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Full Length Research Paper

Blooming occupation undertaken guidance and counselling action for learners with disabilities: Preparation for employment

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This research explored the role of guidance and counselling in preparing learners for work from primary to university levels of education. It explored current status of learners with visual impairment regarding their ability to understand abilities and potentials, realistically accepting limitations and making independent career decisions. The study adopted Career Development and Self-efficacy Theories as bases of exploration. Proponents of these theories assume that career development process facilitates development of vocational self-concept and decision-making self-efficacy. The premise was that a correct self-image as a worker contributes to the person environment match, facilitating self-actualization to impact on future employment outcomes. Major findings indicated linear relationship between vocational self-concept and decision-making self-efficacy, implying increased development as learners progressed in education. However, learners portrayed limited awareness on impact of severity of disability. This affirmed need for developmental career guidance and counselling process for learners with disabilities, culminating to suggested model by Murugami (2010).

Keywords: Disability, Impairment, Participation, Special Needs Education, Visual impairment, Vocational Guidance, Vocational Rehabilitation, Vocational self-concept.

Background

Career development and decision-making self-efficacy for learners with disabilities is a current debate in research world-wide, such as in the United States, Britain and Australia. Furthermore, Pierangero and Giuliani (2004:8) posit that one of the most significant concepts to emerge in the recent decades is the awareness of self-determination in the life of an individual with disability. They argued that, for too long, professionals have made decisions for persons with disabilities with little input from the persons with disabilities themselves or their parents.

As much as these decisions may have been motivated by good intentions, they may have overlooked the desires, hopes and aspirations that remained hidden within individuals with disabilities. With the current call of inclusion, persons with disabilities are calling the attention of society to heed to their voices.

Webson (1997:20), who is visually impaired, asserts that “Despite decades of programs development by many well-intentioned organizations and significant financial investments, the majority of persons with visual impairment in the world today receive no services at all. Hence, Webson (1997:20) asserts that in such circumstances, persons with visual impairment will never have an opportunity to fully participate in their communities.” Whereas the statements may appear too absolute to be true, they still raise the concern that demands review of our approaches while giving services to learners with disabilities. Learners with disabilities in Kenya need similar interventions, if they are expected to cope with current challenges in the fast changing world of work.

This study adopted Career Development (Super, 1994) and Decision-making self-efficacy (Betz and Taylor, 1987) theories as the bases of its exploration. Super’s (1994) Life-span Theory of career development was selected for this study because it was the most comprehensive developmental theory applied to

careers (Estrada-Hernandez, 2004:33). The theory combined elements of developmental, personal, social, learning and phenomenological psychology with self-concept and trait and factor considerations (Estrada-Hernandez, 2004; Szymanski and Hersherson, 1998, in, Estrada-Hernandez, 2004:33). Essential assumptions of Super's Theory are based on the individual characteristics of people and the world in which these people live. Super conceptualizes vocational development as the process of developing and implementing a self-concept (Estrada-Hernandez, 2004; Savickas and Vancollin, 2003; Sharf, 2002; Savickas and Super, 1996; Estrada-Hernandez, 2004).

In the African context, Mengitsu (1994) in his research with learners with visual impairment in Ethiopia noted the lack of research on career development of learners with disability. He stated that due to this lack of reliable data, there has been no empirically guided development of career guidance and counselling approaches specifically for learners with disabilities Mengistu (1994). He also embraced a theoretical point of view that persons with disabilities do not need differential theories. They need to compete with their non-disabled peers and the same instruments used with the non-disabled counterparts should be employed so that their needs can be identified for effective career guidance and counselling.

In essence, the importance of increasing participation of learners with disabilities in mainstream education and consequently their participation in the labour force surpasses the traditional systems of vocational education that uses primary disability as a major determinant of assigning persons with disabilities to predetermined occupations. Furthermore, career theories and their associated instruments have been successfully used for learners with disabilities (Estrada-Hernandez, 2004; ElHessen 2002; Beveridge, Craddoc, Leisener, Stapleton and Hershenson 2002) with the assumption that there is no clear dichotomy between types of guidance and counselling approaches that are relevant for persons with and without disability. A general consensus within the current era of inclusion strongly disputes the focus on differences rather than similarities when used to isolate persons with disabilities from the general society.

In Kenya, the work acquisition goal for young school leavers with disabilities has been a big challenge. It is observable that, there is lack of clear integration among personal, academic guidance and career guidance. Majority of students rarely relate their academic subjects to their future careers and what they would like to be in their adulthood. This creates lack of vocational self-concept and career decision-making skills. Consequently**,** this study assumed that learners with disabilities view career guidance and counselling as important as their non-disabled peers. However, they may be less satisfied with the opportunities they are provided with to enable them to access adequate preparation for their future careers. Hence, the majority of learners with disabilities do not successfully complete secondary school and often fail to access further education to enable them to compete in a wider variety of careers.

The Republic of Kenya, (2005), has also noted that the current curriculum on vocational education and training is inflexible and not responsive enough to the changing needs of the labour market. This affects the entire learner population in Kenya and especially learners with disabilities. The demand for both career guidance and counselling as well as vocational education to be more comprehensive for learners with disabilities in particular, is very critical because of their pressing needs, which include restricted early opportunities in work related experiences, dependence on family and teachers, and experiences of academic failure. These often lead to low self-esteem and limited self-knowledge especially in work-related skills that may generally affect their development of vocational self-concept and career decision-making self-efficacy. This has been observed specifically by the researcher while teaching learners with visual impairment as a teacher earlier at primary, secondary and now university level of education.

The need of learners with disabilities to enhance their vocational self-concept is not over emphasized because they need to make career decisions more effectively. Capella and Hermmela, (2002): Estrada-Hernandez, (2004) examined the self-reported job-related skills awareness of high school learners with disability in the US. The premise of this study was that a correct self-image of a worker will contribute to the person environment match and also facilitate self-actualization in order to impact on employment outcomes. The results of this study indicated that there was lack of job-skills awareness among learners with disability. A replication of Capella et al., (2002) study for learners with disabilities in Kenya would likely yield almost similar results.

Investigation of the Problem

The function of career guidance in broad context as described by Wright (1997), convey career guidance as 'a means of helping individuals to apply relevant knowledge, understanding and skills to their own particular circumstances when choices have to be made'. Career counselling on the other hand was defined as 'a means of helping clients explore their own thoughts and feelings about their present situation, about options open to them, and about the consequences of each option'. The clients were then given chances to make informed decisions. The aim of career guidance and counselling, therefore, is to help individuals make objective career choices and transitions towards vocational success. This perspective suggests the importance of incorporating the self to the future work roles and making decisions

that will be satisfying to the individuals in order for them to be productive members of their communities.

Essentially, career guidance and counselling as a service to all learners (including learners with disabilities) is the responsibility of schools and colleges and collaboration between teachers and career counsellors would yield enhanced success. This service should not be treated as an additional subject rather it should be identified as one of cross-curricular themes. Career guidance and counselling, thus should be taught through the subjects of National Curriculum and be promoted through the wider aspects of life such as community occupations. This is in line with the Kenyan Curriculum and if implemented would enhance the aspirations of quality education as envisioned by the current curriculum whose philosophy is 'Total Integrated Quality Education' (1999).

The current segregation practices, such as vocational rehabilitation centres, have not facilitated comprehensive career guidance and counselling in Kenya, since the concepts of most programmes have been focused on fitting persons with disabilities into jobs at skilled and unskilled levels (Wamocho, 2003). Specifically, opportunities for direct experience of the world of work through part-time jobs or work experience are not only very rare, but almost non-existent for learners with disabilities. This implies that self-presentation skills may have remained underdeveloped in the majority of the learners with disabilities. In the current highly competitive employment selection processes, employers may not even tolerate some patterns of behaviours often tolerated within the segregated settings where many learners with disabilities receive their education and rehabilitation. Therefore, these learners will require comprehensive career guidance and counselling that will enhance the development of their vocational self-concept and decision-making self-efficacy, if they have to be ready for inclusion in the world of work within their communities.

Furthermore, the failure in learners with disabilities to establish what they would like to be and what they are capable of being in the world of work can continue to propel them to dependent decision-making into the very vocational stereotypes that have segregated them from their communities. Such practices are against human rights as well as being anti-inclusion, yet rights and inclusion are the themes of the contemporary world.

The Main Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study was first, to use the literature review of this study to provide insight into a more enhanced preparation of learners with disabilities for the world of work in Kenya. This was facilitated through highlighting current practices being tried elsewhere as bases for review and possible borrowing from them, what can be useful for learners with disabilities in Kenya. This was timely during this era of inclusion where poor preparation posed a barrier to inclusion of persons with disabilities into equitable participation in the labour market. Secondly, to uncover critical data that would contribute a component of career guidance and counselling to enhance the Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling Programme for Persons with Disabilities in Kenya proposed by Wamocho (2003).

The school is in a position to facilitate the development of vocational self-concept of all learners and ensure an orientation towards career decision-making self-efficacy that would emanate from objective self-appraisals. These, in turn, are likely to enable all learners to make the fullest possible use of their individual talents. The challenge the school currently faces is how it can provide comprehensive, relevant, quality and challenging, as well as contemporary experiences for all learners including those with disabilities that can facilitate these outcomes. There is a need for change from previous practices in which career guidance and counselling and vocational training received minimal attention, while academic and social skills building received most of the assessment attention. Many young persons (with and without disabilities) leave secondary education with very little knowledge of vocational self-concept and career decision-making self-efficacy. Specifically, young persons with disabilities lack positive work attitudes that are important for successful transition from school to work or post secondary education (Fore and Riser, 2005). These past failures have left many high school graduates with disabilities working in environments not suited to their abilities.

Along the same line of thought, Thoma and Sadder, (2002) emphasize that the transition from school to adult-life is the culmination of education. All that educators teach learners in their classrooms comes to fruition when the learners as adults enter successfully into the adult world. However, learners with disabilities are not meeting their goals for a desired adult lifestyle. Recent researches worldwide indicate abysmal outcomes for individuals with disabilities describing adult lives without employment, recreation and leisure, or community living options for the majority (Louis Harris Associates Poll, 2000; Thoma, et al., 2002).

METHODOLOGY

Permission to conduct this study was sought from the Ministry of Education Science and Technology and further down from the District Education Officers, head of institutions and parents of learners in integrated programs. For learners in residential schools permission from principals was considered adequate because it was not easy to reach all parents. Furthermore, ethical considerations of informed respondents and confidentiality were adhered to.

Table 1.1 Distribution of the sample subjects

Institution	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
Thika primary school for the blind	37	28.91	37	28.91
Kilimani integrated program (Nrb)	9	7.03	46	35.94
Thika High School for the blind	75	58.59	121	94.53
Moi Nairobi Girls High integrated	2	1.56	123	96.09
Kenyatta University	4	3.13	127	99.22
Industrial Training Centre for VI	1	0.78	128	100.00

Key: Nrb. - Nairobi VI – Visual Impairment

Table 1. 2 Distribution of subjects across classes

Class	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Frequency	Cumulative Percent
6	21	16.41	21	16.41
7	25	19.53	46	35.94
10	35	27.34	81	63.28
11	42	32.81	123	96.09
13	5	3.91	128	100.00

NB/ Class 6 and 7 were at the primary school level
Class 10 and 11 at high school while
Class 13 was university learners. The numerals denote grade levels.

Learners were explicitly explained the purpose of the study and the impact of the study findings upon their learning and planning of their transition into the world of work. Participants of this study were given the opportunity of voluntary involvement and those who declined were not forced to participate. This provision reduced the targeted sample from 164 to 128. Therefore, the actual respondents were 128 (Table 1.2).

Data were collected in four primary schools serving learners with visual impairment, one high school for learners with visual impairment, one integrated secondary school, one rehabilitation centre and one university (Table 1.1). The mode of data collection involved individual administration of Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy (CDMSE) questionnaire and Vocational Decision-Making Interview (VDMI) schedule which were conducted individually. Both instruments were prepared in print and Braille to enable learners with visual impairment use their preferred medium of communication in responding to the items presented to them. The administration time varied from 40 minutes to 60 minutes. Most Braille readers spent 50-60 minutes responding to CDMSE since they had to write down their responses in Braille.

The Vocational Decision-Making Interview (VDMI**)** comprised fifty-one structured questions in a two-point Likert Scale reflecting how sure or unsure they were of the responses. Respondents were required to answer questions, were given a chance to ask for clarification where they were not sure and even elaborate their answers where the researcher, felt the need to. Since the questions were open-ended, the respondents had a chance to express themselves fully. The score ranged from 0-1 where 0 corresponded to lack of satisfactory response and 1 to satisfactory response.

The VDMI had open-ended questions that required content responses. The responses were however, scored providing two diverse types of data. The open-ended questions gave concise information that gave broad insights into decision-making strengths and weaknesses in an individual, while scoring the responses allowed the researcher to compare patterns of scores of the interviewee with normative data. The questions were distributed into five sub-scales namely, occupational knowledge problems (11 items), decision-making problems, based on occupational information (6 items), environmental problems (11 items), self-knowledge problems (14) and decision-making to facilitate choice of a career (9 items). Three summary questions were included to enable the researcher to gain additional information vital for the development of a remedial or treatment plan. These questions are not meant for scoring, but for clarifying the overall experience with a respondent. Hence, they were not included in the initial scoring.

Respondents were interviewed by the researcher keenly probing the respondents using the items in the scale and gave a score along the continuum indicated above. The manual instructions were studied to aid in objective scoring. Any useful information relating to respondent's self-concept or decision-making that emanated from the interview was recorded in observation notes column to facilitate qualitative data analysis.

Table 1.3 Linear regression on the relationship between CDMSE and VDMI

Linear regression (GLM approach) to investigate the relationship between the general CDMSE self-concept and the general VDMI self-efficacy dimension scores.

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	Pr > F
Model (VDMI total)	1	3.35	3.35	10.04	0.0019**
Error	126	41.97	0.33		
Corrected total	127	45.32			

Estimates of regression coefficients

	Estimate	std error	t value	Pr > abs (t)
Intercept	2.75	0.12	16.80	<0.0001***
Slope (VDMI total)	0.03	0.009	3.17	0.0019**

Significance legend: *** Significant on 0.1% level; ** Significant on 1% level**;** * Significant on 5% level

Scoring was done by calculating the scores of each of the fifty-one items selected. The total score was out of 51. Mean scores were indicated in the interview sheet for the subscales and the total mean score is 28.7.The researcher used the incorporated scoring procedure in the interview sheet for the interviewer which is clearly explained in the VDMI manual to establish the highs and lows. The researcher had the manual.

The Career Decision-Making Self-efficacy (CDMSE) (short form) had twenty-five structured questions in a five-point Likert Scale reflecting the level of confidence of the respondents. Respondents were required to indicate where they fall on the continuum to express their level of confidence. The score ranged from 1-5 where 1 corresponded to No confidence at all and 5 complete confidence.

Respondents were expected to circle the numeral that indicated their position for those writing in print, while Braille users had the same choices but were required to indicate in letters where A denoted Full confidence, B Some confidence, C Moderate confidence, D Little confidence and E No confidence at all. These letters were preferred for the totally blind learners because they can easily be generalized from the academic grading system.

The scale had five subscales namely; Self-appraisal – (5 items), Occupational information – (5 items), Goal selection – (5 items), Planning – (5 items) and Problem solving – (5 items). Scores for each task were calculated out of 5 for twenty-five items in the five sub-scales. The total score was out of 125. Means were calculated by totalling the five items in each sub-scale and then getting the average response per item.

Ethical considerations of informed respondents and confidentiality were adhered to. Learners were explicitly explained the purpose of the study and the impact of the study findings upon their learning and planning of their transition into the world of work. Participants of this study were given the opportunity of voluntary involvement and those who declined were not forced to participate. This provision reduced the targeted sample from 164 to 128. Therefore, the actual respondents were 128.

To make sense of the collected data descriptive analysis was done as follows:

T test was done to calculate mean differences between subject samples. Two-way Analysis of Variance was also conducted. The two-way analysis helps the researcher to test the first main effect of the dependent variable, the second main effect on the same variable and the interaction effect. It allows the researcher to conduct follow-up tests if one or more of the overall effects are significant or switch the focus to the main effects if the interaction effect is not significant. The researcher also conducted linear regression to test the relationship between vocational self-concept and decision-making self-efficacy (Table 1.3)

DISCUSSION

The respondents during the interview showed minimal guidance on career issues at primary school level. However as the progressed to secondary school career issues emerged during the choice of subjects to major in. This is demonstrated in the table above which presents the results of linear regression test on the Vocational Decision Making Index (VDMI total scores) and Career Decision Making Self-Efficacy. There is a linear relationship between these vocational self-concept and decision-making self-concept as portrayed by both regression coefficients of intercept and slope which indicated significance at 0.001 and 0.01 levels. The deductions there in implied that education plays an important role in the development of both vocational self-concept and career decision-making self-efficacy. These two aspects were reflected in the manner learners demonstrate confidence in making career choices. The higher the level of education, the more learners demonstrated confidence in independent deci-

sions concerning their future careers. Specifically, learners at the secondary school level seemed to be more confident in their career choices than those in primary level. Earlier analysis had found that age was not a predictor of the development of vocational self-concept since there was no demonstration of confidence in career choice by primary school learners of the same age as those in secondary school level.

RESULTS

The major findings of the study were;

There was a linear relationship between the development of vocational self-concept and decision making self-efficacy. This was evidenced in the manner the learners with visual impairment demonstrated increased development of self-concept and decision-making self-efficacy as they progressed in their education.

Learner's age had no significant effect on the development of vocational self-concept. Learners with visual sometimes progress at a slower pace in their education. Hence some learners were of the same age as those in secondary school. Hence, it was discovered that age was not a predictor to learners' educational level. While educational level could show impact on the development of vocational self-concept, age per se did not seem to have any influence. This implies that older learners at primary school level were less confident than their age peers at the secondary level.

Learners with low vision responded in closely the same manner as those who were totally blind, thus, portraying no significant difference in the way they portrayed their confidence in making career decisions in relation to severity of visual impairment. This demonstrated limited awareness on the impact of disability on career choices. The fact that most career choices followed stereotyped careers that persons with disability engage in would suggest that these learners assumed that blindness does not pose any limitations on the careers persons with visual impairment engage in.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveals serious gaps in the manner learners with visual impairment develop their vocational self-concept and decision-making self-efficacy. First and foremost, learners at primary level do not seem to acquire adequate exploration skills of what they would prepare themselves to be in adult life. Their self-knowledge in relation to careers is quite limited as it only demonstrates knowledge of stereotyped careers probably through observation of the school environment or gathered information from teachers or peers within school settings. Learners at the secondary school level indicates that education probably their choice of subjects do subject them to better understanding of the need to assess themselves and decide on what type of careers would best suit them. Hence, they portray higher confidence in their career decision-making. However, their high reliance on occupational stereotypes still suggests that they may have limited occupational information, restricted work skills experiences and inadequate self-knowledge. This scenario, although portrayed by learners with visual impairment could be generalized in other learners with disabilities because of the nature of their education and vocational training which follow almost similar patterns. Therefore, the proposed vocational development model of career guidance and counselling process is applicable to learners with disabilities and not one particular category.

Proposed Vocational Development Model (Murugami, 2010)

Establishing adequate vocational self-concept and decision-making self-efficacy requires that learners are provided with developmental career guidance and counselling programme starting from primary school, through high school, and college. The suggested component, takes a cross categorical approach to move away from categorical career guidance that most often propel learners to stereotypic thinking that certain career**s** are for certain categories of learners with disabilities.

In this cross categorical approach, career guidance is interpreted not only to include the acquisition of occupational skills, but also the development of attitudes, knowledge and self-concept which can facilitate decision-making, career choice and life adjustment. The developmental approach would therefore, be sequential, starting from primary level, through high school experiences, bridging the gap between education and the world of work. This component thus take**s** into account the total growth and development process of the individual, including practically oriented academic subjects, family relationships, social and community activities, personal social behaviour as well as employment. In this light, the classroom, the home, the community and the world of work, become part of the learning environments.

The proposed career guidance and counselling component, therefore, gives significance to academic subjects by stressing their practical aspects. It tries to interpret work ethic in its ability to facilitate the feeling of usefulness and personal worth. Learners with disabilities should realize their right to the opportunity for earning a living and make a contribution to society. They should also realize their right to leading meaningful lives. Career guidance and counselling in the present time of social inclusion would aim at taking the 'special' out of special education in order to bring

the learner with disability closer to equal participation in the world of work with peers without disabilities. In this era of inclusion, society has the obligation to equalize this opportunity through special services to persons with disabilities so that they may earn a living and become integrated into society.

Elements of the Career Guidance and Counselling Programme for learners with disabilities

Due to limited early experiences that learners with disabilities may bring with them into school, teachers need to deliberately teach these learners to:-

- Relate academic subjects to activities of daily living – Learners can be engaged in comparative shopping, budgeting, banking and filling banking slips, sending and withdrawing money.
- Relate academic subjects to the world of work and adult living roles – Learners can be introduced to relationships between education and work. Learners can be given activities that may include measurements, making simple garments, craft items made from locally available materials, keeping school gardens and domestic animals such as chicken and rabbits.
- Experience basic orientation to the world of work – Can be provided through field excursions, use of local resources through apprenticeships and work study programs. Learners can be left behind during the school holidays to participate in work study programs that will make them earn a little money but most of all gain hands on experiences on job demands along their interests, abilities and limitations.

Purposes of the Elements of Career Guidance and Counselling Programme for Learners with Disabilities

The purposes of the elements of career guidance and counselling for learners with disabilities can be expressed as; to encourage learners with disabilities to evaluate their own interests, strengths and limitations in the process of forming a satisfying and realistic self-concept; and encourage a vocational behaviour that lies within the individual learner's abilities. Learners are encouraged to develop attitudes, habits, knowledge and skills they need to become valued family members, successful employees and responsible citizens. These elements would also facilitate decision-making skills applicable to resolving family and social problems, as well as making career choices. Career guidance at high school level would provide the learner with the expected work experiences to the fullest extent possible to enable him or her compete favourably in the labour market.

Objectives of the Career Guidance and Counselling for Learners with Disabilities

In order to facilitate the development of vocational self-concept and decision- making self-efficacy of learners with disabilities, career counsellors would work on the following objectives:

By the end of the program, Learners would be able to use to the maximum their capabilities in the basic academic subjects in application of communication skills, numerical concepts, skills to solve problems on their encounters in everyday living situations. They would also acquire habits of safe and healthy living including basic skills in personal hygiene, proper grooming and etiquette.

Learners would be able to assess their interests, assets and limitations, neither overestimating nor underestimating their abilities and be able to perform at some level despite limitations. They would compare their personal profiles of strengths and weaknesses with job requirements and then exercise skills in choosing career options as well as changing career decisions, while identifying different kinds of jobs and their related fields of work available in relation to their specific interests.

Learners would demonstrate confidence in their ability to perform a variety of jobs and maintain a positive view of themselves as productive. They would have an opportunity to increase their manual dexterity by performing certain routine jobs.

Learners would show that work has dignity through appreciation and respect for all types of jobs in all levels of work, and expressing that every job is important and has social usefulness. They would explain the importance of performing a job to the best of one's ability which, in turn, raises self-esteem and provides better self-understanding. They would also explore the immediate community and its resources which they can utilize to find employment or participate in wholesome leisure time activities, as well as demonstrate special skills needed for a particular occupation within one's potential.

Murugami's vocational development framework

Introduction

This framework is intended to guide teachers and career counsellors on how to follow vocational development stages of learners with disabilities as they progress in their education. Various transitional levels are crucial check points for assessing whether learners portray desirable vocational development and identification of possible lags in order to implement

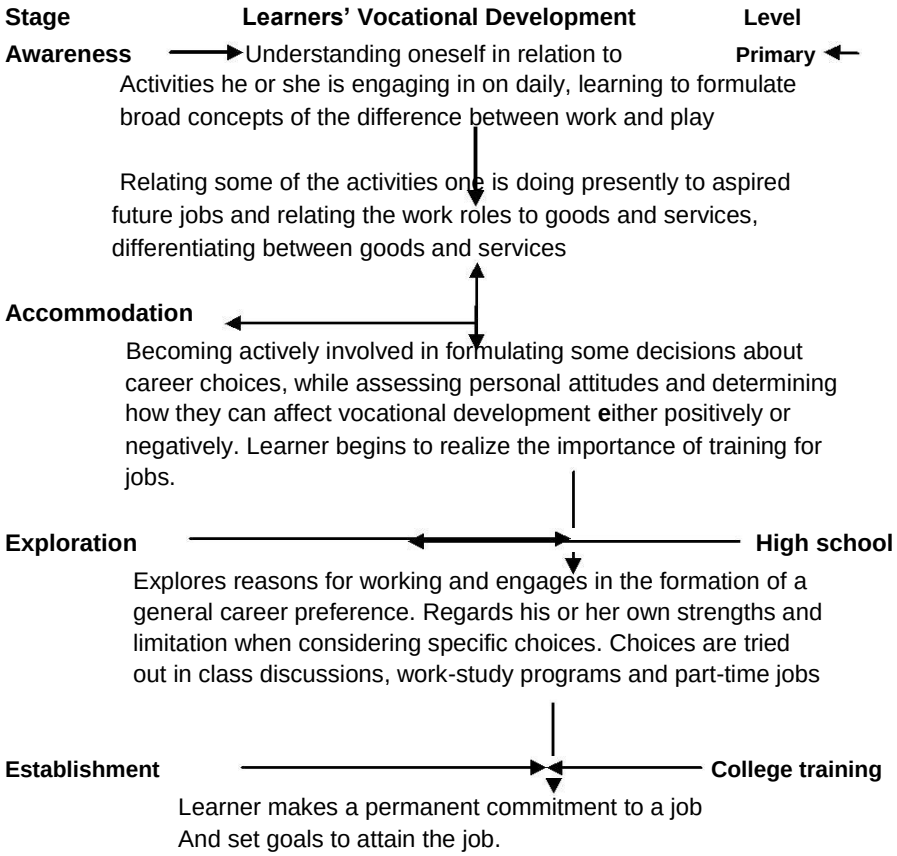

Figure 1.1. Framework for the Vocational Development Model (Murugami, 2010)

appropriate intervention measures. The proposed model framework would be best applied in inclusive education settings which are more likely to expose learners to wider range of occupational information and career choices. Inclusive education settings also offer learners with wider range of role models who are within the community and environment that learners are familiar and culturally suited. Inclusive education also allow learners with disabilities to access community resources naturally as their siblings and peers do as opposed to segregation in special education institutions which sometimes rear learners outside their communities and cultures (Figure 1.1).

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