

Priorities in 21st century career counselling: Implications for counselling psychology training

**Author:**Kamilla V. Rawatlal¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Psychology,
Faculty of Humanities,
University of Pretoria,
Pretoria, South Africa

Project research number:

HUM025/0522

Corresponding author:

Kamilla Rawatlal,
kamillarawatlal@gmail.com

Dates:

Received: 11 June 2022

Accepted: 24 Aug. 2022

Published: 28 Sept. 2022

How to cite this article:

Rawatlal, K.V. (2022).
Priorities in 21st century
career counselling:
Implications for counselling
psychology training.
*African Journal of Career
Development*, 4(1), a59.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/ajcd.v4i1.59>

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Background: The call to decolonise and transform the curriculum for social responsiveness in South African higher education is seen as a priority.

Objectives: This study explores revising the career assessment and counselling curriculum on the professional masters (MA Counselling Psychology) programme.

Method: Utilising a qualitative design and exploratory approach, the research aimed to address the objectives through gauging master's students' perceptions of the applicability of the course, through thematically analysing evaluation transcripts received during and 2021, were thematically analysed. Patterns and themes that emerged indicate how the revised curriculum can support intervention at the individual and systemic levels.

Results: Themes identified were the influence of traditional career counselling theory, accessibility to assessments, a need to expand theory to include social constructivism and post modernism at the individual level. At the systems level, engaging trainees as socio-ecological advocates, integration of mental health to intervene with 'at risk' groups, post the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic intervention and the 4th industrial revolution (IR) highlighted a need to adopt a public health agenda.

Conclusion: Critical consciousness raising at the systems was highlighted as paramount to informing intervention and to strengthening Counselling Psychologist trainees' identity to develop a sense of agency in promoting social responsiveness.

Contribution: The role of the training course to address transformation priorities, intervene with post-modern realities, such as the unstable job market in the 4th IR, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and assert the uniqueness of career counselling and assessment as a specialisation area of Counselling Psychology forms the basis of the study contribution.

Keywords: curriculum; higher education; transformation; public health agenda; critical consciousness; COVID-19; 4th IR.

Introduction

The focus in South African higher education in the 21st century is on the transformation of the curriculum. This is seen as necessary to address societal concerns such as socio-economic, educational, health disparities and intervene through addressing issues of access, equity and diversity. This study discusses revising the career counselling and assessment curriculum to address such societal concerns. Career counselling realities in the 21st century that are regarded as societal concerns include high failure rates and drop out in higher education because of a lack of access to career counselling. In South Africa disparities also exist in basic education delivery in the different provinces. Career counselling and assessment provision have also been characterised by affordability and accessibility issues. Another reality concerns the need to contextualise career development and intervention so that young people and citizens will be able to reconcile career pathing in the post-coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic phase. The aim is to support the training and development of student practitioners to address such systemic factors that influence career decision making through focusing on a revision of the curriculum.

The University of Pretoria (Ogude et al., 2018) *Curriculum Transformation Framework* refers to decolonising and democratising higher education to address issues of exclusion, marginalisation and social injustice. These are listed as key priorities in informing a more relevant teaching and learning curriculum and has implications for the country at large (Ogude et al., 2018). The call to transform curricula is also seen as part of a larger vision of a return to the idea of the university as

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a space for discovery, critical inquiry, thinking and democratic public engagement (Ogude et al., 2018). Curricula are informed by the nature of the field or the discipline, the philosophical beliefs of the teacher, who the students are and the broader context in which the curriculum are enacted (Rhodes University, 2018). The context of South African higher education is regarded as complex with inequality, lack of resources and personnel characterising much of the landscape. The inability of the curriculum to respond to local challenges is a vital reason behind the call for the decolonisation of the curriculum in South Africa (Teferra & Fomunyan, 2017). Moll (2004) argues that curriculum responsiveness is the ability of curricula taught in schools or universities to address student needs as well as societal circumstances. The curriculum, therefore, not only focuses on what happens in the classroom but also on what students do with what they learnt (Moll, 2004).

A transforming curriculum recognises local and global contexts, histories, realities and problems and adopts both a critical and self-critical stance (Ogude et al., 2018). Drivers of curriculum transformation in higher education, according to the Curriculum Transformation Framework (Ogude et al., 2018), include a responsiveness to social context. This includes critically examining the role of race, socio-economic class, gender, sexuality, culture, nationality, age and other categories. Social transformation is prioritised by focusing on the ways in which disciplines can contribute to the development of society. A transforming curriculum envisages students and academics as thoughtful citizens, part of a diverse public who are able to contribute meaningfully to different communities and society. A transforming curriculum positions students as critical thinkers who acknowledge indigenous knowledge systems and world-views and also have the ability to draw from old and new frameworks and theories to inform intervention (Ogude et al., 2018).

Transformation agenda and implications for career training and transforming practice

In addressing issues of transformation and responsiveness this article discusses how the career counselling and assessment curriculum on the masters Counselling Psychology programme was revised to address such issues. In revising the curriculum to address systemic factors, the author pays homage to the work of Maree (2020), who emphasises practitioners to adapt, innovate and contextualise their career counselling service to address societal needs. In informing a socially responsive, decolonised and transformative curriculum, the author now provides a summary of the systemic realities.

In considering the education sector, the attrition rates of students in South African higher education is seen as a persistent problem. Undergraduate drop-out rates are high (Moodley & Singh, 2015), and it is indicated that 52% of

learners made their career selection after Grade 12, while 34% made concrete career decisions during registration at tertiary institutions (Fundiconnect, 2021). This, according to Singh (2016), supports that many Grade 12 learners have not made well-informed selections of what they want to study post-school. Moodley and Singh (2015) further contend that one in eight learners believes that because of the lack of career-related information at the relevant time, students did not make the correct career choice. Okana (2010) also makes reference to how predictably the attrition of students from previously disadvantaged population groups may result in further racial and socio-economic disparity among future generations. This according to Okana (2010) should also be the concern of education authorities.

South Africa, according to the World Bank (2014), ranks among the world's most socio-economically unequal countries and the practice of psychological assessment is seen to be directly impacted by such disparity (Laher & Cockcroft, 2017). Laher and Cockcroft (2017) further indicate that because of affordability issues, poor quality education and high levels of illiteracy, the majority of the population do not have access to the potential benefits of such assessment. Assessment practice is also confronted with administration challenges. The majority of psychological assessments are only in English and Afrikaans. There is limited practitioner proficiency in languages other than English. Assessment settings are also identified as unsuitable and test materials are limited. There also exists a shortage of practitioners to develop new tests for the multi-cultural South African population (Foxcroft & Davies, 2008; Johnston, 2015; Laher & Cockcroft, 2013; Seedat & Mackenzie, 2008).

Other priority areas to inform revising career assessment and counselling training include addressing how the changing career counselling needs of young people during the COVID-19 pandemic can be met. Maree (2021) refers to limited research conducted on the impact of COVID-19 on career counselling and, especially, the contextualisation of career counselling to address the changing career counselling needs of young people during the pandemic. The pandemic, according to Autin et al. (2021), has become to be viewed as a 'vocational magnifying glass bringing knowledge of previous career development practitioners to the forefront of public life.' The need for career practitioners is to be especially sensitive to workers' basic survival needs, be knowledgeable about existing social welfare programmes and be prepared to serve populations that have reduced occupational choice (Autin et al., 2021).

Research design and methods

The study implemented a qualitative research design utilising an exploratory approach. The focus was on the revision and evaluation of a career assessment and counselling masters' curricula and exploring students' perceptions of the experience of the course. Literature refers to curricula and the discipline in career counselling and assessment being traditionally informed by an objective, (positivist)

perspectives (Maree & Beck, 2004). The need to revise curricula to support practitioners to also navigate systemic influences (discussed earlier) was thus deemed necessary.

Revision of the curriculum involved addressing competency development of practitioners in two different areas identified below:

- Individual-level influences, whereby students were exposed to traditional theories and psychometric assessments (i.e. personality, values, interests and occupational matching).
- Assessment, risk and intervention at the different systemic or societal levels.

The aim was to provide empirical evidence of the need to revise the curricula to address individual-level intervention and systemic intervention in career counselling and assessment training. Given the emphasis on revising curriculum for social responsiveness, addressing both levels was deemed necessary.

Individual-level (traditional theories and psychometric assessments) components

At this level one cannot discount the formidable influence of traditional theories and models directed at exploring only individual-level characteristics such as personality and occupational types. Reference is made to the work of, for example, Parson's (1909) talent matching and Holland's (1997) occupational matching. Such individual-level theories provide insight into identifying development and shaping many career guidance programmes. The unit thus provided student practitioners with grounding in the foundations of career assessments based on Parson's (1909) talent-matching approach that later developed into the Trait and Factor Theory of Occupational Choice. Holland's (1997) focus on personal characteristics and occupational tasks was also integrated. Students were thus exposed to the administration, interpretation and report writing of the Self-Directed Search (SDS), Value Scale (VS) and the Jung-Type Indicator (JTI), given that most internship sites for trainees require exposure to such psychometric assessments. Based on the critiques levelled at objective, 'match and fit' assessments that highlighted a need for a shift in the 21st century to understanding individuals developing their identity and constructing careers against the backdrop of different systemic influences (culture, socio-economic realities), the training unit was extended to incorporate post-modern interventions. Post modernism stems from the view that 'reality' is created by entities that differ in terms of personal, historical and cultural contexts (Hergenhahn, 2005). The incorporation of not only the objective but also the subjective meanings people attach to their career and life stories is central to successful career choices. Positive compromise in the context of vocational and career psychology refers to exercising more control over a reality that is very often beyond human control (Chen, 2014).

Systemic level components

Theron (2016) refers to career counsellors as socio-ecological actors who have relevance to the resilience process of South Africa's young people who are challenged by structural disadvantage. At this level, training referred to involving key role players (such as parents, teachers, practitioners and other service providers, community and cultural leaders and policy makers). These role players are seen to play a critical role in young people's achievement of positive life outcomes (Masten, 2014; Ungar, 2013). This also emphasises the importance of integrating a socio-ecological perspective in training informed by a Public Health Agenda. Public health interventions can be classified into three types: primary, secondary and tertiary prevention. In *Primary prevention*, trainees were exposed to implementing intervention to reach the whole population or target 'at risk' groups such as unemployed and young people. Trainees were exposed to developing proactive, self-directed, career counselling services that had outreach to schools, post-secondary preparation programmes and social skills development programmes for nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). In *Secondary prevention*, the practitioner's role as an intermediary or intervener, providing early intervention or individual counselling, was highlighted. In *Tertiary prevention*, the role of the practitioner in providing essential services to clients in need of individual counselling, crisis intervention and re-direction counselling was highlighted. An assessment of factors and/or issues that have an impact on their success was also incorporated at this level.

At this level, the focus on training was on critical consciousness raising of practitioners. In transforming and decolonising the curriculum for relevance and social responsiveness, this component was seen as crucial as it aims for practitioners to consider what career development interventions have to offer individuals who are socially or economically disadvantaged, who are underrepresented in our educational systems, who may have limited access to meaningful employment or who remain unemployed in the labour market. Aligned to this unit, the MA Counselling Psychology training programme also incorporates a separate module on Professional Identity of Counselling Psychologists. Training was thus aligned to this focus and provided the space for the trainee practitioners to reflect on their professional identity as Counselling Psychologists. Implicit is the need for Counselling Psychologists to return to their vocational roots to empower marginalised groups and/or clients and become critical of informing intervention to address 21st century realities. Counselling Psychology is seen to have its roots in the vocational guidance movement; however, Neimeyer et al. (2011) indicate Counselling Psychology's waning commitment to its vocational and guidance roots.

Validity and trustworthiness

To support the validity of the research findings, the following strategies were implemented. Firstly, the researcher was aware of her own bias as lecturer of the curriculum and

coordinator of the professional training programme and attempted to bracket her own assumptions. According to Guse (2010), in professional training research, this is necessary in presenting a neutral stance. Secondly, this study presents two separate analyses (two different years of implementing the curriculum). According to Krefting (1991), this strategy adds to the dependability of results. Finally, peer debriefing (Creswell, 2003) was used to review the study and enhance the accuracy of the findings. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, the intention was not to generalise findings but to provide insight on curriculum areas for revision.

Study population

The participants in the study were purposefully selected (Creswell, 2003). All the students who were in their first years of study in 2020 and 2021 of the MA (Counselling Psychology) degree in the Department of Psychology at a Gauteng university participated voluntarily in the study. The demographics were that the samples were female and their ages ranged from 22 to 43. Five of the participants were African, three were white people and three were Indian. An evaluation transcript from each student was received and thematically analysed. In contextualising students' responses, it must be noted that the students were also exposed to providing a mental healthcare service at primary health care level, in which they receive clients and outpatients from the low-middle income economic demographic groups.

Data collection and analysis

The data consisted of written accounts (evaluation forms) submitted by the participants. In these documents, the students reflected on their experience of being introduced to the 20-h unit as part of the core curriculum in the training programme. According to Creswell (2003), documents often present data that are thoughtful, because participants could have given considerable attention to their compilation. The researcher was the lecturer responsible for facilitating the unit that occurred, once a week, over a period of four weeks. Each session was the duration of five hours. The revision of the curriculum involved the alignment of content at the individual and systemic levels to ensure the relevance of the professional training for practising in the South African context. The research evaluation questions of the study sought to explore the below, post the training unit:

- Students' reflections and efficacy in applying interventions at the individual and systemic levels

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the documents. This included familiarisation with the data to search for meanings and patterns, while also attempting to bracket own assumptions to allow further themes to emerge. This was followed by generating initial codes, leading to the formulation and definition of themes and subthemes. To address the researcher's bias as lecturer of the unit, she attempted to bracket her own assumptions and implore peer reviewing of the research findings. Because of the exploratory

nature of the study, the intention was not to generalise findings but to formulate hypotheses for further training and empirical research.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the university of Pretoria Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent to use these documents was obtained from the students, and participants' identity remained anonymous.

Results

In this section, the researcher highlights the different themes and subthemes that emerged at the different levels. The different levels and themes will be discussed in conjunction with direct quotes and will also be contextualised within existing literature.

Addressing individual-level influences

Theme 1: Application of theory to practice (individual level)

At the individual level, participants referred to the importance of foundational theory in practice.

'They referred to how this [*builds*] confidence in career assessment and counselling development where there is still a reliance on objective, assessments. Career counselling and development was also regarded as an area that was unfamiliar territory.' (Transcript 5, Participant 5, 22 years old, Female)

'[B]efore we commenced the unit I was anxious as I wasn't exposed to career counselling and assessment before (both personally and professionally). Post the unit, I feel confident to conduct and administer a career counselling and assessment session in my internship.' (Transcript 2, Participant 2, 23 years old, Female)

'I'm able to make the links between how theory has informed the assessments that are being used and the importance of how to communicate the meaning of assessments to our clients and possibly their parents (to debunk the psychological jargon and clarify myths).' (Transcript 8, Participant 8, 32 years old, Female)

'[I]n assessment report writing, I would always aim to give career recommendations that is informed by the client's context and refer to their context to inform realistic recommendations. I look forward to combining both quantitative and qualitative methods (narrative, social constructivist) for viewing the individual holistically.' (Transcript 4, Participant 4, 25 years old, Female)

Theme 2: Views on accessibility to assessments administered at the individual level

In exposure to intervention at the individual level, participants were able to become more critical of issues related to barriers to accessing career assessments and counselling services from their personal experiences.

'Some of the assessments are only available in English and Afrikaans and therefore excludes and disadvantages other language groups in South Africa.' (Transcript 3, Participant 3, 26 years old, Female)

'Career counselling and assessment services still remain a service largely unavailable to the larger community because they cannot afford the service.' (Transcript 4, Participant 4, 25 years old, Female)

Theme 3: Need to expand individual-level intervention to social constructivist and post-modern approaches

Through exposure to foundational theories at the individual level, participants shared the following reflections:

'Critical of contemporary issues in career development there is a need to shift to a more dynamic approach.' (Transcript 1, Participant 1, 26 years old, Female)

'Theories of career assessment and counselling are shifting from a narrow, linear path to career decision making to a more cyclical approach. This places emphasis on how people meet the demands of the changing world of work and ensuring that we as career psychologists remain relevant to such changing times.' (Transcript 2, Participant 2, 23 years old, Female)

'4th and 5th wave industrial revolution developments on the impacts on the relevance of individual career assessments and the recommendations we make in career assessment reports. It also impacts skills and competencies in provision of services in under resourced communities we work. In the post covid-19 period we are receiving clients/outpatients who have suddenly become unemployed and who now need job-searching skills etc.' (Transcript 5, Participant 5, 22 years old, Female)

In addressing contemporary challenges in career pathing, after the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to extend, post-modern and social constructivist concepts to support clients in managing such challenges.

'We live in an ever-changing and evolving world where individuals and jobs are constantly changing. The reality is that people will not keep the same career for their entire working lives. Therefore, career adaptability has become an important part of career counselling' (Transcript 8, Participant 8, 32 years old, Female)

Based on the critiques levelled at objective, 'match and fit' assessments that highlighted a need for a shift in the 21st century to understanding individuals developing their identity and constructing careers against the backdrop of different systemic influences (culture, socio and economic realities) that influence access, the training unit was extended to incorporate social constructivist, ecological and post-modern interventions. Post modernism stems from the view that 'reality' is created by entities that differ in terms of personal, historical and cultural contexts (Hergenhahn, 2005). The incorporation of not only the objective but also the subjective meanings people attach to their career and life stories is central to successful career choices. Positive compromise in the context of vocational and career psychology refers to exercising more control over a reality that is very often beyond human control. In this sense, career choice and development for many individuals is not about reaching the most ideal state of affairs, but rather finding a better solution for a career problem (Chen, 2014).

Addressing systemic levels (Teachers, parents, nongovernmental organisation's)

Theme 4: Practitioners as socio-ecological actors and systemic change

At this level, participants were able to identify their role as socio-ecological actors.

'I have learnt how to make career information more accessible to our communities in new and innovative ways. Working with NPO's, and schools I believe is a smart approach to working with existing challenging systems to further access our communities and also provide that element of psychoeducation around the pressures a student may feel when embarking on such a decision-making process (emotional factors). By doing so, making parents, teachers and students themselves aware of the emotional challenges they may face (providing a sense of normalization), a better understanding of how to handle them and for parents, methods to support.' (Transcript 2, Participant 2, 23 years old, Female)

'The unit exposed me to how important it is to present talks and presentations on career decision making that we could use at the community and group work level. It referred to the application of social constructivist theory to help identify and intervene on perceived challenges, barriers to career counselling created sometimes by parents expectations and knowledge in communities.' (Transcript 5, Participant 5, 22 years old, Female)

Theme 5: Careers and mental health

Incorporating mental health in career counselling to address social responsiveness was also highlighted

'In reflecting on this unit, I believe it would be important to incorporate strengths-based work and resilience as part of psychoeducation. This as the unit has exposed us to, influences sense of learners/client's agency and resilience in an unstable job market in the 21st century.' (Transcript 11, Participant 11, 29 years old, Female)

The importance of intervening with this group is also highlighted by other authors. Young people (i.e. adolescents and young adults) are not only a key group for guidance services, but they are also the age group most likely to experience first onset of mental health conditions (Robertson, 2013). He further indicates they are exposed to intense social and transition pressures, while biological maturation is not yet complete. Given the evidence that the developmental effects of unemployment on mental health conditions are potentially serious and long lasting, this area must be of particular interest as a target for primary prevention (Allen et al., 2007; Monroe & Harkness, 2005). Career education and guidance interventions could strengthen identity and self-esteem in adolescence and promote pro-active behaviour and are associated with positive mental health.

Theme 6: Addressing 'at risk' groups

Participants were able to identify the need to integrate mental health into career development in addressing vulnerable or 'at risk groups.

'[I]t is important to integrate both areas to motivate learners, to prevent drop-out or making poor career decisions. Also, in the case of adults, due to the COVID-19 pandemic who have suddenly become unemployed and experiencing the trauma of such an experience of loss it is particularly important.' (Transcript 9, Participant 9, 27 years old, Female)

Theme 7: A need for supervision to address systemic levels

The importance of extended services to improve accessibility was highlighted; however, participants indicated the need for supervision, guidance to address this in their practice.

'I am confident that novice practitioners, with supervision, would be able to provide greater intervention at the group and community levels.' (Transcript 4, Participant 4, 25 years old, Female)

Theme 8: Critical consciousness raising

At this systemic level the importance of critical consciousness raising in developing practitioners as scientist-practitioner advocates to be socially responsive and address systemic change was highlighted.

'Being exposed to career intervention at the group/community level inspired me to make proper career information accessible to our communities at large, with the overall aim of empowerment. As a future professional, I acknowledge the need for innovative and creative means for making career counselling and assessment services accessible beyond an individual one on one basis.' (Transcript 9, Participant 9, 27 years old, Female)

'There is great importance in what career assessments and counselling hold for empowering our youth. I hope to fulfil the potential it holds for providing guidance. My approach will be more group centred (systemic) as I enjoyed working with the approaches and find them relevant for addressing systemic realities.' (Transcript 10, Participant 10, 28 years old, Female)

Theme 9: Relevance of the training on incorporating intervention at the individual and systemic levels

'The teaching approach (engaging the multiple levels) resulted in critical reflection on the areas for concerns in career counselling and the challenges we could face. This, personally stimulated thought and focus on how to address such challenges and my professional identity as a Counselling Psychologist. I approached them as opportunities for change within the field of career assessment and would capitalise on this to inform a more relevant service in the future.' (Transcript 2, Participant 2, 23 years old, Female)

Raising critical consciousness at this level was seen to strengthen distal level influences to ensure that a transformative agenda and social responsiveness is facilitated. Distal level influences are seen as higher order cumulative influences that transcend indirectly from events and experiences. Distal influences are seen to be relatively stable and necessary to drive agency to impact social change as opposed to proximal level influences (at the micro level) which are recognised to be more directed and immediate.

Theme 10: Relevance of the unit to strengthening the professional identity of Counselling Psychology

Implicit in the need for a transformed curriculum based on principles of social justice, critical consciousness raising, the literature also identifies a need for practitioners such as Counselling Psychologists to return to their vocational and guidance roots. This study advocates the need for Counselling Psychologists to re-affirm their commitment to development in career development and counselling intervention by providing a more accessible, equitable and relevant career intervention service to South African citizens.

'The unit allowed reflection on the importance and relevance of the work 'Counselling Psychologists' do and the importance of having a vision. Using practical examples/scenarios aided this understanding. We were stimulated to develop a career vision that we hold for ourselves as gatekeepers of our profession.' (Transcript 1, Participant 1, 26 years old, Female)

'The unit was relevant in my training as a Counselling Psychologist. Career counselling and assessment is a major point of differentiation between the fields of Counselling Psychology and Clinical Psychology and it would be beneficial for students to be exposed to a module more extensively.' (Transcript 4, Participant 4, 25 years old, Female)

'I am now aware of career counselling and assessment as a specialisation area in Counselling Psychology. It is something that I was largely unfamiliar with previously but am able to reflect on the important role CP's play in career development.' (Transcript 7, Participant 7, 28 years old, Female)

Leach et al. (2003) also indicate that it would be best for Counselling Psychologists to maintain its independence from Clinical Psychology because of its unique philosophical emphasis on holism and intervention features such as career issues. The authors refer to the importance of training programmes in allowing the influence of Counselling Psychology to grow and exert its uniqueness in the future.

Discussion

In revising a career counselling and assessment unit for master's in Counselling Psychology training, to address social responsiveness and transformation goals, this article highlighted that the traditional (match and fit) psychometric assessments and theories can no longer be used in isolation. There needs to an integration of both the traditional approaches and theories that inform systemic level intervention to inform curriculum transformation. Studies on curriculum transformation in career counselling and assessment are limited and it is hoped that this study (in a limited way) prompts future studies in the field.

Critical consciousness raising at the systems level was seen as paramount to driving sense of agency in developing practitioners to becoming scientist practitioner advocates. Raising critical consciousness at this level was seen to strengthen distal level influences. There was an awareness that while individual-level interventions and the confidence of administering, one-on-one psychometric career assessments serve to increase proximal influences. They, however, do little

to influence distal influences (critical consciousness) raising which provides the impetus for change and intervention at systemic levels.

Traditional quantitative assessments were highlighted as important so that trainee practitioners could feel confident in their assessment ability and better equipped to practice at their internship sites. Krishnamurthy et al. (2004) highlight those surveys of assessment training practices in graduate programmes in North America also indicate a reliance on traditional tests and that although issues of multiculturalism were addressed, these needed to be expanded. The importance of a curriculum that combines both quantitative, objective assessments and qualitative, social constructivist approaches that address multi-culturalism and socio-economic realities was regarded as necessary given the limitations in accessibility and administration of career assessments discussed earlier. Expanding the curriculum to include social constructivist and post-modern approaches to address the 4th and 5th Industrial Revolution and an unstable job market post the COVID-19 pandemic is deemed necessary. Post-modern interventions such as 'positive career compromise' (Chen, 2004) were seen as relevant in confronting such realities. There is a need for Counselling Psychologists as Autin et al. (2020) indicate to return to traditional career counselling practices like provision of job search skills (e.g. resume writing, networking skills), exploration of interests and values, and assessment of experience and expertise as these will continue to be important during the pandemic and recovery from it (Autin et al., 2020). The authors caution that because of an unstable labour market, career counsellors should be especially sensitive to workers' basic survival needs, knowledgeable about existing social welfare programmes, and prepared to serve populations that have reduced occupational choice (Autin et al., 2020). *Deconstruction and reconstruction* of career counselling and career theory may be worth the effort as constructivist approaches have a 'greater capacity to accommodate the complex and dynamic processes of a rapidly changing society than theories underpinned by the logical positivist worldview' (McMahon, 2014, p. 18).

Further at the systems level, Robertson (2013) highlights the importance of integrating a public health agenda to intervening with at risk population groups. This is identified as a key area to inform training of practitioners. Many authors have begun to highlight how career guidance has the potential to promote public health by contributing positively to both the prevention of mental health conditions and to population level well-being (e.g. Robertson, 2013). While practitioners recognise barriers to career counselling and the need for a public health agenda that intervenes at the different systemic levels, they often lack training on how to intervene at such levels. Integrating a public health agenda in career counselling training thus has implications for transformation and social responsiveness in low-middle income contexts such as South Africa. Internationally as well, the need for additional curriculum content to address broader social and structural issues as key priority areas identified to inform the future of

career counsellor education in countries such as Canada have also been highlighted (e.g. Burwell & Kalbfleisch, 2007).

Other themes identified at the systems level in this study included the role of career counsellors in integrating career and mental health counselling interventions with clients impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Autin et al. (2020) identify that there will be an increased need for career development professionals who are proficient in trauma-informed care. According to Barrow et al. (2009), trauma-informed career counselling approaches include: (1) establishing an environment of trust and safety, (2) assessing for trauma-related symptoms, (3) use of ecological frameworks to conceptualise associations between traumatic experiences and work, (4) developing healthy coping strategies and (5) promoting career adaptability (Barrow et al., 2019).

Recommendations

Arthur et al. (2009) study on Canadian career practitioners implementing ecological and social justice systemic interventions abroad identify a lack of support from supervisors, lack of training, insufficient funding, insufficient time to spend on social justice and systemic interventions. The exploratory study provides preliminary findings from the reflections of trainees on ways in which the traditional focus on objective, traditional approaches resulted in restricted roles and responsibilities in career service provision. An integrated approach, with different levels of interventions was seen to provide possibilities for disadvantaged groups. Further research is thus needed to explore the utility of the curriculum training revision in application to the different institutional/practice settings Counselling Psychologists in South Africa are placed in and the administrative and logistical support required. Research exploring practitioners' experiences in implementation at the different levels could also serve to further inform training and supervision.

Limitations

Although this study discusses preliminary findings that may inform training, there are certain limitations for consideration. Firstly, there was a connection between the researcher and the students, often referred to as 'backyard research' (Creswell, 2003), which may have influenced the students to provide biased or compromised data. Secondly, documents (evaluation transcripts) were used as data, which could be incomplete as there was no opportunity to ask participants to elaborate on their responses; this could have provided more and richer data. The findings also cannot be generalised to the experiences of students in other training programmes.

Conclusion

In informing a curriculum for social change and responsiveness, facilitating training of practitioners as critical consciousness raisers through engaging them as agents of social ecologies is paramount. According to Seccombe (2002), the role of social ecologies in career development should

engage practitioners in proactively 'changing the odds' that obstruct the wellbeing of young people. The training of practitioners to intervene at different ecological levels enables what Secombe (2002, p. 384) refers to as 'beating the odds'. This highlights the dual role South African career counsellors have in intervention. Firstly, they should make contemporary, culturally relevant career interventions (as documented by Ebersöhn, 2012; Maree, 2013; Maree et al., 2006; Morgan, 2010; Savickas, 2012) available to young people in disadvantaged communities. Secondly, South African career counsellors need to make it their business to expose clients to the multiplicity of employment trajectories shifting youth focus away from narrow stereotypical career expectations. Heightening individual clients and community awareness of 21st-century opportunities and career paths based on technical and vocational education and training (TVET) (Diale, 2015) have an important role to play in this endeavour.

Counselling Psychologists in South Africa have a significant role to play in the development of culturally sensitive models of career psychology to address issues of transformation and social responsiveness. To accomplish this, however, requires a recommitment of Counselling Psychologists to affirm their specialisation area in vocational counselling. This draws attention to the role of the curriculum in ensuring relevance and thereby influencing the growth and professional identity of Counselling Psychology. This article provides a systematic way of revising curriculum content to address both these objectives.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the students who participated in the study.

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contribution

K.V.R. is the sole author of this research article.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

All data retrieved will remain in the researcher's possession at the University of Pretoria.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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