

The Role of Guidance Counsellors in the Career Development of Adolescents and Young Adults with Special Needs

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Abstract

Guidance counsellors work individually and with other educators to meet the developmental needs of all students, including those with special needs or disabilities. Significantly, they focus on the academic, career, and personal/social developmental needs of all students, including those with special needs. Inconsistencies in the roles of practising guidance counsellors have caused some specialists in education to begin to address the emerging role of the counsellor regarding students with special needs, especially with respect to their career development. Since the level of happiness an individual exudes in life is closely related to the type of career the person chooses, and other career development activities relating to job retention and advancement, guidance counsellors must endeavour to expose their students to several career development activities in order to help them to successfully, choose occupations, prepare for, enter into and progress in them. This paper discusses what career development is and some theories of career development. It also discusses factors that affect career choice. It highlights who the special needs persons are as well as the role of guidance counsellors in career development of special needs adolescents and young persons.

KeyWords: Guidance Counsellors, Career, Adolescents, young adults and special need.

Introduction

The goal of guidance and counselling is to make it possible for an individual to see and explore his or her unlimited endowed options. Many scholars such as Odeck (1999), Ipaye, (1995), Makinde (1981) opined that the major service areas of guidance and counselling are: educational guidance and counselling which assists students in their curriculum and school life choices, vocational guidance and counselling which assists the individual to choose and prepare for an occupation that is compatible with his interests and aptitudes, and personal and social guidance and counselling which assists the individual to behave appropriately in relation to other members of the society.

As part of vocational guidance and counselling programme, career development enables guidance counsellors to assist individuals to identify and learn the skills by which they can be more effective in planning for and choosing jobs, in making effective transitions and adjustments to work, and in managing their own careers and career transitions effectively. Career development, for most people, is a lifelong process of engaging the work world through choosing among employment opportunities made available to them. It is a process of getting ready to choose, choosing, and continuing to make choices (Brown, Brooks, & Associates, 1996). The National Career Development Association (NCDA) (1993) noted, "Helping individuals increase self-understanding of their abilities, interests, values, and goals is a vital foundation of the career development process" (p. 2). The NCDA suggested that career development activities help students develop positive work habits (for example, organization, following directions, completing assignments on time), set goals, make informed decisions, identify interests and abilities, and explore jobs (for example, job shadowing, and apprenticeships).

A major turning point in adolescents' lives involves the career choice that they make while in senior secondary school. Frequently, it is viewed by family and community as a mere start to workplace readiness; however, this decision plays a major role in establishing youth in a career path that opens as well as closes opportunities. Since some adolescents with special needs like those with severe mental retardation may not even complete secondary school education because of their unique characteristics, the guidance counsellor should endeavour to assist these adolescents in their career development as early as possible. Therefore, whether college-bound or work-bound, meeting the challenge of this developmental milestone is critical in adolescents' lives. This is why career development plans and activities are important for individuals with disabilities.

Besides, career development has been described as the way an individual manages his career either within or between organizations. It includes how a person makes effort to learn new skills, and make improvements to help in his career. Individuals with disabilities should not be left out in career development plans. Like other employees, they want to do good jobs, appreciate constructive supervision, enjoy new challenges and want to get ahead. Therefore, educators must seek to understand their unique needs and challenges as well as tackle their problems by ensuring that necessary career information, plans, and activities are put in place. The ultimate goal is to make persons with special needs become adjusted and successful in life.

Career Development

Career development refers to a developmental process extending over almost the entire life span, through which persons develop the capacity for and engage in work as part of their total life style. According to Callahan and Garner (1997) career development is a dynamic

process that requires individuals to engage in the ongoing assessment, analysis, and synthesis of information about the world of work and self. Career development suggests establishing certain career goals and deciding what criteria may be desirable in attaining the set goals. As individuals set career goals they have better opportunities to become more efficient in their jobs.

Career development refers to both the factors and the processes influencing individual career behaviour and as synonymous with interventions in career behaviour. The term career development, as used in the title of the National Career Development Association (NCDA), had increasingly come to describe both the total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic, and chance factors that combine to shape individual career behaviour over the life span (Sears, 1982) and the interventions or practices that are used "to enhance a person's career development or to enable that person to make more effective career decisions" (Spokane, 1991, p. 22). Thus, inherent in the current usage of the term career development are two sets of theories, or conceptual categories, one that explains the development of career behavior across the life span and the other that describes how career behaviour is changed by particular interventions.

Theories of Career Development

Renowned scholars have developed theories that describe manners in which adolescents make choices about career development. In other words, researchers tend to explain why and how adolescents choose the careers of their choice. For instance, Holland's personality type theory centred on the notion that people fit into one of six personality types namely, realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (RIASEC). Holland (1987) maintained that in choosing a career, people prefer jobs where they can be around others who are like them. They search for environments that will let them use their skills and abilities, while taking on enjoyable problems and roles.

Super (1967, 1976) propounded a career self-concept theory. According to Super an individual's self-concept plays a central role in his or her career choice. Super believes that it is during adolescence that individuals first construct a career self-concept. Super talks of crystallization phase when the adolescents develop ideas about work that mesh with their already existing global self-concept. Next is the specification phase. This is when the adolescents narrow down their choices and initiate behaviour that enables them to enter some type of career. The implementation phase is when the adults complete their education or training and enter the world of work. The stabilization phase is when a specific, appropriate career is made and finally when the individuals seek to advance their careers and to reach higher status positions. This phase is called consolidation. For Super, a time perspective was always centrally important to the career development process:

"It has always seemed important to maintain three time perspectives: the past, from which one has come; the present, in which one currently functions; and the future, toward which one is moving. All three are of indisputable importance, for the past shapes the present and the present is the basis for the future. But if I were forced to declare a preference in orientation to time, it would be for the future - even after more than fifty years of work experience" (Super, 1990, p197)

In 1996, Krumboltz developed the Learning Theory of Careers Choice and Counselling (LTCC) to provide 'a guide to practising career counsellors who want to know what they can do to help people troubled with a variety of career-related concerns'. Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) identified four fundamental

trends with which people must cope when making career choices in modern society and with which careers counsellors must help. First, people need to expand their capabilities and interests. Therefore, counsellors should assist clients to explore new activities, rather than routinely directing them on the basis of measured interests that reflect limited past experiences. Second, people need to prepare for changing work tasks: As a result, learning new skills for the changing labour market can be very stressful for clients. Counsellors have a role to play in helping them cope with stress as they learn to develop new skills on an ongoing basis. Third, people need to be empowered to take action. In other words, many issues relevant to career decisions are often overlooked in guidance practice (for example, a family's reaction to taking a particular job). This could cause a fear of the decision making process (referred to by Krumboltz as 'zeteophobia') or cause delay in making a decision. Counsellors need to be prepared to help with these issues as well as providing effective support during the exploration process. Fourth, career counsellors need to play an extended role. This entails that career and personal counselling should be integrated. Issues such as burnout, career change, peer relationships, obstacles to career development and the work role itself together with its effect on other life roles are examples of potential problems that should attract the support of the careers practitioner.

Factors that Affect Career Development

As identified by the theories of career choice highlighted above, one major variable that affects how people choose their occupations is personality traits. Holland (1987) argued that the choice of an occupation is an expression of personality and members of an occupation share similar personality characteristics. Career interest is a second factor that affects the choice of a career. An interest may be conceived in terms of an activity which an individual engages in for the interest of it without desiring for an external reward. The reward is in the performance of the activity the person does.

Personality and interest are not the only criteria for choosing a career. An individual's aptitude and intellectual abilities are equally of great importance. An aptitude is a potential for success in an area after undergoing some training but a layman may define aptitude as a flair for something. The context in which people live, their personal aptitudes, and educational attainment are other things that do influence people's career choice. (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001).

Similarly, skills and values also affect peoples' choices. Values are the guiding principles that are ordered in importance and serve as standards for judging and justifying actions (Schwartz, 1992). In addition, Osakinle and Adegoye (2008) identified factors that influence adolescents' choice of career as: sex, location of choice maker, environment, school influence (peer and curriculum content), and religious affiliation, child rearing and family values.

In the opinion of Morris and Levinson (1995); Pierce, McDermott, & Butkus, (2003), although intelligence is associated with career maturity and the development of decision making skills, factors other than skills, abilities, and personality play a major role in career development and satisfaction for people with mental retardation. Factors such as interests, social opportunities, emotional rewards, and economic benefits influence career choices (of most adolescents, including those with cognitive limitations) (Szymanski, Hershenson, Enright, & Ettinger, 1996).

In addition, Krumboltz, Mitchell and Jones (1976) opined that there are four factors that affect career choice of individuals. These are: **genetic endowment and special abilities (such as race, gender, physical appearance and characteristics)**, environmental conditions and events (like social, cultural & political; economic forces; natural forces & natural resources), learning experiences (instrumental learning experience which consists of: preceding circumstances/stimulus; behavioural responses (overt and covert); consequences, associative learning experience, and task approach skills (personal standards of performance; work habits; emotional responses).

Categories of students with Special Needs

Ormrod (2003) enumerated the special kinds of people with special needs to include persons with: learning disabilities, attention-deficit hyperactivity (ADHD) speech and communication disorders, emotional or behavioural disorders, autism, mental retardation, physical and health impairments, visual impairments, hearing loss, severe and multiple disabilities and giftedness. Further, Ormrod gave a brief description of each of these categories. According to her, individuals with learning disabilities possess difficulties in specific cognitive processes (examples, in perception, language, memory, or metacognition) that cannot be attributed to such other disabilities as mental retardation, emotional or behavioural disorders, or sensory impairments. Persons with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder have disorders marked by either or both of these characteristics (a) difficulty focusing and maintaining attention and (b) frequent hyperactive and impulsive behaviour.

Also, speech and communication disorders refer to impairments in spoken language (example, mispronunciations of certain sounds, stuttering, or abnormal syntactical patterns) or language comprehension significantly interfere with classroom performance. Emotional or behavioural disorders describe emotional states or behaviours that are present over a substantial period of time and significantly disrupt academic learning and performance. Autism refers to condition marked by varying degrees of impaired social interaction and communication, repetitive behaviours and restricted interests; a strong need for a predictable environment also commonly observed. Mental retardation is used to describe a condition marked by significantly below average general intelligence and deficits in adaptive behaviour (that is, in practical and social intelligence).

Physical and health impairments refer to physical or medical conditions (usually long-term) marked by one or more of these three characteristics: limited energy and strength, reduced mental alertness, or little muscle control. Visual impairments, describe malfunctions of the eyes or optic nerves that prevent normal vision even with corrective lenses. Hearing loss refers to malfunctions of the ear or associated nerves that interfere with the perception of sounds within the frequency range of normal speech. Severe and multiple disabilities refer to the presence of two or more disabilities, the combination of which requires significant (adaptations and highly specialized educational services. Giftedness refers to unusually high ability or aptitude in a specific academic field, creativity, visual or performing arts are leadership (Ormrod, 2003).

Guidance Counsellors and Career Development of Persons with Special Needs

Several scholars such as Ormrod (2003), Heward, (2003), Wadsworth, Milson and Cocco (2004) opined that guidance counsellors are professionals trained in psychological perspective who typically render numerous tangible services to parents, students and teachers of all students, including those with special needs or disabilities. In the light of the role of the guidance

counsellor in the career development of adolescents and young adults, the following fundamental services will be discussed: (a) identification of students with special needs, (b) individual and group counselling and (c) vocational rehabilitation

(a) Identification of Students with special Needs

One very important aspect of guidance counsellor functions is matching men with suitable jobs. Guidance counsellors are in key positions to assist with identifying students who have special needs. Gearheart and Gearheart (1990) noted that educational assessment enables the educator to gain information about the student and such information about the student in most cases, are used in some types of decision-making. Lerner (1997) opined that educational specialists engage in assessment of learners for five major reasons namely, referral, screening, classification or placement, instructional or programme planning, and monitoring students' progress.

According to American School Counsellors Association (ASCA) (1999), the primary role of guidance counsellors in regard to special needs students is to serve on multidisciplinary teams that work to identify the educational and counselling needs of special needs students, share this information with appropriate faculty and staff, and use a team approach to address those needs. To facilitate this process, school counselors can develop their own checklist of student behaviors or characteristics (Lockhart, 2003). As noted by Reis and Colbert (2004) without appropriate knowledge and understanding of the needs and characteristics of specific groups of students with disabilities, guidance counsellors may not know how to contribute to their academic, career, and personal/ social development.

Once a student has been identified as having a disability, the next step would be to develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) following a fairly standard procedure (Lerner, 1997, Lockhart, 2003). An IEP has been described as a management tool for ensuring that the education designed for an individual student is appropriate for that student's special learning needs and that the special education services are actually delivered and monitored (Lerner, 1997). Guidance counsellors can help the IEP team contextualize classroom activities such as choice making and social skill development as important components of vocational preparation.

Moreover, Odeleye (2010) maintained that the guidance counsellor is well positioned to identify pupils with special needs, for instance, the gifted and help them reach their life goals by referring such cases to appropriate authorities. He further averred that the introduction and sustenance of guidance and counselling culture at preprimary and primary levels of education is crucial to identifying the special needs children. Therefore, it is necessary that counsellors collaborate with other professionals to identify students with special needs as early as possible. This is because career development planning beginning in early childhood and extending through adulthood can promote employability and career advancement especially for persons with disabilities.

(b) Individual and Group Counselling

This is an important service rendered to all students by guidance counsellors. Regular meetings with the guidance counsellor for either individual students or groups of students with special needs can be integrated into the IEP process to address educational and counselling needs, including career development plans and activities. The American School Counsellor Association National Model (ASCA, 2003) provides a framework for guidance counsellors to help all students to "develop career awareness," "develop employment readiness," "acquire

career information," "identify career" goals," "acquire knowledge to achieve career goals," and "apply skills to achieve career goals" (Campbell & Dahir, 1997, pp. 25-27).

Career development activities within the educational setting may be the best opportunity for a student with special need to explore the world of work before entering private or state-federal vocational rehabilitation service programmes for adults that focus primarily on job placement and tenure. Individualized career development curricula can help document that students with special needs and their parents, educators, and advocates have information from which to make meaningful choices about the activities and outcomes of the IEP. The counsellor can teach decision-making skills. Guided decision-making exercises and planned opportunities for students to make important decisions and experience consequences in a safe environment are frequently used methods of teaching decision-making skills.

The guidance counselor may have to apply different strategies with different categories of students with special needs when delivering career guidance to these students. For instance, the future career paths of many students with mental retardation are likely to reflect a succession of employed positions at different settings rather than a single, sustained placement, because employment and job tenure continue to be low for adults with mental retardation (Pierce, McDermott, & Butkus, 2003; Schaffer, Banks, & Kregel, 1991). Therefore, the guidance counsellor may expose young persons with mental retardation to several school-based learning opportunities aimed at equipping them with useful vocational skills. These activities are particularly important for people with cognitive developmental disabilities who, unlike their peers without cognitive disabilities, may have limited opportunities to participate in social, work, volunteer, and community activities; and thus may have limited exposure to occupational role models.

For example, a vocational skill set that will transfer to multiple employment opportunities in clerical and reception occupations may include social skills (for example, appropriate socialization with peers and customers), mechanical skills (for example, the use of office equipment), safety skills (for example, seeking assistance), communication skills (for example, telephone etiquette), and hygiene skills (for example, appropriate dress and professional appearance). Individuals with mental retardation often have difficulties generalizing work behavior to new work settings; thus, the opportunity to practice skills across employment contexts is an essential part of developing a career that is resilient to changes in the labor market (Szymanski, 1999).

Further, for students with learning disabilities or for those who are academically gifted and talented, counsellors can encourage these students' teachers and parents to emphasize student abilities and talents, as opposed to focusing solely on their deficits. They can also encourage the acquisition and use of compensation strategies to address learning disabilities, such as books on tape and other technological aids, as well as the acquisition of targeted study and learning strategies (Reis, McGuire, & Neu, 2000). These materials can centre on career awareness, vocational interests predominantly associated with their career choices, educational requirements of careers they desired and other career related issues.

Abilities, interests, and talents can be assessed and counsellors can encourage the use of some time both in school and at home that focuses on the development of students' talents and strengths. When educators view the successful development of talents in these students with optimism and hope, more opportunities for school success may occur. Educators and counsellors also can help students to learn higher-order problem solving and information processing skills. As students' academic performances improve, students' self-confidence will increase and this

will in turn enable the students to understand that they can perform assigned duties at work and they will readily pursue their desired careers with ease. Counsellors also can help to encourage both teachers and parents to find enrichment opportunities that will positively engage students, possibly focusing on mentorships.

In career development, mentors can play vital roles like advising on job skills, coaching, encouraging, networking contacts, references, and introductions, motivating, and broadening perspectives about the transferability of skills and interests, as well as future career directions to consider (Osakinle, 2010). For students with special needs be it learning disabilities, mental retardation, visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech disorders and others, guidance counsellors can help their parents access important information regarding future labour market trends, typical career trajectories in a variety of occupational groups, and career development activities that can be adapted to assist students with career success. Such information is critical if young people and their parents are to participate meaningfully in planning that focuses on the future needs and preferences of the student (Whitney-Thomas, Shaw, Honey, & Butterworth, 1998).

Guidance counsellors also have an important role in advocating for broadbased career plans that focus on the student's interests and abilities and that will increase future career options. Vocational exploration activities implemented at the elementary- and middle-school levels can prepare students with special needs for example, students with mental retardation to make career choices in young adulthood (Black & Langone, 1997).

For example, through career exploration activities, the salient features of a career as a firefighter for a student with moderate mental retardation are the opportunity to gain respect through wearing a uniform, the perceived social opportunities with fellow firefighters, and the enhanced self-esteem through identification with valued community members. These same components can be constructed within a sheltered work experience that permits that student to train as a "fire safety officer," wear a white shirt as a uniform, conduct fire safety and fire extinguisher checks with staff, participate in fire drills, and meet with firefighters during a routine business inspection. The student's interest and skills in emergency preparedness will increase the student's value to future employers concerned about on-the-job safety and may help this student achieve a succession of work opportunities that are increasingly congruent with and incorporate the student's long-range career goals (for example, fire department custodial staff, maintenance assistant, clerical assistant). As a result, guidance counsellors should engage in a lot of vocational exploration activities. Besides, guidance counsellors may focus on helping students develop knowledge of personal interests and abilities and foster an awareness of careers as a succession of related paid and unpaid work activities (Black & Langone; Reid & Bray, 1997).

People with special needs may lack realistic information about occupations and careers on which to base their interests. Job experiences play an important part in the development of maturity with regard to vocational interests, abilities, and traits (Black & Langone, 1997; Levinson, Peterson, & Elston, 1994; Pumpian, Fisher, Certo, & Smalley, 1997). Career interests may be stimulated through short-term job tryout experiences and job shadowing experiences that include documentation of preferences and performance. Information regarding the student's preferences of activities, work environments, emotional and monetary rewards, and supervision can help students and parents to identify congruent short-term occupational choices and long-term career outcomes. Likewise, accurate information regarding performance may assist the student and transition planning team in identifying the training, work experiences, effort, and timeline that will be required to achieve the student's career preferences.

(c) Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational rehabilitation is a process of restoring individuals with disabilities to a maximum usefulness of which he is capable physically, mentally and vocationally. According to the International Labour Office (ILO) (1973) “The term “Vocational rehabilitation” means that part of the continuous and coordinated process of rehabilitation which involves the provision of those vocational services, example, vocational guidance, vocational training and selective placement, designed to enable a disabled person to secure and retain suitable employment”.

Mba (1995) noted that the rationale for rehabilitation is the principle that in an organized society each member should have a right to an opportunity to work for a living and to make some contribution to the development of the society. Further, Mba stressed that as part of career development, vocational rehabilitation is a way of helping persons with special needs to overcome the disabling conditions involved with disabilities. It involves building new lives. Services of vocational rehabilitation generally include professional services rendered by physicians, teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists, physiotherapists, guidance counsellors and social workers. These services are made available to the rehabilitates (Mba, 1995).

Conclusion

Just like other aspects of education of adolescents and young persons with disabilities, career development which is a lifelong process, can be quite challenging. There could be attitudinal barriers in employment. The issue of competition for preferred job is there. The self-concept of the adolescent may be low and this could hinder his or her perception and performance at work. Challenges could arise as a result of cognitive deficits or other physical, psychological issues. Thus, career counselling becomes mandatory for every adolescent and young person who intends to succeed at school as well as at work place. Throughout the young person’s life, the guidance counsellor should find ways of assisting in his or her vocational adjustment through career guidance and counseling programmes.

To sum up, appropriate early identification of persons with special needs, individual and group counselling (that would include exploration of vocational areas, skills, and career interests, goal setting, decision –making skills, mentoring) as well as vocational rehabilitation, should not only be encouraged and practised, but should also be part and parcel of their career development plans to enhance the overall career adjustment of persons with special needs.

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