Conceptualizing Self-Awareness as a Correlate for Career Development of Students with Disabilities

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

The lifelong process of career development poses special challenges for people with disabilities. Although the career development of individuals with disabilities is not widely discussed in the literature, key pieces of legislation enacted or reauthorized in the 1990s indicates a backdrop from that perspective. Employers are increasingly recognizing that a diverse and inclusive workforce is critical to success in the 21st century global economy. This is increasingly recognized as opportunities have opened up, in recent decades, both in in-service training and in the open labour market. Yet in many countries such as Cameroon, the potential of many persons with disabilities remains untapped, as they frequently do not have equal access to training in employable skills, relevant to the labour market in which they seek to work, either in formal employment, in self-employment or small businesses in the informal economy. This article looked at self-awareness as a guide for career development of students with disabilities. Career development is the outcome of actions on career plan, which starts as early as childhood, when children starts having an idea of what they want to be in future. For students with disabilities, the challenges are enormous considering that; they face special changes based on their special needs. Overcoming the challenges of career development is not always easy for students with disabilities, but having an awareness of themselves, can act as a guide in their career development process. This article briefly presents the influence of self-awareness on the career development process of students with disabilities. These Employment issues for persons with disabilities underscore the need for a multifaceted career development programme particularly for developing countries such as Cameroon. Career development which is a cyclical process involves self-knowledge about personality, interests, skills, and abilities; understanding of the world of work and the requirements of specific occupations; and the ability to match one's abilities and skills satisfactorily with an occupation and a work environment. Other aspects that influence the process are occupational aspirations, self-efficacy expectations, and career maturity. Despite these conceptual and methodological problems, there is still a need for a conceptual framework to guide career development counsellors in tracking and facilitating the career development of persons with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

The wish of every individual as they grow older in life is to have a career from which they can be financially independent, socially comfortable, be productive in the society and have a sense of self-respect. Therefore questions such as: 'what will I become in future? Is one which everyone at one point in time or another is being confronted with? According to Block (2014), it is never too early to start thinking about your future. LaValley (2009) expressed that, for students with disabilities, questions such as; what do I become in the future? Is one that does not foster hope and excitement; but rather creates dread and frustration? Such students, struggle through school without seeing the meaning in education as pertains to their life and future career. Shingleton (1977, p. 51), in Klover (1983), views a career as an "ever-changing process of planning that involves coordinating interests, abilities, attitudes, economics, and decision-making." According Dictionary.com (2018), a career is an occupation or profession, especially one requiring special training, followed as one's life work.

A career is a very integral aspect in life. Most often people define themselves with relation to their career, as such, having a career can sometime make one feel fulfilled in life. Levinson and Palmer (2005) articulated that a career can provide a sense of accomplishment, pride and have an enormous effect on our overall life satisfaction, or it can serve as a source of frustration and dissatisfaction. It is important to note that, people do not just get up one day and find themselves in a career; they go through the process of career development, which is a developmental phase.

Anastasia (2016) defined career development as a process spanning over an individual's lifetime that inevitably moulds his work identity. She further explained that, it is a lifelong process, starting as early as that point in their childhood when for example, a child saw a fire-fighter save someone from a burning building and, in complete admiration, declares, "I want to be a fire-fighter when I grow up". Judging from this definition, all the career choices we make while in school, which guides the major subjects we undertake in school, are all aspects of career development, because you are doing so towards achieving career in future. Super (1953) called this stage of career development the 'Growth Stage'. Some people go through the process of career development successfully and secure a career for themselves, while others are unable to sustain the process, secure a career and get a job for themselves.

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES ON HIRING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The growing inclusion of disability in company diversity strategies is a positive development, and one that the disability employment service system could well take advantage of in attempting to reverse the consistently low employment rates among the working-age people with disabilities in Cameroon in particular and African in general. Moreover, the economic downturn that began in 2008 had a disproportionate negative impact on employment for people with disabilities (Fogg, Harrington, & McMahon, 2010; Kaye, 2010). These data notwithstanding, studies show that many people with disabilities want to work (Livermore, Goodman, & Wright, 2007). Innovations are needed on multiple fronts to increase employment for people with disabilities. As world's economies continue to recover from the recent recession, vocational rehabilitation (VR) and other disability employment service providers need to develop effective business partnerships to help employers recognize the contributions that people with disabilities can make to the workplace.

Although people with disabilities face multiple employment barriers, one factor believed to contribute to their low employment rate is reluctance on the part of employers to hire from this pool of prospective workers. Employer attitudes towards and concerns about hiring people with disabilities have been well described in literature. In a comprehensive review of the literature on employer attitudes toward people with disabilities, Unger found evidence suggesting that the type and severity of disability can impact employers' hiring decisions (Unger, 2002). Some studies suggest that employers have greater concerns about hiring individuals with invisible disabilities, such as mental and emotional conditions, than they have about hiring people with physical disabilities, and that employers tend to have more positive views about employees with physical disabilities than those with psychiatric or intellectual disabilities (Unger, 2002). More recent studies suggest that employers may be concerned that employees with disabilities have lower productivity, higher absenteeism, lack the necessary skills or require greater supervision compared to those without disabilities (Domzal, Houtenville, & Sharma, 2008; Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011).

In addition to concerns related to job performance, studies show that some employers lack awareness of people with disabilities as a potential talent pool or have difficulty finding qualified candidates with disabilities (Taylor, Krane, & Orkis, 2010). A survey of employers conducted by the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) found that while larger companies were more likely to actively recruit people with disabilities, small and mid-sized companies often lacked the information needed to recruit these workers and were unfamiliar with resources that might support them to hire and accommodate workers with disabilities, such as OneStop Career Centers, the Job Accommodation Network, or the employer assistance and resource network (Domzal et al., 2008). In a review of research on employers' views, Luecking (2008),

suggests that this lack of knowledge among employers indicates that disability employment marketing efforts have fallen short of creating awareness of people with disabilities as a viable workforce.

A lack of understanding and concerns about obligations for instance under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) can deter employers from recruiting workers with disabilities. Employers have expressed concerns about potential liability and the prospect of facing disability related litigation as well as the costs associated with providing accommodations to workers with disabilities, even though research shows that most accommodations can be provided at no or relatively low cost (Domzal et al., 2008; Hernandez et al., 2008; Job accommodation network, 2012; Luecking, 2008). A recent study by Chan et al. (2010) found that employers with greater knowledge of the ADA and job accommodations had more positive perspectives on hiring people with disabilities than those with lower levels of knowledge. Beyond ADA-related concerns, employers have also expressed concerns about the cost of workers compensation insurance and health care coverage for workers with disabilities.

To a lesser extent, employers have also expressed general concerns related to a lack of comfort or familiarity with disabilities as well as concerns regarding the attitudes of managers, co-workers and customers (Domzal et al., 2008; Unger, 2007). Despite concerns, studies have shown that employers with experience working with individuals with disabilities have more favorable attitudes toward employees with disabilities, and display greater willingness to hire other individuals with disabilities (Hernandez et al., 2008, Luecking, 2008; Unger, 2002, 2007). Surveys of employers who have hired people with disabilities found that employers perceive workers with disabilities as easy to supervise, to have productivity levels equal to or higher then employees without disabilities, and to have low absentee rates (Hernandez et al., 2008; Kaye et al., 2011).

Research points to decidedly mixed experiences with the publicly-funded disability employment service system among employers. Public system services include those provided by state agencies, state-funded Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) organizations, One Stop Career Centers, and others. Some studies show that employers find employment service providers and programs to offer critical assistance in identifying qualified applicants and providing supports to those hired, and to be a good source of information about disability (Gilbride, Stensrud, Vandergoot, & Golden, 2003). However, studies also suggest that employers sometimes find the complexity of the public service system confusing, are frustrated by the lack of coordination among various providers soliciting job opportunities on behalf of people with disabilities, and perceive disability employment service providers as lacking the knowledge and skills to effectively operate in

a business arena. In recent years there has been an increased recognition that the system needs to develop more business-focused, "demand-side" approaches that focus on understanding employer needs and carefully matching job seekers to the demands of the workplace (Fraser, 2008; Hernandez & MacDonald, 2007; Luecking, 2008).

DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING

Negative attitudes are usually the most significant barrier that people with disabilities face and it often underlies the failure to address other barriers such as those related to accessibility, laws and policies etc. Disability awareness training or disability equity training is an approach to dispelling such negative attitudes. Find opportunities to explain disability inclusion to those who need to understand the concept better. You may need to educate staff, influential people in the community, and employers. Involve qualified people with disabilities in the training so that they come to be perceived as competent leaders and trainers by those who you are trying to influence. From a rights-based perspective, disabled people should be included in matters that involve them, either directly or indirectly. Including them in training is a strong message about inclusion.

If there is a legal basis for inclusion, and in most countries there will be some legal basis, include the legal framework in the training. Your vocational training system should have as its mission to serve everyone in the community, especially if there is a legal basis. If you find the need to target the general community or businesses to get employers more involved, build and communicate an economic and business case for inclusion as well. Many people with disabilities live in poverty. By assisting them in developing marketable skills and securing employment you are strengthening local economies and reducing the costs related to disability dependence, freeing up families and community resources for other purposes. Businesses will have access to a broader customer base and talent pool, the chance to benefit from a more diverse workforce, and access to trained and qualified people with disabilities to help them comply with quotas or related legislation.

Disabled persons and their families may also need to be included as participants in awareness-raising. As noted previously, some disabled people may doubt that they are truly welcome in vocational development activities and some parents or family members may have concerns about their disabled family member travelling or attending a training programme designed to result in employment.

Challenges Faced by Students with Disabilities in Career Development

Considering how important having a career is for an individual, it become very challenging for anyone who is unable to secure a career in life. Levinson and Palmer (2005) explained that, finding the right career or simply knowing what it might be is not easy even for highly skilled individuals, doing so is even more difficult for those who lack adequate training or face special challenges such as disabilities. Owen, Froman and Moscom, (1981) in Ihenacho, Darma and Abdullahi, (2008) defined students with disabilities as those that have deviated from the societal norms (above or below average) to the extent that adapted programmes or specialized methods are required to meet their needs. They include learners who experience difficulties in learning as well as those whose performances are superior, that modification in curriculum and instructions are necessary to make them achieve their maximum potentials. Dunn (1996) in Levinson and Palmer (2005) articulated that, compared to their peers, students with disabilities are more likely to experience unemployment, underemployment, low pay and job dissatisfaction.

In analysing the challenges students with disability face with regards to the career development process, La Valley (2009) noted that, students with disabilities, face challenges in selecting proper career goals and appreciating career aspiration, 'While working with freshman in the spring of 2008, he noticed the struggle which was quite apparent and concerning in completing an interest survey about careers. He observed students all answered "yes" to questions concerning subjects they have never studied, and when talking to them about "what they wanted to be when they grew up," the responses varied from veterinarian to underwater welder to air traffic controller and so on'. He distinguished that, these students with disabilities were not making informed and realistic choices. Their responses revealed that they lack an awareness of their strength and weakness (self-awareness) and as such could not make career choices which matches their strength. Reddy (2016) explained that, if anyone fails to understand the interest and skills set within him/her, it will be quite difficult to choose a suitable career. Generally, a poor career choice, start affecting an individual's career development from his/her school days because, the career choices students make while in school, influence the subjects they chose, which letter on influence their performance and the way they develop in that career path. Therefore choosing a career part without clear awareness of yourself, may lead students to frustration, poor performance and eventually school dropout. According to Levison and Palmer (2005), dropout cause students with disabilities to be unprepared and less likely to obtain a job. In a quest to appreciate and remedy the situation, this study seeks to understand; what is self-awareness? How is it developed among students with disabilities? And how self-awareness influence the career development process of students with disabilities.

The Concept of Self Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to understand yourself, it include recognizing your strengths and weaknesses and the ability to manage your emotions. Guber (2015) defined self-awareness as a "conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives and desires." In that regard, Cherry (2019) explained that, self-awareness involves being aware of different aspects of the self; including traits, behaviors, and feelings. Essentially, it is a psychological state in which oneself becomes the focus of attention. Self-awareness is one of the first components of the self-concept to emerge. She further stated that, while self-awareness is something that is central to who you are, it is not something that you are acutely focused on at every moment of every day. Instead, self-awareness becomes woven into the fabric of who you are and emerges at different points depending on the situation and your personality. Goleman (1998) identified three component of self-awareness which are; emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence. In other words, it is all about knowing your emotions, your personal strengths and weaknesses, and having a strong sense of your own worth.

How Can Students with Special Needs (Disabilities) Develop Self Awareness

Growing up without having a complete understanding of who you are can be very dangerous. Judging from the ideas of Daniel Goleman (1998), a guru in self-awareness analysis, for an individual to be aware of his or her self, they must be emotionally aware, have self-confidence and be able to do self-assessment. But question here is that; how is self-awareness developed among students with disability? According to Clare (2017), as children grow up, parts of their self-awareness will unfold, but it needs to be nurtured to fulfil its biggest potential along the way. Developing self-awareness requires more than just reading self-development books, it require some practical activities. Some of the ways students with disabilities can develop self-awareness are:

Always have a Self-Reflection
Self-reflection is a critical analysis of yourself. It include aspects such as self-questioning, which provokes a critical examination of your person and letter on bring out an understanding of your strength and weaknesses. Kennedy (2019) explained that, self-awareness is a meditation or serious thought about one's character, actions and motives. It is about taking a step back and to mirror your life, behavior and beliefs. An individual may never be conscious of who he or she really is unless he/she takes out time for self-reflection. Therefore, students with disabilities should frequently do self-reflection in order to know your worth and enhance self-awareness.

Reverse Negative Thoughts.

Most often, having a negative thought about oneself, limits the ability to explore your strength. Without a clear understanding of your strength, progress is limited, self-confidence is lost and self-esteem very low. Students with disabilities should try as much as possible, to reverse the negative impression they have about their disabilities or themselves, because these thoughts interfere with their healthy development and promote false and negative sense of self which limits growth. They should nurture positive mindset and build self-confidence by exploring their worth with a positive mind. For example, encourage yourself by; appreciating yourself for those things you can do in spite of your challenges or disabilities.

Be Patience

Students with disabilities should learn to practice patience in their daily interaction. Patience facilitate one's understanding of his/her emotions. According to Goleman (1998), emotional awareness, is a component of self-awareness. You cannot claim to know yourself, when you cannot manage your emotions. Most often, the information we need for self-awareness is at our fingertips but we miss out because we are impatient to search. So learning to be patient is vital for self-awareness development.

Interact with Others in the Environment

Brinck, (2001) expressed that, interacting with the environment is necessary to distinguish between oneself and the rest of the world. It is only through interaction that one gets to distinguish or identify him/herself from others. When students with disabilities isolate themselves from others, they may not be able to make realistic judgment of self, but interact with others in the environment, leads to the understanding of the consequences of their behavior in the environment and they may tend to make practical judgment about their; ability, interest, strength and weaknesses. After having a clear understanding of how students with disabilities can develop self-awareness, it is important to bring out the benefits of self -awareness, and how it can help these students overcome challenges of career development

The Influence of Self-Awareness on the Career Development Process of Students with Disabilities

Kerka (2002) explained that, career development is a cyclical process that involves self-knowledge about personality, interests, skills, and abilities. He added that, understanding the world of work and the requirements of specific occupations requires; the ability to match one's abilities and skills satisfactorily with an occupation and a work environment. To achieve this, one needs to have a clear understanding of self. Self-awareness will help students with disabilities to;

Acknowledge Issues of Career Interest.

Self-awareness plays a critical role in how students make sense of life experiences. When students with disabilities, learn to know and accept themselves for who they are, understand their strength and weaknesses, they will be able to make subject choices which matches their abilities and interest. In that light, they will be able to stay focus and overcome distraction

Look at the big picture.

Having a clear understanding of self, will help students with disabilities look at a bigger picture of their career vision. They will be able to match their interest, skills and the career choice because they have and understanding of whom they are. In that light building a strong thought of 'I can make it based on my potentials'. Career development for such a student is easier because the mind is ready for the task ahead.

Look at their strength and not to allow their weakness be a taboo among others.

When you are aware of yourself, you will not allow your weaknesses to be seen as a taboo, because you have a clear understanding that, each human being is unique, made up of strengths and weaknesses. Self-awareness will students with disabilities not to be uncomfortable with their weaknesses, but to use their strengths to overcome weaknesses and foster career development

Develop their passions.

Self-awareness help students with disabilities develop their passion. Because self-awareness entails emotional-awareness, self-confidence, understanding of interest, weaknesses and abilities. Kyriaki Raouna (2017) expressed that, with self-awareness comes self-improvement. Therefore, it will be easy for student with disabilities who have self-awareness to develop their passion.

Regulate-Self

In a whole, our ability to engage in self-reflect, facilitates a smooth navigation in our social environment and thus increases the likelihood of survival (Leary, 2004) in (Morin, 2011). More specifically, one major adaptive function of self-awareness is self-regulation, is the ability to alter one's behavior, resist temptation, change one's mood, select a response from various options, and filter irrelevant information. All this will guide students with disability stay focus and overcome challenges in career development

POLICY BENCHMARKS TO ENHANCE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES.

Creating a workplace that is free of discrimination and provides true career opportunities for people with disability requires managers and staff to feel disability-aware and disability-confident and to positively support any adjustments that may be required by employees with disability. A strong knowledge of unconscious bias, workplace adjustment and flexible working policies are key to creating a barrier free and disability-confident workplace. These resources help managers support staff to perform at their best, to ensure they have everything they need and to make certain they are able to thrive in their roles. To build a workplace that is more inclusive of people with disability, there is need to:

- Ensure the Reasonable adjustment policy is current, published and communicated to all employees and is available.
- Ensure managers have a point of contact for one-on-one support to provide advice about supporting people with disability.
- Ensure accessibility guidelines for publishing and printing are current, published, communicated and available.
- Ensure the department's leading with Respect development program suitably encompasses and progresses disability confidence and awareness.
- Ensure the Disability language guide is published, communicated and available.
- Develop a guide for managers for being more inclusive of people with disability in the workplace and publish it, communicate it and make it available
- Provide managers and teams with disability awareness, disability confidence, unconscious bias and any other specific training or experiences to help create inclusive and safe workplaces.
- Analyse relevant People Matter survey results to measure issues such as discrimination and career satisfaction as compared with people without disability.
- Participate in the national Network on Disability Access and Inclusion Index to measure inclusive workplace outcomes.
- Develop and implement professional development programs for employees with disability that focuses on talent and individual needs and potential.
- Investigate opportunities for a dedicated secondment program for long-term employees with disability.
- Develop, communicate and publish a contact list of people who employees with disability can contact for information and support.
- Develop a checklist to ensure key events, internal and external training and e-courses are inclusive and accessible for employees with disability including inclusive venues, inclusive materials, inclusive course activities and inclusive e-learning modules.

CONCLUSION

In the process of career development, students with disabilities just like any other student in school may face certain challenges. But self-awareness is an important factor, which may influence their ability to overcome career development challenges. Regardless of how students with disabilities, feel about themselves, adding the idea of who they really are to their cognitive architecture, will change the way they process information positively and give them the ability to match their interest, skills and abilities with their career interest, and actively overcome career development challenges. Innovations in the public disability employment service system and in company practices related to hiring people with disabilities are needed to reduce the disparity in employment rates between persons with and without disabilities. Employers usually identified substantial but not insurmountable challenges to hiring people with disabilities. To overcome these challenges, employers identified a need for improved coordination in the disability employment service system and a need to improve the exchange of information about the hiring and employment of people with disabilities across businesses and within businesses. We described specific innovations, for example the "account management" model to improve coordination of public employment services and "business-to-business" networks to improve information sharing across businesses. These innovations may help to both increase employment of people with disabilities and benefit employers. We recommend that state-level public disability employment service agencies and employers work together to implement these innovations.

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