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Transition Teacher Perspectives of Community-Based Vocational Education Programs for Students With Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

The transition from school to work can be an especially challenging time for adolescents and young adults with disabilities, and their families, as they navigate the complex postsecondary transition process. Community-based vocational education (CBVE) is a coordinated transition service that provides students with opportunities for the acquisition of career and life skills in real-world environments. The goal of CBVE is to best prepare individuals with disabilities for employment and subsequently important life skills necessary for the transition to a more independent life. The study was designed to explore special education transition educators' perceptions of the barriers to implementing CBVE programs for students with disabilities and how they could potentially be minimized. The study investigated CBVE programs across four states where students with disabilities attended community worksites at least two days per week. Twenty-one special education teachers who work in CBVE programs for students with disabilities responded to data through a participant data form, questionnaire, and rating scale. The results indicated that a lack of the business community and employer interest and an absence of CBVE awareness and understanding were the greatest barriers to implementing and sustaining a CBVE program for students with disabilities.

KEYWORDS

postsecondary transition, community-based vocational education, work-based learning, barriers

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Special education legislation for individuals with disabilities has targeted the requirement for transition services to improve student post-secondary work and educational outcomes. In 1984, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act was enacted. Commonly known as Perkins I, it placed an emphasis and shift on integrating vocational curriculum with traditional academics in order to keep up with the current labor market demand (Kim et al., 2021). As a result, career and technical education (CTE) specialized high schools, career academics, vocational high schools, work-based learning (WBL), and community-based vocational education (CBVE) were introduced to the mainstream American educational system (Kim et al., 2021). In addition, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 was monumental for postsecondary transition as it first introduced the obligation for school districts to coordinate transition planning and services for students with disabilities (Morgan & Riesen, 2016), while the 1997 and 2004 reauthorizations further redefined the transition planning process emphasizing student-centered planning and increasing focus on measurable postsecondary goals related to further education, employment, and independent living (Zirkel, 2019). Initiatives such as the School to Work Opportunities Act (1994) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) of 2014 have played a vital role in the advancement of work-based learning programs, community-based vocational instruction, career learning and exploration, and employment services and outcomes for youth with disabilities (Mamun et al., 2018a; Wonacott, 2000). These legislative efforts have significantly enhanced policy and practice in postsecondary transition. Research also supports CBVE, indicating that when students with disabilities participate in real work experiences during high school, they will be better equipped and more likely to improve their chances in the attainment of competitive employment (Almalky, 2018; Cease-Cook et al., 2015; Mamun et al., 2018a; Schutz & Carter, 2022; Test et al., 2009).

Transition Challenges

Despite the legislation and research supporting CBVE, many states do not have policies or direct funding for transition programs to implement community-based learning for students with disabilities according to a report by the American Student Assistance (2021). The positive relationship between CBVE programs and successful post-secondary employment outcomes for students with disabilities has yet to be reflected in the United States employment data indicating the need for a focus on successful methods of implementation to improve results (Mamun et al., 2018b). Although, it is one of the most common positive indicators for postschool employment success for youth with disabilities in participating in CBVE programs during high school, data show that only 7%-8% students with disabilities in Idaho and 26%-28% of students with disabilities in Pennsylvania were participating in work, career, or vocational education programs (Harvey et al., 2020). Moreover, data from the United States Department of Labor in November 2023 show this employment disproportion for persons with and without disabilities ages 16-64. The employment rate for persons with a disability is 41.5% and employment for persons without a disability is 77.88%. In addition, the employment to population ratio for persons with a disability is 38.3% and for persons without a disability is 75.3%. The unemployment rate of persons with a disability is 7.8% and without a disability is 3.3% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023). To remedy the low employment numbers for persons with disabilities, the research indicates the need for students with disabilities to participate in real work experiences in high school to be better equipped and more likely to attainment of competitive employment (Almalky,

2018; Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011; Cease-Cook et al., 2015; Mamun et al., 2018b; Test et al., 2009).

Initiatives

Initiatives such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) play a vital role in the advancement of work-based learning programs, community-based vocational instruction, career learning and exploration, and employment services and outcomes for youth with disabilities. WIOA marked a significant transformation of the role of vocational and transition programs for youth with disabilities (Taylor et al., 2022). The intent of WIOA is to provide vocational and workplace services that assist youth with disabilities in obtaining competitive and improving post-secondary employment outcomes (Gilson et al., 2021). WIOA requires state and local vocational rehabilitation agencies to collaborate with schools to increase transition services in the areas of employment (Gilson et al., 2021).

WIOA continues to play an important role in CBVE through strengthening workforce development with continued vocational and employment training services, while also expanding year-round and summer job programs (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024). The goal is that with a concentrated focus on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) in school during secondary years, students with disabilities will be able to attain and generalize the necessary skills to become qualified job candidates in the competitive employment market with long-term success and retainment.

Community-Based Vocational Education

Community-based vocational education components meet the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requirements to provide appropriate transition services for students with disabilities. CBVE is an extensive term covering any vocational instruction that takes place within an integrated community setting and is utilized for the preparation of students with disabilities for postsecondary outcomes, particularly, employment. (Kim & Dymond, 2010). Community-based vocational education helps students with disabilities prepare for employment by providing non-paid, volunteer work experiences in real-world settings, developing communication, self-advocacy, and social skills, increasing self-awareness of career interests and abilities, and practicing decision-making skills to move toward their employment goals (MIU, n.d.). Research consistently indicates that students with disabilities who work in a real-world, natural work-based learning setting have higher odds at obtaining competitive employment after high school (Cease-Cook et al., 2015; Test et al., 2009).

Developing a CBVE using research-based components is important to the success of the program. Research has identified multiple components that must be implemented to sustain a viable CBVE program and produce positive employment results for students with disabilities. These components include developing positive school/employer collaboration planning and providing appropriate tasks for students and a variety of work experiences and job tasks implemented at least two times per week (Kim & Dymond, 2010). In alignment with these findings, Mazzotti et al. (2021) reinforced that work-based learning, particularly paid employment and work experience, is strongly correlated with postschool success. Their research identified key predictors of postschool success, such as inclusion in general education, self-determination, and career technical education, which have all been shown to improve

employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. Work-based learning experiences are vital in these areas, as they help students develop critical job readiness skills in authentic environments, better preparing them for competitive employment.

To address the disconnect between the research identifying the need to implement research-based components for a successful CBVE program and the data indicating low employment numbers for students with disabilities, this study explored the barriers of implementing CBVE programs from the perspective of transition educators who work directly with students with disabilities. In addition, the study sought to provide insights on how to potentially minimize these barriers to improve CBVE implementation and outcomes. CBVE program teachers face various barriers in the implementation and sustainability of the program. Studies report staffing, funding, transportation, time, lack of administrative support, student disability severity, student behaviors, and planning resources are the primary barriers concerning to teachers (Almalky, 2018; Rooney-Kron & Dymond, 2021). This study sought to identify the barriers to implementing a CBVE program for students with disabilities who attend worksites at least two days weekly and how the identified barriers can potentially be minimized.

Research Questions

1. What are the barriers to implementing a community-based vocational education program for adolescents and young adults with disabilities who attend worksites at least two days per week?
2. How can these barriers potentially be minimized?

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative research paradigm to describe, understand, and interpret human phenomena, human interaction, or human discourse (Lichtman, 2012). The intent was to uncover barriers according to public school special education transition educators' perspectives of CBVE programs for students with disabilities who attended CBVE worksites at least two days weekly framed the study. The qualitative paradigm allowed the researcher to engage transition teachers in identifying and categorizing the barriers of implementing CBVE programs and how these barriers could potentially be minimized. This collective case study targeted teachers from multiple CBVE programs focusing on their experiences with the goal to identify strategies to remediate the barriers of implementing a community-based work program to improve transition outcomes for students with disabilities.

Collective Case Study

A collective case study was utilized to explore multiple CBVE programs with the goal to better understand them through the perceptions of the transition professionals who work in this area. Collective case study research is useful because “we are examining several cases to understand the similarities and differences between the cases” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 550). This study involved multiple cases that investigated the central phenomena of barriers in CBVE programs for adolescents and young adults with disabilities. The cases were made up of each unique CBVE program in which the different transition educators worked with. Collective case study

research is connected to the central phenomena that is being investigated in a natural, real-world scenario that is not distant from its context as it exists with an experiment (Morgan et al., 2017).

Participants

The criteria for participation required participants to be transition special education educators who worked with students with disabilities ages 16-21 and who had experience developing, implementing, and providing instruction in CBVE programs. A total of twenty-one participants consented to participate in the study. To be included in the study, the special education transition teachers must work directly with students participating in CBVE programs. Data were collected via a questionnaire, rating scale with open-ended comments, and interviews.

Instrument Development

The research was designed to include a participant data form, questionnaire, rating scale, and interviews. All data sources included human participants. Human participants are the key to qualitative research because of the words, feelings, thoughts, and beliefs they can share leading to rich context and deep understanding of the phenomenon being studied. However, careful ethical considerations must take place when conducting a study using human beings as participants. The basis of this study utilized participant responses to answer all research questions and as a result all ethical considerations including anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent with Texas Tech University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. A participant data form created through SurveyMonkey was sent to each participant via email once they provided consent to participate in the study. The participant data form was used to gather demographics and other information that will be necessary for the inclusion criteria of the study. The questionnaire consisted of two open-ended questions that provided insights into the barriers of CBVE programs and how to reduce these barriers. Questions could be answered with just a few sentences to provide sufficient information at this stage of data collection. Rivano and Hagström (2017) explain that one advantage of using a qualitative questionnaire is the profound insights the researcher gains from it. A questionnaire is a relatively short, simple way of obtaining rich information from participants' experiences and helps lead the way for the other data collection methods such as interviews to be conducted. In fact, questionnaires are one of the most widely used means of collecting data (Rowley, 2014).

The rating scale was composed of six questions, constructed via SurveyMonkey, and sent by email. Questions used a Likert-like rating scale to obtain the attitudes of special education transition educators about the most influential barriers of their own CBVE programs. Other questions were used to obtain open-ended questions that were follow-ups to the Likert-like rating scale questions. These open-ended questions were designed to be short and provide some detailed information about why the participants rated some of the items as they did. The last item on the rating scale was a statement asking participants if they would like to continue to the next phase of the research study. A rating scale is ideal for eliciting perceptions, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs about a topic, which are key elements to a qualitative study (Royal et al., 2010).

Semi-structured virtual interviews were conducted via Zoom. Participants were randomly selected from the participant pool from those individuals who completed the consent form, participant data form, questionnaire, and rating scale. Participants who were interested in participating in the interview indicated on the rating scale they agreed to participate in the audio

recorded virtual interview. Multiple dates and times were provided for convenience of the participants. Six total participants were randomly selected from participants who agreed to participate in the interview stage. Interviews are one of the most common forms of qualitative data collection as they provide deep context into the participants thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about the research topic. Semi-structured interviews follow the same general format and direction for all participants but provide leeway for follow up questions that may arise (Lichtman, 2012). Furthermore, Qu and Dumay (2011) explain that semi-structured interviews are the most efficient and convenient way of data collection due to its flexible style and ability to elicit natural responses comfortably from participants in their own terms.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data was gathered, analyzed, coded, and assigned themes by the researcher. The audio recorded interviews were also transcribed and codes were derived from the four data sources participant data form, questionnaire, rating scale, and interviews. Although, there were quantitative data from the rating scale, these numbers were not used to produce statistical conclusions but reported in percentages to enhance understanding of the qualitative themes. NVivo qualitative data analysis software was utilized in order to assign codes from the text and develop emerging themes.

A cross-case analysis was applied to this study. Miles et al. (2020) state that cross-case analysis is especially useful to enrich understanding of the phenomenon, while identifying similarities and differences across cases that can create more generalized outcomes. Each individual case must be studied and analyzed for its intricacies and uniqueness then looked at in the larger picture of presenting themes that have or have not occurred across the cases (Stake, 2006). Generalizations that come from cross-case qualitative analysis are said to be analytical or conceptual, and do not include numbers as in quantitative hypotheses (Yin., 2013). Furthermore, qualitative researchers often produce these generalizations from conducting cross-case analysis through rich details and outcomes of the different cases in real-world settings (Yin, 2013).

Results

Twenty-one participants completed the participant data form with participant information, rating scale, and questionnaire. Participants represented four states including Colorado, Connecticut, New York, and Texas. Table 1 displays the participant demographic information derived from the participant data forms, along with the responding participant identifiers.

Rating Scale

The rating scale was completed by twenty-one participants who included open-ended comments and comprised the initial data set deriving the results of each question in percentages (Table 2). These percentages were not analyzed in isolation and were utilized to help identify patterns and trends that were explored qualitatively. The Likert rating scale ranged from *not significant*, *slight significance*, *neutral*, *significant*, to *very significant*. Three of seven identified barriers were related to employer knowledge and four barriers were related to school responsibilities. The rating scale question asked, “Which barriers are the most difficult to implement for a CBVE

program?” Seven identified barriers were included in a Likert rating scale ranging from *not a significant barrier* to *very significant barrier*. The barriers that were most identified as a *very significant barrier* via the rating scale with open-ended comments were a lack of employer

Table 1. Demographic Information

Participant	State	Experience With CBVE
1	New York	5 years
2	New York	5 years
3	New York	3 years
4	New York	4 years
5	New York	6 years
6	New York	4 years
7	New York	18 years
8	New York	14 years
9	New York	1 year
10	Texas	15 years
11	Texas	3 years
12	New York	27 years
13	Texas	1 year
14	Texas	8 months
15	Colorado	1 year
16	Connecticut	10 years
17	Texas	3 years
18	Colorado	25 years
19	Connecticut	5 years
20	Connecticut	2 years
21	Connecticut	11 years

Table 2. Percentages for Rating Scale Responses Barriers of Implementing CBVE

	Not a significant barrier	Slight barrier	Neutral	Significant barrier	Very significant barrier
Lack of administrative support and interest (Almalky, 2018)	47.62%	4.76%	28.57%	14.29%	4.76%
Lack of employer interest (Almalky, 2018)	4.76%	28.57%	14.29%	19.05%	33.33%
Transportation (Almalky, 2018)	38.10%	19.05%	23.81%	14.29%	4.76%
Shortage of staffing for supervision and instruction (Almalky, 2018)	14.29%	14.29%	33.33%	33.33%	4.76%
Legal requirements and documentation	28.57%	14.29%	28.57%	19.05%	9.52%
Absence of awareness for CBVE programs	14.29%	19.05%	9.52%	38.10%	19.05%
Liability and safety concerns (Almalky, 2018)	19.05%	28.57%	19.05%	23.81%	9.52%

interest (33.33%) and an absence of community awareness for CBVE programs (19.05%). In total 57.15% of participants believed a lack of community and employer awareness was a prominent barrier, followed by 52.38% for a lack of employer interest. Participant ratings of 47.62% indicate a lack of administrative support was not a significant barrier to implementing CBVE with only 19% reporting a lack of administrative support as *significant* or *very significant*.

An additional question from the rating scale was an open-ended question used to obtain further information into the barrier ratings of CBVE. “Explain how some of these significant barriers could potentially be minimized?” A majority of participants expressed the need to establish more CBVE worksites through community and employer awareness and collaboration. When asked how to minimize the barriers, one participant stated “conversation, awareness, and education” (Participant 18). Another participant further extended this belief and stated: “If we had a better outreach person explaining how our students could get into the community more and help at worksites” (Participant 20). Table provides the participants responses to the rating scale with open-ended questions. Almalky (2018) identified the barriers of CBVE for students with disabilities. Lack of administrative support and interest, lack of employer interest, transportation, shortage of staffing for supervision and instruction, and liability and safety concerns were items on the rating scale that came from the 2018 study. Legal requirements and documentation, as well as absence of awareness for CBVE programs were added by the researchers to expand the list of potential barriers.

Questionnaire

The questions on the questionnaire pertained to the barriers of a community-based vocational education. More than half of participants stated that finding willing employers to create a worksite partnership was the greatest barrier of CBVE. Participant 16 stated, “The most prominent challenges of implementing and sustaining a community work-based learning program is finding an employer to support suitable employment for special-needs students. Making sure students are capable of completing their tasks so they are not overwhelmed and get frustrated” (Participant 16). In addition, another participant said, “Challenges may arise when finding or recruiting community members to participate in these programs as a possible workplace site or opportunity for students. This can sometimes be due to employer lack of knowledge of how it works and their viewpoints of it” (Participant 14). A majority of participants also reported about the difficulty of finding business community employers to establish worksites. One participant said, “It is difficult to create those community partnerships. Many times, businesses either have a misconception of who our students are, or what we are trying to accomplish with the CBVE programs” (Participant 4). A lack of information and understanding of implementing CBVE at a business results in employers’ hesitation to provide implement a CBVE program and to implement all the required components.

Question six on the questionnaire asks how the challenges could be minimized. A majority of participants reported that fostering community awareness and collaboration with employers as the best strategies to minimize barriers in CBVE. One participant commented that open and positive communication could help minimize barriers. Participant 5 stated, “Build positive relationships with businesses and employers in the area of the school in hopes of obtaining work sites for students. Talk to businesses/ employers in the area early in the school

year to open lines of communication and trust” (Participant 5). Another participant stated, “We need to continue to educate the community on how capable our students are!” (Participant 4). Participant 2 went a step further and provided a suggestion on how to better create community awareness and collaboration with employers, “Perhaps having a liaison that is dedicated to advocating for our students and explaining to the worksites the importance of their participation” (Participant 2).

Themes From the Data

Thematic analysis was utilized to generate themes from the codes. A theme is “a word, or more typically, a set of words denoting an important idea that occurs multiple times in your data” (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p. 552). Thematic analysis is described as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). Furthermore, Kiger and Varpio (2020) suggest that thematic analysis is most appropriate when the goal is to understand the beliefs, ideas, and experiences across a data set. Once the coding process was complete, the themes were the larger concepts that multiple codes fell under. The first step that was conducted was to gather the codes based on likeness and then place initial themes to the groups of codes. Once initial themes were assigned, they were reviewed to ensure each theme had sufficient supporting data. All themes were derived from the codes from all data sources to guarantee the triangulation of data.

A lack of the business community and employer awareness and interest in CBVE programs was reported by more than half of participants as a *significant* to *very significant* barrier in the rating scale. Participants were asked to elaborate on how these challenges could be minimized. The theme that emerged was to provide program information and plan collaborative opportunities with employers and the business community to improve awareness of the CBVE program. Participant 14 suggested, “Find ways to increase employer interest (supported by research and successful experiences).” In addition, Participant 13 stated, “Having more individuals talking about and informing others about our students and their abilities will allow us to open more doors in community businesses.” Participant 10 also emphasized the importance of awareness stating, “I hope we can continue to educate the world that our students are valued members of the community. With proper training and support, they are an asset.” The majority of participants voiced their belief that community awareness and collaboration were important to minimizing the barriers of CBVE. Participant 4 stated, “We need to educate our community on the benefits of hosting our students at a worksite, and we need administrators to buy in on teachers' ideas!” Lastly, Participant 3 suggested, “Greater opportunities to educate the general public and businesses on the value and positive skills our students with disabilities can provide.” A lack of business community and employer awareness and interest was ranked as the most significant barriers to implementing a successful CBVE program by a majority of participants. Insights and suggestions into minimizing these barriers included the need to develop strategies to improve community and employer awareness and provide collaborative opportunities with them to establish CBVE programs for students with disabilities.

Discussion

One of the first research studies to identify barriers to CBVE was Kim and Dymond’s (2010) study which identified barriers to community-based vocational instruction through exploring the

perceptions of special education teachers' views. They found that 1) a lack of staff, 2) standardized testing requirements, and 3) a lack of funding were the greatest barriers to implementing CBVE. This indicates the community work-based program had established employer collaborations and work placements; however, logistical issues were the difficulties preventing a smooth and successful program implementation. While logistic barriers were reported as minimal barriers in the current study, the greatest challenge identified in this study was a lack of business community and employer awareness of CBVE programs.

Eight years later, Almalky (2018) identified barriers in CBVE through special education teachers who worked with students with intellectual disabilities. The main barriers that were found in this study were: 1) a lack of administrative support, 2) employer-CBVE program collaboration, and 3) a lack of interagency collaboration. The current study found that the most prominent barriers to CBVE were a lack of the business community and employer awareness of CBVE programs. This agrees with Almalky's (2018) finding about employer-CBVE program collaboration. However, the Almalky (2018) study also found that the most prominent barrier of CBVE was a lack of administrative support. The current study indicated that more than half of the participants stated that lack of administrative support was not a significant barrier to CBVE.

This shift suggests that while early concerns centered on logistical and systemic issues within schools, more recent barriers reflect external challenges, particularly the need to build stronger partnerships and awareness within the broader business community. As CBVE frameworks have evolved, the focus has shifted from building capacity within schools to working more closely with the local business community.

Valentini et al. (2019) found that employers were more likely to participate and collaborate in CBVE programs if 1) they had personal connections to individuals with disabilities, 2) the business/organization practiced social responsibility 3) had educator outreach, and 4) believed it creates a positive work environment. Valentini et al. (2019) found that employers were more likely to form a CBVE partnership when educators reached out to their business. Across many of the interviews, employers highlighted how important it is for educators to invite business engagement. The current study aligns with the results that increasing awareness and interest comes while establishing partnerships for their CBVE programs comes from educator outreach (Valentini et al., 2019). While many participants acknowledged that existing partnerships with worksites was a significant factor in CBVE, they mentioned that awareness and collaboration must occur whether it be a previously established worksite or creating a new one. Participants advocated for more community outreach and collaboration by teachers and the school.

Moreover, Riesen and Oertle (2019) conducted a study on employer perspectives in the collaboration and participation in CBVE programs. The study demonstrated that less than 40% of employers who participated provided training for the assigned jobs for students with disabilities at their worksite. This reinforces the current study's findings that establishing worksites is a major barrier to implementing a successful CBVE program. Riesen and Oertle (2019) also found that 45% of employers felt the nature of their worksite was too difficult. This supports the current study's findings about the lack of the business community awareness and employer collaboration with school staff as concerning barriers.

In addition to the challenges identified, recent research highlights the importance of structured collaboration between schools, employers, and service agencies to sustain effective CBVE. Rowe et al. (2021) emphasized that employment interventions are most effective when they integrate multiple components, such as; job coaching, family involvement, and ongoing

employer feedback, into a coordinated transition plan. Similarly, Test et al. (2020) found that when educators use evidence-based predictors of post-school success, such as work-based learning experiences and interagency collaboration, student outcomes improve significantly. These predictors require not only school-level implementation but also meaningful engagement from employers who understand their role in preparing youth with disabilities for the workforce. Moreover, Schall et al. (2022) examined Project SEARCH and found that when employers are supported through structured training and partnership-building, they are more likely to offer sustained placements and improve employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These findings reinforce the current study's call for increased employer awareness and educator outreach and suggest that collaborative frameworks can address many of the ongoing barriers to CBVE.

Implications for Practice

The success of community-based transition programs depends on the availability of community employers willing to partner with schools as a context for work-based learning (Valentini et al., 2019). The majority of participants in the current study believed that a lack of employer interest and the business community awareness could be improved by school and teacher informational outreach to build positive business community and employer relationships. The common theme to minimize these barriers was to establish more CBVE worksites through knowledge and collaboration. Valentini et al. (2019) recommend establishing partnerships begin with discussing clear expectations of CBVE for students and the employers, followed by explaining the benefits of the program for students. Moreover, to sustain the partnership, Valentini et al. (2019) indicated the importance of implementing steps to maintain ongoing communication, begin with a trial period, communicate appreciation to employers and students, and adopt a flexible posture. The current study reinforces that open lines of communication between CBVE programs and employers should be frequent and positive with the goal of creating an appropriate and meaningful workplace for students. Acknowledging the benefits for both students and the worksite, while incorporating values of respect and gratitude are also important in this process. Schools should dedicate time and resources to allow transition professionals to inform the business community with the goal of locating employers that are willing to partner with a CBVE program.

Furthermore, the Valentini et al. (2019) study identified teachers to be the primary staff member responsible for initiating conversations and found that employers believe they are responsible for engaging in conversation with employers. One participant from the current study suggested CBVE programs would benefit from having a liaison from the school. The schools that have a transition coordinator position or a dedicated teacher supervisory position to locate and develop collaborative business community and employer partnerships report higher numbers of student employment than schools who do not provide coordinators dedicated to the CBVE program. These individuals work directly with administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, students, families, vocational rehabilitation agencies, and the community.

Rooney-Kron and Dymond (2021) explained that many transition programs do not have an individual who is dedicated to finding, establishing, and maintaining CBVE worksites. Although transition teachers have expressed interest in collaborating with employers to develop CBVE worksites, they had difficulties establishing the relationships (Rooney-Kron & Dymond, 2021). Increasing and dedicating primary staff with the responsibility of establishing,

implementing, and maintaining CBVE worksites through community awareness and employer collaboration is the key to increasing special education post-secondary employment.

It recommended that transition professionals develop structured plans with detailed information to inform employers and outline the necessary steps to increase awareness and build successful collaborative partnerships with the business community. A comprehensive CBVE plan should include clearly defined student learning objectives, individualized assessments, structured on-site work experiences, job coaching and support services, and consistent communication strategies between school personnel and employers (Wehman et al., 2015). Additionally, it should establish clear expectations for workplace behavior, safety protocols, and the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved to ensure a safe, effective, and supportive learning and working environment (Mazzotti et al., 2016).

The plan should also emphasize the benefits of CBVE participation for employers. These include early access to a reliable and diverse labor pool, improved employee morale through inclusive hiring practices, the opportunity to shape future workforce development, and enhanced community recognition (Carter et al., 2021). These benefits, when paired with structured guidance and support from transition staff, make CBVE a mutually beneficial and sustainable investment for both students and businesses. The barriers identified in this study reinforce the need for schools to allocate resources and professional development for educators to actively cultivate and maintain these partnerships, ensuring that employers are fully informed of both the structure and long-term advantages of CBVE programs.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The study has limited qualitative generalization qualities due to the small sample size of twenty-one lacking representation from different types of community work-based learning programs. Many different models of CBVE are implemented in various demographic settings that were not represented in this study. Furthermore, CBVE programs serve an extremely diverse range of students with disabilities who exhibit various levels of functioning and needs requiring establishing a variety of worksites. Lastly, CBVE programs partner with unique worksites that may have potentially different barriers for each type of program.

Future research may be conducted to explore and detail effective strategies special education transition professional can communicate with the business community to increase employer awareness and develop collaborative partnerships between schools and employers. A recommended future study of barriers to CBVE would be to implement employer surveys and interviews focusing on their perceptions of providing work-based opportunities for students with disabilities. Future research should explore which types of worksites, businesses, and employers are most effective in providing CBVE opportunities that align with the diverse strengths, support needs, and learning profiles of students with disabilities. Lastly, another area of study would include students reporting workplace and vocational preferences when participating in a CBVE program.

Conclusions

Transition educators found a lack of business community and employer awareness as the significant barrier for establishing and implementing a community work-based learning program. WIOA (2014) funding can provide additional support to establish partnerships with local

businesses and organizations and work-based learning experiences. It is recommended that school districts plan proactive steps assigning transition teachers and coordinators to develop and provide CBVE program information to educate the business community and provide the employers with strategies and support to establish and maintain these programs.

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