

The Influence of Growth and Fixed Mindsets among Special Education Teachers on the Implementation of Career Transition Programs

Pengaruh Minda Berkembang dan Minda Tetap dalam Kalangan Guru Pendidikan Khas terhadap Pelaksanaan Program Transisi Kerjaya

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Abstract

This research proposal aims to examine the influence of special education teachers' mindsets on the implementation of career transition programs for students with special educational needs (SEN) in Malaysian secondary schools. Despite the formal introduction of the Career Transition Program Module by the Ministry of Education in 2019, implementation across schools has remained inconsistent. While past studies have explored structural factors such as teacher readiness, training, and resource constraints, limited attention has been given to internal belief systems that shape pedagogical behaviour. Grounded in Dweck's Growth Mindset Theory, this study investigates whether teachers' beliefs about the malleability of student abilities, either as developable through effort (growth mindset) or predetermined and static (fixed mindset), influence the quality and consistency of transition program delivery. Adopting a quantitative cross-sectional design, data will be collected through structured questionnaires from special education teachers across nine districts in Kedah. Descriptive and inferential analyses, including Pearson correlation, will be used to explore the relationship between teacher mindset and implementation levels. This study is expected to provide new insights into how psychological constructs such as mindset shape teaching practices in special education. The findings have the potential to inform the design of belief-oriented professional development and inclusive transition practices. Importantly, this research supports Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by promoting equitable learning opportunities, and Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through its emphasis on cross-sector collaboration in supporting students with special needs.

Keywords: Growth mindset, fixed mindset, special education teachers, career transition program, student with special educational needs

Abstrak

Kajian cadangan ini bertujuan untuk meneliti pengaruh minda guru pendidikan khas terhadap pelaksanaan program transisi kerjaya bagi murid berkeperluan pendidikan khas (MBPK) di sekolah menengah di Malaysia. Walaupun Modul Program Transisi Kerjaya telah diperkenalkan secara rasmi oleh Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia pada tahun 2019, pelaksanaannya masih tidak konsisten antara sekolah. Kajian lepas banyak menumpukan kepada faktor struktur seperti tahap kesediaan guru, latihan dan kekangan sumber, namun kurang memberi perhatian terhadap minda guru yang mempengaruhi tingkah laku pedagogi. Berdasarkan Teori Minda Berkembang oleh Dweck, kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti sama ada kepercayaan guru terhadap kebolehan murid, sama ada boleh dibentuk melalui usaha (minda berkembang) atau dianggap kekal dan terhad (minda

tetap), mempengaruhi tahap dan kualiti pelaksanaan program transisi kerjaya. Reka bentuk kajian kuantitatif keratan rentas akan digunakan dengan pengumpulan data melalui borang soal selidik berstruktur yang diedarkan kepada guru pendidikan khas di sembilan daerah di negeri Kedah. Analisis statistik deskriptif dan inferensi, termasuk korelasi Pearson, akan digunakan untuk menentukan hubungan antara minda guru dan pelaksanaan program. Kajian ini dijangka memberikan dapatan baharu berkaitan bagaimana konstruk psikologi seperti minda mempengaruhi amalan pengajaran dalam pendidikan khas. Penemuan kajian ini berpotensi menyumbang kepada pembangunan latihan profesional yang berorientasikan kepercayaan serta amalan transisi yang lebih inklusif. Kajian ini turut menyokong Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) melalui usaha meningkatkan akses kepada pendidikan berkualiti secara saksama, serta Sustainable Development Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) yang menekankan kerjasama rentas sektor dalam menyokong perancangan transisi murid berkeperluan khas secara lebih mampan dan bersepadu.

Kata kunci: Minda berkembang, minda tetap, guru pendidikan khas, program transisi kerjaya, murid berkeperluan pendidikan khas

INTRODUCTION

This research proposal begins by recognising that career transition programs constitute a vital component of special education policy and practice. These programs are structured interventions designed to facilitate the progression of students with special educational needs (SEN) from school to adulthood. These programs are designed to enhance post-school outcomes by focusing on key domains such as employment preparation, independent living, and social integration. Comprehensive models often include elements such as vocational training, life skills education, self-advocacy development, and engagement with real-world work environments (Kohler & Field, 2003). In both developed and developing contexts, such interventions are recognized as essential for improving the long-term quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

In the Malaysian context, a formalized approach to transition programming emerged in 2019 with the introduction of the Career Transition Program Module for Secondary School SEN Students, developed by the Special Education Division of the Ministry of Education. The framework outlines six core components: (i) Life Skills, (ii) Self-Advocacy and Communication, (iii) Fostering Adulthood Living, (iv) Career Skills, (v) Career Readiness and (vi) Workplace Support Development. Despite the structured nature of the module, empirical studies have highlighted considerable disparities in implementation across schools. These inconsistencies are often attributed to factors such as resource limitations, inadequate teacher training and institutional constraints (Mohd Yusoff & Khairuddin, 2024; Tordin & Mokhtar Tahar, 2021; Tordin & Tahar, 2021).

One underexplored yet potentially significant factor influencing the quality and consistency of transition program implementation is the mindset of special education teachers, particularly regarding their beliefs about student ability and potential for growth. The theoretical framework developed by Dweck (2006) distinguishes between two primary orientations: a growth mindset, characterized by the belief that abilities can be developed through effort and effective strategies and a fixed mindset, which assumes that intelligence and competence are innate and immutable. These mindsets have been shown to influence teacher expectations, instructional practices and student outcomes across educational settings.

Within the domain of special education, teacher beliefs are especially salient, as they directly inform pedagogical choices and the extent to which educators engage students in rigorous, future-oriented learning experiences. Teachers who hold a growth mindset are more likely to maintain high expectations for students with SEN, invest in personalized support strategies and implement transition practices that foster autonomy and readiness for adult life (Husni & Low, 2023). Conversely, a fixed mindset may lead to lower expectations, minimal differentiation and reduced emphasis on transition planning (Husni & Low, 2023; Laine & Tirri, 2023).

This research proposal seeks to examine the relationship between special education teachers' mindsets (growth versus fixed) and the implementation fidelity of career transition programs in Malaysian secondary schools. By addressing this gap, the proposed study aims to contribute to the development of evidence-based professional development strategies and inclusive policy interventions that promote equitable transition practices.

The implementation of inclusive and structured career transition programs also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Additionally, SDG 17 emphasizes the importance of partnerships across sectors and stakeholders, including schools, employers, families, and communities, in achieving effective and sustainable educational outcomes. By investigating the internal belief systems of special education teachers, this study contributes to these global goals by promoting inclusive practices and strengthening collaborative efforts for the successful transition of students with special educational needs.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite ongoing efforts to implement structured career transition programs, the unemployment rate among individuals with disabilities in Malaysia remains disproportionately high (Yusof et al., 2020). According to government statistics and non-governmental assessments, many students with special educational needs (SEN) continue to face significant challenges in securing stable employment after completing formal schooling. This trend persists despite the introduction of transition initiatives such as the Career Transition Program Module for Secondary School SEN Students launched in 2019 (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2019), which was designed to improve career readiness, life skills, and workplace integration. The persistence of post-school unemployment among SEN graduates raises concerns about the quality, consistency and effectiveness of these programs at the school level.

A review of existing literature reveals that numerous studies have explored teacher-related factors that influence the implementation of transition programs in Malaysian schools. Research has frequently focused on variables such as teacher readiness (Mohd Tajuddin & Shaffeei, 2023), skill levels (Nuraisyah Adnie, 2021), challenges (Sefotho & Onyishi, 2020) and commitment (Mohd Yusaini & Mohd Izham, 2019) towards the career transition framework. These studies have yielded important insights into the operational and structural barriers to effective program delivery, highlighting issues such as limited professional training, lack of inter-agency collaboration and resource constraints at the school level.

However, a critical gap remains underexplored in the current body of research: the role of teacher mindset specifically, the distinction between growth and fixed mindsets in influencing the effectiveness of transition program implementation. Rooted in Dweck's (2006) theoretical framework, mindset refers to the underlying beliefs educators hold about the potential for student development and learning. While a growth mindset suggests that abilities can be cultivated through effort, feedback and strategic support, a fixed mindset implies that abilities are static and predetermined (Husni & Low, 2023). These beliefs have profound implications for teacher expectations, instructional behaviors, and willingness to engage students in rigorous and meaningful transition experiences.

In the context of special education, where students often require personalized instruction, sustained encouragement and long-term planning, the mindset of teachers may significantly influence whether transition programs are executed with fidelity and intentionality. Despite its theoretical relevance, mindset remains a largely overlooked variable in empirical studies on career transition implementation in Malaysian SEN settings. This gap limits a comprehensive understanding of why certain schools or educators succeed in delivering impactful transition services while others fall short, even when operating under the same national framework.

Therefore, this study aims to address this research gap by examining how the mindsets of special education teachers, whether growth or fixed, affect the implementation quality of career transition programs in Malaysian secondary schools. The findings are expected to inform teacher development strategies and policy reforms that more directly target belief systems, not just procedural or technical competencies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Implementation of Career Transition Programs for Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Career transition programs are structured interventions designed to prepare students with SEN for adult life, particularly in the domains of employment readiness, independent living, and social integration. In Malaysia, the introduction of the Career Transition Program Module for Secondary School SEN Students in 2019 reflects the Ministry of Education's commitment to improving post-school outcomes for this population. The module comprises six core components, namely life skills, self-advocacy and communication, fostering adulthood living, career skills, career readiness and workplace support development.

Despite the availability of this formal structure, implementation across schools remains inconsistent. Research has identified several barriers including inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and insufficient collaboration with external agencies (Mokhtar et al., 2024; Tordin & Tahar, 2021). These constraints have hindered the effective delivery of transition activities and affected the overall quality of implementation.

Previous Malaysian studies have focused primarily on observable teacher-related factors such as readiness, pedagogical competence, understanding of the program module, and commitment to its execution. While these aspects are critical, they primarily reflect procedural and operational concerns. Limited attention has been given to the cognitive dimensions of implementation, particularly the belief systems that influence teacher decision-making and expectations. These internal psychological factors may significantly shape how transition programs are understood, prioritised and applied in school settings.

Teacher Mindset and Its Implications for Special Education Practice

The theory of mindset introduced by Dweck distinguishes between two orientations. A growth mindset is characterised by the belief that abilities can be developed through effort, persistence, and learning (Yeager et al., 2022). In contrast, a fixed mindset reflects the belief that abilities are static and unchangeable (Lee, 2022). In educational settings, teacher mindset has been found to influence instructional practices, expectations of student potential, and responses to student challenges. Teachers who adopt a growth mindset are more likely to encourage resilience, provide meaningful feedback and support student learning through adaptive strategies (Porter et al., 2022; Sahagun et al., 2021). These behaviours are particularly important in preparing SEN students for independent living and employment.

Although the concept of mindset has been widely applied in general education, its relevance to special education practice has received limited attention. Preliminary studies indicate that special education teachers with a growth mindset are more inclined to promote autonomy, real-world skills, and positive self-beliefs among SEN students (Graham et al., 2024; Husni & Low, 2023). However, in the Malaysian context, empirical studies that examine how teacher mindset influences the implementation of transition programs are still lacking (Husni & Low, 2023).

This lack of empirical focus is concerning, given that teachers' beliefs about the potential of SEN students may directly impact the scope and effectiveness of transition activities. Teachers who

view their students as incapable of improvement may unconsciously restrict opportunities for workplace exposure and skill development. In light of this, the present study aims to explore the extent to which teacher mindset specifically growth and fixed orientations influences the implementation of career transition programs for students with SEN in Malaysian secondary schools.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research proposal aims to investigate the relationship between teacher mindset and the implementation of career transition programs for students with special educational needs in Malaysian secondary schools. Specifically, the proposed study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. Determine the level of implementation of career transition programs among special education teachers.
2. Examine the levels of growth and fixed mindsets among special education teachers.
3. Identify the relationship between teacher mindset and the implementation of career transition programs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the research objectives, the following research questions will guide the proposed study:

1. What is the level of implementation of career transition programs among special education teachers?
2. What are the levels of growth and fixed mindsets among special education teachers?
3. Is there a significant relationship between teacher mindset and the implementation of career transition programs?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Based on Dweck's Mindset Theory, teachers' beliefs about student abilities are expected to influence how actively they implement career transition programs. Teachers with a growth mindset are more likely to engage in supportive and future oriented practices, while a fixed mindset may limit the depth of implementation. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed

H1: There is a positive relationship between special education teachers' growth mindset and the level of implementation of career transition programs.

H2: There is a negative relationship between special education teachers' fixed mindset and the level of implementation of career transition programs.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research proposal offers important contributions to both theory and practice in the field of special education, particularly in relation to career transition programs for students with SEN. It focuses on understanding how the beliefs of special education teachers, shaped by their growth or fixed mindset may influence the way transition programs are implemented at the school level.

From a theoretical standpoint, the proposed study aims to advance the application of Growth Mindset Theory, as introduced by Dweck (2006). While this theory has been widely examined in general education contexts, its relevance in special education remains limited in empirical research. By exploring how teacher beliefs about student ability affect program implementation, this research

proposal introduces a psychological perspective that will enrich existing literature on transition practices. The findings are expected to strengthen the understanding that teacher mindset is not only a personal trait but also a key factor influencing educational planning and decision making for students with special educational needs.

From a professional and policy perspective, the proposed study is expected to provide meaningful insights for the Ministry of Education, school administrators and training providers. Identifying teacher mindset as a factor that may support or hinder effective implementation can help in designing training programs that go beyond technical skills. Such programs may aim to cultivate positive beliefs about student potential, persistence and change, which are aligned with the core principles of Growth Mindset Theory. Promoting a mindset that values continuous learning and effort could enhance the quality and consistency of transition activities offered in schools.

Practically, this research proposal emphasises the importance of teacher attitudes in shaping real outcomes for students with special educational needs. Teachers who believe that students can grow through support and effort are more likely to implement engaging and purposeful transition plans. This belief has the potential to improve long term student outcomes, including employment readiness and independence, and to reduce the gap between policy and actual success in inclusive education.

In alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, this proposed study directly supports Goal 4 by promoting inclusive and equitable quality education for students with special educational needs through improved transition practices. Furthermore, it resonates with Goal 17, which highlights the importance of partnerships in achieving sustainable development. The study emphasises the need for collaboration between educators, school leaders, employers, families and community stakeholders to ensure effective and coordinated transition planning. By addressing both individual teacher beliefs and systemic collaboration, this research proposal contributes to a more inclusive and future ready education system.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework underpinning this study is grounded in Dweck's Mindset Theory, which distinguishes between two fundamental belief orientations: the growth mindset and the fixed mindset. A growth mindset reflects the belief that abilities can be developed through effort, practice and effective learning strategies, whereas a fixed mindset assumes that abilities are innate and difficult to change. These belief systems shape how teachers interpret student potential, respond to learning challenges and make pedagogical decisions.

In the context of special education, teacher beliefs hold particular significance as students with special educational needs often require sustained support, personalised scaffolding and long term planning. Teachers who endorse a growth mindset tend to maintain higher expectations, adopt adaptive instructional strategies and persist in providing opportunities that promote autonomy and future readiness. Conversely, teachers with stronger fixed mindset beliefs may set lower expectations, limit task complexity and reduce exposure to opportunities related to transition planning.

The implementation of career transition programs in Malaysia is guided by the Career Transition Program Module introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2019. This framework comprises six core components: life skills, self advocacy and communication, fostering adulthood living, career skills, career readiness and workplace support. Effective implementation requires teachers to embed these components within classroom activities, practical learning tasks, community participation and workplace simulations.

To strengthen the theoretical link between teacher mindset and program implementation, this study adopts an expanded conceptual model that incorporates teacher practices as the underlying

mechanism connecting belief systems to implementation outcomes. Research in special education consistently demonstrates that mindset shapes pedagogical routines such as expectations, feedback patterns, instructional strategies, support practices and monitoring behaviours. These teaching practices subsequently influence the extent to which transition related activities are delivered meaningfully and consistently in school settings.

To provide a clearer representation of these theoretical linkages, Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual pathway connecting teacher mindset, teacher practices and the implementation of career transition programs.

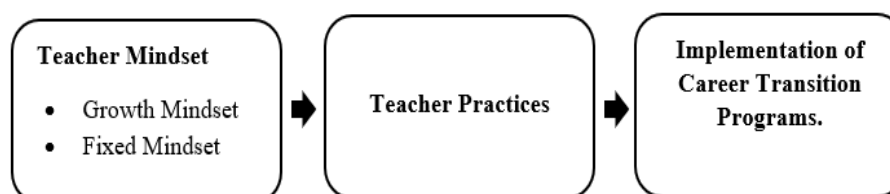


Figure 1: Conceptual model illustrating the theoretical pathway linking teacher mindset, teacher practices and the implementation of career transition programs.

Following the theoretical pathway presented in Figure 1, this study focuses on examining the direct relationship between teacher mindset and the implementation of career transition programs. While teacher practices constitute an important mediating mechanism in the broader theoretical model, they are not empirically tested in this study. Their inclusion serves to strengthen theoretical coherence by clarifying how belief systems may influence implementation behaviour in actual teaching contexts.

For empirical analysis, the study adopts an operational framework that retains the two primary constructs measured: teacher mindset, consisting of growth and fixed orientations, and the implementation of career transition programs across the six components specified in the national module. This operational model is presented in Figure 2.

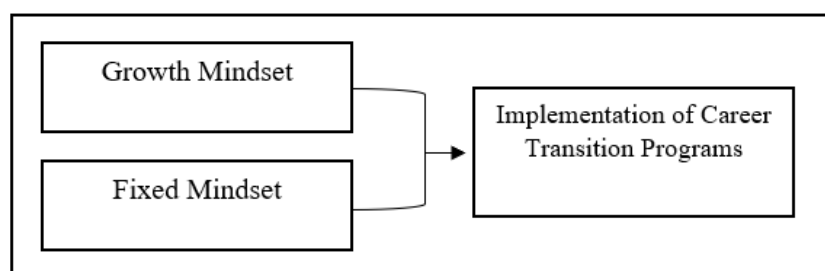


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework

Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework of this study based on Dweck's Growth Mindset Theory. It illustrates the relationship between special education teachers' beliefs about student ability (growth or fixed mindset) and their level of implementation of career transition programs.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research proposal will employ a quantitative research design using a cross sectional survey method. The quantitative approach is selected as it allows for the systematic measurement of variables and

enables statistical testing of the relationship between teacher mindset and the implementation of career transition programs for students with special educational needs. The cross sectional nature of the study will allow the researcher to capture a snapshot of practices and beliefs across schools within a specific time frame, providing insights into the prevailing conditions of implementation.

Population and Sampling

The target population for this proposed study comprises special education teachers serving in the Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi at government secondary schools across the state of Kedah. These teachers are directly responsible for implementing vocational skills subjects aligned with the Career Transition Program Module introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2019. To ensure equitable representation across geographical zones, a stratified sampling strategy was employed, with proportional allocation based on the distribution of eligible teachers across all nine educational districts in Kedah.

The determination of the minimum sample size was guided by Cohen et al. (2018), whose sample size table indicates that a population of approximately 200 teachers requires 168 respondents to achieve adequate statistical power for detecting medium effect sizes at the 0.05 significance level. In adherence to best practices in sampling, an additional ten percent was incorporated beyond the recommended minimum to mitigate the risk of non response and to enhance the overall precision and representativeness of the dataset. This augmented sample size ensures that the study meets the methodological rigour expected for correlational analysis.

Instrumentation

Data will be collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of three sections. Section A will gather demographic data including gender, years of experience and school location. Section B will assess the level of implementation of career transition programs using items based on the six components outlined in the official Ministry of Education module: life skills, self advocacy and communication, fostering adulthood living, career skills, career readiness and workplace support. Each item will be rated on a five points Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Section C will measure teacher mindset using an adapted instrument based on Dweck’s Growth Mindset Theory, containing items that capture both growth oriented and fixed oriented belief patterns. Prior to full scale distribution, the instrument will be reviewed by a panel of experts for content validity and followed by a pilot test involving a small group of teachers. Cronbach’s alpha will be used to determine the internal consistency of each scale.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

To ensure the quality of the measurement instruments, several validation procedures will be conducted. Content validity will be established through expert review involving specialists in special education and educational measurement. The experts will evaluate the clarity, relevance and representativeness of each item in relation to the constructs measured.

Internal consistency reliability will be assessed using Cronbach’s alpha. A minimum alpha value of 0.70 will be adopted as the acceptable threshold for early stage research, while values between 0.80 and 0.90 will be considered indicative of strong reliability, as recommended by Cohen et al. (2018). A pilot study will be carried out with a small sample of teachers to refine item wording and ensure that all scale components function adequately before full scale administration.

Data Collection Procedures

Ethical clearance and official permission to conduct the study will be obtained from the Ministry of Education Malaysia, the Kedah State Education Department and the respective school principals.

Questionnaires will be distributed either via online forms or hard copies, depending on school access and respondent convenience. Participation will be voluntary and all responses will be treated with strict confidentiality to protect the identity of the teachers and schools involved.

Data Analysis

The collected data will be analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations and frequency distributions will be used to describe the levels of teacher mindset and program implementation. To explore the relationship between teacher mindset and the level of implementation, Pearson correlation analysis will be employed. The level of significance will be set at $p < 0.5$ to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables under investigation.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This research proposal is expected to generate several important findings that will contribute to both theoretical understanding and practical improvement in the implementation of career transition programs for students with special educational needs. It is anticipated that the level of program implementation among special education teachers will vary depending on their underlying beliefs about student potential. Teachers who exhibit stronger growth mindset characteristics are likely to demonstrate a higher level of engagement with the transition program, as they are more inclined to believe that students with special needs can improve their skills and succeed in post-school life through effort, exposure and structured support (Dweck, 2006, 2017).

This proposed study is also expected to reveal the general pattern of mindset among special education teachers in Malaysia. It is likely that there will be a mix of growth and fixed mindsets, with some teachers displaying ambivalence or limited belief in the capacity of their students to transition successfully into employment. This is consistent with previous research indicating that mindset beliefs can vary across teachers and may affect instructional priorities and motivation (Hecht et al., 2023; Rattan et al., 2015). Identifying this variation can offer deeper insights into why some components of the transition module may be under-implemented or inconsistently applied across schools (Husni & Low, 2024; Mohd Yusoff & Khairuddin, 2024).

Furthermore, the findings are expected to show a significant correlation between teacher mindset and the level of implementation of career transition programs. A positive relationship would support the premise that internal cognitive factors such as mindset play a critical role in shaping how teachers interpret their responsibilities and act upon them in practice (Yeager & Deardorff, 2022). Such evidence would validate the inclusion of mindset-oriented content in teacher training and professional development programs, particularly in the context of special education, where teacher expectations and beliefs can substantially influence student outcomes (Fronozo et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2023).

Overall, the outcomes of the proposed study are expected to reinforce the importance of addressing psychological and belief-based variables in educational reform. The results could offer valuable guidance for education stakeholders in designing interventions that not only provide technical training but also cultivate growth-oriented thinking among educators. In doing so, the study has the potential to contribute to the broader national agenda of improving inclusive education and enhancing the employability of students with SEN.

CONCLUSION

This research proposal proposes a study that addresses a critical yet underexplored factor in the implementation of career transition programs for students with special educational needs in Malaysia. While existing research has extensively examined structural and procedural challenges, few studies

have investigated how internal cognitive beliefs among educators influence their engagement with transition planning. By applying Growth Mindset Theory as a guiding framework, this study offers a novel perspective that integrates psychological orientation with program delivery.

The proposed research is expected to yield findings that not only enrich theoretical discourse on educator cognition but also inform more holistic and sustainable strategies for teacher training and policy design. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to improving transition outcomes for students with SEN by empowering those responsible for delivering educational support. Recognising and addressing belief systems as a key component of implementation is a timely and necessary step towards more inclusive and effective educational practices.

Importantly, this study will support the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive and equitable educational practices for students with special needs. It also aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) by emphasizing the need for cross-sector collaboration among educators, families, institutions and employers to ensure successful and sustainable transition planning.

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DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USE

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT and Scite to enhance the clarity and organization of the writing. After using the ChatGPT and Scite, the author(s) thoroughly reviewed, revised and edited all generated content as necessary. The author(s) take full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity and originality of the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was involved in this research.

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