Exploring Career Paths: The Role of Self-Efficacy and Outcome Expectations in Shaping Career Choices for Students with Disabilities

**Abstract**

This study explored the role of self-efficacy and outcome expectations which are pivotal in shaping career aspirations, decisions, and readiness for professional pathways. The research employs a systematic review of studies, analyzing existing literature to explore the multidimensional factors influencing career decisions among students with disabilities and how self-efficacy and outcome expectations interact with other critical factors. The findings highlighted the role of tailored career counselling services in enhancing self-efficacy, refining outcome expectations, and equipping students with the skills necessary for successful transitions to employment or higher education. By bridging theoretical insights with practical interventions, this review offers actionable recommendations to improve career readiness and outcomes for students with disabilities, addressing a critical gap in supporting this underserved population.

**Keywords:** Self-efficacy, Outcome expectations, Disabilities, Career choices, Career development.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Preamble to the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) (CRPD, 2006) defines “Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”. Disability is a fundamental aspect of the human experience, arising from the interaction between health conditions like dementia, blindness, or spinal cord injury, and various environmental and personal factors. Currently, approximately 1.3 billion people, or 16% of the world's population, live with a significant disability (WHO, 2011).

In India as per 2011 Census, India has over 2.68 crore individuals (approximately 2.21% of the total population of 121 crore) living with some form of disability (Government of India, 2016). The distribution of disabilities includes 19% with visual impairments, 20% with mobility issues, 3% with mental illness, 6% with mental retardation, 7% with speech impairments, 19% with hearing impairments, 8% with multiple disabilities and 18% with any other disabilities. Additionally, the census data reveals that nearly one-third of the total disabled population or only about 36% of people with disabilities are employed, and this low employment rate can be attributed to several factors. These include the limitations imposed by disabilities themselves, lower levels of education and work experience, and discrimination from employers in both hiring and providing necessary accommodations. Individuals with disabilities are more likely than those without disabilities to face adverse outcomes from workplace challenge. These outcomes may include negative effects on their physical or mental health, financial stability, personal relationships, job satisfaction, productivity, and overall well-being, often leading to absenteeism or job resignation (Hagner et al. (2002). Discriminatory attitudes and entrenched institutional practices significantly disadvantage individuals with disabilities in the workforce. People with disabilities often encounter numerous challenges and barriers in employment and frequently lack sufficient job opportunities (Barnes,1991). Additionally, individuals with disabilities may face challenges in maintaining employment after a disability arises, as well as a lack of support services that could help them overcome these barriers, showing a need for better workplace inclusion and support. Difficulties in making career decisions can also significantly affect an individual's overall happiness and interpersonal relationships. Recognizing and addressing these challenges early can help prevent future complications.

**2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION**

**Self-Efficacy and Outcome Expectations**

Self-efficacy is an individual’s assessments of his ability to plan and carry out actions needed to achieve specific performance goals (Bandura, 1986). Individuals who recognize their ability to make an impact feel positive and are therefore motivated to take action (Farmer & Dupre, 2022). Self-efficacy beliefs played a predictive role in career interests (Nota et al., 2010) and key factor in representing a person’s belief in their capability to effectively manage and succeed in making well-informed career choices (Ardianti et al., 2024). It reflects students’ confidence in their ability to successfully perform career-related tasks, while outcome expectations are their beliefs about the potential consequences of these actions. Together, these factors significantly influence career aspirations, decisions, and overall readiness for professional pathways. Outcome expectations are formed by observing situations and events in one's surroundings, as well as by the actual results of the actions the individual has taken (Bandura, 1986). Individuals form expectations about the potential results of their actions by watching what happens in their environment—such as how others respond to certain behaviors or situations. Additionally, these expectations are influenced by the actual consequences of their own past actions. When individuals see certain outcomes from their behaviors or decisions, they use these experiences to predict future results, which in turn affects their motivation and approach to similar situations in the future (Fouad & Guillen, 2006).

**Career Choices**

Career choices are an important aspect of a person's development, as they involve decisions about employment. These decisions are influenced by an individual's personal self-perception (Dvouletý et al., 2021). Career selection encompasses the stages of preoccupation, occupation, and post-occupation throughout a person's life. A successful career is backed by effective career planning. Career planning plays a crucial role in preparing individuals for choosing further education or their ideal job (Damai et al., 2019).

**3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) emphasizes the critical role of outcome expectations, which represent the anticipated results or consequences of performing career-related behaviors. It is developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett in 1994, is widely regarded as one of the most influential and validated frameworks in career research. This model is extensively discussed in the literature for its ability to explain how individuals develop career interests, set goals, and make career-related decisions. Studies such as those by Gore and Leuwerke (2000), Smith and Fouad (1999), and Swanson and Gore (2000) have further supported and expanded upon the SCCT framework, highlighting its relevance in understanding the interplay of personal, environmental, and behavioral factors in career development. SCCT emphasizes the role of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals in shaping career paths. It integrates cognitive and contextual influences to provide a comprehensive approach to career decision-making self-efficacy. Career decision-making self-efficacy was originally defined by Taylor and Betz (1983) as a person’s beliefs that he or she has the ability to complete successfully the tasks related to decision making in relation to his or her career. It provides important information relevant to understanding the complex career development process (Niles and Sowa, 1982) and plays a crucial role in guiding individuals through the process of making career choices, significantly influencing their career development, future pursuits, and overall job satisfaction (Betz, 2007; Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Conklin et al. (2013) discovered that career decision self-efficacy acts as a mediator between students' emotional commitment to their major and their expectations regarding career outcomes, such as anticipated career performance and job satisfaction. Additionally, students' perception of how well their abilities align with the demands of their major influences the relationship between affective commitment and these career outcomes. These results through the lens of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) and provide recommendations for career counselors and academic advisors. Gushue et al. (2006) examined the connection between career decision-making self-efficacy and the outcomes of vocational identity and career exploration behaviors and found that higher career decision-making self-efficacy is linked to a clearer vocational self-concept and greater involvement in career exploration activities. Castillo & Fischer (2019) explored how proactive personality and entrepreneurial self-efficacy were significant predictors of entrepreneurial intentions. These results align with prior research, emphasizing the importance of entrepreneurial self-efficacy in career decisions, especially among individuals with disabilities. The self-efficacy assessment used in this study could be a valuable tool for rehabilitation counselors working with potential entrepreneurs. This is especially true for individuals with high entrepreneurial self-efficacy, who are confident in their ability to reach goals, perceive a low risk of failure, and focus on opportunities rather than risks. Understanding the role of entrepreneurial self-efficacy can help practitioners equip their clients with the necessary tools and motivation to pursue self-employment. Empowering experiences included moments of encouragement, respect, and accomplishment, which provided participants with validation and a sense of achievement (Francis et al., 2019). Cervone et al. (2000) found that self-efficacy beliefs extend to different personal situations. While a negative mood doesn't always affect how people view their abilities, it can raise their performance expectations, creating a gap between what they believe they can do and what they expect. They also discovered that self-efficacy can be understood in two ways: believing in one's ability to carry out strategies and believing in one's ability to achieve goals.

Klassen (2002) found that in certain situations, particularly regarding the writing performance of students with specific writing difficulties, students tend to overestimate their self-efficacy. Jemini Gashi et al. (2023) found that a career guidance workshop significantly improved adolescents' career self-efficacy and career goals. While the impact on outcome expectations was not significant, it still showed an increase. Career guidance interventions are beneficial for improving adolescents' career decision-making skills and also coaching interventions helped students overcome career barriers, reframe experiences, and develop action plans Molyn (2018).

**4. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Despite the extensive application of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) in understanding career development, there is a notable gap in research concerning the influence of outcome expectations on career decision-making self-efficacy. The current literature on career decision-making self-efficacy within the framework of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) lacks sufficient empirical studies isolating the direct effects of outcome expectations, particularly in the context of students with disabilities. Including students with disabilities challenges in this area could provide valuable insights into how outcome expectations—whether intrinsic (e.g., personal satisfaction) or extrinsic (e.g., salary, job status)—influence career decision-making self-efficacy. Students with disabilities or Person with Disabilities (PWD) often face distinct barriers such as environmental obstacles, societal discrimination, or internalized perceptions of their abilities, which may significantly shape their career choices and self-efficacy. By investigating how these challenges impact outcome expectations, researchers can better understand the unique factors influencing students with disabilities' career decision-making processes. Moreover, examining this relationship could inform interventions tailored tostudents, helping career counselors and educators design strategies that bolster confidence and offer targeted support. Specifically, exploring how social support, accessibility, and accommodations interact with career decision-making processes for students with disabilities could lead to more inclusive and effective career guidance practices.

**4.1 Research Objectives:**

1. To understand how self-efficacy and outcome expectations influence career choices and choices for students with disabilities.
2. To review existing studies to identify key factors shaping career choices for students with disabilities.

**5. METHODOLOGY**

The methodology involves systematically searching academic databases and journals for relevant studies on the applications and outcomes of the role of self-efficacy and outcome expectations in career choices for students with disabilities. Key search terms include "self-efficacy", "career choice", "challenges for disabled students", "outcome expectations", and "problem-solving". The literature review examines empirical evidence from both quantitative and qualitative studies, synthesizing the findings to elucidate the multifaceted benefits of self-efficacy for students. Additionally, this paper analyzes case studies and observational research to provide a nuanced understanding of self-efficacy. The selected studies were chosen based on their relevance to the specific aims of this paper. Research that did not meet the study's core objectives was excluded from the review.

**6. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

*SCCT connects career development to self-efficacy, learning experiences, and contextual factors.*

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), developed by Lent et al. (1994), draws from Bandura's social cognitive theory and self-efficacy theory, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding career development. SCCT integrates psychological, social, and economic factors, providing a holistic view of career development (Long et al., 2002). The theory emphasizes the dynamic interplay between self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals, which regulate career behavior (Buthelezi et al., 2010). Learning experiences, including personal successes, failures, and social influences, play a crucial role in shaping career choices and interests (Lent et al., 1989, 2017). Additionally, contextual factors, such as family background and societal influences, significantly impact career decision-making (Lent et al., 1994).

*The Role of Self-Efficacy in Career Decision-Making*

Self-efficacy, or an individual’s belief in their ability to succeed, significantly influences career decision-making. Higher self-efficacy is linked to better career exploration, persistence, and effective decision-making (Choi et al., 2012; Hou, Wu, & Liu, 2014). It encourages individuals to pursue challenging career goals and make informed decisions. Conversely, low self-efficacy may lead to career indecision and missed opportunities (Taylor & Betz, 1983). For individuals with disabilities, self-efficacy plays an especially important role in overcoming barriers and pursuing career goals despite challenges.

*Challenges in Applying SCCT*

Despite its widespread application, SCCT faces challenges, particularly regarding research methodologies. Most studies rely on quantitative tools like the Career Decision Self-Efficacy Questionnaire, limiting qualitative insights into the career decision-making process (Miles & Naidoo, 2016). Additionally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the limitations of traditional SCCT interventions, underscoring the need for more diversified approaches, including workshops and individualized strategies (Sulkowski & Michael, 2014; Fang et al., 2014). However, SCCT remains a valuable framework for addressing career development issues, particularly when adapted to meet the needs of diverse populations, including students with disabilities.

*Resilience and Self-Efficacy in Employment Outcomes for Students with Disabilities*

For students with disabilities, resilience has emerged as a significant predictor of employment outcomes, while self-efficacy alone did not have the same impact (Fang et al., 2014). Sociodemographic factors, such as education, age, marital status, and disability benefits, also influence employment outcomes. This suggests that career counseling should focus not only on enhancing self-efficacy but also on fostering resilience and considering broader contextual factors to improve career outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

*Academic and Career Self-Efficacy in College Students with Disabilities*

For college students with learning disabilities (LD) or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), academic self-efficacy and self-advocacy are key predictors of career expectations. While these students may report lower academic self-efficacy than their peers without disabilities, their future career expectations often remain comparable (McWhirter et al., 2019). Family and academic support, especially from specialized support centers, play a crucial role in shaping their career expectations and providing the resources needed to enhance career development.

*The Intersectionality of Identity in Career Decision-Making*

College students with disabilities (CSWD) face unique challenges in career decision-making, influenced by a range of psychosocial factors, such as disability identity, racial/ethnic identity, and societal attitudes (Kim & Choi, 2019). The intersectionality of these identities can create additional barriers, leading to internalized stereotypes and limiting career exploration (Crenshaw, 1991; Fabian et al., 2009). However, a strong sense of both disability and ethnic identity can help students overcome these challenges and achieve career success (Mpofu & Harley, 2006). Understanding these intersectionalities is crucial for career counselors to provide effective guidance.

*The Importance of Social Support in Career Development*

Social support is a key factor in enhancing career decision-making self-efficacy for students with disabilities. Support from family, peers, and mentors, along with inclusive campus environments, can foster self-esteem and self-determination, which are vital for academic and career success (Zimet et al., 1988; Belch, 2004). Positive social support plays a significant role in helping students with disabilities navigate career challenges and achieve their goals (Tinto, 1993; Wilson et al., 2000). Encouraging mentorship programs and peer support can be particularly impactful in improving career outcomes for these students.

*Identity Acceptance and Career Self-Efficacy*

Studies have shown that identity acceptance, particularly disability identity, enhances career decision self-efficacy among students with disabilities (Chao et al., 2022). Students who embrace their disability identity tend to exhibit greater confidence in making career decisions, underscoring the importance of fostering identity acceptance and providing strong social support systems to enhance career self-efficacy.

*The Importance of Career Decision Self-Efficacy (CDSE)*

Career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) is essential in addressing career indecision and promoting vocational success. CDSE is closely correlated with self-esteem, vocational identity, peer support, and vocational outcome expectations, highlighting its crucial role in career readiness (Miles & Naidoo, 2016). Career counseling interventions aimed at enhancing CDSE can help students with disabilities overcome career barriers and make more informed career decisions.

**Conclusion**

The career development of students with disabilities is heavily influenced by self-efficacy, resilience, and the support of social networks. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex interactions between individual, behavioral, and environmental factors. However, to effectively address the unique challenges faced by students with disabilities, a more nuanced approach is needed. This includes integrating strategies to enhance self-efficacy, resilience, and identity acceptance, alongside fostering inclusive environments that provide social support. Future research should focus on tailored interventions that consider the intersectionality of disabilities, identity, and resilience, while evaluating the long-term impact of SCCT-based approaches on career outcomes. Career counseling services must improve self-efficacy, align expectations with achievable goals, and create inclusive environments. Further studies should explore how different disabilities impact career decision-making. These efforts will enhance career development for students with disabilities, promoting better outcomes and opportunities.

**Declarations:**

**Ethical Approval**

An ethics statement is not applicable.

**Availability of Data and Materials**

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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