



Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development

**FACILITATING THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES INTO ADULTHOOD: A PRELIMINARY
STUDY**

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**Bachelor of Science with Honours
(Cognitive Science)
2019**



1000283515

UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK

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**FACILITATING THE TRANSITION OF STUDENTS WITH LEARNING
DISABILITIES INTO ADULTHOOD: A PRELIMINARY STUDY**

OLIVIA CHEN CHING HUI

**This project is submitted
In partial fulfilment of the requirements for a
Bachelor of Science with Honours
(Cognitive Science)**

**Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
(2019)**

The project entitled 'Facilitating the Transition of Students with Learning Disabilities into Adulthood: A Preliminary Study' was prepared by Olivia Chen Ching Hui and submitted to the Faculty of Cognitive Sciences and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Bachelor of Science with Honours (Cognitive Science).

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Proverbs 3:6

First and foremost, glory and thanks to God Almighty for the inspiration, opportunity, guidance, and strength to conduct this study, to face the challenges that had come in the way, and to bring this study to its completion.

Next, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Julia Lee Ai Cheng for her valuable sharing, ideas, feedback, resources, time, dedication, and effort in directing and supporting me in this study. She has been an inspiration to me and widened my horizon to do greater things for the greater good.

I would also like to express my deepest gratitude towards my friend and her family for their willingness to share their experience and struggle in helping a young adult in transitioning into adulthood, to get into college, and to get employed, which became the main motivation for this study.

Besides that, I would like to thank my friend, Serene Koh Wei Yen, and cousin, Mark Chin Jack Sui, for proofreading this work and in their opinions for the betterment of the write-up of this thesis.

I would also like to thank to my parents for their care and hard work to provide for me in all the ways they could.

Last but not least, lots of thanks to my friends for their support, reminders, and motivations throughout the process of this study .

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ABSTRACT

The democratization of a nation needs to start with the democratization of education, in which every student gets equal education opportunity, which can then increase their chances of getting employed as they enter into adulthood. The transition from adolescence into adulthood is a challenging process for students with learning disabilities. Developed nations such as the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (US) have taken great measures in their policies and practice to support them to ensure a smooth transition from adolescence into adulthood. Therefore, this study aims to identify and compare the policies, educational supports, and employment support in the UK, US, and Malaysia for students with learning disabilities through a systematic literature review involving a total of 26 articles from the Disability and Society journal and Journal of Research in Special Education Needs (JORSEN). Additionally, the study found five global policies, 13 UK policies, three US policies, and four Malaysian policies. The overall academic supports in the three countries are support and development for educators, academic support, physical or material support, support personnel, school-to-work/postsecondary education support, educational research, personal support, and Individualized Education Program (IEP). The overall employment supports are rehabilitation program or agencies; treatment, intervention, and therapy; accommodation; government support; support for entrepreneurship; supported employment services; individual or group support; and training. In short, much effort has been taken in policies and in practice to help students with learning disabilities to transition into adulthood. The findings from the present study suggest that Malaysia uses these developed countries such as the UK and the US as benchmarks.

Keywords: students, learning disabilities, special needs, transition, policies, education, employment, support, United Kingdom, United States, Malaysia.

ABSTRAK

Pendemokrasian sebuah negara perlu bermula dengan pendemokrasian pendidikan, yang setiap pelajar mendapat peluang pendidikan yang sama, yang kemudiannya dapat meningkatkan peluang mereka untuk mendapat pekerjaan ketika mereka dewasa. Peralihan daripada remaja kepada dewasa adalah satu proses yang mencabar bagi pelajar yang mempunyai kelemahan pembelajaran. Negara-negara maju seperti United Kingdom (UK) dan Amerika Syarikat (AS) telah mengambil langkah besar dalam dasar dan amalan mereka untuk menyokong mereka untuk memastikan peralihan lancar menjadi dewasa. Oleh itu, kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti dan membandingkan dasar, sokongan pendidikan, dan sokongan pekerjaan di UK, AS, dan Malaysia untuk pelajar dengan masalah pembelajaran melalui penelitian dokumen sistematik yang melibatkan 26 artikel daripada jurnal '*Disability and Society*' dan '*Journal of Research in Special Education Needs (JORSEN)*'. Tambahan pula, kajian ini mendapati lima dasar global, 13 dasar UK, tiga dasar AS, dan empat dasar Malaysia. Sokongan akademik keseluruhan dalam ketiga-tiga negara tersebut ialah sokongan dan pembangunan bagi pendidik, sokongan akademik, sokongan fizikal atau bahan, kakitangan sokongan, sokongan sekolah ke alam pekerjaan/sokongan pendidikan selepas pendidikan menengah, penyelidikan pendidikan, sokongan peribadi, dan '*Individualized Education Program*' (IEP). Sokongan pekerjaan secara keseluruhan ialah program pemulihan atau agensi; rawatan, intervensi, dan terapi; penginapan; sokongan kerajaan; sokongan keusahawanan; sokongan terhadap perkhidmatan pekerjaan; sokongan individu atau kumpulan; serta latihan. Rumusannya, banyak usaha telah diambil dalam dasar dan amalan untuk membantu pelajar yang kurang upaya pembelajaran beralih ke dewasa. Dapatan daripada kajian ini mencadangkan Malaysia mencontohi negara maju seperti UK dan AS.

Kata kunci: pelajar, masalah pembelajaran, keperluan khas, transisi, dasar, pendidikan, pekerjaan, sokongan, United Kingdom, Amerika Syarikat, Malaysia.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Learning is a part of everyone's life, and all children have the right to education (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [UNHCR], 2015). Dewey (1934) argued in his book on Pragmatism that learning must involve experience as he mentioned, "Experience occurs continuously, because the interaction of live creature and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living" (p. 1), and that knowledge is acquired as children are engaged in activities (Dewey, 1916). Moreover, a learned society is important for the development of a country.

Democratization of Education

Democratization of education means that every students of school-going age ought to have the right to receive education in schools and to get help to attain the same level of achievements as others in the same cohort or defined by the curriculum (Nordin, 2011). Two fundamental principles in in the democratization of education are, first, the principle of equality, which includes fairness, accessibility, and acknowledgement of everyone's rights; and second, the principle of participation, which includes the freedom of expression, choice and active involvement in decision making with regards to practices in education, together with taking up responsibilities (Cerović & Levkov, 2002). To achieve the democratization of education, a few conditions that are needed. These include the extension of compulsory education, the removal of selectivity and discrimination in education, and affirmation of lifelong education and learning (Murati, 2015). Therefore, it is very important to have equity and quality in education for all students.

Quality and Equity in Education

Equity and quality are often present in education systems that have high levels of performance (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012).

Equity and quality are also emphasized in the fourth United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal which calls for quality education; as well as in the Incheon Declaration for Education 2030, which also calls nations to work "towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all" (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2016, p. 3).

Equity in education refers to the access to education opportunity by all students, while quality education refers to the access to quality resources in education (Pereira, 2016). With good education, students can transition into the labor market easily, whereas if they have difficulty at the early stages, good support and guidance can help them to persevere in their studies till the end, regardless of their family or social background, which can enhance the practice of inclusion in education.

Education Failure

Education failure can hinder the democratization of education in the country. Without proper education, students are exposed to limited opportunities in acquiring better jobs, better incomes, and better quality of life in the future, which also affect the growth of a nation's economy in terms of higher costs on public health expenses, social support, and increased crime rates (OECD, 2012).

One of the aspects where education failure can be observed is in a nation's rate of dropout of school children. Studies have revealed that in the United States of America (US), around 20% of students with disabilities dropped out of high school, which was two times the rate of their peers without disabilities; over 35% of adolescents who were not institutionalized in a school did not finish their education in high school and their chances of attending college were also lower than their peers (Shaw & DeLaet, 2010).

In Malaysia, the dropout rates of students in 2011 were recorded at 1.9% and 1.2% in urban and rural areas, respectively for primary school students; and 9.3% and 16.7% in urban

and rural areas, respectively for secondary school students (Nordin, 2011). In 2016, the overall rate of school dropouts in Malaysia was 0.35, which reduced to 0.29 in 2017 (Amran, 2018). The education minister hopes that it could be further reduced to 0.27 in 2019 (Amran, 2018). Some of the factors affecting school dropout that were identified by the education ministry include the following: lack of interest, poverty, parents who paid little attention to their children, illness, disability, social challenges, learning difficulties, and underage marriage (Amran, 2018).

In addition, lack of accessibility and academic underperformance were related to several factors such as “family economic and education backgrounds, ethnicity, school locations, school and teacher distributions, allocation of school funds, diversity in the implementations of specific reforms, the presence of physically and mentally handicapped students, and parent-teacher association involvement in school activity” (Nordin, 2011, p. 117). Therefore, it has been found that there are limitations in the current Malaysian education system that can lead to education failure.

Inclusion of Individuals with Disabilities

Exclusion. A century ago, exclusion occurred as people who were very different from others were excluded from the society (Planchamp, 2016). These people are also known as people with special needs or people with disabilities (PWDs). They were often thought as threats to the society and were either killed in infancy or used for entertainment (Kisanji, 1999), even though disability can be part of every human’s lives (World Health Organization [WHO] & World Bank, 2011). Disability, which has no single meaning, is best described as a “complex, dynamic, multidimensional and contested” condition (WHO & World Bank, 2011, p.3).

Students with disabilities. Currently, students with disabilities are defined as pupils among six categories including hearing impaired, sight impaired, speech impaired, physically

impaired, learning difficulties and multiple disabilities in Malaysia (Ministry of Education [MOE], 2013). The Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA; 2004) describes this group of people as individuals with disabilities, and include 13 categories – autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment (ADHD), specific learning disability (dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia), speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (blindness) (Andrew & Lee, 2018). Learning disorders are neurodevelopmental disorders that affect one's academic and/or social learning abilities (Pennington, 2009). The IDEA (2004) further defines learning disability as a disorder in at least one of the fundamental psychological processes involved in language comprehension, speech, or writing, that may be presented in the flawed ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations (IDEA, 2004).

Segregation. Segregation started to emerge in the 20th century when specialized institutions were built for children with disabilities to cater for their educational needs (Planchamp, 2016). For example, specialized institutions such as Institut Medico Educatif (IME) or Centre Medico Pedagogique (CMP) were established in France during that period for children who were disabled in any ways (Planchamp, 2016). In spite of the kind effort, these people were still in a situation of segregation as they could not be fully accepted in their societies.

Integration. In the 1960s, integration emerged, in the effort to combine the special education system and special schools, and to provide the opportunity for students with special learning needs to take part in learning in the mainstream environments (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017). This was facilitated by the introduction of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975) in the US and the publication of The Warnock Report (1978) in Great Britain (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017). However, the problem that occurred

with integration was that the children were required to adapt to the schools instead of having an educational environment that could suit their learning needs created for them. As a result, they had to be removed from the class once more when they could not follow the syllabus, which also brought about major negative consequences. Therefore, a change from integration to inclusion started in the 1970s in the US (Planchamp, 2016), followed by Europe, to integrate students with special needs in the mainstream education and to deal with the limitations of segregation and integration.

Inclusion. Inclusion is the “the act or practice of including students with disabilities in regular school classes” (“Inclusion”, n.d., para. 1). Inclusion started with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its amendments in 1986 and 1992 in the United States, which allowed the rights to education and employment for people with disabilities (Torreno, 2000). The IDEA was introduced and it mandated that all schools must provide free and good public education for all students, including those with learning disabilities; and especially after its reauthorizations in 1997 and 2004, together with the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, education has been more guaranteed for these students (Torreno, 2000).

Additionally, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Malaysia (UNICEF) defines an inclusive education system as one that develops schools in which the children are the centre of attention in teaching, including those with disabilities (UNICEF, 2018); and provides “full support and optimal environment for each student to be taught in the nearest school and in a regular class” (Spasenović & Maksić, 2013). Therefore, it needs to be seen as a transformation process, whereby policymakers and schools gain greater responsibilities to accommodate the needs of a greater diversity of the population of the students (Fasting, 2013).

Inclusion in Malaysia. In Malaysia, everyone is guaranteed the right to education irrespective of their religion, race, descent, place of origin, or disabilities. The MOE provides

free and compulsory education on primary and secondary levels to all students (UNESCO International Bureau of Education & UNESCO Cluster Office in Jakarta, 2009). Special schools, Integrated Special Education Program, and Inclusive Education Program have also been established to meet the needs of children with disabilities (MOE, 2013). Therefore, among a total of 2,693,318 students and 2,041,798 students who were enrolled in primary schools and secondary institutions under the Malaysia MOE, respectively in 2018 (MOE, 2018), a total of 1,296 students were enrolled in the national special education at primary level, 268 students at secondary level, 892 students in secondary-vocational program, and 3 students in Form 6, which amounted to a total of 2,458 registered students who have been enrolled in the national special education in 2018 (MOE, 2018).

Besides, development programs and sectors have also been using principles of disability inclusive development including “awareness, participation, comprehensive accessibility and the twin track approach”, whereby the twin track approach identifies specific steps to include people with disabilities in the mainstream environment. (Christian Blind Mission [CBM], 2012, p. 3).

Employability

Just as proper education is able to provide the necessary skills to increase employability, experiencing educational failure can negatively affect employability. This can be reflected in the employment rates, which are higher for people with higher levels of education, but lower for those with lower levels of education. Among the countries in the OECD, 83% of the population who possessed tertiary education were employed, but 74% of the population with upper secondary and post-secondary education, and 56% of the population without upper secondary education had a job (OECD, 2012).

The study by Shaw and DeLaet (2010) also showed that people with special needs physically or mentally had difficulty being employed, which may delay their independence.

This is reflected in only 35% of the people with special needs contributing in a workforce, while most of them were unemployed (Shaw & DeLaet, 2010), even though they wished to work. Without being able to be independent especially in financial terms, governments of each nation need to support individuals with disabilities in various ways including providing allowances, which are often from the contribution of the working society in the nation. In Malaysia, approximately RM100 million was allocated for the allowance for students with special needs in 2018, and it has been increased to RM142 million in 2019 (MOE, 2018).

Laws and Policies

As human beings, individuals with disabilities have their rights to work as stated in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights [UNDHR] (Office of the UNHCR, 2015). In Article 23, it has been stated that that everyone is entitled to the right of work. In Article 25, it has been stated that everyone is entitled to the right to a decent living which allows him to take good care of his health and well-being, and those of his families, as well as to receive necessary social services, and in Article 29, it has been stated that everyone holds a responsibility to the community where they can develop their personality most freely and to the fullest possible. In order to work, people need to receive proper education and learn the necessary work skills first, which makes education human right.

Many policies that protect people and their welfare regarding the rights of individuals to education have been established, revised, and reinforced. The right to education is also elaborated in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In Article 26 in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (Office of the UNHCR, 2015) it is stated that “everyone has the right to education” (p. 7). The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) also disallows education opportunities to be held back because of differences such as gender, race, language, religion, nationality, socioeconomical status and ability. In addition to that, the UNESCO Salamanca Statement, appeals to international community to endorse

the approach of inclusive education. Many countries have endorsed the Salamanca Statement and the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (UNESCO, 1994) to strengthen the practice of inclusion (Nilholm, & Göransson, 2017), and Malaysia is included.

There is also strong support for education for everyone by the OECD. The OECD has also made five recommendations to elevate issues in educational equity, which are to remove grade repetition, to avoid the early tracking of students but to put off selection to upper secondary, to manage schools to reduce segregation and inequities, to allocate funding strategies for the needs of students and schools, and to design pathways for upper secondary education to help all students complete their education.

In the United Kingdom (UK), the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years was published in January 2015 to integrate the support for students with learning disabilities in their future studies and work (Hanson, Codina, & Neary, 2017). In the US, the IDEA 2004, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and its amendment in 2008 (Ascherman & Shaftel, 2017) were mandated to ensure education for students with special needs.

In Malaysia, students in lower primary classes no longer need to sit for examinations, while their examinations will be replaced by assessments based on their development in learning (Menon & Priya, 2018); and the Zero Reject Policy has also been implemented since January 2019, whereby all children with special needs must be included in the education system (Azmi, 2018). Under the Zero Reject Policy, education will be provided for the students in accordance to their abilities, either through the Inclusive Education Programme (IEP) in mainstream schools, Special Education Integrated Programme (SEIP) or the Special Education School (SEP) for both primary and secondary levels (Azmi, 2018).

Transition from Adolescence into Adulthood

The transition from adolescence into young adulthood is defined as a period from 18 to 21 years old, when individuals experience major changes in life (Lenz, 2001) and exemplifies a major developmental challenge for all people (Fegert, Hauth, Banaschewski, & Freyberger, 2017). It is a process of an individual moving from adolescence to adulthood in every area, including home, health care, education, and community (Shaw, & DeLaet, 2010). The changes they experience during this transition may cause instability in their lives as they need to make adjustments, build new skills, or to learn to deal with novel experiences to face the changes (Lenz, 2001). Some people can have a successful transition, but there are some who cannot (Fegert, Hauth, Banaschewski, & Freyberger, 2017). This is also because the period between adolescence and adulthood is a vulnerable period in which mental disorders may either develop or intensify (Fegert, Hauth, Banaschewski, & Freyberger, 2017).

Before the 19th century, in an agrarian society, the shift from childhood to adulthood was marked and celebrated with rituals. After a change in the structure of the economy of the society in the US, youths started to have more opportunities in getting education and jobs, and individuals who transition from adolescence into adulthood were viewed to have attained physical maturity, but immature in social and education aspects, financially dependent on parents, and unready to take up adult responsibilities (Lenz, 2001). In the modern society, the transition from adolescence to adulthood is an important event in one's life as it happens during the final years of high school, when they go through graduation and settle into their new roles as young adults, in which they assume greater responsibilities and independence (Lenz, 2001). As young adults, many of them move out of their homes and live separately from their families for further education, work, or to establish their own family (Lenz, 2001).

While the transition from adolescence to adulthood is a challenging process for non-disabled people, it is even more challenging for those with special needs. According to Pandey and Agarwal (2013), policies, advocacy programs, and employment plans which

failed to cater for the needs of adolescents and young adults with special needs; the failure of programs designed for non-disabled students to meet the needs of those with special needs in social, psychological, education, and economic areas; and their personal physical, sensory, cognitive and communicative challenges, and environmental limitation are great challenges for them to transition smoothly from adolescence to adulthood (Pandey & Agarwal, 2013).

Context of the Present Study

Many developed countries have been taking great measures to ensure quality education for their students with special needs and to help them to have a smooth transition from adolescence into adulthood. In the UK, there are integrated schools and classrooms set up for students with learning disabilities, where they are also offered functional life skills curriculum, community based instruction, social and personal skills development/training, and vocational assessment and education for career (Hanson, Codina, & Neary, 2017).

Business and industry connections have also been built for them, as well as the development of individualized and comprehensive plans that cover the development of the students' self-determination and advocacy (Hanson, Codina, & Neary, 2017). To prepare the students for work, supported internships or employment, paid or unpaid work experience, employment preparation program, enterprise education, social skills training, and student focused planning are provided for them, and their families are also involved in the programs to give them an even stronger support (Hanson, Codina, & Neary, 2017).

In the US, students with disabilities are supported in their education as they are provided with extended test duration, silent and private venues for exams, have the tests read aloud for them, note-takers, recordings of sessions of class, tutoring services, and specialized programs to cope with their studies (Ascherman & Shaftel, 2017). Other forms of support include the Individualized Education Program (IEP), Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists (CAPs), advocacy for students with learning disabilities, and self-advocacy training

(Ascherman & Shaftel, 2017). As they enter work, there are workplace accommodations whereby the workstations and schedules are modified to cater for their needs, with the addition of screen reading or dictation software, written instructions, extra training, and assistance with task prioritization and organization (Ascherman & Shaftel, 2017). The Job Accommodation Network, a federal agency in the US Department of Labor, has also been set up to support employees with disabilities. Furthermore, the vocational rehabilitation in the US helps students with learning disabilities to prepare for employment and to get employed (Ascherman & Shaftel, 2017).

For students with learning disabilities in Malaysia to transition into the workforce, there are special schools, the Integrated Special Education Program, and the Inclusive Education Program (Nilholm & Göransson, 2017); the 1% Policy on Employment Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in the Public Sector (Jamil & Saidin, 2018; Menon, 2018); and job coaches who have been trained to support students with learning disabilities as they enter the workforce (Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit [MAMPU], 2019a).

In spite of the efforts mentioned above, Malaysian students with learning disabilities are still struggling to transition into postsecondary education and work. Moreover, the special education in Malaysia is also faced with various challenges such as limited financial resources, lack of facilities, low student readiness, no clear guideline for equitable examination system, limited professional resources, limited suitable teaching materials, and poor early intervention programs (Nasir & Efendi, 2016). These challenges reflect some of the limitations of the policies in protecting the rights of students with disabilities. Therefore, there are political, knowledge, and implementation gaps in the ways developed countries (i.e. the UK and the US) and Malaysia support students with learning disabilities in their transition into adulthood.

Purpose of the Present Study

This study aims to compare the ways students with learning disabilities are supported in their transition into postsecondary education and into work in the UK, US, and in Malaysia. This is guided by the following research questions:

Research question 1: What are the policies for individuals with learning disabilities in the UK, US, and Malaysia?

Research question 2: What are the educational supports for students with learning disabilities for their transition into postsecondary education in the UK, US, and Malaysia?

Research question 3: What are the employment supports for students with learning disabilities for their transition into the workforce in the UK, US, and Malaysia?

CHAPTER TWO

METHOD

Research Design

Research framework. The qualitative research framework was adopted in this study to gain insight into the ways students with learning disabilities are supported in their transition from adolescence into adulthood in the UK, US, and Malaysia.

This study is a preliminary comparative study involving systematic literature review. This approach to comparative analysis was used to compare the supports for students with learning disabilities in the UK, US, and Malaysia. It also attempted to “fill a void in the literature available to students and scholars in both special education and comparative education” (Mazurek & Winzer, 1994, p. xi). Mazurek and Winzer (1994) stated that comparative studies in special education worked as an antidote to the negative effects of the fragmentation of related academic works in the field. This was done by connecting the knowledge of support systems for students with learning disabilities in various studies and literatures by comparing them in a few countries to identify gaps (Mazurek & Winzer, 1994).

The approach to literature review in the present study was a systematic literature review, which used a systematic, explicit, and accountable method to review literatures (Gough, 2012). Systematic reviews apply rigorous, objective, and transparent methods for a comprehensive study of literatures (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006), which require designing a protocol. This is important to avoid bias in the selection of publication (Honingh, Bondarouk, & Brandsen, 2018). Through a systematic review, researchers can also identify aspects where progress have been made and future directions of the research (Vries, Bekker, & Tummers, 2016).