (67%), were able to retain employment, while eight participants (33%) were not able to retain employment. Twenty-seven participants (53%) from the 2006-2007 school year were able to retain employment one year after high school graduation, while twenty-four participants (47%) were not able to retain employment.

During the investigation, some of the participants that were enrolled in the 2006-2007 school year were still currently enrolled in school, thereby resulting in a low level in the job retention rate in that group. Some of the participants who indicated that they did not retain their original employment were currently enrolled at Long Beach City College.

The manual computation results are presented in Table B2. The table gives the results from the survey about the number of students that were able to retain their job after high school graduation. A pie chart of these results is also presented in Appendix D.

Table B2

What is the job retention rate of students who received Vocational Education Program intervention after high school?

Year of Participation.	Total Number of contacts made.	Job retention in numbers.	Job retention in percent (%).
2004/2005	9	6	67 %
2005/2006	21	13	67 %
2006/2007	51	27	53%

Secondary Analysis for Research Questions One and Two.

A secondary analysis of individual responses relating to students' job acquisition, job retention and not applicable was also conducted using the SPSS® Software. This analysis tried to make a clear distinction between the yes, no and not applicable (N/A) responses. The non-applicable candidates are mostly participant who are currently enrolled in school or attends college and therefore either responded as N/A or do not currently have a job.

For survey question: Do you currently have a job, five participants (6%) responded as N/A, 48 participants (60%) responded as a YES, while 27 participants (33%) responded as a NO. For the question: I have kept a job since after high school, 19 participants (24%) responded as N/A, 40 participants (50%) responded as a YES, while 21 participants (26%) responded as a NO. Result data to the question: I lost my first job, and do not currently have a job, showed that 28 participants (35%) responded as N/A, 11 participants (13%) responded as a YES, while 41 participants (51%) responded as a NO. Finally the response for the survey question: Vocational Education Program helped me get a job, indicated that 12 participants (15%) responded as N/A, 62 participants (78%) responded as a YES, while 6 participants (8%) responded as a NO.

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of VEP on students' career success after high school graduation. The Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004 requires that schools and public agencies provide an Individualized Transition Plan for every student that has an Individualized Education Plan. The program effectiveness and impact on students' career success relied on the following two variables (a) rate of job acquisition, and (b) rate of job retention.

The results from the first research question *What is the job acquisition rate of students who received Vocational Education Program intervention after high school graduation?* showed that forty-nine out of the eighty-one participants who were contacted were able to acquire a job after high school graduation. Thirty-two of the participants that were contacted were not able to gain employment after high school graduation.

The results from the second research question *What is the job retention rate of students who received Vocational Education Program intervention after high school graduation?* indicated that forty-six out of the eighty-one participants who were contacted were able to retain employment two to three years after high school graduation. Thirty-five of those participants were not able to retain employment after high school graduation. The research did not address the reasons for these participants responding as not retaining a job or responding with a not-applicable response. However during the course of interview the researcher discovered that some of the participants who responded to question two as not retaining a job or not-applicable were either currently enrolled in LBUSD or were enrolled in the Long Beach City College.

Conclusions

The results for research question one, showed that 67% of the participants from the 2004-2005 school year acquired employment after high school graduation, while 67% of the participants from the 2005-

2006 school year were able to get a job after high school graduation. Research results further indicated that 57% of the participants from the 2006-2007 school year were able to acquire employment after high school graduation. The second research question referring to students who retained employment for a specified period of time after high school graduation indicated that 67% of the participants from the 2004-2005 school year retained employment three years after high school graduation. Response to the same research question also showed that 67% of the participants from the 2005-2006 school year were able to retain employment two years after high school graduation. Results also revealed that 53% of the participants from the 2006-2007 school year retained employment one year after high school graduation.

The Vocational Education Program is a transition intervention program that was offered to students with disabilities who graduated from Long Beach Unified School District. The objective of the program is to ensure that students with disabilities are able compete favorably at the job market with their non-disabled peers.

Recommendations for Further Research

The Vocational Education Program is a transition intervention program that was offered to students with disabilities who graduated from Long Beach Unified School District. The objective of the program is to ensure that students with disabilities are able to compete favorably at the job market with their non-disabled peers. Based on the findings from this study, two recommendations are proposed to the school district.

The first recommendation is to provide support for further studies and investigations that relate to improving the Vocational Education Program's impact on students post high school career, education and independent living outcome. The study should also include the implementation of a 3-5 years longitudinal study related to transition and post high school outcome of students with disabilities who participated in the VEP and other transition programs at the district. Results from the gathered information should be utilized to further address the transition needs of students during IEP and ITP meetings and hopefully increase students' job acquisition, job retention, college enrollment rates and positive independent living outcomes.

The second is to locate and utilize other supplemental curriculum that focuses more on real life skill acquisition. Students should be able to generalize and apply the acquired skills in the real world, such as in the work place, educational pursuits and independent living endeavors. Similar analyses, with questions that focus on explaining why some participants indicated that the question of acquiring or retaining a job does not apply to them should be conducted. These explanations will help make an accurate distinction between students who are actively engaged in a job or post-secondary education and those that are idle or non-productive.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Definition of Terms

Emotional Disturbance (ED). Emotional disturbances under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is defined as a condition that exhibits one or more of the following characteristics over a period of time, and to a marked degree adversely affecting a child's educational performance, (a) an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, (b) an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, (c) inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, (d) a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, (e) tendency to develop physical symptoms of fears associated with personal or school problems.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP). An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Public schools in the United States are mandated to develop an IEP for all students with disabilities who are eligible for special education. This document must be designed to provide the student with a free and appropriate public education. The IEP covers both the educational program and interventions that will be provided for the disabled student and their family. The IDEA, 2004, requires that an IEP must be individualized and written to meet the unique needs of each student.

Individualized Transition Plan. Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) includes a set of coordinated activities assisting students with disabilities in moving from school into self-determined post graduation activities. The IDEA requires that schools provide transition services to students with disabilities beginning at age fourteen.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is a federal law governing the rights of children or students with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment possible.

Intervention. Intervention is an orchestrated attempt by one or more people to offer assistance to students with disabilities.

Learning Disabilities (LD). Learning disabilities affect the brain's ability to receive process, analyze, or store information.

Participants. Participants are defined as the living individuals about whom an investigator conducting research obtains data through interactions and with identifiable private information.

Transition. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) defines transition services as: a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability.

APPENDIX B

Interview/Survey Questions

Please mark Yes Or NO to the Following Questions.

1. Do you have a job nowYES.....NON/A
2. I have kept a job since after high school graduation....YES.....NO.....N/A
3. I lost my first job, and do not have a job now..... YES.....NON/A
4. Vocational Education Program helped me get a job....YES.....NON/A
5. If you would like to change something in the program, what will that be?

.....

APPENDIX C
Computer Printout
Secondary Analysis for Research Questions One and Two.

Frequencies
 Computer Printout for table 2

Statistics

		Do you have a job now?	I have kept a job since after high school	I lost my first job, and do not have a job now	Vocational Education Program helped me get a job
N	Valid	80	80	80	80
	Missing	0	0	0	0

Frequency tables

Do you have a job now?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not applicable	5	6.3	6.3	6.3
	Yes	48	60.0	60.0	66.3
	No	27	33.8	33.8	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

I have kept a job since after high school

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not applicable	19	23.8	23.8	23.8
	Yes	40	50.0	50.0	73.8
	No	21	26.3	26.3	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

I lost my first job, and do not have a job now

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not applicable	28	35.0	35.0	35.0
	Yes	11	13.8	13.8	48.8
	No	41	51.3	51.3	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

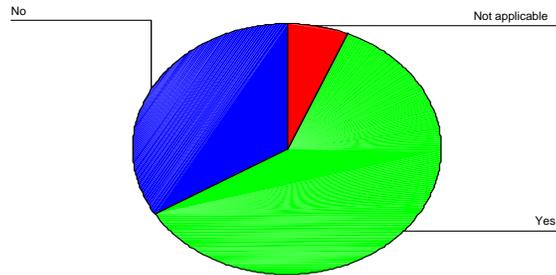
Vocational Education Program helped me get a job

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not applicable	12	15.0	15.0	15.0
	Yes	62	77.5	77.5	92.5
	No	6	7.5	7.5	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

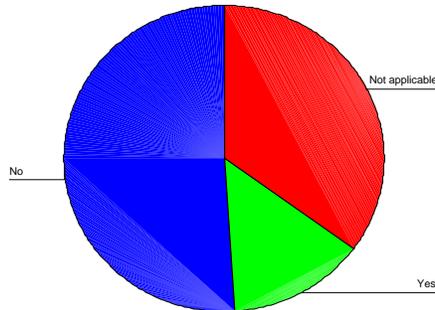
APPENDIX D

Pie Chart demonstration for Secondary Analysis for Research Questions One and Two

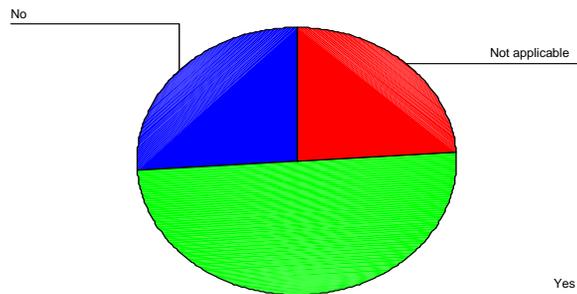
Do you have a job now?



I lost my first job, and do not have a job now



I have kept a job since after high school



Vocational Education Program helped me get a job

