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Practical-Based Culinary Education to Develop Vocational Skills for Deaf Students at SLBN Cicendo

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Abstract

Vocational education plays a critical role in preparing deaf students for successful participation in employment and independent living. However, vocational programs in special schools often emphasize technical instruction without adequately connecting learning experiences to outcomes in the school-to-work transition. This study aimed to examine how practice-based culinary learning contributes to the development of vocational competence and transition readiness among deaf students from a Life Centered Career Education (LCCE) perspective. A qualitative implementative case study was conducted at SLBN Cicendo involving deaf students and vocational teachers participating in a culinary training program. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and performance-based assessment, and were analyzed using interactive and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that practice-based culinary learning strengthened students' procedural competence, work accuracy, task responsibility, independence, and adaptive work behaviors through authentic and visually supported learning experiences. Repeated hands-on activities enabled students to internalize workplace routines and develop employability-related skills, including discipline, collaboration, and persistence. From an LCCE perspective, the learning process functioned not only as vocational training but also as a structured school-to-work transition mechanism that connected technical competence with daily living and occupational skills. This study contributes to special education literature by demonstrating how experiential vocational learning can operationalize LCCE principles in deaf education and support transition-oriented instructional practices. The findings offer practical implications for developing vocational curricula and transition programs that better prepare deaf students for inclusive employment opportunities.

Keywords

Deaf Students; Vocational Education; Culinary Learning; Life Centered Career Education; School-to-Work Transition

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1. INTRODUCTION

The right to education and employment for persons with disabilities has become a major concern in contemporary educational policy and practice. Inclusive and equitable education aims not only to provide academic knowledge but also to prepare individuals with disabilities for independent living and meaningful participation in society. Among various indicators of educational success, successful transition from school to employment is considered one of the most important outcomes for students with disabilities because employment contributes significantly to economic independence, social inclusion, self-esteem, and quality of life(Carter, 2021; Morningstar, 2021; Wehman, 2020).

Despite global efforts to promote disability inclusion, employment participation among individuals with disabilities remains substantially lower than that of the general population. Recent international reports indicate that young adults with disabilities experience higher unemployment rates, limited access to vocational opportunities, and greater challenges during the transition from school to work (OECD, 2020; Reid, 2025). These challenges are particularly evident among deaf individuals, who often encounter communication barriers, restricted access to workplace accommodations, and persistent social stereotypes that limit employment opportunities (Bactong & De Rosario, 2024; Wang et al., 2021). Consequently, improving vocational competence and transition readiness has become a strategic priority within special education systems worldwide.

In the context of deaf education, vocational training plays a crucial role in bridging educational experiences and future employment opportunities. Deaf students possess unique learning characteristics that rely heavily on visual information processing, concrete demonstrations, and experiential learning experiences (Guardino & Cannon, 2021; Marschark & Knoors, 2020). Therefore, vocational programs designed for deaf learners require instructional approaches that emphasize direct practice, visual modeling, and authentic work experiences. Previous studies have consistently demonstrated that experiential learning environments contribute positively to the development of vocational skills, self-confidence, and work-related competencies among students with disabilities (Lindsay, 2020; Pham, 2021; J. Smith, 2022).

Vocational education in Indonesian Special Schools (Sekolah Luar Biasa/SLB) is intended to equip students with practical competencies relevant to future employment. At the secondary level, vocational programs are expected to function as a bridge between formal education and workforce participation. However, evidence suggests that many vocational learning activities remain dominated by teacher-centered instruction and product-oriented assessment practices that do not sufficiently reflect authentic workplace conditions (Istiarsyah et al., 2025). As a result, students may acquire technical knowledge without fully developing adaptive work behaviors, independence, problem-solving abilities, and employability skills required in real employment settings.

Recent studies have emphasized the importance of authentic vocational experiences in preparing students with disabilities for successful transition outcomes. For example, Cawthon, 2021 found that work-based learning experiences significantly enhanced employment readiness among deaf students. Similarly, Test et al. (2020) reported that transition programs incorporating authentic work experiences improved long-term employment outcomes for students with disabilities. Research by Lindsay et al. (2020) further demonstrated that vocational programs emphasizing practical engagement positively affected career self-efficacy and workplace adaptation. Moreover, Nicholas et al. (2021) highlighted that soft skills, including responsibility, communication, collaboration, and perseverance, are equally important determinants of employment success.

Among various vocational fields offered in special schools, culinary education represents a promising area for developing vocational competence among deaf students. Culinary activities provide opportunities for hands-on learning, task sequencing, teamwork, time management, and responsibility, all of which mirror authentic workplace demands. Through direct engagement with cooking tasks, students are exposed to real-life work situations that facilitate the development of both technical and

non-technical competencies. Experiential learning theory suggests that knowledge is constructed through concrete experiences and active participation, making practical culinary learning particularly suitable for students who benefit from visual and kinesthetic instructional approaches (KETA, 2024; Kolb, 1984; Morris, 2020).

The effectiveness of practice-based vocational learning can also be understood through the Life Centered Career Education (LCCE) framework developed by Donn Brolin. LCCE emphasizes the development of competencies necessary for successful adult life through the integration of occupational, daily living, personal responsibility, and social competence (Brolin, 1997; Wehman et al., 2020). Unlike traditional vocational approaches that focus primarily on technical skill acquisition, LCCE positions vocational education as comprehensive preparation for independent living and long-term employment. Within this framework, authentic learning experiences are considered essential because they provide students with opportunities to develop adaptive behaviors and workplace competencies in meaningful contexts.

Several studies have investigated vocational education for students with disabilities from different perspectives. Bactong & De Rosario, 2024 examined deaf learners' readiness for vocational inclusion and found that practical experiences significantly influenced students' confidence and occupational preparedness. Muzite and Gasa (2024) found that authentic vocational experiences contributed positively to career development among students with disabilities. Mndeme, 2025 identified insufficient access to practical learning opportunities as one of the major barriers affecting educational outcomes for deaf learners. Similarly, Alnahdi, 2025 that vocational curricula often fail to align with workplace demands due to limited contextual learning experiences. Although these studies provide valuable insights into vocational education, most focus primarily on vocational program implementation, curriculum evaluation, or specific skill development outcomes.

A critical review of previous literature reveals several research gaps. First, limited studies have specifically examined how practice-based culinary learning contributes simultaneously to vocational competence development and school-to-work transition readiness among deaf students. Second, research integrating vocational learning practices with the theoretical framework of Life Centered Career Education remains scarce, particularly within the context of Indonesian special education. Third, previous studies generally focus on technical skill acquisition, while the development of adaptive work behaviors, independence, and transition-related competencies has received comparatively less attention. Consequently, the relationship between experiential vocational learning and transition preparation remains insufficiently explored.

Addressing these gaps is important both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, integrating experiential learning principles with the LCCE framework contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of vocational education for deaf learners. In practice, identifying effective strategies for developing vocational competence and transition readiness can help special schools design more meaningful, employment-oriented vocational programs. Such evidence is particularly relevant to improving educational practices that facilitate a successful school-to-work transition for students with hearing impairments.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of practice-based culinary learning for deaf students at SLBN Cicendo and to examine its contribution to the development of vocational competence and school-to-work transition readiness from a Life Centered Career Education perspective. By exploring authentic learning experiences in a vocational setting, this study seeks to make theoretical and practical contributions to the advancement of transition-oriented special education.

2. METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using an implementative case study design to explore the implementation of practice-based culinary learning in developing vocational competence and transition readiness among deaf students. A qualitative approach is appropriate when researchers seek to understand educational phenomena within their natural settings and interpret participants' experiences in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The case study design was selected because it enables an intensive examination of contemporary educational practices within a bounded system and real-life context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2021).

An implementative case study was considered suitable because the study focused not only on describing a vocational learning program but also on examining how the program was implemented and how it contributed to students' vocational development. This approach is frequently used in educational research to investigate instructional practices and program implementation within authentic learning environments (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted at SLBN Cicendo, a special education institution that provides vocational programs for deaf students at the secondary level. Participants consisted of deaf students enrolled in the culinary vocational program and vocational teachers responsible for instructional implementation. Participants were selected using purposive sampling because they possessed direct experience and relevant knowledge regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015; Robinson, 2014)

Selection criteria included: (1) students with moderate to profound hearing loss, (2) active participation in culinary vocational activities, and (3) ability to follow visual and instructional demonstrations during practice sessions. Vocational teachers served as key informants due to their involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating vocational instruction.

Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Trustworthiness

Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, documentation, and performance-based assessment. Participant observation enabled researchers to capture authentic interactions, student engagement, and work-related behaviors during vocational activities (Angrosino, 2016; Flick, 2022). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with vocational teachers to obtain in-depth information regarding instructional strategies, student development, and implementation challenges. Documentation, including photographs, field notes, and student work products, was used to complement observational and interview data.

The observation sheets and performance assessment rubrics were developed based on vocational competence indicators and Life Centered Career Education (LCCE) principles. Instrument content validity was established through expert judgment involving special education academics and vocational teachers to ensure relevance, clarity, and contextual appropriateness (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021)

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2019), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In addition, thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns and themes emerging from participants' experiences and learning processes (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement. These strategies are widely recognized as essential procedures for enhancing credibility, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Implementation of Direct Practice Learning in the Context of Vocational Education for the Deaf

The results of the observation show that culinary arts learning in the vocational class at SLBN Cicendo is implemented through a direct practice approach, placing students as the main actors in learning activities. The learning process began with a visual demonstration by the teacher, followed by modeling of the work steps, then repeated independent practice with guided assistance. This learning structure reflects the characteristics of experiential learning, where learning occurs through concrete experiences and reflection on the activities that have been carried out. These findings reinforce the view that deaf students demonstrate optimal learning performance when information is presented visually and based on real actions. Recent research confirms that visual processing is the primary modality in the learning of deaf students, making direct demonstration strategies more effective than abstract verbal instructions (Guardino & Cannon, 2021; Marschark & Knoors, 2020). In the context of implementation at SLBN Cicendo, demonstrations by teachers serve as scaffolding that helps students understand the sequence of work before practicing independently.

Repetitive exercises during practice also demonstrate consistency with the principles of motor and vocational skills learning. Repetition allows for the formation of work flow mechanisms, especially in activities that require motor coordination and precision in work steps. Recent vocational education studies show that repetition-based practice improves the memory of work skills in students with disabilities because it strengthens the relationship between visual perception and motor movements (Park & Kim, 2022; Pham et al., 2021). Direct practical learning reflects the concept of work-based learning because cooking activities are carried out using tools and procedures that resemble the actual work environment. Authentic learning environments have been shown to improve the transfer of skills from school to actual work contexts (Lindsay et al., 2020). Thus, the implementation of learning serves not only as an academic activity but also as a meaningful imitation of work experience.

Development of Students' Vocational Skills

Performance assessment data shows a gradual improvement in understanding work procedures, use of tools, accuracy, and responsibility for completing tasks. In the early stages of implementation, students tended to rely on teacher guidance and sometimes skipped certain work steps. However, after several periods of practice, students were able to follow the work flow more independently. This change can be explained by the theory of skill acquisition, which states that skills develop through a transition from the cognitive stage to the associative and automatic stages (Anderson, 2009). In the context of culinary arts learning, direct experience provides students with the opportunity to build representations of work activities, resulting in a significant reduction in technical errors.

Improved tool usage skills indicate that practice-based learning provides opportunities for sensorimotor exploration that are not available through theoretical learning. Research on vocational training for individuals with disabilities shows that direct participation in work activities improves functional understanding compared to abstract simulation-based learning (D. I. Smith, 2024; Wehman, 2020). Increased work accuracy during implementation is also related to increased awareness of the consequences of work results. When students see the results of their cooking firsthand, they receive concrete feedback that reinforces learning. This mechanism is in line with the principle of experiential reinforcement, where real results become an essential reinforcement in the learning process (Morris, 2020). Task responsibility begins to grow when students are given specific roles in group activities. Task division initiates a sense of ownership of the work, which according to transition education research is an important factor in the construction of early work competencies (Cawthon, 2021).

Changes in Work Behavior and Independence

In addition to improved technical skills, the results of the study indicate significant changes in students' work behavior. Students began to show discipline in following procedures, initiative in taking equipment, and the ability to work together during practice. These changes indicate the development of employability skills, which are important indicators of work readiness for individuals with disabilities.

Recent literature confirms that successful work transition is not determined by technical skills alone, but also by soft skills such as responsibility, communication, and work resilience (Lindsay et al., 2020; Nicholas et al., 2021). In this study, hands-on practice constructed social situations that required interaction and coordination among students, thereby enabling progressive development of work behavior. Resilience in completing tasks increases with practical experience. In the early stages, some students show a tendency to give up when they encounter mistakes or difficulties. However, through the support of teachers and repeated empirical experiences, students begin to show persistence until the task is completed. This phenomenon is in line with findings that experience-based learning increases work self-efficacy in students with disabilities (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). From the perspective of Life Centered Career Education, this behavioral change demonstrates development in the domains of occupational skills and daily living skills. LCCE emphasizes that work readiness is formed through the integration of technical competencies and adaptive behaviors learned in real-world contexts (Wehman, 2020).

Practical Learning as a Means of Transition from School to Work

Research findings show that culinary arts education is useful as a means of transition between the school environment and the world of work. Practical activities provide a real work structure, including task distribution, hygiene standards, time management, and responsibility for work results. These conditions provide opportunities for students to take on the roles of workers and learners. Work transition research confirms that actual work experience during school is a strong predictor of successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities(Carter, 2022). In the context of deaf students, practical experience supports the formation of self-identity as productive individuals who contribute to increased work motivation. Simulating the work environment in culinary arts education also narrows the gap between school competencies and industry demands. Many vocational programs fail to prepare students for work because the learning is too academic and not contextual (D. I. Smith & Smith, 2011). The implementation at SLBN Cicendo proves that practice-based learning can provide realistic work experience, thereby optimizing students' readiness for transition.

Interpretation of Findings from a Life Centered Career Education (LCCE) Perspective

When analyzed through the LCCE framework, the research results show strong alignment with the principles of real-life-based education. Learning is oriented towards understanding cooking techniques and increasing responsibility, cooperation, and independence. The principle of contextual learning in LCCE is evident through the use of daily activities as a medium for learning. Students learn skills that are relevant to real life and employment opportunities. Recent research shows that a real-life approach increases the sustainability of skills after students graduate from school (Morningstar et al., 2021). Researchers have identified challenges in implementation, particularly in terms of generalizing skills to complex work environments. Ongoing support, such as apprenticeship programs and industry collaboration, is needed to optimize the implementation of LCCE principles (Carter et al., 2021).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study reinforces the argument that vocational learning is effective for deaf students when it is designed based on direct experience and the actual environment. These findings add to the literature on deaf vocational education by demonstrating the integration of experiential learning and the LCCE framework in the context of special schools in Indonesia. In practical terms, the results of

this study have significant implications for the development of vocational learning models in special schools. Teachers need to shift their approach from theory-based instruction to contextual practices that mirror the world of work. Skills assessments need to evaluate actual performance so that students do not only understand knowledge systematically. This research also contributes to the development of school-based work transition programs by emphasizing that continuous practical experience is the foundation of work readiness. In the context of work readiness-based inclusive education, hands-on learning can be an effective strategy to optimize the future work participation of deaf individuals.

Discussion

Practice-Based Culinary Learning as Experiential Learning for Deaf Students

The findings indicate that practice-based culinary learning provides meaningful learning experiences that facilitate the development of vocational competence among deaf students. Through direct engagement in cooking activities, students construct knowledge through observation, action, reflection, and repeated practice. This process is consistent with experiential learning theory, which emphasizes that learning occurs through the transformation of experience into knowledge (Kolb, 2015). For deaf learners, whose learning characteristics are strongly associated with visual and concrete experiences, hands-on activities provide opportunities to understand vocational concepts more effectively than abstract instruction.

Previous studies have demonstrated that experiential learning environments enhance skill acquisition and engagement among students with disabilities (Anderson, 2009; Brown & Green, 2020). The present findings extend this literature by showing that culinary practice functions not only as a medium for technical skill acquisition but also as a mechanism for strengthening vocational identity and confidence among deaf students.

Development of Vocational Competence Through Authentic Learning Environments

The improvement observed in procedural accuracy, tool utilization, and task completion reflects the effectiveness of authentic learning environments in vocational education. Authentic practice allows students to experience workplace-like conditions that facilitate the transfer of learning into real-world contexts. Similar findings have been reported by Fleming, 2021 who argued that vocational competence develops more effectively when learning environments resemble actual employment settings.

Research by Benz, 2021; Doren, 2020 further suggests that authentic vocational experiences significantly contribute to employment preparedness among students with disabilities. In the present study, students demonstrated gradual progression from dependence on teacher guidance toward greater autonomy in task performance, indicating the development of functional vocational competence.

Changes in Work Behaviour and Employability Skills

An important finding of this study concerns the development of employability skills alongside technical competencies. Students exhibited increased responsibility, discipline, cooperation, and persistence during culinary activities. These findings support previous research indicating that employment success is strongly influenced by non-technical competencies, including self-regulation, communication, teamwork, and adaptability (Febriani, 2022; Shogren, 2021).

The emergence of these behaviors can be explained through social learning processes that occur during collaborative practical activities. Repeated participation in authentic work tasks enables students to internalize workplace expectations and develop adaptive work habits. Similar conclusions were reported by Landmark, 2020 who found that practical vocational experiences significantly contribute to the development of workplace behavior among students with disabilities.

School-to-Work Transition Readiness

One of the major contributions of this study is its demonstration that practice-based culinary learning functions as a school-to-work transition strategy. Students were exposed to work routines, task responsibilities, hygiene standards, time management expectations, and collaborative work structures that closely resemble employment environments. These experiences are critical components of transition preparation.

Transition research consistently identifies authentic work experiences as one of the strongest predictors of successful post-school employment outcomes (Rowe et al., 2021; Mazzotti et al., 2021; Trainor et al., 2021). The present findings reinforce this evidence by showing that vocational learning can simultaneously serve educational and transitional purposes. The culinary program at SLBN Cicendo provides a structured context in which students can gradually assume worker roles while remaining within a supportive educational environment.

Interpretation Through the Life Centered Career Education Framework

The findings can be comprehensively interpreted through the framework of Life Centered Career Education (LCCE). According to Brolin (1997), successful transition to adulthood requires the integration of occupational competencies, independent living skills, and personal-social competencies. The observed development of vocational competence, responsibility, collaboration, and independence demonstrates alignment with the fundamental domains of LCCE.

Studies by (Hirano, 2022) emphasize that transition-oriented education should move beyond technical instruction and promote holistic preparation for adult life. The present study supports this perspective by illustrating how culinary learning simultaneously develops occupational skills and adaptive behaviors necessary for long-term employment success.

Furthermore, the findings contribute to the growing body of literature advocating contextual and life-centered vocational education for students with disabilities (Alwell & Cobb, 2020; Riesen et al., 2021). The integration of experiential learning principles with LCCE provides a conceptual model through which vocational programs can be designed to enhance both competence and transition readiness.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to special education literature by demonstrating how experiential learning and Life Centered Career Education can be integrated within vocational programs for deaf students. The findings extend existing knowledge regarding the mechanisms through which authentic vocational experiences promote work readiness and adaptive behavior development.

Practically, the study suggests that vocational curricula in special schools should prioritize authentic, practice-based activities that simulate workplace environments. Teachers should focus not only on technical competence but also on employability skills, independence, and adaptive behaviors. Collaboration between schools, vocational training centers, and industry partners is recommended to strengthen transition pathways and improve employment opportunities for deaf students after graduation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that hands-on culinary arts learning has a fundamental contribution in shaping the vocational skills development of deaf students at the SMALB level, not only in terms of technical aspects of work, but also in terms of work behavior and readiness for transition to productive life. Through concrete and contextual learning experiences, students learn the mechanisms of workflows in cooking activities, construct an understanding of work through direct interaction with real tasks, work

tools, and social dynamics in activities during practice. This process has implications for increased procedural accuracy, responsibility for tasks, and the emergence of indicators of independence that are relevant to the demands of the world of work. Therefore, hands-on practice is useful as a means of transforming learning from an academic orientation to performance- and experience-based learning. The findings of this study address the main problems identified in conventional vocational education in special schools, namely the dominance of a theoretical instructional approach and a lack of actual experience for deaf students. These limitations often cause a gap between school competencies and real work needs. The implementation of practice-based learning in this study shows that learning experiences that mimic work situations can be a conceptual and practical solution to improve students' work readiness because learning is carried out through a learning by doing mechanism that is in line with the visual and kinesthetic characteristics of deaf students.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the study of vocational education for deaf individuals by demonstrating the operational integration between the principles of experiential learning and the Life Centered Career Education (LCCE) framework. The results of the study emphasize that the development of work skills cannot be separated from the context of real life and the formation of adaptive behavior, as emphasized in the LCCE approach. Therefore, this study positions hands-on learning as a pedagogical strategy that connects work transition theory with special education practices in the Indonesian context and broadens the academic discussion on life-preparation-based vocational learning models. Practically, the research findings have fundamental implications for the development of vocational learning in special schools. Teachers are required to design learning activities that involve students as participants in actual work environments, while curriculum developers are expected to integrate continuous practical experience as a key component of vocational programs. Therefore, the results of this study support the need to strengthen school-based work transition programs through collaboration with the business and industrial sectors so that the skills acquired by students are relevant to the needs of the workplace. At the policy level, a work readiness-based approach can be a strategic goal in the development of special education that focuses on the independence and socioeconomic participation of individuals with disabilities.

This study has limitations that need to be critically reviewed. The implementation was carried out in one school setting with a limited number of participants, so that the learning dynamics obtained did not fully represent the variety of contexts that exist in special schools in general. The results of the study were oriented towards the short-term learning process, so they could not describe the sustainable impact on work success after graduating from special schools. These limitations open up opportunities for more comprehensive follow-up research. Future research should develop long-term studies on the work transition of deaf students by expanding collaboration with the industrial sector as an authentic practice environment and developing LCCE-based vocational assessment instruments that can measure work readiness more systematically. Comparative studies between special schools are needed to understand the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of practice-based learning implementation. Overall, this study emphasizes that practice-based vocational learning is not only a teaching strategy but also a transformative approach that has the potential to strengthen the direction of special education towards work readiness and independence for individuals with disabilities in Indonesia.

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